

Improving education for Indigenous youth

5.1 Different aspects of disadvantage are often interrelated and there are well recognised links between poor health and accommodation and poor educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. In addition, data shows there is a strong link between Indigenous people involved in the criminal justice system and low levels of educational attainment.

5.2 Associate Professor Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia told the Committee:

With regard to education, there is no doubt that there is an absolute correlation between a child failing at school and a child entering the justice system.¹

5.3 The New South Wales Government submission highlighted this issue with New South Wales statistics which reflects a national trend for juvenile offenders:

Three quarters of NSW juvenile detainees surveyed in 2003 and 2006 left school before finishing Year 9, and over 90 per cent had been suspended at one time or another.²

5.4 As noted in *The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* 'Higher levels of education make a person less likely to be involved in risk-taking behaviours such as crime (partially by increasing income and reducing the incentive to commit crime)'.³

5.5 The Australian Government recognises there is a great need to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The Closing the Gap

1 Robert Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 77.

2 New South Wales Government, *submission 84*, p. 21.

3 New South Wales Department of Education and Training, *submission 4*, p. 28.

strategy has three out of the six targets that focus on education in order to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

5.6 These three targets are:

- ensuring all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade, and
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.⁴

5.7 The Prime Minister's Report 2011 *Closing the Gap* outlined the progress that had been made on the above three targets. The first of the above targets was highlighted as one of two targets being most achievable within the given timeframes. The Prime Minister stressed the importance of supporting children and their families to ensure more regular preschool attendance.⁵

5.8 This chapter discusses the findings from the inquiry looking specifically at ways to more effectively engage Indigenous Australians in the education system. The focus on early intervention in terms of school readiness and attendance for Indigenous students and engagement with the education system for children, parents and communities is discussed. The chapter highlights successful programs being carried out that encourage Indigenous community engagement and higher rates of student attendance for Indigenous youth.

5.9 The Committee is aware that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution to Indigenous education and encourages schools to work with their Indigenous community to find a solution to help engage Indigenous Australians in the education system.

Funding for Indigenous education

5.10 State and territory governments and non-government school authorities are responsible for providing education services in Australia. In addition the Commonwealth Government provides supplementary funds in the form of general recurrent and capital grants, and plays a central role in achieving cooperation in the national education system, largely through

4 FaHCSIA, *submission 79*, p. 7.

5 *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2011*, p. 14.

the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

- 5.11 The Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in its submission to the inquiry outlined its policies and programs that provide opportunities for all people to build rewarding social and economic lives. The aim of these policies and programs work 'towards overcoming disadvantage, removing barriers to participation, increasing opportunities, building capacity and ensuring that services are accessible and provide effective support for all Australians'.⁶
- 5.12 DEEWR has five main initiatives to increase the engagement of young people in education and training, one of which is Indigenous specific:
- Compact with Young Australians
 - Indigenous Education Action Plan
 - National Youth Participation Requirement (NYPR)
 - Youth Allowance, and
 - Support for Low Socio-economic Status Students.
- 5.13 The Committee was informed that 'whilst some of these are mainstream initiatives, Indigenous young people will also benefit from these initiatives'.⁷

Indigenous Education Action Plan

- 5.14 The purpose of the Indigenous Education Action Plan (IEAP) is to guide the national effort towards closing the gaps in early childhood and school education outcomes for Indigenous Australians. It includes a range of actions to bring about both systemic and local-level improvements across six domains of activity that evidence has shown will make the most impact on closing the gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous educational outcomes. These are:
- readiness for school
 - engagement and connections
 - attendance
 - leadership, quality teaching and workforce development

6 DEEWR, *submission 63*, p. 1.

7 DEEWR, *submission 63*, p. 3.

- literacy and numeracy, and
 - pathways to real post-school options.
- 5.15 The IEAP is intended to bring together reforms included in national agreements and national partnerships agreed between governments, and will also enhance collaboration between governments, non-government providers and Indigenous communities.⁸
- 5.16 During a public hearing in Melbourne, Alf Bamblett of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association raised concerns about the length of time it takes for bureaucracies to implement policies such as the above IEAP. He commented:
- There is a thing like a partnership in education that produces an education policy that says every Aboriginal child, by whatever year it is, should have an education plan. Terrific, but the policy has been there two or three years, and now we are starting to see some rollout of that. So, in the two or three years, you wonder about the further damage that has gone on in the community.⁹
- 5.17 At a public hearing DEEWR outlined the inception of the IEAP:
- On 16 December 2009, Australia's Education Ministers released a draft Indigenous Education Action Plan for public consultation. A revised draft was then endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), and is ready for final endorsement at the next COAG meeting.¹⁰
- 5.18 The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting on 13 February 2011 did not endorse the IEAP however it was decided that the Prime Minister would write to all state and territory leaders and seek a written endorsement from them rather than waiting for endorsement at the next COAG meeting.
- 5.19 The Committee has been advised that the IEAP was agreed to in an out-of-session process, with COAG members writing to the Prime Minister, in her capacity as Chair of COAG, to record their agreement to the Plan.

8 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *submission 63*, pp. 3-4.

9 Alf Bamblett, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, *Committee Hansard*, Melbourne, 3 March 2010, p. 24.

10 Glen Hansen, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 June 2010, p. 3.

- 5.20 Associate Professor Somerville, Director of Aboriginal Education, Department of Education in Western Australia made the following comments to the Committee regarding poor outcomes for Aboriginal students and a new national effort by way of the IEAP to focus on early childhood education.

We recognise as a system that the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the justice system is directly correlated to their student outcomes. Poor student outcomes equals a very good chance that those children are going to be in the justice system. Western Australia has been leading a national effort to write a new Indigenous education action plan on behalf of the Australian government and the nation to look at the Closing the Gap priorities.

What we have found from looking at the data nationally is quite clear: there is about a two-year lag between the outcomes of Aboriginal children and the outcomes of the rest of the population, particularly when we look at the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy, NAPLAN. In fact, in Western Australia, if we look at the NAPLAN results for year 5 for Aboriginal children, they overlay with year 3; year 7 overlays with year 5 for the rest of the population; and year 9 overlays with year 7. So we have a significant issue with regard to student outcomes.

To be able to turn that around, we believe that we have to put significant effort into the early childhood area – in other words, into getting Aboriginal children more ready for school.¹¹

Committee comment

- 5.21 The Committee is concerned that in spite of the whole of government commitment to Closing the Gap there has been a significant time lag for the IEAP to receive endorsement from COAG. Since the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations spoke to the Committee the IEAP has been awaiting endorsement from COAG for nearly 12 months.
- 5.22 The Committee believes a specific focus on Indigenous education, such as the IEAP, is critical if progress is to be made in terms of a higher attendance and retention rate of Indigenous Australians in the education system. This in turn will assist in reducing the amount of contact

11 Robert Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2010, p. 23.

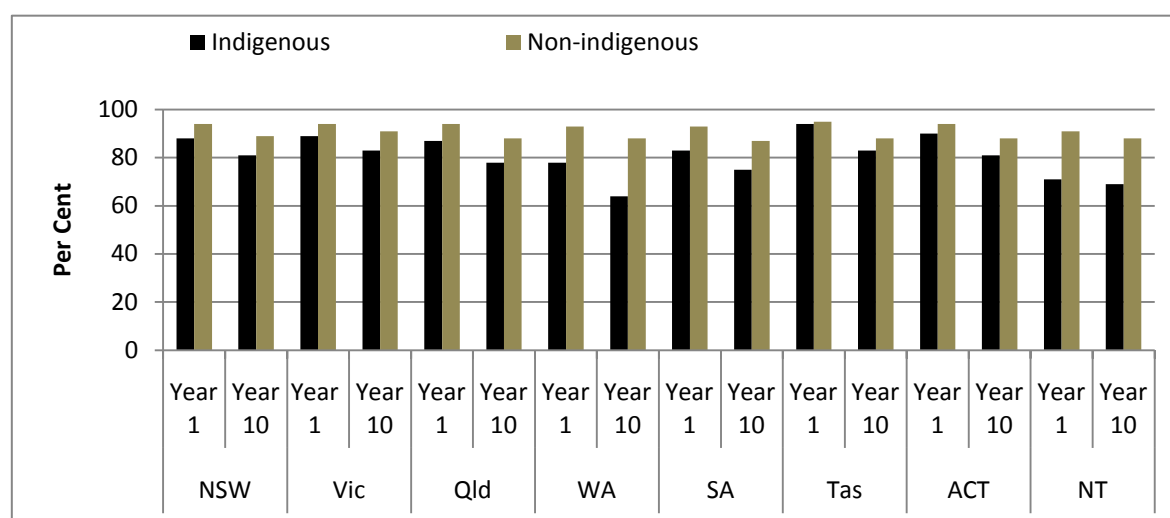
Indigenous people have in general with the criminal justice system and will contribute towards a greater sense of wellbeing.

- 5.23 The Committee was informed in May 2011 that all jurisdictions had signed off on the endorsement of the IEAP. The Committee believes that in future the agenda for COAG should be mindful of the length of time some issues await consideration and endorsement, and the on-going damage that results from these delays.

Indigenous Australians and the education system

- 5.24 The Committee's evidence collected throughout the inquiry suggested there is a sense of urgency to continue to do more to positively engage Indigenous Australians with the education system. The statistics of attendance rates for Indigenous students continue to be lower than for non-Indigenous students.
- 5.25 The correlation between lower attendance levels and lower educational attainment levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are well documented. Current data from 2007 shows that the attendance rates for Indigenous students in government schools for years 1-10 in all states and territories were lower than for non-Indigenous students.¹² Attendance rates declined from year 1 to year 10 for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, however the extent of the decline in attendance was greater for Indigenous students. Figure 5.1 highlights the differences in attendance rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in year 1 and in year 10. These differences are most pronounced in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

12 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, Productivity Commission: Canberra, 2009, p. 6.3.

Figure 5.1 Students' attendance in government schools by state and Indigenous status, 2007

Source: *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2009 Report*, Figure 6.1.1

- 5.26 Educational retention levels are lower for Indigenous students compared with non-Indigenous students. A much higher proportion of Indigenous people aged 15 years and older reported year 9 or below as their highest level of schooling in every age group in 2006.¹³
- 5.27 Access to early childhood education in remote areas for all Indigenous Australians is an area currently being addressed by one of the six Closing the Gap targets. Providing access to early childhood education will help establish a connection for parents/carers and children with the education system and the Commonwealth Government hopes that in time it will lead to stronger educational outcomes including higher attendance rates for Indigenous children at the start of their education.
- 5.28 Current research suggests that children's experiences in their early years affect their development and influence lifelong learning, behaviour and health. Early childhood education programs are associated with increased levels of school completion and enhanced literacy and social skills. The provision of services to children during their early years may provide an opportunity for early intervention to address developmental problems.
- 5.29 Another reason to focus attention and resourcing for Indigenous children around early childhood education such as at the preschool level is that 'investment in early childhood education, particularly for disadvantaged children is more effective than intervention at later stages'.¹⁴

13 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, Productivity Commission: Canberra, 2009, p. 6.15.

14 SCRGSP, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2009 Report*, p. 4.25

- 5.30 The Committee received evidence that some parents had not been actively engaged in the education system when they were growing up and therefore did not prioritise education for their own children. Others found the education system was not always culturally inclusive for Indigenous Australians. Mark Horton noted that:

In many communities education delivery is seen as a waste of time to parents and youth alike, with some communities have only 45% school attendance. The curriculum is aligned and delivered in and to an environment that appears alien to these youth, particularly Aboriginal youth and particularly in remote communities.¹⁵

- 5.31 Alcohol and substance abuse is another significant factor found to be contributing to low attendance rates for Indigenous students. Acting Chief Magistrate Sue Oliver, Darwin Magistrates court made the following statement:

Unfortunately, the social norm is often a household where there is alcohol and substance abuse and where there has not been an engagement with education for a couple of generations.¹⁶

Strategies for Engagement - Both Ways/Two Ways

- 5.32 The Committee received evidence regarding various state and territory strategies that are targeting and supporting the engagement of Indigenous communities in the education system. These jurisdictions emphasise the need for the education system to work together with local Indigenous communities in relation to improving school attendance and ultimately school retention for Indigenous students.
- 5.33 In its submission, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) commented that Indigenous educators have been advocating a 'Both Ways' education concept for decades whereby partnerships are formed with Indigenous parents and the education system and it builds a learning culture that has to go both ways. As an example of this, the Victoria Government's *Inquiry into Strategies to Prevent High Volume Offending and Recidivism by Young People: Final Report (2009)* made some strong recommendations that recognised the 'both ways' concept for early intervention strategies to support engagement and improve educational outcomes. One of the recommendations stated:

¹⁵ Mark Horton, *submission 85*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Sue Oliver, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 18.

The State Government expedite the implementation of the recently released Student Engagement Policy Guidelines. This would require supporting schools to provide a range of prevention and early intervention strategies to support engagement and improved educational outcomes, including: programs to support parental involvement with schools, including effective parenting programs; transition support programs for children moving from primary to secondary school, and for students nearing the compulsory school leaving age; strategies for identifying at-risk students (including those in out-of-home care) and linking them to appropriate specialist support services (for example, youth workers or counsellors); the introduction of restorative justice practices in schools; training for teachers in the delivery of emotional well-being curriculum materials, and in strategies for working with vulnerable and 'difficult' students.¹⁷

- 5.34 The Department of Education, Western Australia has developed the *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* strategy which provides a comprehensive and integrated approach to the provision of services to schools, families and the community to improve attendance. The submission noted that, 'improving the attendance and engagement of students is a key to reducing involvement in the criminal justice system'.¹⁸
- 5.35 The *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* strategy includes a significant focus on Aboriginal students. Targeted funding is provided for schools and clusters of schools with low attendance rates and high numbers of Aboriginal students at risk to assist them to prioritise attendance, set targets and develop local solutions. The strategy includes:
- individual case management, mentoring and strengthening links with other agencies
 - connecting Aboriginal students and their families to the range of services in their community to address the barriers to attendance and engagement, and
 - supporting schools to create learning environments that meet the needs of Aboriginal students, whilst being safe, culturally inclusive and conducive to high attendance.¹⁹

17 Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, *submission 40*, pp. 28-29.

18 Department of Education, Western Australia, *submission 81*, p. 8.

19 Department of Education, Western Australia, *submission 81*, p. 8.

- 5.36 In 2009, the Northern Territory Department of Education employed five regional school attendance officers, in addition to 43 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and 30 Home Liaison Officers, providing schools with additional resources to improve student attendance. The School Attendance Team provides program support and strategic advice dedicated to improving enrolment and attendance, particularly for children at risk of poor school attendance.²⁰
- 5.37 The New South Wales Government recognised that adopting a whole-of-government approach was the most effective way to address Aboriginal disadvantage. This approach is embodied in *Two Ways Together*, the New South Wales Aboriginal Affairs Plan, 2003-2012. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) contributes to this approach through the work currently being progressed in New South Wales under the New South Wales State Plan and the *Two Ways Together* and *Keep them Safe* frameworks.²¹
- 5.38 *Two Ways Together* takes a long-term view by making a ten year commitment to change. This approach is similar to the Both Ways concept as the plan requires government agencies to work together with Aboriginal people to ensure that services are accessible and culturally appropriate. The plan recognises that services need to work in partnership.²²
- 5.39 The New South Wales DET in its submission stated that ‘programs are being targeted to communities where there is particular potential to improve school retention and completion rates and for those that experience early school disengagement and poor school outcomes for Aboriginal students. Programs such as the *Schools in Partnership* initiative, and the *Norta Norta* Program focus on improving engagement, attendance, retention, and literacy and numeracy achievement with the view to achieving educational success for Aboriginal students.’²³
- 5.40 The Queensland Government is working with Indigenous leaders to implement innovative models of education that are suited to the needs of particular communities. More recently, the *Bound for Success* education strategies for Cape York and the Torres Strait are a response to the educational outcomes for Indigenous students in these regions, which are on average lower than for other Queensland students. These strategies

20 Northern Territory Government, *submission 89*, p. 24.

21 New South Wales Department of Education and Training, *submission 43*, p. 3.

22 New South Wales Government, *Aboriginal Affairs, Two Ways Together* <www.daa.nsw.gov.au/policies/policy.html> accessed 30 March 2011.

23 New South Wales Department of Education and Training, *submission 43*, p. 9.

focus on community and government working in partnership and stimulating high aspirations and expectations. The Queensland Department of Education and Training, working with Cape York Partnerships has commenced a three year pilot at the Aurukun and Coen campuses of the Western Cape College incorporating club and culture elements in the education program, and strengthening governance arrangements to ensure that the community has a greater engagement.²⁴

Indigenous community engagement

- 5.41 Indigenous community engagement is a critical factor for schools that have low attendance rates for Indigenous students.
- 5.42 A strong message that came through the inquiry was the need for a 'Two Way' engagement in the education sector between schools and the Indigenous community in order to improve the effectiveness of education for Indigenous students. It was evident that the most successful programs are those initiated and run by Indigenous people in collaboration with government and the non-government sector.
- 5.43 The Department of Education, Western Australia made the following comment in relation to the importance of schools connecting and maintaining a relationship with its school community:
- Schools that work together with communities and encourage participation in the school and at home enable students to learn and meet expectations. Evidence suggests that school connectedness and supportive social relationships have been associated with lower levels of absenteeism, delinquency, aggression, substance use and sexual risk behaviour, and higher levels of academic achievement and self-esteem amongst children.²⁵
- 5.44 John McKenzie from ATSIL NSW/ACT, commented that it is important to see improving the effectiveness of education as a holistic approach. 'We have to be treating not only the child as a whole individual but also the family and the community within which they live.'²⁶
- 5.45 The need to engage Indigenous parents more in the education system was also emphasised by Associate Professor Somerville from the Department of Indigenous Affairs, Western Australia:

24 Queensland Government, *submission 91*, p. 13.

25 Department of Education, Western Australia, *submission 81*, p. 10.

26 John McKenzie, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 32.

The other thing that we are not doing is engaging Aboriginal parents in the educative process. That does not mean going to a school council; that means getting their children to school, being involved in literacy and numeracy, reading and so on. We are not ensuring that those Aboriginal parents are involved in the cultural aspects of being Aboriginal. Noel Pearson and a number of people in Queensland have come out with the Stronger Smarter philosophy, about being stronger in your culture and smarter at school.²⁷

- 5.46 Professor Foley and Professor Lovat from the University of Newcastle provided some good examples of how schools could engage with their Indigenous communities.

If a school has Indigenous Australian students, teachers should assume a leadership role seeking to become actively involved in supporting and promoting Indigenous student success. To achieve this, they will need to look beyond the school for sources of support. These may include parents, Indigenous support staff, community members and Indigenous funding programs. Teachers need to be proactive rather than reluctant participants. They need to be given the tools and motivation to research, interact and network.²⁸

- 5.47 In addition they suggested that:

Teachers in rural schools also need to find out who is the chair of the local Aboriginal Council, make an appointment to meet with that person and determine ways in which the Council might assist in dealing with the matters outlined above.²⁹

- 5.48 The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians submission emphasised the importance of engaging the support of the Indigenous community when running Indigenous specific programs. The submission stated:

Any culturally appropriate school programs, sporting activities, or diversionary programs will not be effective if they are not seen by the children and young people to be valued and supported by

27 Robert Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 22.

28 Dennis Foley and Terry Lovat, University of Newcastle, *submission 28*, p. 16.

29 Dennis Foley and Terry Lovat, University of Newcastle, *submission 28*, p. 16.

Indigenous families and communities, or if there are no expectations that they are to attend or participate.³⁰

- 5.49 In addition, the point was made that 'parents and communities may need support to strengthen their roles around parenting, activities and school attendance as an effective point of intervention, to ensure optimum development of children and young people.'³¹
- 5.50 Associate Professor Somerville outlined a successful program involving the Indigenous community, parents and high expectation for students that over 10 years has demonstrated outstanding outcomes. He explained:

Follow the Dream: Partnerships for Success, is a program that Rio Tinto is involved in with us, along with the Polly Farmer Foundation. So there are a number of very large philanthropic and industry groups. The program looks at supporting Aboriginal children from year 8 through to year 12 to ensure they get a TER. We have turned that around in 10 years. In 2002, two Aboriginal children got a TER that got them to university. Now we are averaging 30 Aboriginal children with TERs who move to university – and with TERs over 90, which will get you straight into medicine. So there is an enormous switch that we have seen over the time. Nearly 300 Aboriginal children are getting a Western Australian certificate of education due to those programs, and the programs are successful because they involve the Aboriginal community. Parents are completely involved in it. They have very high expectations, so children are expected to finish and do very well. We ensure that teachers understand and the cultural aspects are set into place.³²

Committee comment

- 5.51 The Commonwealth has committed to providing better access to early childhood education in remote areas for Indigenous Australians as it understands that participation, attendance and retention is critical in order to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.
- 5.52 The Committee recognises that there has been a significant shift in the way that Commonwealth, state and territory governments are developing policies on Indigenous engagement and the education system.

30 Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians, *submission 59*, p. 12.

31 Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians, *submission 59*, p. 12.

32 Associate Professor Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 78.

- 5.53 The Committee commends Victoria and New South Wales for committing to a Both Ways/Two Ways Together strategy to address Indigenous disadvantage issues. The Committee is encouraged by the focus on early intervention in states and territories throughout Australia in relation to Indigenous education.
- 5.54 The Committee commends the Western Australia Follow your Dream: Partnerships for Success program which has successfully engaged Indigenous communities, industry, the philanthropic sector and government. The program has demonstrated a remarkable increase in the number of Indigenous students achieving TER scores and most impressively, high TER scores.
- 5.55 The Committee believes the continuing development of effective partnerships between local Indigenous communities and education systems across Australia is essential in increasing attendance and retention rates for Indigenous students in the long term.
- 5.56 Each school needs to work alongside the Indigenous parents/carers of school-aged children to create a partnership which will result in the parents/carers seeing value in sending their children to school each day.
- 5.57 The Committee encourages school communities and local Indigenous communities to engage more actively with each other in order to foster positive relationships between parents and carers of Indigenous children and the education system. The Committee believes there is room for further innovation in this area.
- 5.58 The Committee encourages school communities throughout Australia to adopt the 'Both Ways', 'Two Ways' strategy that has been discussed in this chapter.
- 5.59 The Committee is aware that many schools throughout Australia are already fostering positive relationships with their local Indigenous communities. However, as a broad recommendation the Committee sees value for all schools in incorporating and giving greater recognition to Indigenous culture.
- 5.60 The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education works through the MCEETYA and the IEAP to implement greater Indigenous recognition in schools.

Recommendation 16 – School and community relationships

- 5.61 The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education work through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs assist schools throughout Australia to deliver better education outcomes for Indigenous students and to foster more connected and positive relationships with their local Indigenous community. The Committee considers that as a minimum schools should be incorporating a range of the following activities within the school:
- hang or fly an Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag alongside the Australian flag within the school grounds
 - learn about Indigenous sites of significance in the local area
 - incorporate an acknowledgment of country at the start of significant events as well as at school assemblies
 - commission local Indigenous artists to paint a mural, or build or create sculptures within the school grounds
 - use local Indigenous languages names for school classrooms or sporting houses/teams
 - build an Indigenous garden and invite those with bush tucker knowledge to be involved
 - celebrate Mabo day, NAIDOC week, Reconciliation week and Harmony day
 - engage Indigenous school mentors for schools with high Indigenous populations, and/or
 - engage the local Indigenous community to teach language and culture afterschool and provide extra curricula activities.

School readiness

- 5.62 School readiness has been recognised as an area requiring more attention to give children the best start in education. Ensuring children are healthy and have a supportive and safe environment to live in is a vital starting point for school readiness. Early childhood education at the preschool level focuses on teaching children how to interact and learn in a social environment, preparing them for the future years of learning.

- 5.63 School readiness takes into consideration a certain degree of language development, in order for the teacher and the child to communicate; physical well-being or an awareness of limitations that need to be considered; motor coordination and skills, concentration and emotional adjustment, and a certain degree of independence.³³
- 5.64 In its submission, VALS discussed risk factors for Indigenous people that contribute to their offending behaviour. One of several of the contributory factors linked to offending was the recognition that often low birth weight leads to a lack of school readiness and low academic achievement. VALS commented that 'low birth weight is a risk factor with a long reaching impact on school readiness, transition and academic achievement.'³⁴
- 5.65 This issue of healthy pregnancies and risk factors for low birth weights for Indigenous women is discussed in chapter 4. Once again the Committee is aware of the interconnectedness of the contributing factors towards Indigenous disadvantage in the area of health and education.
- 5.66 The New South Wales Department of Education and Training highlighted this point in its submissions' introductory statement:
- The NSW Department of Education and Training recognises that improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal children and young people cannot be achieved in isolation from the work being undertaken in other key human service delivery areas such as health, housing, juvenile and criminal justice, employment and economic development.³⁵
- 5.67 The Committee heard from the Director of Aboriginal Education from the Department of Education, Western Australia that a significant number of Aboriginal children are not school ready for year 1:
- I will use the Western Australian experience – we find that about 50 to 60 per cent of the Aboriginal children are not ready for year 1. It is interesting that around 50 to 60 per cent of Aboriginal children are not ready for high school – year 8 – as we see through the NAPLAN results.³⁶

33 Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, *Community Paediatric Review*, <www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/CPR_Vol14No3_PS_SchlRead.pdf> accessed 9 March 2011.

34 VALS, *submission 40*, p. 3.

35 New South Wales Department of Education and Training, *submission 43*, p. 2.

36 Robert Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 77.

- 5.68 The Queensland Department of Education and Training has an early intervention strategy to assist Indigenous children engage successfully in the education system, focussing on improving the understanding of the English language in pre-prep programs. During a public hearing in Brisbane the Committee was informed:

We have also implemented 35 pre-prep programs in discrete Indigenous communities to help kids as young as age 3 to 3½ to get a better understanding of the English language because the language of school is standard Australian English. We are looking at getting these children prepared to move into prep and getting them to understand the English language better so they can achieve better outcomes. Evidence shows that our Indigenous students tend to be two years behind other students by the time they reach grade 3 and after that they continue to stay two years behind. They are learning at the same rate and so we need to close that gap in the early years. Therefore, that is a big focus for our Indigenous students.³⁷

- 5.69 A lack of school readiness from the outset can result in on-going negative consequences throughout the child's education and may lead to low school attendance rates.

School attendance

- 5.70 The Committee received an overwhelming amount of evidence that highlighted the correlation between low school attendance rates for Indigenous students and low levels of educational attainment for years 10 and above.
- 5.71 The Director of Aboriginal Education, Western Australia, Professor Somerville reiterated this view at a roundtable public hearing in Sydney. He stated:

Aboriginal children across Australia do not achieve in literacy and numeracy – one might say it is because they do not attend school – and also are not retained to year 12 in the same numbers as non-Aboriginal children.³⁸

37 Angela Leitch, Department of Education and Training, Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, Brisbane, 4 May 2010, p. 13.

38 Robert Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 78.

- 5.72 The Committee noted that a lack of school attendance has a detrimental impact on the child's educational and social development. The Western Australia Department of Education stated that:

Absenteeism from school has adverse effects on a child's educational and social development. They miss critical stages of development with their peers and are less likely to achieve academic progress. Absenteeism can exacerbate issues of low self esteem and social isolation. Improving school attendance is a key strategy in improving the life outcomes for young Aboriginal people.³⁹

- 5.73 In a submission from two professors from the University of Newcastle, they commented on low Kindergarten attendance rates for Indigenous children which obviously had a negative flow on effect and set the children back from those children who had attended a full year of kindergarten. Several reasons were suggested for why this was occurring:

Indigenous children statistically have very low records of kindergarten attendance. This is for various reasons, including a lack of access, lack of funds, lack of available places, lack of transport, or a combination of factors. In many situations, while children may have had a nurturing family upbringing, their non-attendance at kindergarten results in school commencement without the early educational training that establishes the essential building blocks for their educational future.⁴⁰

- 5.74 The New South Wales Ombudsman informed the Committee that from its work it had become concerned about the apparently high rates of non-attendance by Aboriginal children in particular locations. The Ombudsman stated that:

This problem often emerges late in primary school, as children are making a transition from childhood to adolescence. The issue is of particular significance to young people because they are not only being deprived of a fundamental right relating to their development but they also lose the social support network and structure that the school community can provide.⁴¹

- 5.75 In relation to the issue of attendance, the Director of Aboriginal Education in Western Australia raised a concern about understanding the real school attendance rates. He commented that whilst the attendance rates often

39 Department of Education Western Australia, *submission 81*, p. 3.

40 Dennis Foley and Terry Lovat, University of Newcastle, *submission 28*, pp. 13-14.

41 New South Wales Ombudsman, *submission 56*, p. 4.

collected by the education departments reflect the attendance rates for role call in the morning it was well understood that these rates did not reflect regular full day attendance. It was suggested that the regular attendance rates for Indigenous students in Western Australia were more likely to be 35 per cent:

In Western Australia, 35 per cent of Aboriginal children attend school regularly. So there is a significant issue for us, and that is the same across all jurisdictions. We have taken our eye off the ball.⁴²

- 5.76 During a public hearing in Cairns, the Commissioner for the Family Responsibility Commission (FRC), David Glasgow also raised a concern regarding the accuracy of attendance level data that was collected from schools. He commented that the role was often taken in the morning and by the afternoon several of the children were no longer at school.

We get figures from the Education Department. I have been a bit suspicious of their figures because I have seen people marked as attending school when some seem to have the afternoon off.⁴³

- 5.77 Commissioner Glasgow discussed some of the challenges faced by families with Indigenous children who are brought to the attention of the Commission in relation to school attendance levels.

We are finding out what is happening to some of these children, so we have to be careful to find out whether the kids are suffering from some sort of disability. I am not there to punish the parent; I am there to find out what is happening to the children. So we are now working very closely with the school case managers, who will go out to the household and find out, basically, what is happening in that household.⁴⁴

- 5.78 Throughout the inquiry the Committee heard about a number of initiatives that are being implemented that are working towards increasing school attendance levels for Indigenous students.

42 Robert Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 78.

43 David Glasgow, Families Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 May 2009, p. 3.

44 David Glasgow, Families Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 76.

Initiatives to increase school attendance

Breakfast and lunch programs

- 5.79 Breakfast and lunch programs have proven to be an effective way of increasing school attendance rates. These programs have multifaceted benefits including increasing attendance rates, providing a nutritional start to the day to assist with learning and concentration as well as potential business spin offs.
- 5.80 The Department of Indigenous Affairs, Western Australia discussed a successful school breakfast program that was carried out on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School in Western Australia. The program was a successful attendance incentive and in turn assisted the women running the breakfast program to start off a small catering service:
- A group of four Warburton grandmothers decided to take action to get children in their community to attend school by starting a small school breakfast program. With the assistance of donations from the charitable organisation, Foodbank, the women have been preparing breakfast for local school children for the past 18-months. The program has been credited for increasing attendance at the school by 60 per cent.
- The program has not only increased children participation in the class room but has also increased momentum within the community with up to 25 young mothers and community members actively involved in preparing breakfast meals daily. The success of the program has enabled the women to commence a small catering service.⁴⁵
- 5.81 Many people raised the importance and success of breakfast programs.⁴⁶ The Committee was also told that ‘a long term breakfast program would do more for education of young Aborigines than many other, more elaborate proposals.’⁴⁷

After school activities

- 5.82 After school activities have proven to be a successful and cost effective way of getting children to attend school. They have a flow on benefit in
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45 Department of Indigenous Affairs, Western Australia, *submission 83*, p. 9.

46 Harry Blagg, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 26; Commissioner Atkinson, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 29; Indigenous Community Volunteers, *submission 18*, p. 4.

47 Rosemary O’Grady, *submission 77*, p. 10.

that the children are in a supervised environment during the after school activity which decreases boredom and opportunities for them to come into contact with the criminal justice system.

- 5.83 Many schools in remote Indigenous communities have a 'no school no pool' policy that appears to be a successful incentive to encourage students to go to school. In its submission the Australian Youth Affairs Commission commented on the success of the 'no school, no pool' policy in reducing truancy:

It is even through simple strategies that school engagement can be increased with both the Northern Territory and the Western Australian Government introducing 'No School, No Pool' policies in regional communities where young people can only access community recreation facilities if they attend classes. 'No School, No Pool' has resulted in an up to 75% reduction in truancy in some communities.⁴⁸

- 5.84 The South Australian Courts Administration Authority raised the 'critical importance of responding to students' non-attendance at school through both the role of Education Officers responsible for truancy, and individual school policies such as 'no school - no pool', and 'no school - no football', which are currently operating in various South Australian schools.'⁴⁹

- 5.85 Another successful initiative was discussed with the Committee during the Roundtable public hearing held in Sydney. Andrew Cummings from the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition stated:

I was in the Northern Territory a few weeks ago and I met a young youth worker from a remote community who is working for the YMCA there. She was telling us how on one day a week she goes into a local community school. The usual attendance rate there is around 60 per cent. On the one day a week that she goes in, it goes up to over 90 per cent. All she does is things like go in and talk to the young people, put on barbecues, have games in the pool after school and that kind of thing. The rule is that if the kids do not turn up at school they do not get to take part in the program. I do not know how much that costs, but I cannot imagine that it is more than a few thousand dollars a year.⁵⁰

48 Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, *submission 61*, p. 8.

49 Courts Administration Authority, *submission 69*, p. 2.

50 Andrew Cummings, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 56.

Sporting programs

- 5.86 Sport can have a positive impact on higher school attendance in a direct way such as ensuring that children attend school in order to participate in a sporting program. The benefits of sport and education are well documented in terms of having a positive impact on learning and education in an indirect way, such as children being more attentive in school after participating in physical education.
- 5.87 In addition the engagement of Indigenous youth in sport can promote positive social and health wellbeing, minimise the potential for offending behaviour for Indigenous youth and provide an incentive for school attendance.
- 5.88 In its submission the Australia Sports Commission stated that:
- Sport and recreation are shown to have a positive impact on Indigenous Australians, improving overall health, reducing violence, crime, theft and vandalism, reducing substance abuse and self-harm and improving school attendance.⁵¹
- 5.89 DEEWR highlighted the Government's recognition of the important role that sport has to play in education and outlined the Sporting Chance Program (SCP) to the Committee:
- This program is an Australian Government initiative that uses sport and recreation as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Indigenous students in their schooling to improve their education, training and employment outcomes. The SCP has been implemented through providers working together with schools, education authorities, sporting bodies, businesses and community groups.
- The SCP has two elements: school-based sports academies for secondary school students and education engagement strategies for primary and secondary students. Across Australia in 2010, there will be 54 sports academies and five education engagement strategies. In 2010, through Australian Government funding of over \$10 million, some 10,000 Indigenous students will be supported through this program.⁵²
- 5.90 An example of a successful Indigenous sporting initiative operating in Geraldton, Western Australia, is where netball is used as a way to re-

51 Australian Sports Commission, *submission 42*, p. 3.

52 DEEWR, *submission 63*, p. 7.

engage Indigenous females with the education system. Leza Radcliffe, Representative of the Western Australian Justice Congress commented:

Just looking at some of the other programs in Geraldton, we have our midwest netball academy looking at sport being a positive grab to get kids back into school. That is a female academy. We offer netball and basketball. It is the only academy of its kind in the country that is managed and operated by an Aboriginal organisation. The important thing is leadership and education attendance. When the program initially started, the average attendance for years 8 and 9 was around 35 per cent to 37 per cent. Our stats last year reflect a turnaround of almost 60 per cent, with 92 per cent being the average classroom attendance and active participation.⁵³

- 5.91 Sporting programs provide an avenue for engaging in education Aboriginal students, who may otherwise have been at risk of leaving school early. The Department of Indigenous Affairs Western Australia outlined the purpose of the Clontarf Foundation's Aboriginal Football Academy:

It provides an education program for Aboriginal students in partnership with selected secondary schools and colleges. The football academies are helping to improve the participation, attendance and retention rates of Aboriginal students. There are eight Clontarf football academies and two annexes in public schools across the State.⁵⁴

- 5.92 The Department of Education, Western Australia commented on the success of the 'Clontarf model' in re-engaging Indigenous students. It stated:

The Clontarf model has proven to be a catalyst for a number of other schools to establish Aboriginal programs utilising different sports to cater for disengaged Aboriginal youth.⁵⁵

Queensland Family Responsibilities Commission

- 5.93 The Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC), which began operation in July 2008 has the objective of restoring social norms in Indigenous

53 Leza Radcliffe, Western Australian Justice Congress, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 74.

54 Department of Indigenous Affairs, Western Australia, *submission 83*, p. 10.

55 Department of Education, Western Australia, *submission 81*, p. 9.

communities, with a strong focus on education and improving school attendance.

5.94 The FRC applies to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members who are welfare recipients who reside or have lived in one of the four CYWR trial communities (Arukun, Coen, Hopevale and Mossman Gorge) for three months since 1 July 2008.

5.95 In regards to improving educational outcomes and school attendance the FRC will be notified if:

- a person's child is absent from school 3 times in a school term, without reasonable excuse, and
- a person has a child of school age who is not enrolled in school without lawful excuse.

5.96 Commissioner of the FRC, David Glasgow explained that encouraging children to go to school is a fundamental element of breaking the cycle of disadvantage, offending and social dysfunction:

If school becomes a matter of interest for children, and they continue to be there, they are not somewhere else where they could cause mischief. If they are busy, and there are activities for them during the evening, they are not on the street causing mischief. If the parents are convinced that there is an advantage out of education and there are job opportunities subsequently, then there is a good reason to continue.⁵⁶

5.97 The FRC sends out a school attendance case manager to the houses of children who are not turning up on time for school. The Commissioner outlined that the case managers speak with the families and knock on doors when required to encourage parents to get their children to school on time:

If your children do not turn up today, they will be around to your house and they will knock on the door, wake you up – that happens in Aurukun; people do sleep in – get the kids and get them to school. Those percentages are fairly firm. You have to have your child there by 8.30. If you turn up at nine o'clock, you are late and you are marked late. It is not only getting them to school but also getting them to school on time.⁵⁷

56 David Glasgow, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 May 2010, p. 5.

57 David Glasgow, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 May 2010, p. 13.

- 5.98 FRC case managers have been effective in increasing school attendance levels. Part of their success is the capacity to work with the household to address the range of issues impacting on the child. If a child is not attending school regularly then usually that reflects a household that does not value education, or does not have the capacity to organise itself, maintain routines or provide transport to school. Often the behaviour of the child is a symptom of a household dysfunction and both must be addressed if school attendance and attainment are to be achieved. The FRC commented that case managers assisted in increasing the school attendance rates in Aurukun to nearly 70 per cent.⁵⁸

Committee comment

- 5.99 The Committee is aware of the need to improve preschool attendance rates for Indigenous children as this provides many of the skills and habits of learning that ensures success within the school system. In addition it is less daunting for families to be engaged at this level especially if they themselves have not had positive experiences of schooling. Evidence has shown that the numeracy and literacy gaps that exist at this level between Indigenous and non Indigenous children often persist throughout their education. This lag can contribute to lower self esteem in Indigenous students and predispose them to disengage from education.
- 5.100 The Committee commends the work of all governments in improving school readiness through preschool attendance and subsequent school attendance rates. Closing this gap will take time, and the Committee stresses the importance of a collaborative approach from schools, governments and communities. A number of attendance incentive programs are operating around Australia, from breakfast and lunch programs, to participation in recreation and extra curricula activities after school which are having a positive impact on school attendance rates.
- 5.101 Key to tracking progress is accurate data on attendance rates and the Committee is concerned to note the deficiencies in how comparable national data is currently collected. While full day attendance rates are crucial to assess improvements in attendance and direct attendance incentives to areas required, the Committee notes that data on morning versus afternoon attendance rates may have value in assessing the best strategies to achieve full day attendance.

58 David Glasgow, Family Responsibilities Commission, *Committee Hansard*, Cairns, 7 May 2010, p. 13.

Recommendation 17 – School attendance data

- 5.102 **The Committee recommends that the Minister of Education immediately conduct a review into how daily school attendance and retention rates are measured to ensure that data collected can accurately inform strategies to increase attendance and retention rates and monitor progress in these areas.**
- 5.103 The Committee notes the success of a number of programs in increasing school attendance. The Committee urges the Commonwealth Government to ensure that funds and assistance are available to support NGOs and communities where they are operating incentive attendance schemes.
- 5.104 The Committee urges the Commonwealth Government to move to a more integrated and holistic approach to Indigenous change where initiatives such as school breakfast programs, or after school sporting activities may be recognised as having health, social and educational benefits and so be able to be funded and implemented by a cross agency (flexible funding) approach.
- 5.105 Common to many of these successful incentive schemes is a cooperative approach that engages the community and is able to address more holistically the impediments to school attendance. In particular the Committee notes the benefits of the case manager approach, to increasing school attendance, whereby assistance is directed to households and communities and Indigenous leaders are involved in driving change and holding community members to account. The Committee discusses the need for more holistic and integrated cross agency approaches, such as that by the FRC, in chapter 8 and makes recommendations regarding for changes to traditional service delivery practices.

Recommendation 18 – School attendance incentive programs

- 5.106 **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government commit to the provision of funds and administrative assistance to establish and expand across Indigenous communities the number of school attendance incentive programs (such as breakfast and lunch programs, and sporting and cultural activities during and after school).**

Teaching

- 5.107 The need to encourage more Indigenous people into the teaching profession was raised with the Committee. An increase in the number of Indigenous teachers would assist in forming positive relationships between Indigenous communities and the school.
- 5.108 In his submission Dr Damien Howard highlighted this point when he stated that ‘one important strategy to create success for Indigenous students is to have more Indigenous teachers.’⁵⁹
- 5.109 In its submission the Department of Education and Training, Northern Territory (DET), discussed its ‘DET More Indigenous Teachers program’. DET offers three types of programs that provide financial support for full-time studies:
- Cadetships (20) - linked with the DEEWR national cadetship support program (Indigenous Cadetship Support)
 - Scholarships (14) - two of which are specifically allocated for people from remote locations under the Wesley Lanhapuy scholarships
 - Fellowships (6) - offered to current DET employees.⁶⁰
- 5.110 In addition the submission commented that ‘internally through close networking between Remote Workforce Development and the CDEP transition program there is monitoring and support of Indigenous learners who are studying at certificate level, for example, an assistant teacher completing a Certificate III in Classroom Support. This has meant that for the first time in many years there is a clear pathway from certificate level teaching studies to higher education level and becoming a qualified teacher.’⁶¹
- 5.111 New South Wales DET emphasised the importance of Aboriginal mentors and role models in the education workforce:
- Employing more Aboriginal people in schools, TAFE Institutes and regional and state offices provides a greater diversity of role models for young Aboriginal students. The visibility of such role models encourages young Aboriginal students to see and hear the value of learning and achievement from Aboriginal people and the life opportunities available to them. Greater Aboriginal representation in the teaching workforce contributes to the

59 Damien Howard, *submission 87*, p. 30.

60 Department of Education and Training, Northern Territory, *submission 104*, p. 2.

61 Department of Education and Training, Northern Territory, *submission 104*, p. 2.

development of teaching and learning practices that recognise and meet the needs of Aboriginal students.⁶²

- 5.112 Teaching methods was another issue raised during the course of the inquiry in relation to improving the effectiveness of the education system for Indigenous Australians.
- 5.113 The submission from the University of Newcastle emphasised the need for homogenous teacher training covering kindergarten through to year 12 across all higher education teaching institutions.⁶³ The submission pointed out that in 2007 'staff in Australian Schools Survey revealed that thirty one percent of early career primary teachers said their pre-service training was of no help in assisting them in teaching Indigenous students.'⁶⁴
- 5.114 Knowing that children may be coming from a background where English is not their first language or where in kindergarten it may be their first introduction to learning in a social setting away from parents is important for teachers when developing class plans. Hearing loss stemming from recurrent ear infections (discussed in chapter 4) is another significant issue for many Indigenous children and requires specialised teacher awareness.
- 5.115 Certain school and classroom structures can enable suitably skilled teachers to create educational success for Indigenous students. Unfortunately, there is little formal training that equips teachers with these skills and Dr Howard suggested that there is 'institutional resistance to schools changing any of their methods of operation to assist Indigenous students to succeed'.⁶⁵
- 5.116 In its submission VALS argued that there was a need for teachers to have 'an appreciation of the cultural, social, environmental and economic factors that can seriously impair the academic potential of Aboriginal children'.⁶⁶
- 5.117 The need for teachers and schools to adopt high ambitions for Indigenous students was emphasised many times throughout the inquiry. Associate Professor Somerville noted that 'high expectations do make a difference when young people are expected to move through the system'.⁶⁷

62 New South Wales Department of Education and Training, *submission 43*, p. 10.

63 Dennis Foley and Terry Lovat, University of Newcastle, *submission 28*, p. 14.

64 Dennis Foley and Terry Lovat, University of Newcastle, *submission 28*, p. 13.

65 Damien Howard, *submission 87*, p. 28.

66 Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, *submission 40*, p. 28.

67 Robert Somerville, Department of Education Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 79.

5.118 Similarly, the Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians said that 'it is important that parents, schools and communities have high expectations of Indigenous children, and expect them to succeed'.⁶⁸

5.119 Dr Howard commented that:

It is critical that positive relationships are combined with high expectations. Positive social relationships cannot be at the expense of high educational expectations. The research is clear that both positive relationships and high expectations are needed.⁶⁹

5.120 A review of MCEETYA's *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* strategy concluded that improvements could be achieved over time with continued commitment and resources. The Chief Investigator, Professor Peter Buckskin stressed that improvements in teacher training and school leadership were crucial:

We need to change the way pre-service teachers are being trained in terms of attitudes and expectations around Aboriginal people and stereotypes need to be confronted to prevent graduate teachers from entering classrooms with low expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Professor Buckskin states that students are quick to pick up on low expectations and their response was often to meet these low expectations.⁷⁰

5.121 The importance of establishing positive and supportive school environments based upon high expectations of Indigenous children was highlighted by several witnesses. Both DEEWR and the Australian Children's Commissioner quoted the successes of Dr Chris Sarra.

Dr Chris Sarra, a leading figure in Indigenous school reform, claims that an underlying philosophy of high expectations for success is crucial to achieving better outcomes for children and young people. His "Strong and Smart" program at Cherbourg State School in Queensland, where he was principal, led to a 94% cut in absenteeism and significant improvements in literacy and numeracy.⁷¹

68 Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians, *submission 59*, p. 12.

69 Damien Howard, *submission 87*, p. 31.

70 Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, *submission 40*, p. 27.

71 Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians, *submission 59*, pp. 11-12; DEEWR, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 17 June 2010, p. 18.

- 5.122 In line with better cultural training for teachers and holding high expectations for Indigenous students, the Department of Education, Western Australia stated it had:

...designed and implemented programs that encourage effective teaching to better meet individual student needs; increase support to school leaders; train staff to be more culturally competent; and encourage staff to hold high expectations of Aboriginal students.⁷²

- 5.123 Queensland Police Commissioner Atkinson gave an example of a positive teaching approach in Aurukun whereby the school had employed a local Indigenous woman as a teacher's aide to provide support in the classroom. He told the Committee that:

One class that we sat in on had about 12 children, two teachers and a local Indigenous woman who was a teacher's aide – so three adults with 12 children, a very, very respectful appreciation of Indigenous culture.⁷³

Committee comment

- 5.124 The Committee considers there are numerous benefits stemming from an increase in the number of Indigenous teachers working in the profession. Employing more Indigenous teachers will create positive role models for students and communities and assist in bridging the gap between school environments and Indigenous communities. A greater number of Indigenous teachers will assist in incorporating Indigenous culture and practices into the classroom with the flow on effect of increasing the engagement and attendance rates of Indigenous students.
- 5.125 The Committee is of the view that positive Indigenous role models play a critical role in providing aspirations for Indigenous children and closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. By encouraging Indigenous Australians to be teachers it highlights the importance of education and attainment for Indigenous Australians. The Committee encourages all states and territories to increase the support provided to Indigenous students who are studying to become teachers.
- 5.126 The Committee acknowledges the value of Indigenous teacher's aides in the classroom and encourages state and territories to similarly provide additional support to recruit and train Indigenous people for these positions.

72 Department of Education Western Australia, *submission 81*, p. 8.

73 Robert Atkinson, *Committee Hansard*, Sydney, 28 January 2011, p. 29.

- 5.127 From the evidence received the Committee believes further work should be done on teacher training to enhance the understanding of Indigenous social, cultural and economic issues. This is critical as it is often graduate teachers who are appointed to regional schools in the first few years out of university.
- 5.128 Equipping teachers with specific teaching strategies for Indigenous students will assist in engaging Indigenous students and will have a beneficial impact on increasing school attendance rates for Indigenous students.
- 5.129 As part of the teaching strategies the Committee endorses the high expectations strategy for teaching Indigenous students. The Committee understands that students will often meet the expectations of those around them whether these are high or low. The results achieved through innovative partnership programs demonstrates that with the right environment and teaching strategies Indigenous students can excel in education attainment.
- 5.130 The Committee recommends that the principle of setting high expectations for Indigenous students should be incorporated into teacher training curricula throughout Australia. The Committee suggests that all states and territories should improve cultural training for teachers and hold high expectations for all Indigenous students.
- 5.131 During its visit to New Zealand the Committee observed how changes in teaching practices and the approach to schooling can dramatically improve education outcomes, confidence and future choices of Maori students. At Opotiki College, a regional township in the North Island of New Zealand with a majority of Maori students who are from a lower socio economic background, students entering year 8 were significantly below national average rates for literacy and numeracy.
- 5.132 Within just two years the change to the teaching approach produced a dramatic turn-around in the student results. Students are now performing at the average and in their final years students are surpassing the national average. Retention rates for students have increased and the students that the Committee spoke with were positive about their futures, could identify a career path, and had made a choice not to engage with drugs or other criminal behaviour.
- 5.133 Central to the philosophy of the school was a culture of high expectations for all students, Maori included, and all teachers were required to undertake specialised training to adapt their teaching methods to this philosophy. Teachers were expected to be conversant in Maori culture

(though not necessarily speak the language) in order to understand the background of students and be better able to engage and build positive relationships with students, their families and the wider community.

- 5.134 In both Australia and New Zealand there is clear evidence of the success of this approach and there is a need for teachers to be better equipped when it comes to engaging Indigenous students in education. The Committee recommends a comprehensive and mandatory professional development program aimed at better equipping teachers to meet the needs of Indigenous students and assist Indigenous students to excel.
- 5.135 In addition, the Committee notes that the 2011-2012 Australian Government Budget allocated \$425 million over four years to reward top performing teachers through the National Rewards for Great Teachers Program.⁷⁴ The Committee recommends that some of this \$425 million be directed towards the formal recognition of outstanding performance in the teaching of Indigenous students.

Recommendation 19 – Teacher development

- 5.136 **The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education work with the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs develop a comprehensive and mandatory teachers' professional development program that:**
- provides specialist training on teaching Indigenous children, and where necessary the teaching of English as a second language (ESL)
 - recognises poor English language skills and health and hearing issues which may impact on learning
 - gives teachers a competency in cultural knowledge and sensitivity to assist in working with Indigenous communities and families
 - can be adapted to reflect local Indigenous community needs and culture, and
 - trains the teachers to set and achieve high expectations for Indigenous students.

The Committee also recommends that a portion of the 2011-12 Budget

74 *Investing in Australia's Regions*, Australian Government Budget 2011-2011, p. 11

funds allocated to reward top performing teachers is directed towards the formal recognition of outstanding performance in the teaching of Indigenous students, where real outcomes in progress can be demonstrated.

