Improving education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Synopsis

There is substantial activity in place, at both the federal and state level, to address issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ engagement with school. Programs designed to support students are particularly prolific at the state level, reflecting their constitutional responsibility for school education.

Additionally, research demonstrates that the most enduring responses, and those likely to have the greatest likelihood of success, are place-based initiatives where development is co-designed with the local communities, and which reflect those communities’ specific needs.

Introduction

Access to quality schooling, supported by experienced school leaders and teachers delivering an engaging curriculum is integral to the achievement of improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to have opportunities to reach their full potential, with teachers and parents holding high expectations for their educational outcomes. However, data shows that the gap between outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remains and targets under the Closing the Gap strategy relating to attendance and literacy and numeracy achievement are not being met (a snapshot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student data is at Attachment A).

The Australian Government has a national leadership and policy role in school education, including providing substantial funding (a separate paper outlining how the Australian Government funds schools, along with data on funds for remote schools has been provided). State and territory governments in collaboration with the education authorities in their jurisdictions maintain responsibility for the delivery of school education, including taking flexible approaches to implementation, which take into account differing local needs. Jurisdictions are, for example, responsible for decisions in relation to professional development of the education workforce, staffing supply issues and ensuring all children attend school.¹

In addressing challenges related to remote and very remote communities, solutions are often complex and context specific. Certain strategies/policies that work in one community will most likely be different to what works in another. Building strong relationships between communities, students, teachers, school leaders and education authorities is important. Gaining community and parental buy-in requires time and commitment to build trust and facilitate change.

This paper provides information, including work underway, for future actions on four key areas of focus identified by the Special Envoy as areas of interest in relation to improving the engagement and educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

- school attendance
- supporting teacher workforce capability
- curriculum (including explicit instruction)
- integrated services.

¹ The Australian Government prepared a paper for the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council in 2018 that highlighted three initial three initial parameters for Council’s consideration – school workforce capability, shared accountability and English as a second/foreign language.
1) School Attendance

Issue

Research shows a student’s level of school attendance has a major influence on their academic achievement. The current data in the 2018 Closing the Gap report highlights that school attendance continues to be an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly in regional and remote communities.

In 2017, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students. There has been no meaningful improvement in any of the states and territories. In the Northern Territory, the Indigenous attendance rate fell from 70.2 per cent in 2014 to 66.2 per cent in 2017.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance is also lower in remote areas than non-remote areas, and the attendance gap remains larger in remote areas. In 2017, Indigenous attendance rates ranged from 86.8 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 64.6 per cent in Very Remote areas.

The evidence and what works

In 2018, the Smith Family report Attendance lifts achievement found that attendance and achievement are early indicators of students who are likely to have poor longer-term outcomes, as they help predict school completion and engagement post-school in work or further study. It also found that improvements in attendance and achievement are possible, with important interventions comprising:

- tracking students’ individual progress
- using educational data to identify, as early as possible, which students need additional support, and
- targeting support to meet the educational challenges and circumstances of individual students.

This data is held by government and non-government education authorities in the states and territories.

In 2013, the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations commissioned the report Student Attendance and Education Outcomes: Every Day Counts from the University of Western Australia and the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. The research found:

- in all analyses, average academic achievement on NAPLAN tests declined with any absence from school and continued to decline as absence rates increased
- the nature of the relationship between absence from school and achievement strongly suggests that every day of attendance in school contributes towards a child’s learning and there is no ‘safe’ threshold for non-attendance
- the effects of absence accumulate over time, and that absence from school was related to academic achievement not only in the current year but in future years as well, having an ongoing impact on a child’s learning
- unauthorised absences (that is, absences that are unexplained or where the reason is not deemed acceptable by a school) are more strongly associated with lack of achievement than authorised absences, and
- some students are more adversely affected by absence than others, with distinct gaps in achievement depending on where students live, their socio-economic status, mobility and Aboriginal status. Even among students with perfect attendance records, students in high socio-economic index schools

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achieved at much higher levels than students in low socio-economic index schools, and more advantaged children had relatively high achievement levels irrespective of their level of attendance at school.

The 2016 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) report *Indigenous School Attendance: Creating Expectations that are ‘REALY HIGH’ and ‘HIGHLY REAL’* found the overarching principle that emerges from the research is that schools and communities require resources and empowerment at the local level to devise strategies that are context sensitive, culturally appropriate, collaborative, and re-energise a love of lifelong learning. It highlighted 15 recommendations to improve school attendance:

1. Set expectations early and establish patterns early, through sustained investments in early childhood education.
2. Build bridges between homes and schools in Indigenous communities.
3. Foster high-performing school leadership which is culturally responsive and externally engaged.
4. Support joint school-community collaborative initiatives in high-risk communities over the long haul.
5. Emphasise fostering and stimulating community demand for high-quality and culturally responsive lifelong learning.
6. Think creatively and laterally about community-based solutions and then seed and fertilise innovation, by investing in community-based human and financial resources.
7. Embrace whole-child and place-based models.
8. Integrate children’s academic development with their health, wellbeing and safety by supporting schools and the Indigenous non-government community sector simultaneously.
9. Improve data systems by making them transparent and regularly reported.
10. Refine and sharpen the data relating to why children and young people are missing school.
11. Innovate and open up choices for teenagers to retain their engagement in school education, through vocational education and training programs and also through project-based programs, creativity learning, work-studies and entrepreneurial education.
12. Create reward and recognition systems for regular school attendees.
14. Recruit Indigenous students into Initial Teacher Education.
15. Foster the systematic professional development of teachers to ensure that there is continuous improvement in learner-centred teaching.

**What is happening**

**States and territories**

The primary responsibility for school attendance policies and responsibility for ensuring all children attend school lies with the individual states and territories.

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1 Dreise, T; Milgate, G; Perrett, B; and Meston, T, *Indigenous school attendance: Creating expectations that are ‘really high’ and ‘highly real’* ACER, https://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/4, 2016
The Productivity Commission’s (2016) analysis of what works in *Indigenous Primary School Achievement* concluded that the fundamentals for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are the same as for non-Indigenous children. Schools that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with these partnerships enabling a collective commitment to hold high expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Schools and school systems across Australia are using planning processes to engage with their school community to set expectations. In many cases, the process to develop these plans is as important, if not more so, than the actual documents themselves. This process, when implemented effectively, builds positive relationships between the school and their school community, leading to greater engagement in students’ educational outcomes.

For example, Cairns West State School has implemented the ‘Academic Success Guarantee’ program developed in response to the challenge of continual low attendance, low performance and low expectations for Indigenous students. Under the ‘Academic Success Guarantee’ policy, students and families are encouraged to achieve 95 per cent (or higher) attendance rates. Once a student is attending at 95 per cent or more, the school works with them to develop a contract/compact, committing the school to help the student achieve the national minimum standard or above in literacy and numeracy. If this result is not achieved, the school then works with the student and their family on a case-by-case basis to improve outcomes.

These signed service commitments outline each school’s aspiration and desire to achieve academic and post-school success for their students through an underlying simple two-way message:

- for parents/families—if you want your child to be successful send them to school and
- for schools—if students come to school every day then we must do whatever it takes to help them be successful.

*Australian Government Department of Education and Training*

The Smith Family’s Learning for Life Program provides another example of a shared accountability written agreement where parent engagement is at the core of the program. The Learning for Life Program, supported by the Australian Government with $48 million over 2016–17 to 2019–20, provides financial, practical and emotional support to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds with their education and post school transitions. 20.5 per cent of students on the Program identify as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander.

Through completion of a Family Partnership Agreement with a trained Family Partnership Coordinator, families are supported to hold high expectations of their children and to accept shared responsibility for student attendance and educational outcomes. The Family Partnership Coordinator’s role is to build family capacity through strengths based conversation, linking the family to knowledge, services and networks that seek to address the educational barriers the family has identified.

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5 School community includes students, student families and care givers and school staff
Behavioural drivers behind school attendance

To design policies that maximise the chances that students will attend school on any given day, it is important to have a detailed understanding of how students and their families make the decision about whether to attend or not attend school. Assumed factors of poor attendance are attributed to social indicators such as poverty, remoteness, health, housing, culture and language.

The department is currently managing the project *Behavioural Drivers behind school attendance* to identify and better understand the behavioural drivers behind school attendance and non-attendance amongst Indigenous students (albeit not focussed specifically on remote schools). The research project aims to address an evidence gap on specific behavioural drivers behind school attendance. While broader conclusions around observable characteristics for school attendance are well established, these characteristics explain some but not all of the drivers behind school attendance.

The research, being undertaken by Coolamon Advisors, is anticipated to be completed by early 2019. The findings will support jurisdictions in building their evidence-based approaches to improving school attendance and provide insights into how current initiatives could be tailored to achieve better outcomes.

**Future actions**

Following completion of the Behavioural Drivers project, the Department of Education and Training will provide the findings to the COAG Education Council’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Group to inform the development of possible interventions to improve student attendance that can be considered in the context of developing a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy.\(^6\)

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2) Supporting teacher workforce capability

Issues

Teacher and school leader capability

Teacher effectiveness is widely recognised as a critical factor in improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.\(^7\) Evidence shows teachers can accelerate student achievement through a consistent, evidence-based approach to teaching and learning practice, with a focus on performance in literacy, numeracy and attendance and setting higher expectations for students to reach.\(^8\)

Factors that affect the capability of teachers to lift educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- teachers feeling poorly prepared to teach students from Aboriginal and Torres Islander backgrounds and often hold deficit views of students’ ability to achieve academic success.\(^9\)
- low numbers of teachers (particularly primary) participating in professional learning to support teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.\(^10\)
- professional learning that can be highly variable, ad hoc and lack cohesiveness, with formal professional learning rarely evaluated and the success of professional learning opportunities for staff dependent on the principal.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) require all teachers to employ effective strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and maintain an understanding of the issues affecting Indigenous Australians. The Teacher Standards are complemented by the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Principal Standard) which asks principals and aspiring school leaders to foster understanding and reconciliation with Indigenous cultures as part of their leadership, particularly when engaging with their school communities.

Attraction and retention difficulties

Attracting skilled teachers and school leaders into schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is problematic for many schools, as is retaining teachers for any significant length of time. This can be especially problematic in rural, regional and remote schools.

While all states and territories have existing policies, practices and incentives to attract and retain teachers to remote and rural schools, the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education found that attracting and retaining the best teachers for regional, rural and remote schools continues to be one of the most persistent challenges on the ‘education agenda’.

Research identifies that social factors, such as living away from family, friends and other support, is one of the areas that requires attention to ensure adequate staffing of rural schools. Teachers are more likely to move and stay in regional and remote areas if their family members are with them and engaged in the community.\(^11\)

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\(^7\) House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, The power of education: From surviving to thriving Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students retrieved from www.aph.gov.au, 2017

\(^8\) Ibid

\(^9\) Hattie, J., Visible learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. 1st edn, Routledge, Oxon UK, 2009

\(^10\) Australian Council for Educational Research, Staff in Australia’s schools 2013: Main report on the survey, Department of Education, Canberra, 2004

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher workforce

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and principals continue to be under-represented in the education workforce, making up approximately 1.2 per cent and 1.4 per cent, of their respective workforce. By comparison, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up over 5 per cent of the student body. In order to move towards parity in representation, three key areas need to be considered:

- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students commencing and completing initial teacher education programs.
- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates entering and remaining in the education workforce.
- the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers undertaking school leadership roles.

Currently, only around 2 per cent of higher education students commencing initial teacher education are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and these students have a markedly lower rate of successfully completing study. In 2017, Universities Australia released their Indigenous Strategy 2017–2020, which seeks to address this issue more broadly across the higher education sector, focusing on increasing enrolment, retention and completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education students. The Strategy recognises that the primary power to implement change within higher education lies with universities.

While the reasons for low retention rates are complex, studies have found that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers and teachers report experiences of marginalisation and disenfranchisement in schools and often have ill-defined job roles and insecure working conditions.

The evidence and what works

Research recognises the fundamental importance of quality teaching in the achievement of student outcomes. This starts with well-trained, skilled and knowledgeable teachers who provide the foundation for a high quality education system. Evidence shows the effectiveness of the teacher in the classroom is the biggest in-school influence on student achievement. Principals have been reported as having the second biggest in school impact on student outcomes after classroom teaching. Focus should therefore be on what can make the greatest difference in the classroom – teachers and principals.

Research shows that teacher attitudes and teaching approaches play an important role in how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel about school and so have a significant impact on student

attendance, learning and attainment. Research indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student and parental engagement with school tends to improve where schools adopt an organisational culture and teaching approach that affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity. Principals’ values and leadership strategies shape the school environment and classroom practices, which result in improved student learning outcomes. Ensuring teachers and school leaders have the skills, knowledge and competency to effectively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is key.

The Behrendt Review in 2012 found that ‘building a class of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals who can respond to the needs of their own communities will be vital to meeting Closing the Gap targets’. Similarly, the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report in 2014 noted that increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers could help foster student engagement and improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Strengthening the cultural safety of schools to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the teaching workforce will contribute to making teaching a more attractive and sustainable career choice.

At the national level, the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) which ceased in 2016, examined the opportunities and challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher recruitment, attraction and retention, and also noted the importance of cultural safety in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce participation and improving rates of self-identification in workforce data.

What is happening

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is a shared space. State and territory governments have constitutional responsibility for schooling, including:

- registration of schools
- teacher recruitment and employment conditions
- registration and certification of teachers
- teacher professional development.

States and territories

Progress to date in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education has primarily focused on improving the cultural competency of initial teacher education students and existing teachers, targeted pedagogies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and strategies for increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce participation and better data to support this.

There have been a number of initiatives, such as Good to Great Schools and the Stronger Smarter Workforce Program, which have focused on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by building capacity in schools. These have supported teachers to adapt their pedagogies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and school leaders to build their cultural competency, and

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20 Our Children, Our Future: Achieving Improved Primary and Secondary Education Outcomes for Indigenous Students n.d, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia, n.p
21 Our Children, Our Future: Achieving Improved Primary and Secondary Education Outcomes for Indigenous Students n.d, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia, n.p
that of the school more broadly, through reflecting on cultural biases in the classroom, including challenging deficit discourse.

Most states and territories have developed cultural standards frameworks and also provide a range of resources to their schools to support teachers to provide culturally safe learning environments for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There is also a range of high quality professional learning programs that seek to build teachers’ cultural awareness, such as Connecting to Country in New South Wales.

As teacher employers, many state and territory government and education authorities have commitments in place to attract and recruit high quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching staff, some of which include employment targets. These commitments also include a range of strategies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators’ career development, such as the Aspiring Leaders program in Queensland and scholarships in the Northern Territory to support assistant teachers gain teaching qualifications. All states and territories have existing policies, practices and incentives to attract and retain teachers to remote and rural schools. Examples of initiatives to attract and retain teachers in place in jurisdictions are at Attachment B.

The certification of teachers at the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher career stages of the Teacher Standards is an important initiative that recognises and rewards teacher expertise in classroom practice. Some sectors and schools are utilising the expertise and experience of certified teachers through deploying them in hard-to-staff schools.

Australian Government

Pre-service (initial) teacher education (ITE)

The Government has led the establishment of a nationally consistent system of accreditation of ITE as a key part of improving teaching quality. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has led the implementation of ITE reforms to strengthen the accreditation system. Previously, assessment of pre-service teachers against standards 1.4 and 2.4 for accreditation has been inconsistent, if applied at all. Under the revised ITE program Accreditation Standards, providers must ensure that all ITE students demonstrate they meet all aspects of the Graduate Teacher Standards in order to graduate. Providers of ITE have responded to the new requirements, making changes to program design and delivery for pre-service teachers commencing their studies in 2018. Graduates from these programs will enter classrooms from 2020 (postgraduate students) and 2022 (undergraduate students).

In December 2017, the Education Council endorsed the Leading for impact: Australian guidelines for school leadership development (the Guidelines), for use by jurisdictions, to ensure opportunities for school leadership development for all teachers including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. The Guidelines focus on embedding strategies to find future leaders in under-represented groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, within systemic identification processes to achieve greater equality and improve diversity.

The Graduate Teacher Standards describe the professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement at the first of the four career stages defined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: Standard 1.4 relates to strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Standard 2.4 relates to understanding and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
ACARA illustrations of practice

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has developed illustration of practice on ways to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority in and across the learning areas of the Australian Curriculum.

They demonstrate innovative content and delivery of the Australian Curriculum from school communities across Australia. These schools range from those with very few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to those with 100 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment.

The illustrations recognise the unique and significant place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and show how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and knowledge are a part of every Australian student’s identity.

Future actions

Cultural competency

The Government is supporting the embedding of cultural safety in schools through funding a cultural competency initiative. Targeted funding will soon be provided to AITSL to work in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts to develop a suite of professional learning resources to support the cultural competency of the teaching workforce and increase cultural safety in schools. This work is complemented by AITSL’s ongoing projects and as part of the Government’s response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education to improve access to high-quality professional learning particularly for teachers in rural, regional and remote schools.

Workforce data

To address the lack of consistent teacher workforce data, AITSL has been tasked to develop and deliver the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Strategy. This Strategy aims to connect teacher workforce data from around Australia and will provide critical insights and support informed investment and decision-making. This Strategy will help provide a more reliable data set on how teachers are graduating, getting jobs, professional learning and retention, including in remote and regional areas.
3) Curriculum

Issue

For meaningful and effective learning, teachers must be able to draw on curriculum that reflects local context and culture, the lived experience of their students and a range of pedagogical approaches.

At a national level, the Australian Curriculum – Foundation to Year 10 supports teachers to deliver meaningful and culturally inclusive education, ensuring that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected across the curriculum, and
- all students are able to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world’s oldest continuous living culture.

Despite positive developments in curriculum delivery and pedagogy to improve student outcomes, there continues to be a substantial gap in student literacy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students across all year levels.

In particular, the literacy results of children in remote primary schools across Australia continues to be well below those in other areas. In 2017, only 62.1 per cent of Year 3 students and 52.7 per cent of Year 5 students in very remote schools met the national minimum standard in NAPLAN reading assessments.

The evidence and what works

There is a body of evidence for the efficacy of Direct Instruction or Explicit Direct Instruction on student learning outcomes.

Direct Instruction (DI) is a teacher-directed and skills-oriented pedagogical approach developed by the National Institute for Direct Instruction in the USA. It emphasises the use of small-group instruction by teachers and aides, using carefully scripted lessons in which skills are broken down into small units, sequenced deliberately, and taught explicitly. Students are grouped according to ability rather than age.

Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI) is a teaching practice based on educational theory, brain research, data analysis and DI. The education pedagogy combines a set of instructional practices with well-crafted lesson design. It includes continuous ‘checking of understanding’ until students master the skills being taught. It is based on the premise that all children can learn.

Both DI and EDI place emphasis on teacher direction, presentation of prompts, briskly paced lessons, constant practice, assessment and review. Unlike EDI, DI includes curriculum and outlines how complex strategies should be broken down and taught as smaller sub-skills. It is also supported by formal teacher training and scripted delivery.

Archer and Hughes for example, state that DI should be a consistent mainstay of working with students both with and without learning difficulties.25 ACER’s research director, Professor Steve Dinham states, “Direct Instruction and explicit teaching is two to three times more effective than inquiry-based or problem based learning.”26

Research on beginning reading using DI strategies has reported that disadvantaged students, and those with diverse needs, benefit most from early and explicit teaching of word recognition skills, including phonics.

What is happening

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25 Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes, Explicit instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching, 2011
26 Stephen Dinham quoted in, Bridie Smith, Results back principal’s return to instruction The Age, 10 May 2008.
States and territories

Education authorities recognise the crucial role literacy skills play as a foundation for education. With responsibility for education delivery in schools, state and territory education authorities are implementing a variety of programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ skill development. Since literacy development occurs most intensively in the early years of life, the majority of literacy programs and interventions are concentrated in the primary years of schooling.

Examples of literacy strategies and initiatives supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is at Attachment C.

Australian Government Department of Education and Training

The Australian Government supplements state and territory efforts with targeted investment in pilot programs that evaluate pedagogical approaches for various priority contexts. Currently this includes the Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program and the English Language Learning for Indigenous Children.

Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program

The Australian Government is funding Good to Great Schools Australia to deliver the Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program pilot across 16 schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. The program uses DI to improve literacy outcomes for students.

The Government has commissioned an evaluation of the program to provide robust evidence regarding the effectiveness of DI and EDI teaching approaches as illustrated in the 16 participating schools in WA, NT and QLD. The 2017 evaluation of the program showed mixed results for participating schools. Schools who implemented the program more stringently achieved better outcomes. The evaluation also found showed that the Flexible Literacy program teaching approaches, on average, achieved results comparable to other methods of instruction and fewer than half the teachers surveyed believed the program gave them better teaching skills or improved their ability to teach literacy. A final evaluation report is due in March 2019.

English Language Learning for Indigenous Children (ELLIC)

The Government has committed $5.9 million from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to trial ELLIC initiative. ELLIC aims to improve English literacy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander preschool children for whom English is an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), supporting the Government’s commitment to Closing the Gap in literacy achievement. The trial will be underpinned by a series of digital, play-based apps aligned to the Early Years Learning Framework and Australian Curriculum: Foundation, designed for use in preschool classrooms to support English literacy development. Resources for educators, parents and community members will also be developed to support use of the ELLIC apps with preschool children in the year before full-time school. These are anticipated to be ready for the start of the 2019 school year.

Future directions

The Australian Government is undertaking a meta-evaluation of literacy and numeracy initiatives examining the factors that support improved student learning in rural and remote schools, to identify literacy and numeracy strategies that have currency in these schools. Evaluation findings from both the Flexible Literacy for Remote Schools Program and meta-evaluation will provide a robust evidence base to consider the efficacy of DI teaching approaches and other pedagogical approaches that may be piloted to further support improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ outcomes and skill development.

4) Integrated services
Issue

In his Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, Professor John Halsey found that 
"The achievements and opportunities of children and students are greatly helped when there is a productive 
and complementary relationship between their out of school life and the time they spend at school."

As the discussion paper that preceded the Review report noted, "For some children and students, there are 
home and community factors which impact negatively on their success. Included here are poor health and a 
lack of regular nutritious food. It is very hard, or perhaps impossible, for students to concentrate on learning 
if they always feel hungry and are frequently unwell or 'out of sorts'. These factors are compounded if their 
home life is very stressful, there is a long history of unemployment and underemployment, and there is 
always a looming sense of another problem being just around the corner."

Integrated services – or wrap around services – provide a means by which organisations partner to ensure 
students are ready for school.

The evidence and what works

In 2004, the UK Civil Renewal Unit in the United report Firm Foundations: The Government’s Framework for 
Community Capacity Building introduced the concept of anchor organisations and the role they play in 
community capacity building. These organisations are located in the community had have sufficient 
presence, respect, and openness to work in partnership to grow and sustain communities.

This ‘Collective Impact’ approach is gaining momentum in Australia in the government, non-government 
and philanthropic sectors. Key to this approach are the formalised governance arrangements that look and 
feel different in each community with projects tailored to respond to community need. Schools and 
community health facilities are often seen as anchor organisations due to their centrality in families’ lives.

What is happening

States and territories

States and territories implement a range of placed-based initiatives that provides wrap around services.

For example, in Birchip in north-west Victoria, the maternal and child health nurses work with families to 
provide services for children from birth to 3.5 years. With the relationships and information the nurses 
build up over time, they link families into specialist services such as occupational therapists and speech 
therapists, and connect parents and children into other services such as playgroups and new parents’ 
groups where advice and support is available. The local school is supportive and is known for the care and 
attention it provides as well as its relentless focus on learning.

The Western Australian Government has announced its Early Years Initiative which will see four Western 
Australian communities partner with it, the Minderoo Foundation and the Telethon Kids Institute on a 
long-term strategy to link community leaders, government, researchers, business and philanthropic 
organisations to find better ways to design and deliver services. This is in response to evidence that 
suggests many children aged 0-4 years old in WA are not reaching developmental milestones before 
reaching school age. Factors including housing, employment, education, health and safety will be taken into 
consideration as part of the initiative.
Connected Beginnings

The Connected Beginnings Program is a component of the Community Child Care Fund, which is part of the new Child Care Package. The program responds to the early childhood recommendation of the 2014 Forrest Review of Indigenous Training and Employment (Creating Parity) Report. The program is jointly administered with the Department of Health.

Annually, around $12 million (ongoing to forward estimates) is available to support selected communities to better prepare Indigenous children for school and contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous children and their non-Indigenous peers.

The program integrates early childhood, maternal and child health, and family support services with schools in selected Indigenous communities and is currently supporting over 3,000 Indigenous 0-5 year old children experiencing disadvantage through a community led ‘Collective Impact’ approach.

This integration is more than simply co-locating services. The Collective Impact approach puts community squarely at the foundation of the project, and includes community co-design. Each project will formalise community governance arrangements that support a whole of community services approach to ensuring children are school ready.

There are currently 12 communities participating, and the program is continuing progressive implementation in a number of additional selected locations. The current program sites include:

- NT: Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Galiwin’ku and Angurugu
- QLD: Doomadgee
- VIC: Mildura
- SA: Ceduna and Port Augusta
- NSW: Doonside and Mt Druitt
- WA: Kalgoorlie
- TAS: Bridgewater/Gagebrook.

Common across the governance arrangements is representation and engagement of key government agencies, organisations and services that support Indigenous children starting school ready. These governance arrangements provide a platform for sustainability of the approach, building in systemic good practice of integrated services to provide ongoing holistic support to children and families. An example of governance in action is the program’s Alice Springs Project. This project’s governance arrangements include a formal MOU between the Project Team and the local Aboriginal Health Service.

Additionally in Alice Springs, around 20 key agency, organisation and service representatives regularly meet to progress integration and wrap around support to children and families regarding transition. Discussions include data sharing across an estimated 40 child, family, health and housing projects.

Future actions

The department will continue to implement the Connected Beginnings program. An evaluation is underway by the Australian Healthcare Associates that encompasses both the health and education aspects of the Program. The evaluation report is due mid-2019.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education – Data Snapshot

- In 2017:
  - there were 215,453 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, accounting for 5.6 per cent of all school students; 7.2 per cent of total students in government schools; and 2.6 per cent of total students in non-government schools.
  - 83.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled in government schools.
  - the average Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student goes to a government school in a metropolitan or provincial area, where the majority of peers are non-Indigenous students.
  - New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia had 75 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments.
  - the overall attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
  - the Year 7/8 to Year 12 retention rate was 62.4 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, compared with 86 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

- In 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 20-24 years olds nationally who had achieved Year 12 or equivalent was 65.3 per cent, compared to 89.1 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

Closing the Gap targets – Early Childhood and Education

- The target to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018 is on track. Over the long term (1998 to 2016) the Indigenous child mortality rate has declined by 35 per cent, and there has been a narrowing of the gap by 32 per cent.

- The target to have 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025 is on track. In 2016, around 14,700 Indigenous children (91 per cent) were enrolled in early childhood programs.

- The target to close the gap in school attendance by 2018 is not on track. In 2017, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

- The target to halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018 is not on track. In 2017, the proportion of Indigenous students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN is on track in only one (Year 9 numeracy) of the eight areas (reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9).

- The target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020 is on track. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous 20-24 year-olds who had achieved Year 12 or equivalent increased from 47.4 per cent in 2006 to 65.3 per cent in 2016.
Indigenous student attendance rates, by state and territory

Indigenous student attendance rates, for the national target

Indigenous students meeting National Minimum Standards for reading, with trajectories, 2008 to 2017

Indigenous students meeting National Minimum Standards for numeracy, with trajectories, 2008 to 2017

Proportion of students meeting National Minimum Standards (per cent), by Indigenous status, 2008 and 2017

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Reading

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<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
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Numeracy

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
State and territory workforce initiatives

New South Wales

The NSW Rural and Remote Human Resources Strategy aims to attract pre-service and experienced teachers to teach in rural and remote schools. Under the strategy, the NSW Government offers a number of initiatives including incentives, scholarships and experience programs. An example of the scholarships and experiences offered include the Teach Rural Scholarship.

Year 12 students and current university students can apply for a Teach Rural Scholarship. The scholarships are a recruitment initiative aimed at assisting schools who have had difficulty in attracting high quality graduate teachers. The scholarships include $7500 annual stipend to assist initial teacher education (ITE) students with their studies and a $6000 appointment allowance. To be eligible participants must remain in a rural or remote location for a minimum period of three years.

NSW offers incentives to attract and retain existing teachers to regional or remote schools, including bonuses of up to $30,000 per annum on top of base salary, depending on the school and level of seniority. They also offer flexible incentives and benefits including:

- $10,000 "sign-on bonus" for eligible positions
- $5000 annual retention bonus, paid in cash available for up to 10 years
- additional personal leave
- additional professional development days
- transfer points.


Queensland

The Remote Area Incentive Scheme (RAIS) provides a range of allowances and incentives for teachers appointed to state schools located in rural and remote Queensland. Depending on location, incentives to attract teachers to rural and remote schools include:

- permanent employment
- locality allowance, paid fortnightly
- financial benefits, including compensation benefit (up to $6000); incentive benefit (up to $6000); dependant benefit (up to $6000 for an adult and $4500 for a child); and Identified Location Payments of $1000 a year for up to five years when appointed to a school in an Identified Indigenous community
- extended and additional leave entitlements
- specialised induction programs
- subsidised housing
- flight allowances
- transfer and relocation expense assistance
- accrual of accelerated transfer points for permanent teachers.

Western Australia

The Remote Teaching Service recruits graduate and experienced teachers to work in remote communities in Western Australia. A range of allowances and benefits are offered, including:

- permanency on completion of two years satisfactory service
- rent-free housing and fully subsidised relocation costs
- locality and financial allowances up to $25,782 per year
- two return trips to Perth and a return trip to a main regional centre each year for eligible staff and their dependants
- an additional 10 weeks paid leave on completion of three years, or an additional 22 weeks paid leave on completion of four years.


Victoria

The Rural Scholarship Program provides cash scholarships to individuals studying to be a teacher and living in rural Victoria.

Recipients are paid:

- $3000 when the scholarship agreement is signed
- $2000 with evidence of enrolment in an identified undergraduate ITE course
- for postgraduate study, it is a single payment of $4000.

Incentives are also offered for schools having difficulty attracting high quality graduate teachers. The incentives are designed to be given to graduates as part of an ongoing employment offer. Three incentive types are available:

- Category 1: Priority and rural schools – incentive valued at up to $11,000
- Category 2: Provincial and outer metro growth schools – incentive valued at up to $7000
- Category 3: All other schools with a hard-to-staff teaching vacancy – incentive valued at up to $4000.

Graduates who receive an incentive must enter into an agreement to work for a minimum amount of time.


Tasmania

The Professional Experience in Isolated and Rural Schools Program encourages pre-service teachers to undertake school experience in participating rural and isolated schools by providing support for accommodation (up to $150 per week) and travel (where applicable, up to three return flights).


Incentives for teachers to teach in remote locations in Tasmania include:

- dependants allowance
- leave expenses, fares out of isolated locations (Bass Strait Islands) up to three times per year
- special allowances up to $4679 per annum


Northern Territory
Incentives for teachers to teach in remote locations in the Northern Territory include:
• Remote Incentive Allowances of between $1153 and $8794
• Remote Retention Payment of between $500 - $1000 on completion of full year
• increased access to study leave
• fares out of isolated locations (2-3 per annum)
• subsidised housing (up to 100 per cent) in regional and remote localities
• access to up to four business days per year to access services not available in the remote location
• guaranteed transfer to Darwin, Katherine or Alice Springs following completion of three years.

**South Australia**

Incentives for teachers to teach in remote locations in South Australia include:
• cash incentive payments during years one to five of services at a school within a relevant Country Zone (up to $9133 per annum)
• one off incidental payments upon recruitment to permanency (up to $946).

Band A (Principals/Preschool Directors) school leaders and Band B (Deputy Principals/Senior leaders /Coordinators) in Aboriginal and Anangu Schools are eligible to receive:
• a four-week induction program
• one term study leave with pay after two years of service in these schools.

Literacy strategies and initiatives supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

*Literacy and Numeracy Essentials (LANE)*

The LANE program is being introduced across remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory. It uses the explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy through the use of developmental learning progressions with support of specific resources.


*Language, Learning and Literacy in the Early Years (L3)*

L3 is a research-based intervention program for kindergarten students, targeting reading and writing used in New South Wales. Students receive explicit instruction in reading and writing strategies in small groups in a daily literacy lesson, and then rotate to independent or group tasks.


*Making up Lost Time in Literacy - Reading Tutor Program (MULTILIT)*

The MULTILIT research Initiative, directed by Emeritus Professor Kevin Wheldall from Macquarie University Special Education Centre, comprises research and development into effective ways of teaching low-progress students experiencing difficulties in learning literacy skills, carried out in the MULTILIT Tutorial Centre and Clinic, and in outreach programs and resources. The MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program caters for students who have not acquired the basic skills needed to become functional readers and is available for use across Australia.


*Meeting Initial Needs in Literacy (MiniLit)*

Under MULTILIT, the MiniLit program targets the bottom 25 per cent of students and is specifically aimed at struggling Year 1 readers, ‘at risk’ Kindergarten and some struggling Year 2 students. It is an evidence-based, explicit model of 80 structured lessons for teaching reading skills to small groups and is available to all jurisdictions.


*Teaching Handwriting Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS)*

The THRASS Institute (Australasia & Canada) is an Australian-based company that has developed a Specific Pedagogical Practice for the teaching of literacy. The THRASS program provides professional learning and tools for teachers to teach phonetics (and spelling choices) explicitly and systematically. https://www.thrass.com.au/

*The Spalding Method*

The Spalding Method is the methodology and educational philosophy of The Writing Road to Reading program. The Spalding philosophy identifies the physical and mental well-being of students as the primary concern of Spalding teachers. High expectations for all children are central to the philosophy. These principles of learning and instruction are applied throughout the spelling, writing, and reading curricula.


*Reading to Learn (R2L)*

R2L is designed to enable all learners at all levels of education to read and write successfully, at levels appropriate to their age, grade and area of study. The strategies have been independently evaluated to
consistently accelerate the learning of all students at twice to more than four times expected rates, across all schools and classes, and among students from all backgrounds and ability ranges.


Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI)

EDI was developed by DataWORKS founders, Dr. Silvia Ybarra and John Hollingsworth. EDI focuses on improving education at the lesson level by incorporating a strategic collection of instructional practices informed by educational and cognitive research.


New Focus on Reading 3-6

New Focus on Reading 3-6 is a school-based professional learning initiative. It applies learning directly to the classroom to address and improve teacher practice and student outcomes in reading. The initiative consists of two years of professional learning for teachers and school leaders. It encompasses reading comprehension, reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge. The initiative is available to all schools in NSW to inform and improve pedagogy.


Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is a school-based, short-term intervention designed for children aged five or six, who are the lowest achieving in literacy after their first year of school. The intervention involves intensive one-to-one lessons for 30 minutes a day with a trained literacy teacher, for between 12 and 20 weeks (from 2018, the NSW Education Department no longer provides system support for this program).

https://readingrecovery.org/

QuickSmart Literacy

QuickSmart is a literacy and numeracy strategy for students at or below the National Minimum Standard in literacy and numeracy in years 4–8. It focuses on developing fast and accurate basic academic skills through 30-minute lessons, three times a week, for 30 weeks. QuickSmart was developed with the support of the National Centre for Science, Information and Communication Technology, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR National Centre) at the University of New England.


Raising the Bar

Raising the Bar is a Tasmanian Government strategy designed to increase the number of students completing primary school with functional literacy skills. The approach targets school leadership and teacher professional learning, implementing a whole-school approach to literacy, tracking and monitoring students, and sharing best practice across the state.
