

**REVIEW OF**  
Indigenous Education  
Strategic Initiatives Program  
—Supplementary Recurrent Assistance  
**(IESIP—SRA) FUNDING**

**Executive Summary**

# **1 Key issues**

## **1.1 Context**

There are substantial and unacceptable differences between the educational outcomes of Indigenous students and those of the general student population. As well, Indigenous people are underrepresented within the Education Queensland workforce.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) is Australia's national policy on Indigenous education. Its primary objective is to bring about equity in education for Indigenous Australians.

The Commonwealth Government provides funding for a variety of mainstream and targeted programs in support of the AEP. One of the targeted programs, Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program — Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (IESIP—SRA), provides supplementary per capita funding across the preschool, school and vocational education and training sectors. IESIP—SRA is the subject of this review.

The review was designed to assess the appropriateness of the current IESIP—SRA allocative methodology; its effectiveness in contributing to achieving the outcomes of QSE—2010 and meeting the priorities of the National Strategy for Indigenous Education; and its alignment with Partners for Success (Education Queensland's strategy for the continuous improvement of education and employment outcomes for Indigenous peoples).

Through a series of consultations, the review identified issues regarding the current allocative methodology. Of equal if not greater concern were a significant number of issues associated with the management, application and reporting of IESIP funds at the school level.

The review has produced a set of recommendations for more equitably allocating state IESIP—SRA funds. Implementing these and other review recommendations should lead to improved accountability and enhanced outcomes in the management and application of IESIP funds.

## **1.2 Centrally retained funds**

A notional 20% of IESIP—SRA funds is retained centrally each year to contribute to operational and administrative costs (4%) and statewide strategic initiatives, imperatives of government and short-term developmental projects (notional 16%). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit within the Curriculum Directorate manages these funds.

Because the outcomes of the centrally funded projects and activities have not been published or otherwise made available to the broader education community, schools are suspicious of their management, application and outcomes. Schools are generally unable to identify any benefits accruing to them either directly or indirectly. There is consequently a strong feeling that 20% is an excessive proportion to retain. Some areas mounted strong arguments for schools to receive 100% of funds. Overall, however, there is a general acceptance that some funds need to be retained centrally.

There is a very strong feeling that the schools and communities intended to be the beneficiaries of the centrally funded projects have no input into the identification, prioritisation, delivery or review and evaluation of these projects.

## **1.3 Remoteness**

The current allocative methodology Education Queensland uses to distribute funds to schools does not provide any differential based on remoteness. This is in contrast to the Commonwealth methodology, which incorporates a differential based on schools classed as remote.

Examination of the Commonwealth definition of 'remote' suggests that there are two parts to the weighting — one designed to compensate for costs directly related to a school's geographic location and one that acknowledges environmental aspects (setting) that can have an adverse impact on student learning outcomes.

The bulk of IESIP funds are spent on wages and salaries. The cost of employing casual staff varies little across the state. Freight is not a major cost within IESIP either, as the program does not support capital acquisitions.

However, some legitimate IESIP activities and services do cost more to deliver in remote locations. Examples include professional development and training, student health and nutrition programs, and vocational education programs.

While some remote schools argue that they should receive per capita funding that is twice that of non-remote schools, a contra view is that remote schools are already adequately compensated for remoteness through other grant payments.

## **1.4 Setting**

There are significant differences in learning outcomes among groups of Indigenous students based on the settings from which they come and in which they are schooled. In broad terms, differences in setting can be identified on the basis of, for example:

- how remote the setting is;
- whether the setting is an Indigenous community; and
- whether the setting is rural, provincial or metropolitan.

Within the various settings there are many factors that have an impact on student learning outcomes and the difficulty of raising student performance to benchmark levels. These factors include student attendance and mobility, access to alternative programs and other provisions for students at risk of suspension and exclusion, capacity to provide literacy teaching in response to English as a second or foreign language, tracking and reporting student performance, availability and proficiency of Indigenous personnel for employment, capacity to provide vocational education and some specialist classroom subjects, student health and preparedness for learning, the quality of the relationship between the school and its community, differing levels of infrastructure and social capital, difficulty in participating in programs available to students in other locations, identification of and access to appropriate training and professional development opportunities for employees, level of staff turnover, experience of principals, and administrator and staff awareness of issues of cross-cultural pedagogy.

The review found there are identifiable differences in student need as a consequence of setting and that there should be differentiation within the model on this basis.

## **1.5 Ages of schooling**

While the Commonwealth methodology differentiates on the basis of ages of schooling, no such differentiation is made within the current EQ methodology. Interestingly, focus groups identified legitimate arguments for enhancing allocations to each and every stage of schooling.

As a consequence, no clear consensus position emerged from the focus groups other than a recognition of the importance of the early years of schooling in developing literacy and numeracy skills. Most also agreed that the specialist nature of secondary schooling made it more expensive to deliver and that this was most evident at the post-compulsory level as a consequence of the need to provide for appropriate alternative pathways. However, it was also argued that secondary schools were already comparatively well resourced and had access to other funds for post-compulsory education.

At the systemic level, the broad-based consultation that informed the development of QSE—2010 identified priorities that have relevance for Indigenous students and that could be met, in part, through the application of IESIP funds. These priorities include focusing on the early years of schooling, having more students completing Year 12 in high schools or obtaining qualifications in training or further education, and giving support to young people who need it most.

## **1.6 Student mobility and fluctuating enrolments**

High levels of student mobility are a characteristic of Indigenous student enrolments in many parts of the state, particularly in rural and remote areas. This mobility is evident during the school year, as well

as from one year to another. Some schools experience significant increases in Indigenous student populations from year to year.

The current EQ methodology is not responsive to mobile student populations or to significant increases or decreases in student populations from year to year. This is because funding in a particular calendar year is based on the Indigenous student population as at the July census from the previous year.

The impact of fluctuations in Indigenous student populations is most noticeable in schools with only small Indigenous student populations. In extreme situations, funding can be totally or substantially out of alignment with the actual student population.

### **1.7 Schools with small Indigenous populations**

In July 2001 there were 435 schools with Indigenous student populations of fewer than 10. Their collective enrolment was 1866 students. These small student populations represented situations in which they accounted for the entire student population through to schools in which they represented only 0.1% of the total school population. Their contribution to total school funds similarly varied from significant to negligible.

At the individual school level, funding for small Indigenous populations raises issues that include: difficulty in applying small amounts of money in a worthwhile manner but funds still need to be separately tracked and accounted for; onerous accountability and reporting processes; and difficulty in meeting the requirement for 25% of the funds to be spent on Indigenous employment and/or training. Sometimes schools decide it is easier to simply return the money.

### **1.8 Unspent funds**

Some IESIP—SRA funds distributed to schools remain unspent at the end each school year. Schools are required to return these funds to central office. Analysis of schools returning funds between 1998 and 2001 does not reveal any particular trends — all districts, school sectors and bands are represented, with none being predominant.

Returned funds have either been incorporated into the centrally retained funds or, in some years, redistributed as supplementary grants. Such supplementary grant payments often arrive unexpectedly in schools and late in the school year. Schools indicate that such late distributions reduce the potential effectiveness of the funds and are difficult to incorporate into current school planning.

### **1.9 School planning, budgeting, reporting and accountability**

Planning, budgeting and reporting documents for some schools with Indigenous populations do not include any specific reference to IESIP—SRA funds. As a consequence, some school communities experience great difficulty obtaining information on how IESIP—SRA funds were spent and what outcomes were achieved.

School planning around IESIP funds often appears to be rather short-term (one year).

Schools do not always adopt an holistic approach to budgeting and appear to focus on inputs. Also, some schools appear not to recognise that IESIP funding is supplementary and that core funds must be applied in an inclusive manner.

Completion of the IESIP School Statement Acquittal and the Performance Report are generally not seen as onerous tasks, with the possible exception of some schools with small numbers of Indigenous students. Many schools do, however, view the acquittal as a rather 'loose' document — that is, it does not require schools to demonstrate that the funds have been spent in a way that has contributed to improved student outcomes.

The current methods of monitoring the expenditure of IESIP—SRA funds have no great capacity to ensure that the way schools spend funds complies with the guidelines or systemic priorities.

## **1.10 Community involvement**

Past experiences (segregation, protection, assimilation) and some more recent issues (native title, land rights) inhibit community involvement in school decision making and student participation in education programs.

Under school-based management, schools have a responsibility to deliver quality education services that are responsive to local circumstances. Central to such a responsibility is the need for schools to develop and maintain effective partnerships with their communities.

In some locations, schools and the Indigenous communities have effective partnerships, and community members have a high level of involvement in school planning, budgeting and reporting. In others, schools have made some progress towards enhancing their relationship with the community, and are working towards involving the community in a meaningful way.

Nevertheless, there is a high level of concern across the state about the level of community involvement with IESIP processes. This is particularly apparent in instances where the Indigenous population is small and/or highly mobile. The difficulty of fostering community involvement in these circumstances is recognised, however, lack of community involvement appears not to be restricted to these situations.

## **1.11 Indigenous employment and training**

Indigenous employees are clearly recognised and valued for the significant role they play in delivering education services, affirming diversity and contributing to enhanced student learning outcomes and participation rates. The importance of these people as role models is substantial and, as a consequence, a significant proportion of IESIP—SRA grant funds is used to employ Indigenous people, mainly as part-time, casual teacher aides.

While the use of IESIP funds increases the opportunity for Indigenous employment, a major concern is that these people are not permanently employed. This can cause problems for them as individuals and difficulties for the schools that employ them.

Teacher aides often report being requested, or feeling obliged, to take on roles outside their position description. Most commonly they perform duties that are more appropriately the responsibility of guidance officers, community liaison officers or community education counsellors (CECs). Taking on these additional responsibilities can be a cause of considerable stress and/or a feeling of being 'used'.

Many consequently seek a greater level of job security and/or higher rates of pay by moving to positions outside Education Queensland. This can lead to high casual teacher-aide turnover rates.

CECs and community liaison officers are not equitably distributed among schools, with primary schools particularly disadvantaged.

While principals value the contribution of Indigenous personnel, many report difficulty in identifying suitable personnel for employment. This may be in terms of either personal suitability or having the appropriate skills. Some schools appear to be unaware of the opportunity/obligation for them to provide training for Indigenous employees using IESIP funds. Others indicate difficulties identifying and/or accessing training opportunities that are tailored to the needs of Indigenous personnel.

## **1.12 Cluster and district opportunities**

Some districts have well-established and effective networking and cluster/district organisational arrangements that bring schools together, often with the involvement of the district office. These arrangements allow schools to share good practice and discuss issues such as school capability building, school accountability, curriculum initiatives and the development of pedagogy. They also provide opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. In some districts, schools are networking and entering cooperative arrangements with community, business and government agencies.

Some schools, however, are only at the early stages with respect to networking and clustering. It appears to be particularly difficult for inexperienced principals and/or principals of small schools to

see 'the big picture', to identify the opportunities for and benefits of clustering, and to initiate clustering arrangements.

In situations without networking and clustering arrangements, it is likely that opportunities to maximise the outcomes achieved from IESIP funds are being missed.

### **1.13 Continuity of funding**

Schools frequently indicate that they are unsure about whether IESIP—SRA funding will continue past the end of the current year. There is also a broader concern of what will happen if the Commonwealth decides to discontinue the program. Unless an alternative source of funding could be identified, schools would lose a particularly valuable resource — their part-time, casual Indigenous support personnel employed under the program.

### **1.14 IESIP Guidelines**

The current *IESIP: A Guide for Schools*, published in February 2000, is out of date. There are principals who are unaware of the guidelines or who have difficulty accessing a copy, even though the document is posted on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit website.

## **2 Major recommendations**

The following are the recommendations for change resulting from the review.

### **2.1 Centrally retained funds**

- (1) That the allocation of funds to be retained centrally in any one calendar year be determined by an annual consultation process incorporating a conference of key stakeholders (chaired by the Director, Inclusive Education Branch) that:
  - a. reviews progress and achievements of current projects/activities; and
  - b. agrees on recommendations to the Deputy Director-General for project/activity priorities for the coming year.
- (2) That project/activity priorities be established by reference to a set of principles that are agreed to, and reviewed from time to time, by the meeting of key stakeholders.
- (3) That the Deputy Director-General be responsible for ensuring that project/activity priorities are consistent with those of the Director-General and the Minister.
- (4) That the quantum of funds retained centrally in any one calendar year be no more than 20% of the total allocation of IESIP—SRA funds from the Commonwealth to Education Queensland in that calendar year.
- (5) That any funds available to the centrally retained pool that are not committed through the annual conference process be added to the pool (minimum 80% of total IESIP—SRA funds) to be distributed to schools in the next calendar year.
- (6) That the results of the annual conference (i.e. outcomes achieved through IESIP central funds in the current year and recommended projects/activities for the coming year) be communicated to key stakeholders through posting on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit website.
- (7) That the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit provide operational support for the conference process.

### **2.2 Remoteness**

- (8) That the IESIP—SRA allocative methodology include a weighting to compensate schools in rural and remote locations for additional costs incurred in accessing and providing resources and services within IESIP expenditure guidelines.

- (9) That the weighting be based on the school grant index that is used to compensate schools, based on school size and location, for additional freight costs.

### **2.3 Setting**

- (10) That the IESIP—SRA allocative methodology include a weighting that differentiates funding on the basis of how difficult it is for each school to raise the performance of its Indigenous students to systemic target levels.
- (11) That this weighting be achieved through a learning enrichment index for each school that is derived from appropriate, available systemic data sets that could include student performance, attendance, apparent retention and/or socioeconomic status.
- (12) That the learning enrichment index be recalibrated at the end of the current quadrennium and remain in place for the whole of the 2004–2007 quadrennium.

### **2.4 Ages of schooling**

- (13) That the allocative funding methodology be based on actual Indigenous student enrolments (count or FTE\*2) for preschool and Indigenous full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrolment numbers for Years 1 to 12.
- (14) That no other differentiation on the basis of age of schooling be incorporated in the allocative methodology.

### **2.5 Student mobility and fluctuating enrolments**

- (15) That the IESIP—SRA funding allocation be based on current year Indigenous student populations as collected in February and July.
- (16) That four grant payments be made each year as follows:
- February 80% of estimated Semester 1 allocation based on previous July census
  - April Balance of actual Semester 1 allocation based on end February enrolment
  - July 80% of estimated Semester 2 allocation base on February enrolment
  - October Balance of actual Semester 2 allocation based on July census.

### **2.6 Schools with small Indigenous populations**

- (17) That Education Queensland continues to allocate IESIP—SRA funds to schools based on all Indigenous student enrolments as identified by February and July collections.
- (18) That the requirement to spend at least 25% of funding on the employment and training of Indigenous people be relaxed in those instances where an individual school allocation is less than \$3000 in a calendar year.
- (19) That schools receiving only small amounts of IESIP—SRA funds work together at a district/cluster level to:
- a. consider options for pooling funds; and
  - b. identify employment opportunities, activities and/or projects that align with participating schools' priorities, and could best be achieved collectively.

### **2.7 Unspent funds**

- (20) That schools, assisted by improvements in the funding methodology, work within the framework provided by SIAF and the revised IESIP Guidelines to reduce the amount of funds that remain unspent/uncommitted at the end of each calendar year.
- (21) That district offices work with schools, as appropriate, to ensure that planning, budgeting and financial management processes minimise the risk of IESIP funds being unspent.

- (22) That schools be encouraged to identify and record ‘committed funds’ in the School Statement Acquittal as a means of providing some flexibility of funding across calendar years.
- (23) That uncommitted funds be recouped by applying a discount against the Semester 1 (April) grant payment of the next year and that these funds be included in the pool of funds for distribution to schools in Semester 2.

## **2.8 School planning, budgeting, reporting and accountability**

- (24) That principals ensure that IESIP funds are separately identified in school planning and financial accountability documents (as required by SIAF), and that consideration be given to including additional performance indicators, targets and data collections relating to the Indigenous cohort in the School Planning Overview and Operational Plan.
- (25) That the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit commission a redesign of the school accountability framework and pro formas for IESIP—SRA funds.
- (26) That Education Queensland investigates options for collating and disseminating data relating to Indigenous cohort performance at the district level.
- (27) That school principals be required to provide the Indigenous community with an annual report, in appropriate format, detailing how IESIP—SRA funds have been spent and the outcomes that have been achieved.

## **2.9 Community involvement**

- (28) That, in accordance with Education Queensland policy and guidelines (see *School Improvement and Accountability Framework, Partners for Success* and *IESIP Guidelines for Schools*), principals ensure that strategies are in place that encourage and facilitate the participation of the Indigenous community in decision making, reporting and accountability processes associated with IESIP funds.

## **2.10 Indigenous employment and training**

- (29) That Education Queensland refers issues and concerns identified by the review with respect to Indigenous employment to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy Reference Group.
- (30) That schools use IESIP funds to provide appropriate training and professional development programs for Indigenous support staff and community representatives to ensure they have the necessary skills to enable them to carry out their roles effectively.

## **2.11 Cluster and district opportunities**

- (31) That district office staff work with schools in receipt of IESIP—SRA funds to:
  - a. facilitate school strategic planning;
  - b. identify additional performance indicators, targets and data sets, for inclusion in SIAF planning documents, that are critical to the school in respect of its Indigenous cohort;
  - c. achieve an integrated approach to school budgeting that establishes clear links between planned outcomes and funding sources;
  - d. provide skilling in school financial management;
  - e. facilitate the analysis and evaluation of performance data to inform strategies for improving student learning outcomes;
  - f. build school workforce capability;
  - g. ensure schools know and understand their responsibilities and expectations with respect to school improvement and accountability (as required under SIAF and IESIP Guidelines);

- h. develop productive partnerships in support of collaborative and transparent decision making;
- i. promote school networking and clustering;
- j. identify activities/projects that are best undertaken at a cluster/district level; and
- k. monitor alignment between allocated budgets and actual expenditure.

## **2.12 Continuity of funding**

- (32) That Education Queensland monitor the situation with respect to continuity of IESIP and, if necessary, develop contingency plans to protect the Indigenous employee resource currently provided to schools through the program.

## **2.13 IESIP Guidelines**

- (33) That a comprehensive revision of *IESIP: A Guide for Schools* be undertaken as a matter of urgency.
- (34) That the revised guidelines, *Review of Education and Employment Programs, Partners for Success* and this report be placed on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit website in PDF format.
- (35) That the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit website be updated to include:
  - a. links to other relevant policy and guidelines, such as *Destination 2010* and *School Improvement and Accountability Framework*;
  - b. current IESIP reporting and accountability frameworks and pro formas; and
  - c. results of the annual conference (i.e. outcomes achieved through IESIP central funds in the current year and recommended projects/activities for the coming year).