

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1.1 Purpose

In November 1998, the Director-General of Education authorised a review of education and employment programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland. The review aimed to describe the key issues in the current education and employment situation, and to discuss workable solutions for improving programs and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Queensland state education system.

The purpose of this paper is to summarise the issues raised in the review, and to propose a framework for developing the effective and coherent school practices and systemic support mechanisms necessary to achieve improved outcomes.

## 1.2 Background to the Review

Concerns about the retention, achievement and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and employees prompted the review.

The persistence of unacceptable differences between the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others in Education Queensland suggests a need for a fundamental change of approach.

Several issues have contributed to the current situation, including:

- the ongoing impact of past problems in relationships between parents and schools;
- structural change in Education Queensland over the past decade;
- limited understanding on the part of school staff of cross-cultural issues and pedagogy;
- the patterns of employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland.

These are discussed in more detail in Appendix 1.

## 1.3 Methodology

The review was conducted between February and June 1999. Key stakeholders (state school principals and teachers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, district community education counsellors and participation officers) were informed of the review and invited to contribute to it.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from a variety of sources, including:

- over 70 **submissions** from schools, individuals, ASSPA committees and district community education counsellors;
- **focus groups**, which included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, teacher-aides, MACATSIE participation officers, community education counsellors and district community education counsellors;
- **interviews** with long-time employees of Education Queensland, e.g. district directors, principals, public servants and teachers;
- analysis of **statewide data**, e.g. Year 2 Net, Year 5 Test, and school disciplinary absences;
- **case studies of schools**, including Cairns West State School, Rockville State School, Yarrabah State School, Healy State School, Kalkadoon State High School and St George State High School;
- **departmental reports**;
- **departmental projects**;
- **policy documents**;
- **academic literature**.

## 1.4 Consultations

A steering committee was established to allow a broad range of stakeholders to consider and respond to the outcomes of the review, its recommendations and the strategy developed from it.

Its members were selected by the Director-General with regard to the need for input from schools, district and central offices, and key stakeholders, including members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The steering committee represented, in broad terms, the range of interests involved in education and employment issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland.

There was no attempt to ensure that the committee comprehensively represented communities of interest. To do so would have resulted in a committee so large that it could not have met the strategic challenge it faced.

The steering committee consisted of:

- Terry Moran, Director-General of Education (Chair)
- Shane Williams, Director, Student Services Branch
- Desmond Crump, Principal Education Officer, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Branch (executive officer)
- Paul Leitch, Director, Performance Measurement Office
- Jim McGowan, Director, Human Resources
- Gail Mackay, District Director, Townsville/Burdekin
- Alan Butler, District Director, Mackay North
- Stephen Foster, Principal, Badu Island State School
- Jennifer Jensen, Principal, Kuranda State High School
- Joan Mackay, District Community Education Counsellor, North-Western District
- Penny Tripcony, Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit, Queensland University of Technology
- Lloyd Appo, Chair, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee, Queensland Teachers' Union

## 1.5 Overarching Finding

The review raised a wide and interconnected range of issues. It is acknowledged that, in the past, in a more centralised education system, sound educational practices that met the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were developed by teachers in different places and at different times, and regions, especially Far North Queensland, were given licence to develop localised policy and practices.

At a systemic level, however, existing policy frameworks have not provided the flexibility, accountability or support necessary to achieve widespread improvement in education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. As a result, there have been confusion, misconceptions, off-the-cuff decision making and, at times, questionable practice.

The major finding of the review was that Education Queensland did not have the range or specificity of policy necessary to drive improvement in educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who live and work in diverse communities. It is clear that small-scale, stand-alone solutions will be inadequate to turn around the failure of schools and the education system to overcome the sustained underparticipation and underperformance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## 1.6 Major Recommendation

The steering committee agreed that a broad strategic response that provided the policies and resources to enable schools and their communities to develop solutions tailored to local circumstances was required.

School-based management means that responsibility for the development of localised solutions now rests with schools themselves. The challenge for Education Queensland is to support school-based innovation with policies and resources that incorporate the strengths and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and promote good practice in schools. Such an approach should promote effective use of school and community resources, and minimise bureaucracy by being integrated with whole-of-government service delivery systems.

Appendix 2 provides a more detailed discussion of the issues and solutions that were identified in the course of the review and informed the development of the policies that are the core of the Partners for Success Strategy for the Continuous Improvement of Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland.

Achieving continuous improvement in educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is a responsibility shared between Education Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, based on:

- building effective partnerships, underpinned by agreed targets and mutual obligations, between Education Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- negotiating accountability frameworks at State level between the Director-General of Education Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, and at local levels between principals and their school communities;
- improving coordination and coherence in the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities;
- ensuring that curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, reporting and employment policies and programs effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The State-level agreement between Education Queensland and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will be known as the **Charter for the Education and Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland**.

It will be based on the principles of reciprocal obligation, mutual responsibilities and community capacity building, and will provide the foundation for achieving a continuous improvement in outcomes.





# ESTABLISHING CONDITIONS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

## 2.1 Educational Outcomes and Standards

Case studies provided evidence that a range of key factors, rather than any single issue, influenced student outcomes, taking on local characteristics at individual schools. These included:

- the quality of the relationship between the school and its community;
- the level of cultural understanding among school staff;
- the degree of interconnectedness between the school and other local agencies (community and government);
- the availability of literacy teaching built on recognition of second language learning;
- the use of appropriate techniques to monitor and report student progress;
- the level of awareness among school staff of issues relating to cross-cultural pedagogy;
- the provision of flexible models of schooling with alternative pathways, e.g. post-primary options;
- the proficiency of Indigenous teachers and teacher-aides;
- the stability of staffing, particularly in remote areas.

Significant improvements in participation and educational outcomes will occur when schools are able to:

- monitor participation and key indicative outcomes;
- use identified best practice to bring about continuous improvement;
- develop partnerships with community based on the principle of mutual responsibility.

In some districts where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are in the majority, these things happen as a matter of course. In other districts, individual schools have already begun to put such practices in place.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' achievement is effectively monitored and transparently reported, school-based management provides the best opportunity to develop approaches that are responsive to local circumstances.

However, systemic support is necessary to establish conditions for continuous improvement at a statewide level. The review identified the lack of appropriate policy at system level and a mismatch between existing policy and practice in schools as major impediments to improvement. These impediments will need to be removed for there to be a suitable systemic environment for school-based continuous improvement.

Progress on these matters will be slow, however, unless systemic policies and processes are flexible enough to respond to the diversity of local circumstances. The School Planning and Accountability Framework encourages schools to develop practices that are responsive to local needs. This needs to be accompanied by mandatory tracking and reporting of student cohort data (on educational outcomes, participation, attendance, and subject choice), supervised by district directors.

School-based management activities are represented in Partnership Agreements, School Planning Overviews and Annual Operational Plans. Such documents have the capacity to include the 'voice of the community' as well as to detail methods for achieving continuous improvement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities need to be more deeply involved in the development of these methods and documents, and the client-provider relationship between the community and the school rethought.



## 2.2 Accountability and Improving Educational Outcomes

Developing an initiative to deal with the issues identified in the review is a large task, which can only be successful if it is attempted in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It needs an accountability framework that recognises the role and responsibility of the community (State and local), and measures and reports progress towards agreed targets for participation and educational achievement.

Such progress could be tracked using existing data collection processes, and reported to a peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultative committee within the negotiated State Charter process.

The progress of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohort towards agreed targets can be monitored and reported within the existing School Planning and Accountability Framework. Data collected from internal and external monitoring provide a basis for judging the success of school-based programs. Action research at schools and information from collections of best practice provide a basis for school staff, in partnership with their communities, to improve practice.

An **Equitable Outcomes Framework** is needed at both system and school levels to provide direction for monitoring and reporting equity issues in the School Planning and Accountability Framework.

## 2.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Literacy Achievement

Where communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in rural, remote and urban locations do not speak Standard Australian English, literacy achievement in Standard Australian English is problematic. Poor literacy outcomes at school are related to:

- the language spoken at home;
- teaching methods;
- testing regimes;
- the time devoted to learning English as a second (third or, in some cases, fourth) language.

Education Queensland does not have a policy that recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners may be second language learners, and establishes good practice in meeting their need to develop proficiency in Standard Australian English.

Central to this issue is the status of Indigenous languages, Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Creole in schooling. While speakers of Indigenous languages are now recognised as second language learners for funding purposes, speakers of Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Creole are not, although their needs are similar.

The Year 2 Net process is a diagnostic tool designed for first language literacy learners, not second language learners. Schools are able to exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL students from the Year 2 Net process, but if they do, they will not receive the intervention resources necessary for providing extra support in the classroom.

Schools with 'stand-out' performance support these students in the use of their home language and use ESL pedagogy while they learn English. This approach is gaining support in schools.

## 2.4 Service Delivery and a Whole-of-Government Approach

Given the impact of culture, attendance, health and welfare on educational outcomes, most professionals and community members voice support for a local community development approach that brings school, community, business and government agencies together in partnership. The current trend is towards a **whole-of-government approach**, including agreements such as the Cape York Agreement, and education–industry agreements such as the Pasmenco Century Project. Such an approach can provide mechanisms for supporting community initiatives to meet local needs.

Some schools are developing initiatives that are beginning to bring about school, community, business and agency cooperation without guidance from policy. Organisations such as the Torres Strait Islands Regional Education Council, along with schools or groups of schools working within a whole-of-government approach, have the opportunity to work out solutions to local problems, such as the need to provide different secondary education options for Torres Strait Islander students.

Groups of schools such as the Cape York Alliance, which are already working together in the Cape, need to be encouraged and given resources so that they can design and trial ways to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and build good practice with communities in a 'framework of mutuality'.

To be effective, a whole-of-government approach must overcome differences in organisational structures among departments and among cultures of service provision. Education Queensland needs to ensure that new structures neither increase bureaucracy nor reduce the responsibility of principals.

Governmental or legislative action would need to:

- ensure community involvement in negotiating processes so that services responded to needs identified by the community;
- be flexible enough to support local initiatives in different forms;
- provide cross-departmental protocols and resource agreements;
- follow the principle of subsidiarity;
- provide training and employment opportunities for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers;
- provide accountability safeguards and ways to monitoring program effectiveness.

## **2.5 Role and Empowerment of Communities**


When stand-out programs were investigated, it became clear that education, employment and social factors, and the ways they interact, all need to be considered to create the best chance of success. It is often tempting for teachers, who, in the main, are people of tremendous goodwill, to try to deal with many of the social issues that affect students. However, such practices tend to shift the focus of schools from education and 'enabling' to welfare provision, which is rightly the province of other agencies.

This does not mean that the needs of students and their families should not be met. Rather, it suggests that welfare programs are best delivered by those agencies (community or government) constituted for that purpose. Specific health and welfare programs may well be delivered at the school, but such programs need to be funded by the appropriate agencies, and delivered by their staff, rather than by teachers. Partnerships among schools, communities and community agencies, in which the roles and responsibilities of each is clearly defined, provide for a holistic approach to improving student outcomes, and are to be encouraged.

The challenge is to ensure that an effective framework exists that enables local communities to work with schools, community agencies and State government agencies locally. While interagency approaches are already in operation in some areas, these are often developed without input from the community.

A community development approach to integrated service delivery is very different. The local community is supported by agencies to become involved in and take responsibility for the services used by that community. In the process, community members are empowered to participate in building community infrastructure and community capacity. Such approaches allow social institutions, industry and education to play a role in helping families and communities to escape poverty and welfare traps.





To reposition schools as part of a whole-of-government ‘community-building’ approach, the relationship between Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities and the local school needs to be improved at State and local levels. This can be achieved by incorporating blueprints for developing local service delivery relationships in agreements negotiated between the community, service providers, business and industry and the school.

## **2.6 System Support for Local Decision Making**

Attitudes have changed over the years in both mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Rather than viewing difference as a disadvantage, communities now expect schooling to affirm their diversity while still making equitable educational outcomes possible.

Communities in Queensland are beginning to demand the right to retrieve and maintain their own cultures while participating in and benefiting from mainstream community life. The consequence for schooling is that students need to be comfortable in at least two cultures (home and mainstream), as well as becoming competent in their home language or languages and Standard Australian English.

Teaching and learning strategies that use the home language as the basis for learning and for learning a second language (often referred to as bilingual education) have proved successful in other education systems, but are not yet widely used in Queensland schools to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners.

Schools proposing to use a bilingual approach, especially those in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, need to be aware of local cultural sensitivities, and ensure that the community determines how much the school draws on local language and culture.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees have an important part to play in affirming diversity by:

- helping non-Indigenous teachers understand the educational implications of culture;
- supporting the development of positive working relationships between school and community;
- providing positive Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander role models for all students they teach;
- providing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander voice throughout the educational community.

Sensitivity and flexibility need to be exercised in the appointment of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employees. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employees within a school must be acceptable to the local Indigenous community. Special dispensation from Education Queensland could be needed if these employees are required to follow cultural protocols and obligations (in relation, for example, to funerals) within those communities. Presently, there is no guidance from policy on these matters.

# SUCCESSFULLY MANAGING EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The major finding of the review was the need for a broad strategic response to provide the policies and resources to support the development of local solutions.

A successful approach will depend on Education Queensland's:

- developing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities a shared vision of education of and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- fundamentally changing its relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to one of partnership based on mutual respect, community development and shared responsibility;
- providing a structure that reflects a rights and responsibilities framework rather than the charity or welfare model of the past;
- using existing school-based accountability structures to monitor and report educational outcomes;
- monitoring and reporting the progress of its units and branches in dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in appropriate policy and program areas;
- publicly demonstrating a commitment to deal with educational issues in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at both State and local levels.

Successful reform is also dependent upon acknowledging the challenges posed by change and finding effective ways to deal with it. Change is often accompanied by feelings of uncertainty; encouraging participants to become involved, to develop a sense of ownership of the process and to accept some risk taking can be helpful. It is important to allow for the fact that each person accepts and accommodates change at their own rate.

Educational reform (like other social change) is complicated, so the process must be evolutionary and flexible enough to adapt to unexpected events and local contexts. Problems with change are to be expected and accepted and used creatively as opportunities to find solutions, rather than being seen as resistance.

Change is best made by representative groups that represent the full range of stakeholders, with a mandate to steer the change process and the ability to operate collaboratively while working with and being supported by the central education authority.

Reform must deal with the main elements of the system — curriculum, pedagogy, student support, relationships with the community and so on. System-wide reform has to be implemented locally but local change must be supported and nurtured by the system. Adequate resources must be committed to this process to achieve effective change.

Finally, the nature of any proposed reform must be in line with school-based management and give voice, through strong partnerships, to the perspectives and aspirations of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.





# PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS — THE CHARTER AND LOCALLY CUSTOMISED COMPACTS

The review recommended that an **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Charter** should be established to support the continuous improvement of educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Education Queensland schools.

The Charter will embody the principles underpinning Education Queensland policies on and practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in education and employment. It will include performance targets to set the agenda for policy development and the achievement of outcomes, and resource agreements for the achievement of the targets. Progress will be reported annually through Charter accountability procedures. This does not, however, preclude progress on the policy front independent of the Charter.

To develop the Charter, the Assistant Director-General, Strategic Planning and Portfolio Services will convene an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Charter Task Force (CTF) and establish its terms of reference. It will comprise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders and senior officers of Education Queensland.

## The Charter — Draft Summary of Contents


The Charter will consist of:

- a **statement of context** that recognises that education occurs within the broader context of services and that the effectiveness of education is improved where delivery is coherent across a range of services;
- a **strategy for continuous improvement** in the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, consistent with Strategy 2010, school-based management models, the School Planning and Accountability Framework and the Equitable Outcomes Framework;
- a **statement of responsibilities** that ensures that all Education Queensland services are accountable for improvements to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- an **interagency framework** to allow rationalisation of resources on the basis of interagency delivery of services;
- **performance targets and timelines** for the achievement of the review's recommendations;
- a set of **resource agreements**, based on negotiated targets, between Education Queensland and local and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- a **reporting and accountability agreement** based on existing data and agreed targets;
- **State-level agreements** to support community development, the coordination of services between agencies and local agreements.

The CTF will be chaired by the Director-General or delegate and may include the chair of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body. Secretariat and research support will be provided by the Community Partnerships Unit in the Student Services Branch.

The CTF will:

- develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Employment Charter for the endorsement of the Minister, the Director-General and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board;
- provide advice to the Director-General on the role of Education Queensland in the delivery of coherent cross-government services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;

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- endorse a set of principles to guide its advice;
  - help the Director-General to make agreements for interagency collaboration at chief executive officer level;
  - establish guidelines for local communities and community agencies (government, non-government and private) in the development of service delivery agreements that contribute to improved educational outcomes and services;
  - establish mutual expectations for the roles and responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Education Queensland officers in improving educational services and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
  - endorse the concept of local agreements (compacts) to be negotiated between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their schools, and provide guidelines for their development;
  - develop a basis for appointments to a Charter Reference Group (CRG), and its terms of reference.

**Compacts** will be negotiated between schools and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within guidelines developed by the CTF. Compacts will be consistent with the **Partners for Success Strategy for the Continuous Improvement of Outcomes** in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and will be negotiated locally with an appropriate whole-of-government approach. Schools, or groups of schools, will be encouraged to customise the compact to best suit local circumstances.

Once the work of the CTF is complete, a CRG will be established to negotiate, monitor and review significant Education Queensland programs. It will work with Education Queensland managers to ensure that appropriate means to improve the standards of educational achievement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are incorporated into new and existing programs. The CRG will consist of senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy makers and educators.

# APPENDIX 1 — CONCERNS IN CONTEXT

## **Parent–school relationships — the impact of past experience**

The schooling available to Queensland’s Indigenous students before 1967 was largely established by missionaries and the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement in the north of the State. The last of these schools in Far North Queensland became part of Education Queensland in 1985. Past policies of segregation, protection and assimilation formed the context for the relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to schooling to develop. Schools and the churches were institutions for the assimilation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and, as a result, the relationship was troubled from both perspectives.

Complex, distant and sometimes discordant relationships exist between some schools and their Indigenous communities, inhibiting parents’ participation in decision making and students’ participation in programs, and stunting the effectiveness of teaching and learning programs. Recent debates and controversies about native title, land rights and social welfare, as well as divergent views of Australian history, confront schools with questions of race and racism. Principals, teachers and school communities often do not have sufficient policy guidance or systemic support in dealing with these issues where they affect curriculum, pedagogy and school–community relationships.

A minority of schools have been successful in increasing the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in school life, but most Education Queensland staff report that this is difficult, so there is often little Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into school planning and decision-making processes.

## **Structural change in Education Queensland**

The introduction of school-based management has given all schools responsibility for on-the-ground decision making in key areas, within a statewide policy framework.

But policy written in, applicable to and good for the mainstream is also applied to schools in diverse Indigenous contexts with less than satisfactory results. The review found that there is a lack of policy on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and employment, producing confusion, misconceptions, off-the-cuff decision making and, at times, questionable practice. Existing policy frameworks have not provided the flexibility, accountability and support necessary for improving education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Current examples of difficulties arising from gaps in policy include:

- The absence of a policy allowing communities to choose bilingual education or forms of ‘two-way’ education, if they desire them, even though the main language used in many community schools is not Standard Australian English.
- No policy on the role of schools in the support and maintenance of Indigenous languages and culture.
- No policy approach to staffing remote community schools with teachers who have the cultural awareness, ESL background and commitment necessary for effective schooling.
- The limited scope of the Employment Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff.
- The inappropriateness of the Year 2 Net as an instrument for non-Standard-Australian-English speakers.



- The absence in the Standards Framework for Leaders of guidance on cultural difference or cross-cultural leadership issues.
- The absence in the Principles of Effective Learning and Teaching of specific attention to cultural difference, prior knowledge or cross-cultural pedagogy.
- The absence in the School Planning and Accountability Framework of issues of accountability for equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- The failure of current census testing processes (Years 5 and 7 Tests) to adequately take into account ESL issues, cultural capital or prior learning and cultural understanding issues.
- The absence of published funding policy for community education counsellors.
- Mismatches between the supportive school environment and school disciplinary absences policies.

In the policies, principles and strategies referred to above, there is either no mention or little discussion of how critical issues such as cultural difference, racism, discrimination, English as a Second Language pedagogy, or remote location affect how particular areas of policy operate and are put into practice. It must also be noted that many Education Queensland staff do not have, nor has the system required them to have, the necessary cross-cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes to adapt practices from generic principles or policy without guidance.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures in Schooling**

The review found that most teachers have had little or no experience or training in cultural understanding, second language learning and cross-cultural pedagogy. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend more than 70 per cent of Education Queensland schools, and most teachers will, at some time in their career, work with these students. Yet there is no mandatory preservice requirement for teachers to have knowledge of sound literacy pedagogy for second language learners, cross-cultural pedagogy or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

There are no specialist requirements for teaching in remote community and island settings nor any requirement to be able to communicate in Aboriginal English, Torres Strait Creole or an Indigenous language. At times, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities express contradictory attitudes about the cultural support and maintenance role of schools and the need for a cross-cultural approach to teaching and learning. These attitudes stem from different views about the history of colonisation and are influenced by current debates on race in Australia.

The prevalence of ambiguous attitudes to such issues in schools results in part from Education Queensland's not providing policy direction in any of the following core areas of practice:

- second language learning for students whose home language is not Standard Australian English;
- bilingual education;
- cross-cultural pedagogy;
- cross-cultural behaviour management;
- flexible schooling options with pathways appropriate for remote communities;
- cultural understanding for all students;
- the status of Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Creole in schools;
- teaching of Indigenous languages and cultures;
- anti-racism curriculum.

A public education system committed to equitable outcomes for all students needs to provide a flexible policy framework, based on research and effective practice, which gives schools and communities direction and makes them accountable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and employment.

The development of 'practice standards' in literacy teaching would be helpful in remedying many teachers' lack of knowledge of pedagogy appropriate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ESL students.

### **Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in schools**

The review identified many competent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within Education Queensland. The importance of these employees as role models cannot be overstated.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are underrepresented in employment in Education Queensland. The Human Resources Branch estimated that, in 1998 (when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprised 2.9 per cent of the Queensland population), only 1.4 per cent of Education Queensland employees were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Queensland public service target for 2002 is 2.4 per cent, with this figure to be reflected across all salary levels by 2010.

Many part-time casual teacher-aides are funded by the Commonwealth Indigenous Education Strategic Initiative Program (IESIP). While the provision of Commonwealth funds provides another way of generating teacher-aide employment, it paints an exaggerated picture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. Teacher-aides are not permanently employed, which creates economic and social problems for them.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching staff in any school play an important cross-cultural role just by their presence, over and above their teaching duties. There has been a pattern of expecting these teachers to take responsibility for all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in their schools, rather than having all teachers learn to deal appropriately with them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers also face the pressure of dealing with prejudice in the general school population. These factors can cause considerable stress and could explain, at least in part, the high turnover rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers.

There is a need to employ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teachers from local communities in remote areas. Numbers are growing slowly. Currently, most of these teachers are Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) graduates, who have been recruited and mostly trained in their local area.

Many principals value the contribution of these teachers but report that some graduates are not adequately skilled in Standard Australian English. The availability of the course seems to be limited by the availability of tutors rather than by the demand for training. Other observations pointed to the limited experience of some graduates in mainstream schooling and culture. Most respondents to the review believed that the RATEP course was valuable and necessary but needed to improve the standard of graduates' literacy and include more experience of mainstream schooling.





# APPENDIX 2 — KEY ISSUES AND WORKABLE SOLUTIONS

What follows is a discussion of the key issues raised during the review, and suggested strategies and solutions, which were conceived within the organisational parameters existing in 1999. These could change as the future directions of Education Queensland, presently under development, emerge.

The discussion has been organised around nine clusters of issues and solutions:

- Cross-cultural pedagogy
- Participation, progression and educational outcomes
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting in diverse school settings
- Behaviour management and school disciplinary absences
- Languages and cultures in Queensland state schools
- Literacy development
- Employment
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit
- Commonwealth funding

## Cross-cultural pedagogy

### The issues

The term ‘cross-cultural pedagogy’ refers to teaching and learning practices that acknowledge, respect and affirm both home and school cultures, and build on home cultures to develop school-based learning experiences.

The review identified barriers to implementing cross-cultural pedagogies. The most fundamental is the need for parent–teacher relationships to be continually improved.

There is currently little acknowledgment of or support for cross-cultural pedagogy and few appropriately skilled teachers working in schools with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Teachers’ lack of cultural awareness often means that their expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are low.

The distribution of education advisers is inequitable, and some have questionable knowledge and skills in cross-cultural pedagogy.

Teachers’ preservice education in cross-cultural pedagogy is inadequate and effective professional development in ‘two-way education’ is not easily accessible to practising teachers, a problem compounded by a mismatch between Education Queensland’s current model of delivering professional development and the needs of teachers in rural and remote areas. Moreover, the present Standards Framework for Teachers makes little reference to the demands of teaching in Indigenous contexts.

The services offered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit in central office are not well understood in schools, and its role needs to be clarified. Similarly, school personnel have little understanding of the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcentres in providing pedagogical support. The subcentres also struggle with a shortage of resources to meet demand.





## Strategies and solutions

If relations with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are improved, schools will be able to draw on community knowledge and expertise for cultural input. Parents need to be able to advocate ways of getting information about their children that are acceptable to and understood by parents and community, and be involved in implementing and monitoring changes in this area.

Improving school–community relations can be supported by increased emphasis on reconciliation in departmental planning documents.

Education Queensland needs to pay closer attention to issues of staffing, especially deploying appropriate staff to meet needs identified by the community, and to firmly establish the value of cross-cultural pedagogy.

The support provided to schools by education advisers needs to be more closely monitored and reported at district level by the Manager, Education Services.

At a central level Education Queensland must advocate with universities that provide preservice teacher education for compulsory programs in cross-cultural pedagogy. Such courses must be recognised in appointment processes.

The needs of practising teachers should be met by the Learning and Development Foundation's making applied cross-cultural pedagogical and management in-service programs widely available.

Intensive inservice in this area should be mandatory for principals and teachers who take up positions in schools with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit can support these initiatives by:

- collaborating with the Learning and Development Foundation to produce a practical document in which useful cross-cultural pedagogical resources are identified;
- restating and marketing its core business;
- evaluating and refocusing the unit and its services to schools and districts;
- aligning service delivery with school-based management models;
- advocating across all areas of Education Queensland for cross-cultural approaches;
- monitoring statewide implementation of the Strategy for Continuous Improvement;
- consulting with universities about preservice programs;
- being involved in departmental cross-cultural pedagogy projects;
- establishing service standards to monitor quality of service.

## Participation, progression and educational outcomes

### The issues

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are less likely than others to complete school, and have, on average, poorer educational outcomes. The reasons are complex, and cannot be dealt with separately from one another.

Parental anxiety may explain the low level of preschool enrolment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Their children's enrolment at school may be the first exposure to a mainstream institution for parents; or they may have had negative experiences at schools themselves. This may be compounded by a lack of understanding of the role of preschool education in the preparation of students for the regular classroom environment. This is unfortunate as preschool offers a chance to develop classroom readiness, a need that is often heightened among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because of the cultural practice of giving children independence at an earlier age.

There is great concern in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about the limited achievement of many of their children, but there is little or no tradition in some communities (in metropolitan areas and elsewhere) of working in partnership with schools.

Problems experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at school also need to be identified.

For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, entering a traditional school environment can mean preschool is a difficult experience. There is, however, often a developmental delay in preschool-aged children who do not experience preschool or kindergarten education, resulting in difficulties when entering Year 1.

Students in remote locations often have difficulty in participating in programs available to students in other locations.

Students from many Torres Strait islands and some Aboriginal communities must leave home to attend a secondary campus. Leaving home, and making the transition to a new school and new living arrangements, is highly stressful because of cultural, social and language differences, and many do not manage the transition successfully.

The participation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in secondary schooling is low compared to that of the general student population. It has proven difficult to retain students to Year 12, and to keep them at school in the transition from primary to secondary school.

These problems are exacerbated by the limited availability of relevant curriculum options in some secondary schools. Despite trends towards the convergence of general and vocational education and training (VET) in secondary schools, only 1.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participated in school-based apprenticeships, a much lower rate than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The recent review of VET published in December 1998 says nothing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives and how they integrate with community and schooling, and Indigenous students do not appear to be reaping the full benefit of Government policies and programs.

They face significant barriers to participating in VET, including the academic nature of the post-compulsory curriculum and its assessment. Pathways in VET are often limited because of:


- geographical isolation;
- dropping out before Year 11;
- poor literacy and numeracy skills' limiting students to courses leading to lower qualifications;
- limited availability of employers in specific industries.

Work placements for Indigenous students can be difficult in some areas because of stereotyping and relationship expectations on both sides. The mismatch between schools and the needs of students results in many students enrolling in prevocational courses without having completed secondary education. Many students in the compulsory years of schooling are unable to gain access to accredited vocational education and training programs because they have not completed Year 11 or 12.

The educational disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is compounded by the effects of family poverty. There are high levels of absenteeism in some families in Aboriginal communities and at some city schools, and a high level of truancy among some students.

Family mobility can have negative effects on the educational outcomes of students in all school settings, as can the impact of drug and alcohol usage on some families, especially in early childhood years, and health issues, including poor nutrition. Many students are disadvantaged by geographical isolation and remoteness, with limited access to programs for vocational education and training, sporting excellence and gifted and talented education.





The involvement of parents in the life of the school increases the likelihood of students completing school and achieving success. Some schools encounter difficulties in maintaining support for Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Committees, which aim at increasing parents' involvement in decision making. Moreover, the quality of teacher–community relationships varies from school to school, and it is easy for both sides to fall into stereotyped relationships based on historical patterns and current prejudice.

District offices have a responsibility to play a role in the improvement of outcomes by monitoring and reporting on key issues, such as school participation trends. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in central office must be increased and an effective system of networking between key work units established to improve policy direction and creation.

Strategies and accountability mechanisms are needed to deal with:

- identified gaps in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and others (e.g. more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students proportionately are caught in the Year 2 Net);
- the lower retention rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

### **Strategies and solutions**

To improve the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment in preschool, Education Queensland needs to stress the employment of preschool teachers who are acceptable to the community in areas with a large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and develop a process for introducing preschool teachers to the community.

Continued efforts need to be made to increase parents' interest in education, particularly in early childhood education, and their involvement in local schools. This work can be improved by whole-of-government approaches to community development, establishing links between independent and community kindergartens, and establishing networks among community organisations and schools, bringing the school and community into a more effective partnership over time.

Community liaison officers have an important role to play in improving communication between home and school. Developing partnerships among the school, the local community, government agencies and business with an emphasis on community development can generate local solutions to local problems.

It is critical that absenteeism rates are monitored and reported in all schools. Schools can tackle poor attendance by employing home liaison officers, by closely monitoring attendance and responding quickly to absenteeism. Organising a community bus pickup program, if the community wants one, can also help, as can providing alternative program settings for infrequent attendees (e.g. Festival Fair Program). The implementation of a transition program or classes (such as those in use at Healy SS) can be valuable in some circumstances. Attendance patterns can be affected by racism at school, which can be tackled by fully implementing the anti-racism policy in all schools, and using the *Under the Skin* anti-racism kit for the professional development and training of school staff. Cross-cultural pedagogy must be implemented where appropriate.

Improving literacy outcomes is the responsibility of secondary as well as primary schools. It is critical that literacy learning support specific to and in the context of subjects being studied is available in high schools, and that student literacy outcomes are monitored and reported. Particular efforts need to be made to ease the transition from primary to secondary school, especially for students from remote locations.

An equity strategy within the Post Compulsory Unit is needed to overcome the barriers to school completion identified in the review. The Aboriginal and Islander Career Aspirations Pathways Program should be continued.

The involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in vocational education and training can be improved by establishing links to local employer bodies and the Community Development Employment Program and developing or adapting courses to match local career opportunities (e.g. mining, cultural tourism). Alternative education pathways are best constructed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander industries and the VET sector. Alternative Secondary Programs such as that in place at Lockhart River State School should be implemented as appropriate.

VET modules for students under 15 need to be developed and tried out (e.g. Literacy in the Workplace Module) in conjunction with the Australian Standards Training Framework. A targeted program is needed to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in school-based apprenticeships. As part of the compact process, Education Queensland, through individual schools, will work cooperatively with the community, local industries, training providers and government departments to provide VET options, proposed by the community where possible, for students, thereby increasing the skills of the community at large.

Schools need to provide targeted peer drug and alcohol education programs, developed and delivered within a culturally appropriate framework. The alignment of school plans with community development plans can help to ensure improved service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A whole-of-government approach, which includes agreements among local Indigenous health providers, Education Queensland and the local community on service delivery, should be developed to tackle health issues that have an impact on education outcomes.

District offices can encourage school-based initiatives by developing frameworks to guide discussions with schools, and encourage monitoring and improvement in key areas such as rates of participation, and establishing a reporting and accountability framework that includes reporting to schools and communities.

Central office should develop processes where practicable to encourage networking at all levels to ensure non-Indigenous staff in all work units seek out Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives when policy and projects that have a bearing on Indigenous issues are being developed. Links can also be established at a central level between VET and school-to-work units and relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations such as Nagi Binanga and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Training Advisory Council.

## **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting in diverse school settings**


### **The issues**

Access to information about student performance is critical to making good decisions about education. It can provide a sound basis for decision making that is shared among key stakeholders. To serve such purposes, however, information must be provided in ways that are meaningful to all recipients, and that encourage decision-makers to consider the full range of factors involved in the performance of individuals and groups of students.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have little access to or understanding of the kinds of performance measurement information published in school annual reports about the achievement of their students. Because performance data is so often reported in deficit terms, rather than showing student progress in a continuous development model, negative attitudes towards schooling grow.

‘Deficit reporting’ also leads teachers to accept poor results as inevitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Even ‘like schools’ data for schools with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are mostly discouraging for teachers because the netting, testing and ‘like schools’ groups do not take into consideration Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander second and third language literacy learning issues.





In some schools systematic internal and external monitoring, evaluating and reporting of student outcomes (including literacy and numeracy) are used to help plan and evaluate continuous improvement strategies. Similarly, limited use is made of performance, enrolment, dropout, attendance and destination data to inform and monitor the cost-effectiveness of targeted support strategies. The data are sometimes unreliable because of the false identification of other peoples (e.g. Australian South Sea Islanders, Maori, Samoans, Cook Islanders) as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

While school-based management has created new opportunities to tailor activities to meet local needs, there is as yet no comprehensive strategy at district level to motivate schools to develop practices that will effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to supervise the implementation of such practices. In the Torres Strait Islands, for example, some schools have only one visit each year from the Principal Education Officer, Performance Measurement (PEO PM), who is shared with the Cape and Gulf district.

Education Queensland has failed to respond systematically and transparently to years of data indicating the ineffectiveness of schools in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Nor have centrally administered methods of data collection always served Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students well; for example, current literacy netting and population tests have not taken into consideration the role that access to mainstream 'cultural capital' plays in determining outcomes, nor the differences in literacy development between speakers of standard and non-standard English.

Units in central office whose work has system-wide application often do not deal with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in their domain, but pass them on to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit.

In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit, there has been a lack of expertise in monitoring, evaluating and reporting local and statewide outcomes for strategic planning purposes. An improved performance measurement framework (i.e. service standards) is needed to better structure activity, as are more formal staff performance management mechanisms.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit administers substantial Commonwealth funding that is targeted for particular purposes under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiative Program (IESIP). Accountability frameworks for targeted funding need to be redesigned to be effective in the context of school-based management. Current methods of monitoring targeted funding have no capacity to ensure that funds are spent at the school level in ways that align with Education Queensland's core business.

### **Strategies and solutions**

Strategies developed to improve monitoring, evaluation and reporting need to be clear, meaningful to all stakeholders, and consistent with key Education Queensland initiatives.

There is an urgent need to provide members of school ASSPA and IESIP committees with skills in interpreting and using performance data to inform their strategic planning for targeted funds (training for ASSPA needs to be done in conjunction with DETYA personnel).

District PEO PMs have a role to play in:

- training Community Education Counsellors (CECs), Community Participation Officers and Home Liaison Officers in the understanding of systemic measures and how they are used to judge performance and plan strategically;
- helping schools and communities to use performance and other data to establish priorities and set targets in negotiating school compacts.

At the school level, it should be mandatory that School Annual Reports include cohort performance statistics for numeracy, literacy and cohort subject means. Education Queensland must make mandatory the use of individual school targets for retention,

participation and educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as part of the school improvement strategy, and as a measure of the Principal's performance.

Data from 'like schools' are useful only when sound comparisons can be made. Schools where more than three quarters of the students are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander should only be grouped in 'like schools' studies with schools that have a similar proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

PEO PMs must actively encourage and support schools to monitor and track Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The development of school and student profiles can be used in 'tracking' the progress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

IESIP performance reports and the School Annual Report must detail Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' achievement (where possible) and report directly to the local community. Performance indicators used in reporting must be designed to take account of the school and the students' contexts, and to reflect a continuous improvement approach, rather than a deficit one.

District directors should monitor school cohort means, outcomes, participation rates and improvement targets to inform their conversations with principals. Training must be provided to PEO PMs to support the development of appropriate data in their districts. There is an urgent need to employ a PEO PM who is based on Thursday Island.

Central office can help schools by using performance data to identify, document and publish 'stand-out' practice, and by analysing statewide and IESIP data in a way that can be reported to school communities, and can influence policy, funding distribution and strategy development. Analyses of this kind can also be used to help districts and schools in forward planning processes.

Work units in central office need to develop service standards and key indicators of service delivery in relation to their main functions, and include data about outcomes in these areas in annual reports. All Education Queensland work units must develop expertise in dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues related to their areas of organisational responsibility within the principles established by the statewide Charter.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit can help district directors by developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues kit, designed to guide district directors in their conversations with principals about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. The unit needs to develop service standards with a reporting framework for its own use and for use by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcentres.

It must also develop a performance-monitoring framework for all programs paid for with targeted funding, and design key performance measures to be used as part of the annual reporting process that better reflect the complexity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education issues than published statewide data does at present.


## **Languages and cultures in Queensland state schools**

### **The issues**

Because of sensitivities of language, culture and place, schools need to be cautious in their language policy. Schools work without policy on or guidelines for Indigenous languages programs. The challenges facing schools that are attempting to implement Indigenous language education programs are many, including:

- gaining access to the linguistic resources necessary for designing and teaching programs;
- staff turnover in community schools (for example, in 1999 Kowanyama State School was forced to restart its Indigenous language program partly because half its teaching staff and all its administration staff were turned over);



- 
- shortage of funds to initiate or continue programs;
  - misunderstandings about ownership of cultural knowledge (intellectual property);
  - overreporting of language programs in IESIP reports.

These issues are made more difficult because of the lack of endorsed Education Queensland policy. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit does not have adequate up-to-date knowledge, in part because the information about Indigenous languages collected through IESIP reports is incorrect.

### **Strategies and solutions**

Schools must be advised that the teaching of Indigenous languages should be initiated only when such an approach is endorsed by the local community and should be implemented in partnership with it. Policy is needed to guide schools in negotiating the range of issues related to the teaching of Indigenous languages appropriately. When agreement is reached with acknowledged local community representatives (for example, the Council of Elders), adequate specialist resources and funding need to be provided. Endorsement of Indigenous languages policy and support materials is needed by the system to encourage their use in Queensland schools. Schools also need to be supported to gain access to department-based Indigenous language funds and information on additional funding sources.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit can help district directors to provide support to principals in this area by preparing an information support package on cross-cultural negotiation processes, Indigenous copyright and protocols. The unit maintains a register of language programs, local copyright agreements and language teachers or tutors; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit subcentres are in a position to be able to facilitate or broker joint school–community language programs.

## **Behaviour management and school disciplinary absences**

### **The issues**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are significantly overrepresented in Education Queensland data on school disciplinary absences. They are much more likely than non-Indigenous students to be suspended and excluded from school. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities perceive a link between students' alienation from schooling and the overrepresentation of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the juvenile justice system.

Behaviour that teachers perceive as problematic may in some instances stem from differences in child-rearing practices between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Many Aboriginal children are given more independence at an earlier age than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and as a result may exhibit more independent behaviour than mainstream European teachers are used to in children.

Other factors affecting student behaviour include the impact of the historically poor relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and schooling; there is much work to be done on both sides to overcome this mistrust. Alcohol and drug abuse within the family, and family violence, have deleterious effects on students' behaviour. Conflict between factions in some communities can spill over into the school.

At a professional level there has been a tendency to discuss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander behaviour management issues and school disciplinary absences from a deficit perspective. Policy documents and behaviour management publications rarely consider the cultural or cross-cultural issues that may be involved in students' behaviour at school.

Ways to respond to the perceived link between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' alienation from schooling and their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system were not discussed in the school behaviour management and supportive school environment plans examined in the course of the review.

The police in schools program is not necessarily helpful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because of the generally poor relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and police.

There are too few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults working in most schools on a daily basis (particularly as teachers and administrators) to provide positive role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, or to give non-Indigenous teachers and the general community the chance to challenge stereotypes and prejudices about Indigenous Peoples.

Casual teacher-aides, who are at the bottom of the authority chain in the classroom, form the bulk of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in Education Queensland schools. While making an extremely valuable and generally valued contribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher-aides can be cast in a 'policing' role, rather than teachers and administrators learning the cross-cultural skills necessary for successful behaviour management. Culturally appropriate and long-term approaches built on nurturing close relationships between the school and the community (such as linking with community Elders programs, community justice groups and other agencies) are not widely practised because they do not provide quick answers to 'discipline problems'.

Staffing patterns, especially in remote areas, also contribute to the problem. The two-year cycling of 'mainstream' staff (many with little experience) through community and island schools constantly disrupts school-community relationships, which are necessary to build the two-way understanding, trust and skills necessary to develop culturally sensitive approaches to behaviour management in a supportive school environment.

Young teachers taking up positions in remote communities, some in the first year of professional practice, have not had compulsory preservice training in supportive school environment and behaviour management as it applies to diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts.

As a consequence of the issues discussed above, there tends to be a reliance on punitive responses rather than using the culturally appropriate 'problem solving in an extended community' approach, and this is reflected in high rates of suspension and exclusion. Suspension can reinforce non-attendance and indirectly support dropping out of school. Some schools may use 'unofficial' suspensions, that is, ones that do not follow the proper procedure.


Alternative education programs tend to be seen as a disciplinary option, to be called on when student behaviour becomes 'unmanageable', rather than being provided proactively to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Making aspects of schooling more flexible may, for example, help to close the 'cultural distance' between some schools and students.

The perception exists that in secondary schools there is too often an abdication of behaviour management responsibility to CECs. Some CECs see themselves as powerless to engage administrators and teachers in disciplinary approaches that will avoid students leaving school.

At present, there is little organised inservice training in behaviour management for teachers working cross-culturally; nor is there a recognised behaviour management inservice package that specifically deals with this issue in Queensland. Professional cross-cultural or culturally appropriate counselling is not generally available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because guidance officers are not trained in cross-cultural counselling. There are no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidance specialists, and the implementation of community accountability conferencing is progressing very slowly.

At the classroom level, there is a perceived mismatch between students' needs and curriculum provision, in relation to both curriculum programs and pedagogy. This is compounded by some students' not believing that the education system will provide them with a pathway to work.





There is a lack of confidence on the part of some teachers that they can manage cross-cultural behaviour management situations, and a degree of prejudice and discrimination remains among some teachers.

The racial divisions evident in society generally often exacerbate, rightly or wrongly, student–teacher conflict. Students who experience frustration and failure because of ‘learning difficulties’ or ‘learning difference’ may act out to protect their self-concept/esteem or to meet their need for peer acceptance. Racist behaviour between students, initiated by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, increases the likelihood of behaviour management problems, as does intercommunity feuding which is brought to school.

Many students are sceptical about the fairness of school discipline systems. Disruption in classrooms is often provoked by general misbehaviour and verbal or nonverbal teasing, often unseen by teachers.

Behaviour management and the monitoring of disciplinary absences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not mandatory core issues for discussion between district directors and principals.

A punitive model informs the system’s policy framework for disciplinary absences, which does not acknowledge the links among school environments, disciplinary suspensions, absenteeism and dropout rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Policy on alternative education programs focuses on their role in the student suspension process. This does not readily support the provision of ‘flexible’ schooling programs and alternative options that accommodate the situations and contexts that are part of the experience of alienated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The ways in which projects have been framed in the Behaviour Management Unit in the past have not adequately dealt with issues of cross-cultural behaviour management and cooperation between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the school. Distribution models for behaviour management funds in rural and remote districts are inappropriate because they do not account for the difficulties of service provision in remote locations. There is no strategy to target and train Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander behaviour management specialist teachers.

The removal of Senior Guidance Officer and Guidance Officer positions previously located in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit subcentres has created a gap in the provision of specialised service. However, there has been difficulty in filling these positions.

Commonwealth funds, administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit, are most often used to support ‘alternative programs’ for students who do not attend mainstream school.

The historical separation of schooling, community youth support agencies and the juvenile justice system has led to fragmented social policy, which shows up at the workplace as disjointed services.

### **Strategies and solutions**

Schools must invest in the development of real and active school–community partnerships focused on building trust and two-way understanding. Effective behaviour management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students could be improved by the preparation of a resource package that builds on the existing early childhood policy and helps teachers develop practices to accommodate cultural and behaviour differences.

Cooperative strategies, such as the promotion of conflict resolution at school through collaboration among community agencies such as police and family services, should be encouraged. Schools must also be encouraged to deal with issues of racism by including school strategies and responses to the anti-racism policy in audits and School Annual Reports.

A whole-of-community approach to discipline and alienation must be built into school compacts. An integral part of the compact process must be to build strong and effective links among community and other agency structures and the school, to enable community resources to play an effective role in developing local, culturally appropriate solutions to existing problems.

There is an urgent need to improve the quality of relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and police. The more frequent deployment of Indigenous Police Liaison Officers in appropriate settings would be helpful. Education Queensland and the Queensland Police Service must focus on strategies to develop positive relationships between school-based police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schools where this program is operating. Behaviour management and communication training needs to be developed for Indigenous teacher-aides, focusing on empowering aides to work with teachers to help them understand and respond appropriately to Indigenous students.

Schools need to be much more aware of students who are at risk of committing juvenile offences, and should make greater use of strategies such as community accountability conferencing, community service and working with community police. Schools should ensure that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander advocate from a community organisation is involved in school disciplinary absence processes, and should develop a range of potential outcomes from such processes other than one-to-five-day suspensions.

The development of a resource document outlining key issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander behaviour management would help District Directors and Managers, Education Services to support schools to improve their practice in this area. Decisions could also be made at district level to designate a number of behaviour management support positions to focus specifically on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to the degree appropriate to the needs of schools in the area. Districts also need to develop effective ways of investigating unofficial suspensions.

The role of District Community Education Counsellors (DCECs) needs to be more clearly defined and strongly linked to the supervision, counselling and behaviour management functions of district offices. They need to have a stronger role in linking Indigenous, community and government agencies to school and district structures.

Strategies need to be developed to increase the awareness and understanding of District Directors, Managers, Education Services and District Guidance Officers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues in schools from an Indigenous perspective.


Education Queensland must develop, at central office level, an information campaign to inform discussion of behaviour management for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Such a campaign should be firmly based on research into and best practice in Indigenous behaviour management and supportive school environment issues and solutions. It should make available resources on Indigenous issues and effective approaches that are applicable to all central office work units with responsibility for issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, and to districts and schools.

Any information campaign must be accompanied by a long-term strategy to increase teachers' understanding of cultural difference and effective methods for school and classroom management in Indigenous contexts.

Behaviour management policy needs to be amended to give recognition to the links among unexplained absences, dropout rates, disciplinary absences and alienation from schooling in the context of researching flexible, quality 'alternative' programs for Indigenous students in a variety of contexts and locations.

There is an urgent need for a research project to be conducted to investigate the links between attendance, school disciplinary absences, dropout rates, alienation from schooling and juvenile offences (including individual success stories); this could be a joint project developed with the juvenile justice system.





Changes need to be made to school disciplinary absence policies to provide alternatives to suspension, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools. Policy and resource agreements need to be developed for programs that are alternatives to suspension. Greater flexibility is needed in the distribution of behaviour management funds to meet the particular needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Support needs to be given to wider implementation of community accountability conferencing in schools.

Continued development and distribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Counselling Resource will help meet the needs of Indigenous students, as will targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers for training as guidance officers. The Learning and Development Foundation should coordinate appropriate professional development and training in behaviour management issues for Guidance Officers and other support personnel working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. Education Queensland should initiate negotiations with universities to include a mandatory unit on cultural understanding and cross-cultural counselling for all Guidance Officers and should acknowledge the value of such subjects in employment interviews.

Similarly, the ability to demonstrate cultural understanding and cross-cultural expertise should be required in selection processes for promotion to leadership positions in schools with a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

A range of policies (supportive school environment, behaviour management and alternative programs) need to be evaluated and reshaped to respond better to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and more effectively encompass off-campus student support and vocational training.

Other issues that require attention include:

- the need for practical vocational training to be incorporated in the compulsory years of schooling;
- improved implementation of the *Under the Skin* anti-racism package;
- extending appraisal of students with learning difficulties into secondary school, accompanied by programs specific to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Research needs to be conducted into effective school community-based behaviour management practices in urban, rural and remote locations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit subcentres should seek Commonwealth funds to conduct such research, and to develop and try a range of strategies. The outcomes of such projects should be available online and the projects should be documented (in different media) to form the basis for a resource and behaviour management service to schools. In addition, subcentres can actively support schools to develop strong and functional interagency links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth organisations, and other agencies and organisations.

## Literacy development

The large gap between the literacy levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and others makes this a significant enough issue to warrant being considered separately. This is not simply an issue of differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. There are also significant differences among groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, for example, those in rural, provincial city and metropolitan settings.

### The issues

Parents' understanding of the issues involved in their children's literacy development is sometimes limited because they do not receive appropriate information from schools in ways that are meaningful, about issues such as the importance of attending kindergarten and preschool, or involving their children in storytelling and reading at home.

Strained or non-existent relationships between the school and the community, often the result of the professional inexperience of staff, especially in schools where staff turnover is high, are a barrier to effective understanding of the role parents need to play in literacy development. Other difficulties arise from the lack of awareness by some Aboriginal community members of the linguistic differences between Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English.

Such problems are compounded by the basing of much early childhood teaching practice on the belief that all students are Standard Australian English speakers. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not. Although teachers expend a great deal of effort in early childhood classrooms, pedagogy is rarely adjusted to cater for the needs of these students. Students who speak Aboriginal English or Torres Strait Creole are seen as having a problem in need of remedy (a view that stems from a deficit view of Indigenous cultures), rather than having the challenge of becoming fluent in both Standard Australian English and their home language. Teaching practice in many schools does not match best practice that calls for students in early childhood to be supported by the use of their first language while learning a second language. This is also true in relation to dialect variations.

Classroom teachers and administrators may not have sufficient understanding of home language difference (and its variations) and may not know appropriate cross-cultural or language pedagogy to advance literacy. Most mainstream teachers do not speak or understand the form of Aboriginal English or Torres Strait Creole in use in the school community. As a result, they often cannot understand or be understood by the non-Standard-Australian-English-speaking children they teach for six months or more. In addition, some teachers and teacher-aides are non-Standard-Australian-English speakers themselves and do not model Standard Australian English to students.

The rapid turnover of staff in many remote schools, and the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander casual staff lead to loss of expertise, and means new staff begin with the same misconceptions as their predecessors, and so repeat their mistakes.

Tracking and testing instruments (e.g. Year 2 Net, appraisal) designed for use in contexts where students have competence in spoken Standard Australian English are routinely applied in contexts where students' oral language is not Standard Australian English, resulting in misleading measurement data.


A model of improving literacy outcomes based on the concept of literacy intervention, as opposed to the notion of continuous literacy development of non-Standard-Australian-English-speaking students, creates a deficit approach to teaching. This encourages teachers to have low expectations of these students, with attempts made to 'remedy' a 'fault' rather than develop methods appropriate to continuous literacy learning in a second language context.

There is only infrequent tracking and monitoring of students' oral language development in home language and Standard Australian English. The emphasis in Year 2 on reading and writing has diverted many teachers away from the oral language development that is an essential element of second language learning.

First-language literacy interventions like Reading Recovery, Support-a-Reader and Support-a-Maths-Learner are not useful in their present form as strategies for non-Standard-Australian-English speakers drawn from ESL teaching practice. However, in many remote contexts, ESL support is neither adequate to the needs of these areas nor easily available to teachers and students.

There are too few specialists with training in continuous literacy development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts (including learning support teachers and developmental guidance officers) available to schools, and there is little practical support for improving the skills of teacher-aides. Some teacher-aides have poor access to literacy training. Programs run by the Centre for Teaching Excellence are not accessible to employees working in remote locations. Travel is prohibitively expensive and time-consuming.





There is uncertainty among teachers and principals in community and island settings about the appropriateness of the new appraisal tasks for non-Standard-Australian-English-speaking students with learning difficulties and disabilities; there is considerable concern about the likelihood that **all** their students will be identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities.

The difficulty some students from remote and island schools have in making the transition from primary to secondary school, because of the need to move away from home, also negatively affects literacy development.

At present PEO PMs and District Directors are not required to monitor the achievement or continuous improvement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort in schools or the cost-effectiveness of targeted programs.

There is little recognition in policy that students who are Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Creole speakers need different educational responses from others. Students who are competent in spoken Standard Australian English and who bring with them cultural capital from the mainstream culture are at a significant advantage in literacy development in most classrooms.

Commonwealth and State ESL funding processes do not adequately consider Indigenous ESL issues. The absence of recognition and direction in policy in this area has resulted in the application of a universal approach to literacy and intervention, which is educationally inappropriate for the literacy learning of non-Standard-Australian-English speakers.

The structure of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit makes it difficult to facilitate understanding across the system of the complexity of continuous literacy development in diverse settings. The subcentres cannot offer enough quality literacy development support because it does not have the necessary staff or expertise.

### **Strategies and solutions**

It is critical that parents and community members receive jargon-free information from schools, delivered in a spirit of mutual respect, about:

- issues for students negotiating two different language environments;
- the importance schools place on Standard Australian English;
- the value and nature of second language learning programs;
- how parents and community can help literacy learning.

In schools, classroom teachers need to participate in instructional teams with ESL resource teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to ensure that appropriate pedagogy is used in classrooms. Teaching and learning resources based on ESL principles should be developed for teachers of Aboriginal English or Torres Strait Creole speakers.

Ways of measuring literacy performance need to be developed that serve the key purpose of giving teachers and parents useful information about progress and future needs. In schools where students are non-Standard-Australian-English speakers, the Year 2 Net often reinforces negative views about the learning capacity of students. Netting should occur in Year 3 to allow greater time for competency in Standard Australian English to develop, so that the data from the process is more meaningful. The value of such data would be increased if a tracking instrument with specially adapted 'ESL band scales' equated with the continua used to map continuous literacy learning is used to give reliable information about students' achievements and recognise the ESL context in which they are developing literacy skills in Standard Australian English.

There needs to be a process of actively recruiting early childhood teachers with ESL expertise to work in community contexts. Also, literacy intervention funds in community and island schools should be renamed and redirected to implementing appropriate

pedagogy drawn from ESL practice and adapted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts. An oral language continuum should be developed to guide teaching, and to track students' continuous language development in contexts where students are not Standard Australian English speakers.

It is important to ensure that the use of planned strategies for improving the literacy outcomes of Indigenous second language learners does not end in the early childhood years. A specific focus on literacy learning needs to be maintained in all subject areas, for all students from preschool to Year 12. In community and island schools, English must be taught in Years 8 to 10 using principles of literacy learning in a second language context, designed to support the development of intercultural understanding and multilingual identity.

To do this schools must have in place:

- processes to identify non-Standard-Australian-English-speaking students at enrolment;
- continuous classroom-based language learning strategies that follow the principles of learning literacy in a second language context;
- support structures that use the home language while learning English in the early years.

Performance measurement data sets developed by district offices need to include reports detailing the literacy standards of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohorts for schools where these cohorts are of a suitable size. District Directors should use such data to monitor agents of literacy policy, and maintain a focus on continuous literacy development for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education advisers.

Changes must be made to Education Queensland literacy policy so that it meets the learning needs of all students. This will involve acknowledging the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose first language is not Standard Australian English to have support in their home language while learning Standard Australian English. It will require processes to deal with the different staffing, testing and specialist support needs of schools.

The development and implementation of a literacy strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is needed to execute the above policy through all layers of the organisation, with progress reported regularly to a management committee. Such a strategy must recast the concept of 'intervention' with non-Standard-Australian-English speakers into a model of 'learning literacy in a second language context', and reorganise present funding provisions to support the new policy.

Successful implementation will require staff development in language acquisition, appropriate pedagogy and assessment techniques for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for whom Standard Australian English is not the home language, and the development of groupings of 'like schools' for literacy that reflect community and island settings, as well as methods to apply the principles of appraisal to community and island in ways appropriate to second language learners. Teacher-aide training must be made available in remote locations (such as the Torres Strait and Cape and Gulf districts).


Both the Literacy and Numeracy Unit and the Equity Programs Unit must take up issues identified in this review in current and future literacy projects.

Attention also needs to be paid to:

- improving the Standard Australian English skills of some RATEP-trained teachers by focusing on the oral language component of the program;
- collecting and promoting developmentally appropriate learning strategies that are known to be successful with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially those who do not speak Standard Australian English.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit must negotiate on behalf of Education Queensland with Queensland universities (in particular, James Cook University) for the inclusion of ESL theory and practices in postgraduate courses in learning development and support. It also needs to monitor and analyse statewide literacy





data, identify 'stand-out' performance, and document and publish best practice in literacy. The subcentres must employ second-language Standard Australian English literacy learning specialists to play an advisory role to the unit and schools.

## **Employment**

Issues of employment were grouped around the following themes:

- the deployment of, roles for and issues with Education Queensland staff;
- employment and career management strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples;
- staffing in schools where Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander students form the majority.

## **Deployment of, roles for and issues with Education Queensland staff**

### **The issues**

It is important that when Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people are employed in community schools, they are acceptable to that community and to any community factions.

School-related issues include the nature of the facilities available to teachers in some communities (for example, housing), which can be a serious impediment to extending periods of service, as can isolation and distance. That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher-aides tend to be casually employed creates stress for both teacher-aides and Principals, making it difficult to develop and maintain their expertise and support.

In some schools, responsibility for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues is abdicated to Indigenous staff who are comparatively low in the school hierarchy. There is a lack of training or professional development available for home-school Liaison Officers.

CECs and home-school liaison services are not equitably distributed among schools. The role statements of CECs need to be clarified; at present, some CECs feel pressured to provide 'educational counselling' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students without having the necessary qualifications, and this causes them stress. Many also experience high levels of stress because of the many behaviour management incidents they deal with, feeling that they are being cast in the role of the 'native police'.

There is also inequitable provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher-aide services between primary and secondary settings, resulting in teacher-aides in some schools performing the role of the CEC. It is worth noting the successful involvement of teacher-aides in improving behaviour management, as opposed to their limited success in improving literacy in some schools.

Between district offices there are inconsistencies in workloads of DCECs because of differences in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the number of schools serviced within individual districts. There are also difficulties in the supervisory relationships among some DCECs, CECs and home-school Liaison Officers. Because of the professional development link between DCECs and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit, not all are seen or see themselves as part of the district team. The relationships between some DCECs and their line managers (PEO Student Services) are not strong, which results in:

- the isolation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues from mainstream district business;
- inconsistent approaches to work;
- varying responsibilities among DCECs.

Central office needs to clarify the policy rationale for the distribution of CECs, DCECs and home-school Liaison Officers, make policies more specific about duties, and define good practice in counselling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

### **Strategies and solutions**

Processes must be developed to consult with Aboriginal and Islander community representatives effectively about key appointments to local schools (for example, administrators). Community and school orientation and induction programs must be developed and made mandatory for all new staff.

Improved accommodation for school staff is needed in remote locations such as Normanton.

The number of permanent teacher-aide positions must be increased. The training and professional development needs of school-based support staff (teacher-aides and CECs) must be met urgently. Principals and teachers need improved access to professional development and training, especially in rural and remote localities.

Greater awareness needs to be developed in schools of the valuable contribution made by CECs to a **team** approach to the case management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Other team members are guidance officers, learning support and resource teachers, administrators, classroom teachers and community members.

District directors must encourage school administrators to ensure whole-school ownership of all issues, develop ways to acknowledge and value such partnerships officially, and to improve public awareness of policy and guidelines.

An equitable model for the distribution of teacher-aides and CECs must be developed and implemented. Negotiation with schools will be necessary to ensure fair and effective allocation of Indigenous education workers across districts. The permanent employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher-aides must be a priority when mainstream positions become available. Processes are needed to ensure that teacher-aides whose main role is literacy support are competent in Standard Australian English.

Central office can support such efforts by developing policy and guidelines regarding the distribution of CECs, and reviewing the allocation model for CECs and teacher-aides.

## **Employment and career management strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

### **The issues**


There are few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models in community schools, especially males. Ways need to be found to develop a clearer understanding among members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of careers and pathways in education.

Some principals have trouble identifying appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers for employment. There are few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specialist staff available (guidance officers, librarians, learning support teachers), and the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers is difficult for reasons discussed previously.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff may face barriers when seeking career advancement in Education Queensland, and more lucrative employment opportunities elsewhere lower the number of prospective employees and rate of retention.

Central office lacks a cohesive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers employment strategy or policy with the flexibility to meet the demands of Queensland's diverse schools. That effective ways of identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the past have not been found has made it difficult to identify them and track their careers.





There is a need for recognition in school staffing policy of the characteristics of the local community as an extra dimension of employment policy for schools with mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Present practice at times stereotypes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, not recognising the diversity of communities and individuals.

There are few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in central office other than in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit. Because the unit can draw on only a limited number of experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to meet its own staffing needs, there has been too much reliance on teachers with limited classroom and strategic experience to provide policy development and advice.

### **Strategies and solutions**

Community issues need to be tackled by establishing:

- community and staff mentoring programs;
- mentor registers for employees;
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employer registers;
- remote area employment marketing strategy.

The Director-General must make Human Resources Branch responsible for developing ways of identifying present and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy must be developed centrally, incorporating:

- increased opportunities for experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to work on placement in other central office units, especially in the Literacy and Numeracy Unit;
- cross-cultural awareness training for all Education Queensland staff, regardless of position and worksite;
- the use of bonded scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake tertiary studies and gain future employment as public servants with Education Queensland;
- expansion of executive and leadership development program to include more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees;
- expansion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander middle management program.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit must develop a long-term staff development strategy to improve its effectiveness, and employ appropriate, experienced non-Indigenous staff to work with less experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in a team or mentoring situation to advance their professional growth.

## **Staffing in schools with mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students**

### **The issues**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have very little input into or ownership of the workforce planning processes in schools. There can be a considerable cultural distance between the community and some staff, especially non-Indigenous teachers. The generally rapid turnover of staff in remote and in some rural areas erodes trust and damages school–community relationships. This can be made worse by a lack of understanding at the school level of the community and family obligations of Indigenous staff.

Staffing remote schools can be made more difficult because, in the past, being ‘sent’ to a remote community school was portrayed as punishment for teachers. The high turnover of staff, particularly in remote schools, could be related to no established standard of

competence's being required for teaching in very demanding circumstances. There is very little, if any, appropriate preservice training for teachers to prepare for working in such areas.

Mainstream teachers in these settings have limited formal training in other cultures, cross-cultural pedagogy, ESL or culturally appropriate behaviour management. Students in remote area schools have difficulty understanding teachers' Standard Australian English, and teachers take up to six months in the classrooms to begin to understand Torres Strait Creole and some varieties of Aboriginal English.

Many principals operate in 'survival' mode rather than leading the school and community in a continuous improvement process. The motivation of staff who choose to work in remote areas can be problematic, e.g. fishing, charity, quick promotion and extra opportunities.

While some schools are further advanced in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff than others, not all Indigenous teachers speak Standard Australian English. Moreover, the literacy and teaching competency of RATEP graduates is variable, and some RATEP graduates have very little experience of mainstream schooling and community contexts.

Neither is RATEP available in all remote contexts and RATEP graduates who do not obtain a satisfactory grading from their departmental interview experience acute shame in their communities. Some 'teachers' have no teaching qualifications at all, yet through their experience and the outcomes they achieve are recognised as good teachers. RATEP should be extended to them to allow them proper recognition.

Teaming Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, although it seems obvious, is often, in fact, problematic. This may be because of personal differences, a lack of experience in working cross-culturally or expectations of the relationship that are coloured by stereotypes, differences in professional standing, gender and culture, or all of these.

The lack of staffing guidelines for principal personnel officers in districts that meet these issues results in there still being regional precedents and variations and an inability to staff these schools appropriately.

### **Strategies and solutions**

A clear statement of an Education Queensland vision of employment and career development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the strategy to achieve outcomes by a fixed date is needed.


The system's staffing policy must recognise that in some community and island contexts most of the teachers ought to be well-trained and educated local people. Local workforce agreements should be negotiated with the community as part of the development of the school–community compact process, and should include traineeships, improvements to RATEP, scholarships and targeted programs (for example, a 'principal-in-training' role should be established for community and island schools).

An effective staffing policy for community schools must focus on the provision of appropriately skilled, culturally aware and sensitive staff, and move schools towards a mix of mainstream staff and Indigenous staff from the local community.

This must be accompanied by the gradual implementation of a prerequisite qualification or training course for all mainstream teachers before they are posted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, similar to the Graduate Diploma In Aboriginal Education (GDAE) programs offered by James Cook University.

RATEP must be continued but in an improved form that targets and trains local community members for future employment within the community's school, bonding them with the community. RATEP needs to develop a standard, comparable to other mainstream courses, that all students must achieve to graduate. Some students will have to complete preparatory studies in written and oral language to achieve this. RATEP courses should be made available in locations where existing staff require training.





An exchange program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in communities would help them to gain exposure to mainstream settings for significant periods of time as part of their professional development. In-service literacy training is needed for existing Indigenous teachers who have low literacy competency.

The Learning and Development Foundation needs to provide training for principals in remote area schools and to network with relevant districts. This is essential when developing these programs.

The statewide staffing policy for remote area schools must be expressed in a district context by principal personnel officers. Where possible, staff training and conferences should be coordinated on a district or cluster basis.

There is an urgent need for the development of a whole-of-government approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, with both advocacy and leadership by Education Queensland.

## **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit**

### **The issues**

There is a lack of understanding by the community of the core business of the unit.

Some community members still see the Subcentre South as a replacement for Inala Family Education Centre.

Schools are also unaware of the core business of the unit and its outreach centres. Some schools still regard the subcentres as part of a statewide support centre. Services are not readily available to schools in remote and island settings, and subsequently there can be significant costs for remote and island schools when accessing services. There has been little development of teaching and learning materials by subcentres in the key focus areas of second language learning and literacy, cross-cultural behaviour management and cross-cultural pedagogy.

At the district level, although some PEOs Student Services have only limited knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and services, it is not clear how responsibilities should be divided between districts and the unit.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit in central office is responsible for the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of IESIP funding. Most of the employees of the unit and its subcentres are on contract and in temporary roles because 18 out of 32 positions are funded by the Commonwealth. This limits incremental increases in salaries and opportunities for promotion and can result in more experienced teachers' not being interested in accepting positions in the unit. The small number of project officers employed results in such situations as one employee's 'being the expert' in areas ranging from literacy in Year 2 to vocational education and training. There is a high turnover of staff because of short-term contracts, and too few staff to support schools adequately. The purpose and direction of subcentres needs to be improved and focused on core issues.

### **Strategies and solutions**

The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit and of educational structures and processes need to be clearly communicated to school communities by the community partnerships officers.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues need to be a regular focus of discussion between District Directors and Principals. School requests for services and support from subcentres must go through district offices. District Directors and Principals should advocate for a system of remuneration of travel and accommodation expenses for subcentre staff, when these are incurred in the provision of services to schools.

Service agreements between Education Services Directorate and the districts in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including monitoring, tracking and reporting of specific elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes, must clarify the roles and responsibilities of the District Director; the PEO Student Services; the PEO PM; the Manager, Education Services; the Senior Policy Officer; and the Principal Personnel Officer, and reflect these in individual performance management agreements.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit needs to be restructured so that it more closely adheres to the current strategic directions of Education Queensland (including school-based management, Strategy 2010, the New Basics, and the Equitable Outcomes Framework). The review of the media unit in Cairns will produce recommendations that will inform its future directions and structures.

Commonwealth projects should be based at the subcentres, so that projects can be developed to cover the diversity of situations, services can be closer to schools and there will be enough officers available to form research and development partnerships with schools and communities.

## **Commonwealth funding**

### **The issues**

There is great difficulty in some school communities in obtaining information on how IESIP funds are spent within their school. Schools face uncertainty about whether annual IESIP funding, used to employ teacher-aides and, in some cases, CECs, will continue. Mobile student populations are not considered in the allocation of IESIP funds nor are increases in student population. There are restrictions on how funds can be spent; however, targeted funding is sometimes used for basic educational provision rather than additional programs.

No clear guidelines are available to help supervise or measure the performance of targeted programs at the district level.

### **Strategies and solutions**

Principals need to provide an annual report to the school's ASSPA committee, which will be made available to the school community, detailing how IESIP funds have been spent.

IESIP-funded programs must be accounted for as part of the school's strategic planning and reporting framework, and linked to a continuous improvement cycle. Such a cycle needs to be informed by decision making based on evidence gathered at the school level and by change processes based on action research. The targets and strategies of such continuous improvement cycles should be negotiated with the community as part of the development of the school–community compact.

Support materials on the supervision and performance measurement of targeted programs need to be made available to district directors and PEO PMs.

At a central level, a review is needed of the allocation model used to distribute IESIP funds to schools. Appropriate funding arrangements need to be made for schools with highly mobile student populations. This is an issue that has already been considered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit. The pro-rata adjustment due to be made to schools in July 1999 needs to be clearly communicated to school communities.

A whole-of-department strategic approach to Commonwealth funding issues, with a focus on the alignment of expenditure with Education Queensland's core business, needs to be developed, including a performance measurement framework for all targeted programs and an accountability pro-forma for the reporting of educational outcomes achieved through the expenditure of IESIP funds. Such an approach should include the development of three or four-year projections for targeted school funding, tied to local targets and strategies negotiated by school and community.





### **About the cover art**

This work depicts education in Queensland, and how excellent outcomes are pursued through the involvement of parents and the community in school activities and decision making. It shows the diverse partnerships between communities and schools — in urban and rural settings, involving Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities, building understanding of the family relationships and the home environments of Indigenous students. Partnerships between schools and communities help students to achieve improved outcomes in literacy, to enable students and their communities to gain access to new technologies, and to ensure that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students complete Year 12 and gain access to further education and training.

This is symbolised by the figures in the work, with the central figures representing different communities supporting the areas of excellence aimed for by Education Queensland. The outer ring of figures reinforces the notion of partnerships supporting the achievement of continuous improvement in outcomes for students in the future.

# FOREWORD

At a time when Education Queensland is facing the challenge of building a state school system that meets the needs of diverse communities through innovation, responsiveness and flexibility, it is appropriate to introduce the findings and recommendations of the *Review of Education and Employment Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland*.

The review, which was based on widespread consultation throughout the State, describes the complexity and diversity of issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and employment. It identifies the substantial and unacceptable gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and those of non-Indigenous students in Queensland schools.

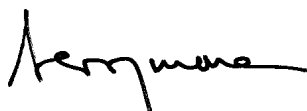
If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are to experience success and exercise control over their lives in an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing world, education authorities have a responsibility to ensure that such gaps are effectively closed.

At the heart of an effective approach to improving educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is the creation of strong and genuine partnerships between Indigenous communities and their schools. Such partnerships are the core of the *Strategy for the Continuous Improvement of Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland*.

The strategy acknowledges the fundamental importance of building enduring, productive links between schools and communities based on the principle of mutual obligation, and provides a sound basis for its achievement. Its key objective is to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve the same standards of education as the general student population.

It marks a new beginning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in Queensland, which will be underpinned by interconnected and outcomes-oriented community and government services, improved school–community relationships and high-quality pedagogy based on cross-cultural understanding.

Education Queensland is determined to support local initiatives with a range of policies and practices at the systemic level to give key stakeholders the best possible opportunity to ensure excellent outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in education and employment.



Terry Moran  
Director-General of Education  
and Chair, Review of Education and Employment Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland

February 2000



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# REVIEW OF EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland

