



Education and Training

# Performance in Indigenous Education

Interim Report to the Legislative Assembly of the  
Australian Capital Territory

**January– June 2009**



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# CONTENTS

<b>A. Overview.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Student enrolment P-12.....	3
<b>B. Early childhood education.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Preschool enrolments.....	4
<b>C. School and community educational partnerships.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Indigenous Education Officers.....	5
ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB).....	6
Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Program.....	6
The Apology.....	7
National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.....	7
<b>D. School leadership.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Indigenous Student Aspirations.....	8
The Dare to Lead program.....	8
<b>E. Quality teaching.....</b>	<b>9</b>
English Literacy and Numeracy.....	9
<b>F. Pathways to training, employment and higher education.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>G. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>10</b>

## **A. Overview**

This interim report to the ACT Legislative Assembly on Indigenous education covers the period January to June 2009 inclusive.

The report is presented against strategic areas for action identified in *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage – Key Indicators Report*. The report is available from the publication section of the Commonwealth Government’s Productivity Commission website at: <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous>. Whilst awaiting the soon to be developed national action plan for Indigenous education the MCEETYA Report *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* provides the key focus areas for action described in this report.

Key headings used in this report are:

- Early childhood education
- School and community educational partnerships
- School leadership
- Quality teaching
- Pathways to training, employment and higher education

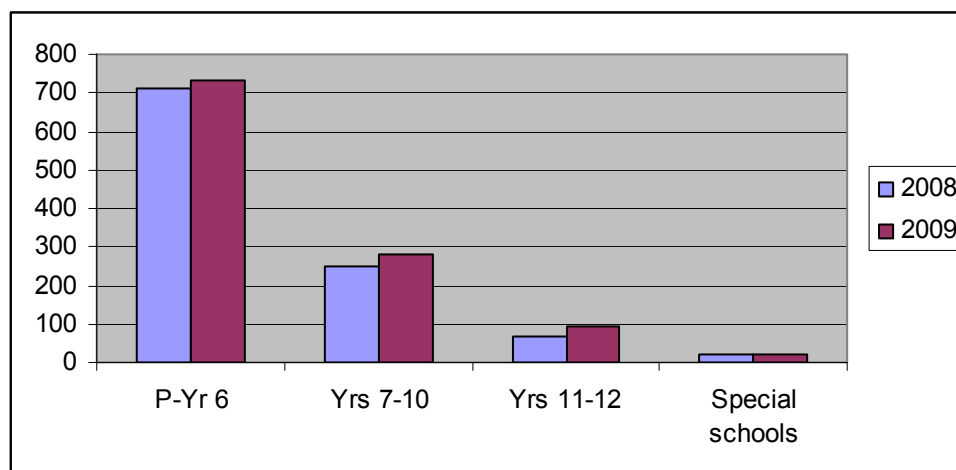
This report provides a snapshot of actions being undertaken by the Department of Education and Training (the Department) to support enhanced learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The report is also an opportunity to recognise the work undertaken by the Department and the celebration events of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

### **Student enrolment P-12**

The February 2009 ACT school census reported a total of 38 280 students enrolled in public schools in the ACT, including Jervis Bay School. Of these students, 1082 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The following graph represents the distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across the years of schooling. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students represent 2.8% of the total enrolment in ACT public schools.

Enrolments increased in all sectors of schooling when compared against the February 2008 school census.

## Indigenous students in ACT public schools 2008 and 2009



### B. Early childhood education

#### Preschool activity

The ACT Government provides preschool education in 76 public preschools and five Koori preschool programs. In the February 2009 ACT school census there were 112 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in ACT public preschools out of a total 3,792 preschool children. This is an increase of 20% from the February 2008 census (93). This increase in enrolment is attributable to the direct action taken by Early Years Learning from the Department of Education and Training to liaise with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about the advantages of preschool participation for children.

Of the 112 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in public preschools, 23 attend the Koori Preschool Program only, 36 attend the Koori Preschool Program and a local preschool setting, six are enrolled at Jervis Bay School, and three are enrolled in preschool programs in special school settings. The remaining 42 children attend a mainstream preschool only.

The Koori Preschool Program has been operating in different forms for over 16 years. The program continues to grow and typically enrolment numbers in each group increase throughout the year. As at May 2009, 64 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were participating in Koori Preschool programs.

The program provides early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from three to five years of age. Children under three years are able to attend the Koori Preschool Program when a parent or adult carer accompanies them. The Koori Preschool Program operates at Ngunnawal, Wanniasa, Calwell, Narrabundah (operating out of Narrabundah Early Childhood School) and Holt (operating out of Kingsford Smith School) preschools.

Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs) and teachers of the Koori Preschool Program conduct home visits and other meetings with families to support their engagement and participation with their child's preschool. This includes facilitating presentations by other services such as ACT Health speech therapists.

Staff from Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service are continuing to perform audiology examinations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in mainstream and Koori preschools. Preschool teachers and staff promoted these occasions and encouraged parents and caregivers to access available services for children who need follow-up visits.

Koori Preschool Program IEOs and teachers worked closely with the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre to stage an Art Exhibition to celebrate NAIDOC week. The art exhibition was held from 5–12 July 2009.

There have also been a number of excursions and activities held on site which promote children's sense of identity and provide them with culturally relevant experiences. These include having an Indigenous artist visit two Koori Preschool Programs to work alongside children, families and staff to create an artwork celebrating NAIDOC week.

Koori Preschool Program teachers and IEOs have created and run professional development for local preschool teachers and assistants. The workshops provided information on creating inclusive environments, as well as providing culturally appropriate art, science, and literacy and maths activities within local preschool settings.

## **C. School and community educational partnerships**

### **Indigenous Education Officers**

Indigenous Education Officers (IEOs), work with schools to implement strategies that address two of the Department's priorities in Indigenous education. The first is to improve attendance rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the second is to build relationships with parents and caregivers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

During this reporting period two new IEOs were employed as permanent officers allowing the Department to support 12 high schools and their local primary schools. Activities implemented in 2009 to date include:

- participation of boys from Lyneham High School in an automotive program at Fyshwick
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content included in curriculum initiatives at Telopea Park School
- a school homework centre operating at North Ainslie Primary School
- regular meetings with parents and caregivers at Narrabundah to support parents and children now enrolled at Curtin, Forrest and Red Hill Primary Schools.

School clusters continued the work commenced in the latter stages of the 2008 school year around partnership agreements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Schools in the northern Canberra cluster, Dickson College, Campbell and Lyneham High Schools, Ainslie, Campbell, Lyneham, Majura and North Ainslie Primary Schools and O'Connor Cooperative and Turner Schools, have completed their partnership agreement. Plans are in place to sign and launch the agreement in August 2009.

## **ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB)**

Since May 2008 the ACT IECB has undergone changes with the development of new Terms of Reference and a reduction in the number of members from 17 to nine.

The Minister for Education and Training appointed members to a new committee in June 2009 for a period of two years. The IECB will hold its first meeting in July 2009. The new Body comprises three community representatives and six parents. All members are Indigenous people residing in Canberra. Parent representatives have at least one child enrolled in a school in the ACT.

The following Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up the current IECB:

- Mrs Meg Huddleston – community member
- Mrs Delma Brennan – community member
- Mr Bradley Bell – community member (Chairperson)
- Ms Deborah Eades – parent member
- Mr Dion Devow - parent member
- Mr Terry Williams – parent member
- Mr Dean Jard – parent member
- Ms Michele-Charee Abel – parent member
- Mr Jozef Belopotozky – parent member

Priorities for the first months of operation of the IECB will be decisions relating to focus areas for the committee and individual members. These decisions will contribute to the development of the IECB Strategic Plan.

## **Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Program**

In December 2008, the Department established a working group to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The working group consists of representatives from all central office directorates and a representative of the Australian Education Union. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) have been invited to participate in the working group discussions.

Members of the working group have responsibility for initiating and supporting focus discussions in their workplace to facilitate input from colleagues. These activities also provide opportunities for staff to develop or enhance their knowledge and understandings about Indigenous Australia.

Focus group meetings were held in April 2009 to provide additional opportunities for input from schools, districts and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. It is anticipated that the Department's RAP will be finalised in December 2009.

Schools have continued the work commenced in 2008 on the development of local RAPs. Wanniasa School completed its RAP in February 2009. This was officially launched by Professor Mick Dodson, Co-Chairperson, Reconciliation Australia, on 4 March 2009.

## **The Apology**

On 13 February 2008, the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, fulfilled one of his key election promises and apologised on behalf of the National Parliament, to the Stolen Generations, an apology offered as a ‘first step to a future that embraces all Australians’.

To celebrate the first anniversary of the 2008 Apology, all schools in Australia received a copy of the Calligraphy Apology artwork. Public schools in the ACT arranged special assemblies to promote and display their gift and continue to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in discussions with their students and staff. Many schools showed a video produced by Reconciliation Australia of events leading up to the apology.

The Department has acquired copies of the Calligraphy Artwork and will distribute one to each Directorate in Central Office in term 3, 2009.

## **National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week**

Public schools across the ACT recognised National Reconciliation Week during the period 27 May to 3 June 2009 by holding assemblies, displays and family and community barbecues. There were many schools that provided classroom activities for students and incorporated aspects of Reconciliation Week into their local curriculum plans.

Public schools conduct activities to recognise National Aborigines’ and Torres Strait Islanders’ Day Observance Committee Week (commonly referred to as NAIDOC Week) in either the last week of term 2 or the first week of term 3, 2009. Whole-of-school NAIDOC Week activities and functions in a number of ACT public schools were attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous parents and caregivers and community members and included school breakfasts, barbecues and special assemblies with guest speakers.

## **D. School leadership**

Professional learning in school leadership for principals and deputy principals is continuing to focus on Indigenous education in 2009. Closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is included in each principal’s performance appraisal.

The School Leadership in Indigenous Education program, with a continuing theme - *Accepting the challenge: Improving learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, held two conferences for school principals and deputies in May and June 2009.

The conferences provided opportunities for school leaders to share and promote ideas of good practice that improves the learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Keynote speakers and presenters offered a diverse range of information from their personal experiences.



A second element of the principal leadership program is the inquiry studies (action research) activities schools are undertaking at the local level. A total of 17 schools of the original 22 school remain engaged in ongoing school-based enquiries. All sectors of schooling are represented. Schools are supported through their participation in workshops led by Professor Tony Shaddock, an academic with a strong background in action research.

Some of the areas being explored by participating schools are:

- developing community – values/mission statement – Jervis Bay Primary School
- programs that support an Indigenous perspective – Maribyrnong Primary School
- improving communication with families (making personalised learning plans more effective) – Canberra High School
- connections with community – Canberra College.

In term three 2009, four schools will be supported to write their activities and findings in a report that will be shared with all public schools and colleges in the ACT.

### **Indigenous Student Aspirations**

The Department has appointed two Indigenous Student Aspirations Coordinators who will commence work at the beginning of term 3, 2009. The coordinators will work with ACT public primary schools, high schools and colleges in each school district.

The coordinators will assist nurture, develop and support identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who demonstrate current or future potential to succeed at tertiary level education and training.

Establishing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their parents and caregivers as well as universities and employer groups will be a priority for the coordinators in terms three and four.

### **The Dare to Lead program**

There are currently 113 schools across all sectors in the ACT that are members of the *Dare to Lead* program. Seventy-six of these are public schools. This represents 91.6% of all ACT public schools.

In June 2009, the *Dare to Lead* program commenced a new phase called partnership builds success. In this phase of the program the education sectors, professional associations and the corporate and philanthropic sectors will work together to achieve outcomes supported by partnerships.

Each year the *Dare to Lead* program acknowledges the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people make towards achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across Australia. In 2009 the program acknowledged Mr Duncan Smith by appointing him as a *Dare to Lead* Ambassador. Mr Smith is a well known visual and performing artist who lives in Canberra and supports ACT schools and education and training providers.

## **E. Quality teaching**

### **English Literacy and Numeracy**

The Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Officer (ILNO) program continued to provide support, in selected schools, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from Kindergarten to year 4 and their teachers. Four officers, placed at Gold Creek School, Gordon, Macquarie and Majura Primary Schools during term 1, 2009 worked directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their teachers promoting strategies and skills to improve literacy and numeracy learning outcomes.

Two ILNOs were appointed to Lyneham and Ngunnawal Primary Schools in term 2, 2009. Three new officers join the ILNO team at the beginning of term 3, 2009.

In addition, a further officer was appointed at the beginning of 2009 to conduct a transition program. This program targets the literacy and numeracy needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in years 6 and 7. The transition officer worked closely with teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Calwell cluster during term 1 and the first four weeks of term 2, 2009. For the final six weeks of the second term the officer was appointed to the Gold Creek Cluster.

A further initiative of the ILNO program involves monitoring the literacy and numeracy progress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students throughout the year following an ILNO placement. ILNOs will meet with classroom teachers at regular intervals to provide support in tracking achievement and planning effective programs to promote learning in literacy and numeracy.

Personalised Learning Plans are developed for each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student. These plans are developed in collaboration with the student and parents and designed to further build individual strengths and address any weaknesses for the individual. The plans provide an important basis for the provision of literacy and numeracy support.

## **F. Pathways to training, employment and higher education**

The February 2009 ACT school census indicated that there were 95 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in years 11 and 12 across all ACT public colleges. This is an increase of 20 students against the same period in 2008.

Three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entering year 11 in 2009 were identified as potential candidates for the ANU Secondary College. All three students and their parents were provided with information about the program. Two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have taken up positions in the year 11 program. One student has enrolled in the mathematics course and one in the conservation biology course at the ANU Secondary College.

Scholarship funding has been provided as part of a major initiative to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in public schools in the ACT.

The first element of this initiative will be the provision of 10 scholarships to year 11 and 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to assist these students successfully complete school. The second element is the provision of three

scholarships to year 12 graduates to study teaching at university. Recipients of the teaching scholarships will be invited to work part-time as school assistants during the course of their study.

The guidelines for this initiative will be finalised in term 3, 2009 and promulgated to high schools and colleges to enable selection to be completed before the end of the 2009 school year.

The Department recruited three Indigenous trainees in 2009. The trainees will commence their placement in August 2009 in a school, a central office directorate or a combination of school and central office. Upon successful completion of the training program the Department has accepted responsibility to investigate appointment on a permanent basis.

The range of courses being studied by the trainees at Certificate III, Certificate IV and Diploma level in 2009 is similar to those studied in 2008 and includes Business, Information Technology, Fitness and Alcohol and Other Drugs. A detailed analysis of achievements and the types of courses trainees participated in throughout the year will be provided in the annual report.

## **G. Conclusion**

In 2009, the ACT Government has committed to implementing the COAG targets to halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade and at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

Key recent initiatives, such as the School Leadership in Indigenous Education, the Indigenous Students Aspiration Program and the scholarships program will complement existing programs and will ensure the ACT is well placed to meet the targets.