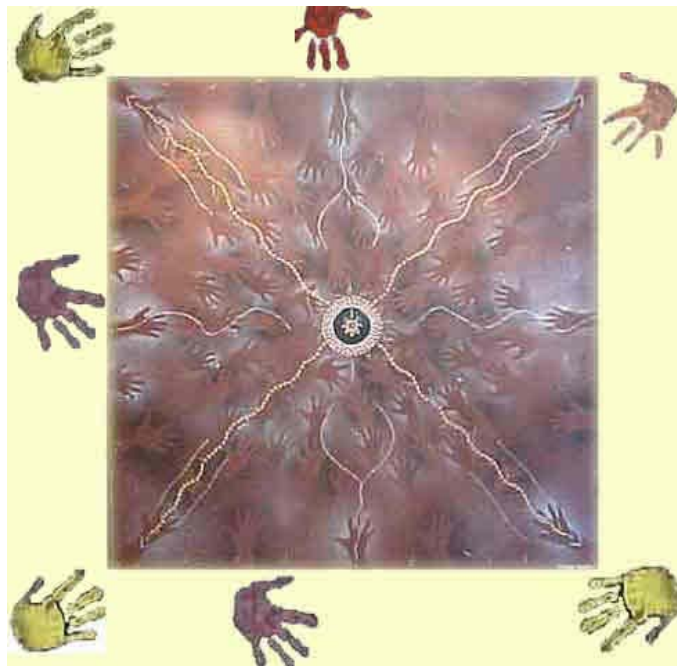




**Report to the Legislative Assembly  
of the Australian Capital Territory**

**Performance In  
Indigenous Education**



**Tenth report covering the period  
1 September 2004 to 28 February 2005**

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## Overview

This report is the tenth report to the ACT Legislative Assembly on Indigenous education, covering the period from September 2004 to February 2005 inclusive.

The report is presented against the commitments and outcomes identified in *Within Reach of Us All, Services to Indigenous People Action Plan 2002 – 2004*. The Action Plan is available from the publications section of the ACT Department of Education and Training website at: <http://www.det.act.gov.au/>. Key initiatives in the plan address the following commitments:

- overcoming racism and valuing diversity
- forming genuine and on-going partnerships with Indigenous communities
- creating safe, supportive, welcoming and culturally inclusive educational and service environments
- Indigenous children and young people achieving outcomes equitable to the total population.

The department has continued the Action Plan beyond 2004 during the development of its new strategic plan and continues to focus directly on Indigenous issues through increased ACT Government resourcing. A key objective of the department's current strategic plan is that *Indigenous children and young people have equitable social and educational outcomes*.

This report particularly highlights educational achievements of Indigenous students in literacy and numeracy as well as end of year results for Indigenous students in Years 10 and 12. In addition, it highlights the increasing successes of the Koori preschool program, designed to deliver broad educational services at the start of formal schooling. The employment of additional Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy consultants during the reporting period will also bring significant extra support for identified students.

## Overcoming racism and valuing diversity

### Racism and the National Safe Schools Framework

In addition to existing departmental strategies to counter racial discrimination, harassment and vilification and promote inclusive learning environments, in 2004 ACT Government schools were assisted in the implementation of the *National Safe Schools Framework*.

One of the framework's guiding principles highlights the importance of caring, showing respect, cooperation and valuing diversity. At the close of 2004, as part of the implementation of the framework, ACT Government primary and high schools were required to audit and report on their strategies that promote a discrimination free, safe environment for students and staff. Schools will use the safety self-audit to review and improve their strategies to fulfil the mandatory requirements of the national framework.

### Anti-Racism Breakfast Forum

An ACT college held an Anti-Racism Breakfast Forum to address diversity issues. The Human Rights Commission, Rape Crisis Centre, and Indigenous departmental staff gave presentations on their roles and activities. Students were invited to contribute to a lesson where they used role-play to explore some of the issues discussed. Students were also provided with information on issues relating to discrimination and harassment, and the support structures available in the College.

### Employment of Indigenous staff

The department's *Equity and Diversity Plan 2003-05* outlines the department's aim to increase employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians and to develop the capacity of the workforce to understand and respond to the cultural, educational and social needs of Indigenous people.

During this six-month reporting period, DET recruited five Indigenous staff, including two administrative officers, one professional officer and two teachers. With those employed in the previous six months, a total of eleven Indigenous recruits have been employed, including six teachers.

### Cultural awareness

The department provides Indigenous cultural awareness training and multicultural awareness training to all staff. Activities during the reporting period are outlined below.

- A panel session was provided to school administrative staff in September 2004 about Indigenous, Islamic and newly arrived migrant students in relation to their needs in an education environment. Participants were provided with fact sheets and a list of useful websites for developing their own knowledge of Indigenous Australia.
- Six principals were included in a cultural awareness course for senior executive and managers in the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Justice and Community Safety, held in October 2004. The inclusion of the principals was to evaluate whether the course was suitable and relevant for presentation to school staff. Principals reported positively about the course content.
- A cultural awareness course was held in October for principals. Principals reported positively about the course content.
- During November 2004, two seminars on Indigenous education were held for all teaching staff. Dr Robert Morgan, a Kamilaroi man from Walgett, NSW, who is one of Australia's leading Indigenous educators, led the seminars. The focus of the seminars was to promote an increased awareness of how to meet the needs of Indigenous students in ACT Government schools.

- At the start of 2005, newly inducted staff attended cross-cultural awareness sessions held as part of their orientation program.

The department recognises that more can be done to develop the cultural awareness of classroom teachers. In term three of 2005 a training program, *Reconciliation, Learning and Leading Together* will commence. The program is aimed at providing teachers with knowledge and awareness of Indigenous culture; strategies to assist Indigenous students in their learning; and strategies to involve Indigenous families and the community in the process.

#### Building the capacity of Indigenous staff

Eighteen Indigenous Education staff members continued their studies towards a *Certificate IV in Community Services*. It is anticipated that this training will be completed by July 2005.

#### End of Year Award

Through the support of his college, a year 12 Indigenous male student overcame a number of personal challenges and was awarded the college Indigenous Achievement Award. As a result of difficult personal background experiences, the student was disruptive and angry, and was finding it difficult to achieve. He was assisted to develop a career pathway after discovering his interest in history and he has established contacts in the Australian War Memorial and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies with a view to future employment.

#### Overcoming racism

ACT Government schools appoint a minimum of one anti-racism contact officer for students. The role of the officer is to support students who consider they experienced racial discrimination, harassment or vilification and to assist in the resolution of complaints.

All government schools are required to record complaints of racism through the MAZE administration system. During this reporting period, no racism related issues were recorded by schools.

In addition, the Indigenous students' transitions officer addressed year 11 classes on racism and discrimination, and was a guest speaker at a college Anti-Racism Breakfast Forum for staff and students.

### **Forming genuine and on-going partnerships with Indigenous communities**

#### Enhanced home/school liaison

In addition to their role of supporting students and teachers in schools, Indigenous Home/School Liaison Officers work with Indigenous families and their community to address a range of issues, including achievements, study habits, absenteeism and peer group relationships or to directly discuss with families progress towards goals articulated in individual student learning plans.

During the period of this report, a total of 341 home visits were made. The majority of these were to follow up issues relating to the student's attendance, behaviour or learning plans.

### ASSPA Committees

In 2004, 57 government schools had established Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees. The committees are parent based and include representatives of students and school staff. These committees received varying levels of funding from the Australian Government to support cultural activities and participation by Indigenous students. Activities included camps at Birrigai for school communities, school packs that include books and pens and the organisation of events such as Reconciliation Day.

In 2005 the Australian Government ceased the ASSPA program, replacing it with the *Parent School Partnership Program*. This new initiative is submission based and has not yet been taken up many by schools and their Indigenous communities. The Indigenous Education Section staff are supporting families and schools to prepare submissions in an endeavour to access funding.

### Birrigai School Board

To ensure Indigenous input into Birrigai outdoor education and self esteem building programs is given priority by the department, a representative from the Indigenous Education Consultative Body has been given a designated position on the Birrigai School Board.

### Softball Gala Day

In September 2004, a Softball Gala Day for Indigenous students was held at Boomanulla Oval. The event was organised by the Indigenous Sport Program of ACT Bureau of Sport and Recreation in partnership with the department. About 25 Indigenous primary school students attended. Each student received a pack containing a hat, ball, drink bottle, stickers and reading materials. The day consisted of coaching clinics and small group games. The parents who attended were encouraged to assist in the clinics or games that were in progress around the oval. All had a great day, and are looking forward to the gala day in 2005.

## **Creating safe, supportive, welcoming and culturally inclusive educational and service environments**

### Koori preschool

The ACT Government provided funding to extend the Koori preschool program. Extended sessions at the existing sites at Calwell, Narrabundah, Wanniasa Hills and Holt commenced in 2004 and a new site at Ngunnawal commenced at the beginning of the 2005 school year.

In 2004, 91 Indigenous children aged from under one year to four years of age were enrolled in and attended Koori Preschool programs.

### Preschool enrolments

The February 2005 preschool census indicates that 95 Indigenous children were attending preschool including thirty three children in attendance at Jervis Bay.

### Student health

The Health Promoting Schools program for preschools to Year 12 is supporting Indigenous students' health initiatives. An officer from the program has joined the Kootara Well Committee at Narrabundah Primary School.

The Koori Preschool Program was awarded \$5000 for *Healthy Bodies, Healthy Lives*, through the ACT Government's *2005 Schools as Communities* Strategic Projects grants. Funding is being used for a variety of purposes, including:

- Healthy breakfast programs. The introduction of a 'brain food' breakfast after children have arrived at Koori preschool. The aim of this program is to ensure that all students start the day with a healthy breakfast, for improved concentration and more involvement in the program.
- Drink bottles for use at preschool will be purchased to encourage the habit of regularly drinking water.
- Parents and carers will be encouraged to supply snacks such as a sandwich and a piece of fruit for consumption by the children at each preschool session
- Sun hats will be purchased so that all children are protected from the sun while at preschool.
- Educational resources including books, games and puzzles that promote exercise and healthy eating have been purchased.

### Indigenous culture

Throughout each year, Koori preschoolers have many opportunities to enhance their learning experiences and learn about their culture. Some 2004 highlights are described.

- The Little Buurraays, a southside Indigenous childcare program made regular visits to the Calwell Koori Preschool. Similarly, the children from the Winnunga Women's Art Group attend regular sessions at Wanniasa Hills preschool.
- Koori preschoolers visited the National Museum to enjoy the early childhood program, *Aboriginal Australia*.
- A grandparent and family day was held at each Koori preschool in October.

Outdoor education opportunities that focus on Indigenous culture are an important part of the Birrigai Outdoor School program. In this reporting period several activities have occurred.

- A partnership between Environment ACT and Birrigai facilitated the provision of Indigenous programs and activities to visiting students of all cultural backgrounds. These programs focus on education about traditional cultures.
- A writers' workshop for Indigenous female students took place. The workshop provided an opportunity for participating students to work for the day with Indigenous women in the areas of writing and art.

- A work experience opportunity was provided for an Indigenous student who was at risk of dropping out of school. This resulted in a growth in his confidence and improved attendance at school.
- The *Birrigai Boys Program*, trialed in 2004, has been renamed '*On Track*'. As a result of receiving funding through the Community Inclusion Fund, the program will continue for a further three years.

The '*On Track*' program is a joint initiative between Narrabundah Primary School and Birrigai on behalf of the department and Gugan Gulwan. The program is supported by an Indigenous Home School Liaison officer and reflects the holistic approach to support services that the department is adopting. The focus of the program is the engagement of Indigenous students in learning through more active participation. The improvement of literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students is the ultimate long-term goal.

There has been some difficulty in attracting a suitably qualified teacher to the position of managing the '*On Track*' program resulting in a delay in the commencement of the program.

#### Hearing screening

An ACT Government funded health-related initiative commenced in 2004, with hearing tests conducted by Winnunga Nimmityjah Health Centre at all Koori preschools for 3,4 and 5 year olds. The screening will be on-going. Where there are areas of concern, results will be made available by parents/carers to teachers for appropriate follow up.

Last year I addressed a year 8 class, telling them my story as an Aboriginal woman finding out about my family as an adult. The students were amazed that I was denied my culture as a child and the hurt and pain I had to go through as I discovered my true identity. The students listened to me talk, through tears, for 40 minutes without uttering a word. They listened so intently and they respected my story. The students then had to write a report on my story, which was later presented to me. They also said how much they appreciated my honesty and that I trusted them with my story. It was a wonderful experience for the students, the teacher and especially myself.

*As recounted by an Indigenous staff member*



## Indigenous children and young people achieving outcomes equitable to the total population

### Literacy and numeracy

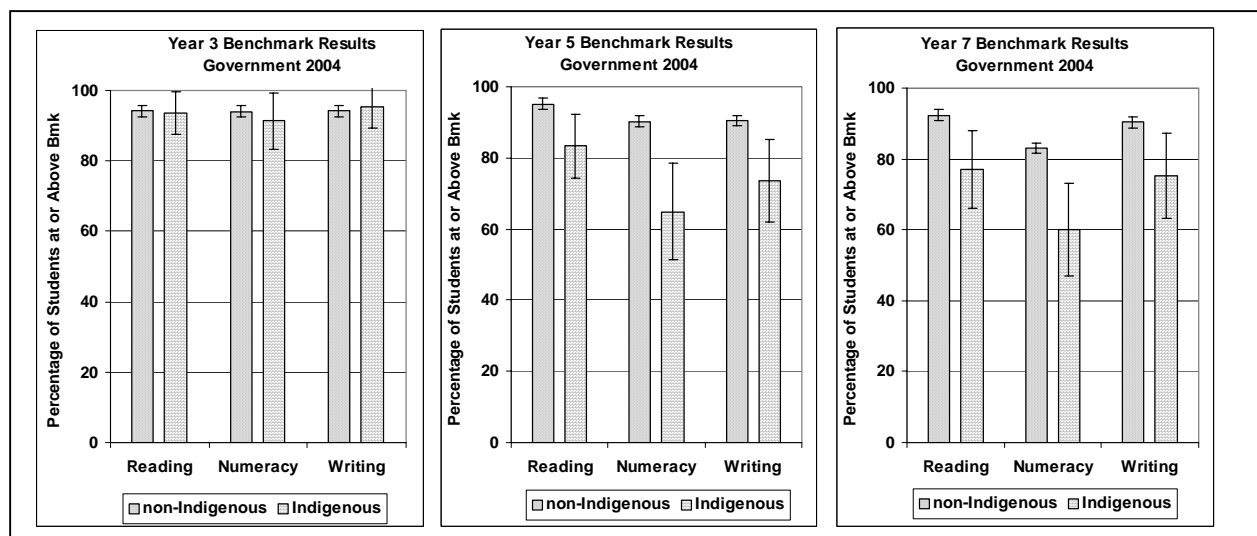
The February 2005 census indicates that in ACT Government schools 139 Indigenous students with Standard English as their second language were included in English as a Second Language programs. All but two students were in primary schools.

The *Language for Understanding Across the Curriculum* (LUAC) Program was conducted in the Gold Creek cluster schools (Gold Creek, Amaroo, Ngunnawal and Palmerston). The program targets an ESL student not receiving direct support through the ESL Program and promotes strategies that assist them in the mainstream classroom. There were 11 Indigenous students in this category across the schools involved.

### National benchmarks

The nationally agreed minimum standards for reading, writing and numeracy at years 3, 5 and 7 are referred to as the national benchmarks. There continued to be improvement for year 3 Indigenous students in 2004 as they performed at the same level as non-Indigenous students in reading (94%) and in writing almost the same (94% for Indigenous and 95% for non-Indigenous). In numeracy the difference between Indigenous (91%) and non-Indigenous (94%) students was not significant. This continues the trend of improvement in year 3 results in 2002 and 2003. However, years 5 and 7 Indigenous student results continue to be significantly below non-Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy.

There was no significant change in the results of years 5 and 7 Indigenous students between 2002 and 2004. The observed fluctuations are due to the small number of Indigenous students in each year level.



All kindergarten students are assessed in aspects of literacy and numeracy on entry to kindergarten, and again at the end of that year to ascertain progress.

In 2004, 87 Indigenous students commenced kindergarten in ACT Government schools. When assessed using the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) program, 31 Indigenous students achieved below the expected level in mathematics on entry to school and 31 achieved below the expected level in reading.

When assessed again at the end of the year, 14 of those students below the expected level on entry to school in mathematics made expected or greater than expected progress, while 23 made expected or greater than expected progress in reading.

#### Enhanced literacy and numeracy support

The ACT Government has provided funding for intensive literacy and numeracy support to underachieving Indigenous students. The program focuses on year 4 students who did not meet the national benchmarks in year 3, falling in the lower 20% in the ACT Assessment Program in literacy and numeracy.

A total of 4.5 Indigenous literacy and numeracy consultants (ILNC) are working intensively with individual students and their teachers to address students' needs. It is anticipated that this significant increase in direct service delivery will enhance the educational outcomes of identified students.

#### Joint high school/preschool literacy and numeracy program

An ACT Government youth grant of \$1000 is providing funding for a joint high school and preschool student program. The high school students visit preschools to assist the children with literacy and numeracy skills under the guidance of Koori preschool staff.

#### Years 10 and 12 certification

87% of Indigenous year 10 students were awarded a Year 10 Certificate in 2004, compared with 97% of non-Indigenous students.

Of the 64 Indigenous students who commenced year 11 in 2003 in ACT Government and non-government schools, 38 received a year 12 certificate in 2004. Five of these students received a University Admission Index (UAI) above 75%. Thirty year 12 students also received a vocational education and training certificate or statement.

#### Achievements of Students Receiving Year 12 Certificate in 2004

Thirty-eight Indigenous students received a Year 12 Certificate at the end of 2004. This was 22 students more than the previous year. Of the 38, 11 gained a UAI, five of these having a UAI above 75. Ten received a VET Certificate and 13 a VET Statement of Attainment.

The department continues to seek evidenced based education programs that will benefit Indigenous students in the ACT. Research is increasingly identifying the benefits of combined agency approaches that target the early years and early intervention for those who are potentially at risk.

#### College transition program

The college transition program is aimed at assisting year 12 Indigenous students in their move from college to further education, training or employment.

Of the 48 Indigenous year 12 students in 2004, 27, or 56%, were identified as either continuing further studies or entering a traineeship or cadetship.

In 2004 the Indigenous students' transitions officer made 57 visits to the ACT's eight government colleges to connect with Indigenous students and offer support. In addition to transition support, Indigenous students were also supported in accessing services such as emergency accommodation, financial assistance, welfare services, health checks, medical treatment, career planning, behaviour management, and motivational support. Other activities included assisting students with job interviews, making home visits, and attending graduation and awards ceremonies to support students.

#### Leadership and mentoring program

This program received significant ACT Government budget funding through the years 2004 – 2008. Following a camp for 40 Indigenous students at the Birrigai Outdoor Education Centre, further developmental work on the four-year program was completed and recruitment of a permanent officer commenced.

#### Teachers of Indigenous Students Network

The Teachers of Indigenous Students Network provides professional learning and networking opportunities to teachers of Indigenous children and young people in government school settings.

Recent activities included examination and discussion of the *Count Me In Too* mathematics program, which has a strong focus on learning for Indigenous students.

#### 'On Track' Exhibition

The "On Track" exhibition showcased the work of Indigenous students attending ACT high schools. The ACT Legislative Assembly was the site for the exhibition and students, parents, teachers and community members were invited to come and enjoy the achievements of the students. An Indigenous Year 9 student acknowledged and paid respect to the traditional owners of the Land, the Ngunnawal people, and welcomed everyone to the exhibition.

The display consisted of assignments, paintings, drawings, photos, sculptures and models and many positive comments were received about the talents of those students who were exhibiting their work.

#### Student attendance 2004

Indigenous students in Kindergarten to year 6 attended school on 87.6% of days in term 3 and 86.9% of days in term 4. Students in these years missed an average of 6.2 days in term 3 and 4.6 days in term 4.

Indigenous students in years 7-10 attended 89% of days in term 3 and 85.6% of days in term 4. Students in these years missed an average of 5.5 days in term 3 and 5 days in term 4.

The percentage rate of students missing more than 20% of days in the term is of concern. In Kindergarten to year 6, 17.8% and 21% of students missed more than 20% of days in terms 3 and 4 respectively. 17.6% and 18.8% of students in years 7-

10 missed more than 20% of days in the term in the same period. The high level of absenteeism by some individual students can be attributed to caring for family members, a significant family disturbance such as grieving, cultural commitments within the ACT and Wreck Bay communities and returning to homeland for a period of time.

Concerns about absenteeism issues have been raised in discussion with the Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB). These discussions reflect the commitment of the department and ACT Indigenous families, articulated in the Indigenous Education Compact, to mutually work towards improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Strategies that have been put in place to address absenteeism include the Leadership and Mentor Program for secondary students and improved communication and home-school liaison through the extension and ongoing evaluation of the Home/School Liaison Officer Program. As well, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) that identify the student's individual needs and priorities for learning are developed for those Indigenous students receiving additional support. Where non attendance is a factor, Indigenous Home School Liaison Officers support the student and the family to identify and address the critical issues affecting engagement.

From September to the end of 2004, a total of seven Indigenous students (six males and one female) were suspended from school for a short period (one to five days). All seven students had follow-up procedures put in place to ensure an understanding of the reasons for suspension and to facilitate their return to school. Non-compliance verbal, non-verbal or physical incidents were listed as the main reasons.

#### Vocational Education & Training

The ACT Government's *Partners in a Learning Culture - ACT Indigenous Action Plan 2003-2005*, launched in 2003, guides the development of programs to address the vocational education and training needs of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT.

Employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people in New Apprenticeships, group training schemes, and through skill centres continues to be a feature of Indigenous education beyond schooling.

- During the period September 2004 to February 2005 inclusive, 165 Indigenous students were active in New Apprenticeships. 129 were active on 1 September 2004, rising to 141 on 28 February 2005. During that period, 55 commenced, 10 recommenced, 24 successfully completed, and 29 cancelled.
- The Indigenous People in VET Committee (a sub-committee of the ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) enables local Indigenous community input into the development of departmental policy on those elements of vocational education and training that concern them.
- ACT Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are encouraged to address the skills and knowledge requirements of the Indigenous community. In addition to the provision of funding for mainstream programs, this is done through the Strategic Priorities Program, where RTOs are funded to deliver training to equity and target groups in the ACT community. During the period September 2004 –

January 2005, RTOs offered programs in which as many as 42 Indigenous students participated. The programs included Hospitality, Business and Children's Services.

Vocational education and training is provided for Indigenous youth justice detainees in the Quamby Youth Detention Centre. Indigenous residents at Quamby's Hindmarsh Education Centre participate in horticulture, furniture construction, business studies and a community transition program. Students also have access to work experience and the *Young Adults at Risk – Developing Skills (YARDS)* program. During this six-month period one Indigenous resident attended a short work experience program and another was released to attend the YARDS program.

There were ten male and five female Indigenous residents attending vocational programs from September 2004 to February 2005.

It should be noted that vocational literacy and numeracy skills are embedded into the curriculum and addressed specifically in each training area as part of the training process.

#### Vocational Education and Training in ACT Colleges

Indigenous students participate in a range of vocational education and training programs in ACT Government colleges.

Three Indigenous students from ACT Government schools were involved in School Based New Apprenticeships in hospitality, library and information services and general construction during the reporting period.

Volunteering ACT receives funding from the ACT Government to operate the *Students Participating in Community Enterprises (SPICE)* program. The program's main criterion for participation is that of being at risk of leaving school before completion of a Year 10 Certificate. During the period September 2004-February 2005, 89 students were referred to SPICE; of that number 6 students were Indigenous and three were placed. The participation of Indigenous students in this program is increasing.

In cooperation with the ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the ACT Department of Education and Training ran the "Journey of Careers" Indigenous Education, Training and Employment Forum in 2004, and plans are underway to repeat this forum in 2005.

## Government initiatives

### *Curriculum Renewal*

Indigenous studies is a key focus in the review and update of ACT school curriculum. A reference group is considering what are the “essential learnings” for all students in the aspect: the *student understands about Australia and Australians*. The group is advising on content, pedagogy and assessment, with understandings of Indigenous peoples, their cultures and contributions to Australia. A representative of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body is included on the Curriculum Renewal Consultative Committee, providing further opportunity for an Indigenous perspective to be considered.

### *College Renewal and Development*

This year a College Renewal and Development program has been established to conduct an external review of years 11 and 12 college programs and services, following the completion of an internal review in 2004. Educational outcomes for Indigenous students in the senior secondary years will form part of the analysis.

## **Conclusion**

The ACT Government is committed to improving education outcomes for Indigenous people. This report shows the wide range of growing programs and support available for Indigenous students and their families at all levels of education.

Teacher professional development, and system and school-based policy-making continue to highlight the importance of a concerted and collaborative approach to Indigenous issues. Positive models of affirmation are intrinsic to growing confidence and motivation in Indigenous students, some examples of these are described in this report.