



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

**Performance In  
Indigenous Education**



**Ninth Report covering the period  
1 March to 31 August 2004**

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## Overview

This report is the ninth report to the ACT Legislative Assembly on Indigenous education covering the period from March 2004 to August 2004 inclusive.

This six-month period saw significant change including the further consolidation of the extended Indigenous Home School Liaison Officer Program, the appointment of the Indigenous College Transitions Officer, the commencement of the Indigenous Leadership and Mentor Program with a leadership camp at the Birrigai Outdoor School, and the extension of the Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Consultancy Program and the Koori Preschool Program.

A number of system wide initiatives also helped to address plans and policies aimed at overcoming Indigenous disadvantage in the ACT schooling system. These included support for student transition and Student Pathways Planning for all students in year 10.

## Within Reach of Us All, Services to Indigenous People Action Plan 2002-2004

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 these 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.



A performance at the Leadership and Mentor program conducted at Birrigai

## Commitments

### Overcoming racism and valuing diversity

One of the three key result areas of the department's *Equity and Diversity Plan 2003-05* focuses on the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The two main objectives of this key result area are:

- to increase employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians
- develop the capacity of our workforce to understand and respond to the cultural, educational and social needs of Indigenous people.

The number of Indigenous employees in DET increased from 35 to 46 during this reporting period. This number included two Indigenous people in principal positions and 38 working in schools.

### Building the capacity of Indigenous staff

Recruitment for the enhanced Indigenous Student Support Program, which commenced in the previous reporting period, was finalised by April 2004. Indigenous Home School Liaison Officers and their team leaders continued studies during this period with all staff reaching the final stages of study towards the Certificate IV in Community Studies. This training will be complete in the next reporting period and preliminary discussions have commenced to identify further areas of need that can be addressed through professional development of staff.

### Cultural awareness

The department provides Indigenous cultural awareness training and multicultural awareness training to both teachers and administrative staff. During this reporting period, this included:

- a cultural awareness session for participants in the Leadership Induction Seminars in February 2005
- a presentation by Indigenous staff to ESL teachers regarding the language and learning needs of Indigenous children and young people in ESL programs in August 2004.

Fadden Primary School has made a firm commitment to ensuring their curriculum reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Across Curriculum Perspectives. For the past two years the school has engaged staff from the Indigenous Education Section to work alongside teaching staff to seek ways to incorporate an Indigenous voice in school programs and activities throughout the year as well as during special times of celebration such as Reconciliation Week.

## Overcoming Racism

The *Combating Racism in Schools and the Workplace Policy* requires each school to appoint at least one Anti-Racism Contact Officer (ARCO) for students. These Officers receive training in current legislation, current issues and tensions, and dealing with complaints including responding to, recording and resolving (with students) complaints.

All government schools are required to record incidents of racism through the MAZE administration system. Nine incidents of alleged or perceived racism were recorded during the reporting period. The department is continuing to work with schools to monitor incidents of racism and ensure all incidents are recorded on the central database and addressed in an educative way.

### **Workshop for students on Racism**

Staff from the Indigenous Education Section presented a workshop on Racism for 15 students and 2 teachers at the Canberra College. The workshop was well received and a sample of comments from students follows.

*'good learning that racism isn't just black and white but all races'*

*'It was really interesting and confronting. You presented some new ideas and viewpoints to us which were really great to hear'*

*'...I know it will really help with my interaction with others as well as my class work'*

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

### Enhanced Home School Liaison

In addition to their role of supporting the development of student literacy and numeracy skills, Indigenous Home School Liaison Officers work with schools and Indigenous families and their community to address issues of attendance, behaviour and achievement. Records show that multiple issues were discussed during all home visits. It should be further noted that the data collection methods for recording home visit/meetings did not distinguish between those of a corrective nature and those focussing on positive improvements as the reason for the visit.

During the period of this report, a total of 209 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 received funding under the Aboriginal and Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program funded by the Australian

Government. This includes two cluster ASSPA groups (one with six schools and one with five schools). Funds are provided through schools to ASSPA Committees that are parent-based and include representation from school staff and students.

Indigenous Home School Liaison Officers work with designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Contact Teachers within each school and their ASSPA Committees to promote activities or provide advice. This communication and liaison engenders close networking and support for Indigenous parents and families. Each year, schools apply to the Australian Government for ASSPA funds based on the number of Indigenous students in the school. The funds support various school programs such as literacy in the home, cultural events, the purchase of Indigenous art works and other resources, and targeted funding assistance for more needy families.

### Birrigai Outdoor School Consultation

During 2004, recommendations from the 2003 consultations between the Indigenous community and the ACT Government on Birrigai Outdoor School were taken up with a number of specific developments. These included the Indigenous Students Leadership and Mentor Camp at the end of June, the commencement of the Birrigai Boys' Program in term 2, and an Indigenous community meeting at Birrigai in July to consider further Indigenous initiatives.

The July meeting was convened by Birrigai staff and included a large number of Indigenous representatives from a broad range of organisations and community groups. It was held as part of the process of ongoing consultation with the Indigenous community. One of the main outcomes of the meeting was the need for an extensive study to help identify the Indigenous cultural landscape of the Birrigai site and surrounds to ensure future programs are developed and delivered in a culturally inclusive manner.

### Community events

During this reporting period, a meeting of the Ngunnawal Country Indigenous Women's Circle Meeting and ACT Government representatives was held. This venture strengthens links between government agencies and the wider local Indigenous community.

The Koori Preschool Program was represented at the Winnunga Nimmityjah Family Day held at Corroboree Park in Ainslie. Posters and information about the Program were available to interested families. This event provided a valuable opportunity for links to be established between the preschool program and other community agencies including Marymead and health centres.

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

### NAIDOC Week and associated celebratory activities in schools

In 2004 the theme for NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) Week was 'Self-Determination: Our Community, Our Future, Our Responsibility'.

NAIDOC Week is identified as the second week in July and falls in the school holidays at the end of term 2. However, schools can elect to celebrate at any suitable time. As in previous years several schools linked Reconciliation Day and NAIDOC Week activities. A highlight of NAIDOC Week was the 2004 NAIDOC Students of the Year Awards.

The NAIDOC Awards are an initiative of the Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) and three students from 18 finalists (15 from government schools and three from Catholic schools) received a plaque and gift certificate from leaders from their school's Indigenous community at special assemblies in early August. The winners had been previously announced at the national NAIDOC Ball held in Canberra in July.

The NAIDOC Students of the Year for 2004 in the primary sector were Jack Worthey of Majura Primary School and Rachel Minchin of Chisholm Primary School. In the secondary sector the winner was Edward Little of The Woden School.

Typically, NAIDOC activities in schools include:

- Indigenous speakers and performances by Indigenous peoples
- Indigenous students leading assemblies
- students performing traditional dance, singing, didgeridoo playing, boomerang throwing, body painting, mural painting, ochre painting, and reading Aboriginal stories
- Reconciliation concerts
- a Yellow, Red and Black Day
- themed library resource displays
- Indigenous students talking about what NAIDOC Week means to them
- ASSPA parent members speaking about their visions for educational outcomes for Indigenous students
- explanation of artefacts and Indigenous flags by Indigenous students
- student workshops on Indigenous issues at the National Museum of Australia
- excursions to Indigenous sites at Yankee Hat in Namadgi National Park
- flag raising ceremonies, including a departmental flag raising ceremony and community activities coordinated jointly by the department's Indigenous Education Section and Youth Services.

During this reporting period the Australian Education Union (AEU), ACT Branch announced the 2004 Reconciliation Awards. The AEU seeks input from the Department of Education and Training each year regarding these awards. Recipients for 2004, **Fran Black from Belconnen High School** and **Helen Dean from Evatt Primary School**, were both recognised for their outstanding contribution to improving outcomes for Indigenous students.

#### **School visit by Pilawuk**

A highlight of term 2 was a visit to each Koori Preschool by Pilawuk, a Ngangiwumерri woman from central Australia, during the time she was the writer in residence at the Australian National Museum. She shared her story, artefacts, videos and slides and read a children's book she had written about her son, called 'Rak Niwilli', with an accompanying music tape.

#### Local Resources

By April 2004 all primary schools and Koori Preschools had received multiple copies of the Ngambri Storybooks that were produced by local Indigenous families.

In addition schools are being encouraged to develop their own resources reflecting the Indigenous perspectives of their locality. Initiatives such as these will help ensure that Indigenous perspectives are included across the curriculum and that Indigenous persons are involved in the development and delivery of Indigenous studies.

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

##### Early Childhood Education

Through local Indigenous networks, the work of the Koori Preschool program staff and the preschool Indigenous Home School Liaison Officer, communication with families has continued to improve and enrolments in preschools have continued to increase. By August 2004, there were 101 Indigenous students enrolled in prior to school programs: 65 in either mainstream preschool or both mainstream and Koori Preschool; 22 in Koori Preschool; and 14 at Jervis Bay. This was an increase on the 80 students enrolled in August 2003. Six Indigenous families applied for and gained early entry for their children in mainstream preschool for semester 2, 2004.

During the reporting period, the ACT Government provided funding under the 2004-2008 budget to extend the Koori Preschool program. Planning commenced for additional staff, extended sessions at all sites, and an additional site to be established from the beginning of 2005.

##### Early Intervention

Early Literacy Officers are based in primary schools for several weeks at a time to provide professional learning in effective literacy teaching strategies for teachers of young children.

The Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Consultant provided additional assistance to teachers of Indigenous students. Through this program, sixty-three Indigenous students were identified as needing additional literacy and numeracy intervention, and their teachers, were supported with appropriate teaching strategies and materials. Individual Learning Plans covering current reading level and skills, areas of concern, and strategies to reach stated objectives were developed for each of these students.

During the reporting period the ACT Government announced funding in the 2004-2008 budget to extend the Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Consultancy program during the next reporting period by an additional 2.5 Classroom Teachers and a School Leader C as team leader. While these additional resources will be primarily directed at supporting Indigenous students who fell into the lowest 20% in the Year 3 ACTAP results of 2004, it is anticipated they will have a wider role in order to on impact on Indigenous student Literacy and Numeracy outcomes generally.

#### Teachers of Indigenous Students Network

The Teachers of Indigenous Students Network was established in 2002 to provide professional learning and networking opportunities to teachers of Indigenous children and young people in government school settings. The initiative receives strong support from the Australian Education Union, ACT Branch. During this reporting period the Network held two meetings. The first focussed on activities suitable for promoting NAIDOC within schools. The term 3 meeting explored literacy and numeracy activities that supported Indigenous students.

#### Birrigai Boys' Program

The Birrigai Boys' Program was a trial project carried out during the reporting period, which aimed at improving outcomes for some of our most disadvantaged and 'at risk' Indigenous students in the areas of attendance, behaviour, self-identity, literacy and numeracy.

The program operates in partnership with a range of ACT organisations including the Department of Education and Training, Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation, parents, and staff from Birrigai and Narrabundah Primary School. Ten students from six schools attended the program for two afternoons each week. The program provided Indigenous students with opportunities to learn and develop self-identity and working collaboratively with others through activities such as:

- campfires
- camping
- dance
- visual arts
- land care work
- cultural excursions
- journal writing.

### **Comments about student outcomes from the Birrigai Boys' Program**

“All students in the program have demonstrated improvements in some of the target areas of attendance, behaviour, self-identity and literacy”.

“Significant improvements in behaviour were recorded for both older boys (Year 6) who both have histories of violence at school”

“The program has had a greater impact on the younger students (Year 3) than the older boys in that change has been recorded across a range of areas (literacy, social skills, anger management) and more has been transferred into their mainstream school setting”.

### Leadership and Mentor Program

Following the success of the 2003 Pilot Mentor Program and the provision of funding through the ACT budget, an Indigenous Student Leadership and Mentor Program commenced with a camp for students at Birrigai Outdoor Education Centre in the last week of June 2004.

Approximately 40 students from years 9 to 11 attended the camp and experienced a range of activities that included team building, leadership, mentoring, traditional games and cultural studies.

Among the many presenters at the Birrigai camp was Uncle Chicka Dixon who was the centre of a photographic exhibition at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in 2003. Uncle Chicka shared a number of his many life experiences with students and staff, including his experiences on a mission school on the NSW South Coast in the 1930s as well as his experience of leading an Aboriginal delegation to China in the 1960s.

Students also had the opportunity meet Pilawuk, a self-described mother, teacher, actor and writer from the Ngangiwumerrri people south-west of Darwin, who shared her stories of growing up as a member of the “stolen generations” and her subsequent emergence as a strong Indigenous role-model. Pilawuk presented the Indigenous Education Section with a painting she created the night before as a symbol of thanks for her involvement in the camp.



Students in the Leadership and Mentor program at Birrigai

### Attendance

The following table summarises the attendance data of Indigenous students for the period covered by this report.

	Term 1, 2004	Term 2, 2004
<b>Kindergarten – Year 6</b>		
Indigenous students		
Percentage% days attended	91.4	87.4
Average days absent	4.1	6.0
% students missing more than 25% of days in the term	6.2%	12%
<b>Years 7 – 10</b>		
Indigenous students		
Percentage% days attended	90.7	87.9
Average days absent	4.5	5.8
% students missing more than 25% of days in the term	9.7%	14%

While there was a slight increase in the number of days absent for Indigenous primary students in Term 2, 2004, the number of individual Indigenous primary students missing more than 25% of days in Term 2 is a significant concern.

On average the number of days absent remained the same for Indigenous secondary students from the previous reporting period. However, secondary Indigenous students still miss twice as many days as non-Indigenous students.

Illness is a contributing factor to the higher rate of absenteeism for both groups in term 2 compared with term 1, as the data includes all absences in line with national reporting practices. However, rather than there being lower rates of attendance for Indigenous students, the detail of attendance data shows that Indigenous students continue to be absent for significant periods of time. Anecdotally, culturally related reasons may account for the high level of absenteeism by some individual students, including caring for family members, a significant family disturbance, cultural commitments within the ACT and Wreck Bay communities and returning to homeland for a period of time.

Students missing more than 20% of days in each term are followed up by the Home School Liaison Officers and Individual Learning Plans are developed for those students who require support. Strategies are constantly being reviewed to best address these high absence rates, including 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.

These issues will be raised with the Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) as part of the evaluation of the Indigenous Education Compact, which included a commitment by Indigenous families to take responsibility for school attendance by their children.

### 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.

Indigenous college students continue to be encouraged to participate in relevant vocational courses. The following table shows the number of students and type of courses undertaken in 2004.

#### **Enrolment of Year 11/12 Indigenous Students in Vocational Courses, 2004**

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Automotive technology	4	2	6
Building construction	3	0	3
Business administration	1	4	5
Social and community work	2	6	8
Computer operations	2	2	4
Furniture construction	5	0	5
Hospitality studies	6	5	11
Information technology	9	1	10
Multimedia	5	1	6
Music industry	0	1	1
Retail	0	1	1
Sport & recreation industry	7	1	8
Technical production for live theatre	1	2	3
Tourism studies	0	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>73</b>

While the number of male students engaged in vocational courses increased, it is of concern that the number of female students decreased significantly. Fewer students were engaged in studies in Information Technology, but this result is more consistent with figures from the same period in 2002. Sport and Recreation Industry Studies had the highest increase in enrolments of Indigenous students. More students are enrolled in Hospitality Studies, which is a positive sign, given the decline in the same period in 2003.

During this reporting period, Indigenous residents at Quamby Youth Detention Centre continued to participate in one unit of a vocational learning program at the Hindmarsh Education Centre. A range of programs is on offer including horticulture, permaculture, wood/metal technology, and animal/poultry husbandry.

#### Indigenous College Transition Officer Program

An Indigenous person was employed in the position of the Indigenous College Transition Officer during this reporting period to support the transition of Indigenous students in Year 10 to Year 11 and the transition of Indigenous students in Year 12 to further studies or employment.

The Transition Officer during the reporting period worked with Indigenous Home School Liaison Officers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Contact Teachers as well as other staff in schools as an 'uncle/role-model' for Indigenous male students presenting with challenging behaviours.

#### Charles Perkins Scholarship for Undergraduate Indigenous Students

In 2003 the then Department of Education, Youth & Family Services initiated a partnership with the University of Canberra Ngunnawal Centre, which resulted in the annual awarding of two Charles Perkins Scholarships, to the value of \$2,000 each, to undergraduate Indigenous students.

The scholarships assist Indigenous students with costs associated with their studies, and support and encourage Indigenous people in undertaking higher education. This initiative is part of the department's commitment to support young Indigenous people in attaining equitable access to educational opportunities, including tertiary education.

Seven applications were received for 2004 from Indigenous students in a number of disciplines including Arts, Laws, Sports Media, Communications and Education. The successful applicants were Tamara Giles and Paul Colliss. Both students demonstrated extensive involvement in community work with Indigenous youth, mental health, home care and mentoring of other students and were most worthy recipients. They received their scholarships at an award ceremony at the University of Canberra in May 2004.

### **Conclusion**

This report reflects the ACT Government's ongoing commitment to enhancing participation in education for Indigenous students. Highlights include a number of initiatives commenced during this reporting period in areas such as literacy and numeracy in primary schools and programs in early childhood education. Links between the department and the local Indigenous community continue to strengthen through proactive strategies and programs that include community consultation and input.

It should be acknowledged that the March to August report is an interim report and more comprehensive data, particularly in relation to academic achievement, will be provided in the September to February report. That report will also allow the Government to discuss outcomes from the new initiatives it is supporting to improve outcomes for Indigenous children and young people and their families.



A performance at the Leadership and Mentor program at Birrigai