Chapter **2**

EDUCATING ABORIGINAL CHILDREN – ISSUES, POLICY AND HISTORY

Chapter 2

EDUCATING ABORIGINAL CHILDREN – ISSUES, POLICY AND HISTORY

Education is an important means by which individuals can realise their full potential and make positive, informed choices about their lives. Educational experiences can affect job prospects, help the acquisition of socially valued qualities of character and behaviour, and support participation in social, cultural and economic life. Achieving these benefits for the population requires ensuring equity of access, participation and engagement with learning so that a critical mass of children attain a sufficient level of academic achievement to be empowering in their daily lives. This chapter provides a snapshot of the issues that have shaped the educational experiences of Western Australian Aboriginal children over time. It describes the school education system, and the relative disadvantage of Aboriginal students within that system, in terms of participation, retention and attainment.

INTRODUCTION

The education of children is an enterprise that is the responsibility of families, schools, communities and governments. It spans a wide range of developmental settings, sectors, and occurs in formal and informal settings throughout the years of child and youth development. The aim is to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills they require to become responsible adults who make an active contribution to society.

Clearly, schools play a vital role in providing formal learning to children. This they should do in a nurturing and caring environment that will also support positive development. Schools should be places where children can come together to learn, play, interact and establish their social skills, as well as the abilities to read, write and do arithmetic. However, much informal learning occurs prior to the commencement of formal learning — through interactions in the home, play groups, child care centres, etc. Children traditionally consolidate this early informal learning with the formal development of their literacy and numeracy skills in the school environment. Research emphasises that pre-formal learning and early childhood learning are important determinants of later learning pathways.[1] Thus, the quality of the pre-school environment as well as that of teaching and support staff, and the characteristics of the school environment and curriculum all contribute to the quality of students' educational experiences. Each of these factors can have a profound impact on a range of developmental outcomes important for successful adaptation and function in Western Australia in the 21st century.

Education is a key factor that is known to build resilience and has potential to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. Improving rates of participation and attainment of Aboriginal peoples in the education system are key strategies to improve socioeconomic and health outcomes, in particular. Many reasons have been offered for why the participation and attainment of Aboriginal people in education is below that of non-Aboriginal people. Factors contributing to this may include trouble accessing schools (particularly in remote areas), inability to afford education, and other community pressures and expectations affecting the ability and desire of families to get children to school.[2] There is currently a range of Aboriginal-specific education programmes designed to improve the educational experiences of Aboriginal

children but, despite this, Aboriginal children have significantly lower rates of school attendance and retention than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Measuring Aboriginal people's participation, performance and educational outcomes allows researchers and administrators to create an evidence base from which decisions can be made to improve the education of Aboriginal people as well as providing an indication of the relative disadvantage between Aboriginal children and other population groups. This chapter draws on a number of data sources to quantify this disadvantage and establish a context for the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) results contained in subsequent chapters. The measures described here focus on issues of access to education (e.g. retention and participation) and effectiveness of the educational system (e.g. proportion meeting academic benchmarks and completing Year 12). In addition, the introductory parts of the chapter touch on some of the historical, social and cultural issues that have shaped Aboriginal education in Western Australia (and Australia), to provide a context for the analysis of survey data in subsequent chapters.

Despite the currently available sources of data that measure the educational participation, performance and outcomes of Aboriginal people, there is considerable scope for improvement in their measurement (in terms of breadth of available data and the quality and useability of existing data), both within Western Australia and Australia, and internationally.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM

Governments have a statutory responsibility for educating children through the formulation of relevant policy and funding the delivery of schooling. The funding arrangements of governments (with regard to school education) are multifaceted, and include: the provision of funds to enable the implementation of new and existing policy initiatives; ensuring educational resources are sufficient and appropriately distributed; supporting families in meeting the financial costs of education; and promoting equitable access to education and training.

In Australia, state and territory governments have most of the responsibility for administering and funding school education. The Australian Government, in conjunction with the states and territories, provides the policy framework for the school education system, promoting consistency in the provision of education across Australia. It also has special responsibilities when it comes to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, providing special grants to states and territories to address areas of particular need in Aboriginal education. This is in addition to the general funding that states and territories receive from the Commonwealth for educational purposes. It also has responsibilities to fund research and analysis to assist improvement in the quality of Aboriginal education.

THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

The age at which compulsory schooling starts and ends varies across Australia. At the time of the survey in Western Australia, school attendance was compulsory from the beginning of the school year in which a child turned six until the end of the year in which they turned 15 years. The school leaving age in Western Australia was raised in January 2006, to extend the compulsory education period to the age of 16 years. It is expected to be lifted again, to 17 years of age, by 2008.[3] These recent legislative changes allow young people to either attend school or undertake formal training — as a result,

some 16 and 17 year-olds will be enrolled in school but not attend any of the final two years of schooling (Years 11 and 12).

Prior to the years of compulsory education, the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET) offers kindergarten and pre-school programmes for eligible children at their local or nearest school, or at the school or community kindergarten of their parents' choice. Kindergarten programmes are available to children who have/will have turned four by 30 June in any given year and these programmes run for the equivalent of four half days per week. Pre-primary programmes, which run for five full days per week, are available to children who have/will have turned five by 30 June in any given year. Schools may choose to 'phase-in' children's attendance at kindergarten and pre-primary during the first four weeks of the school year but all programmes must be running full-time by the beginning of week five. Parents are able to request that their child(ren) attend full-time in pre-primary, and/or the equivalent of four half days per week in kindergarten, from the first day of enrolment in school.

ABORIGINAL KINDERGARTENS

There were 29 Aboriginal kindergartens operating in Western Australia in 2005. These kindergartens provide early childhood education programmes for both three and four year-old Aboriginal children. In addition to the general aims of all kindergartens, i.e. furthering the development of social, language, cognitive and physical skills, etc., Aboriginal kindergartens have a greater focus on:

- supporting and strengthening children's Aboriginal identity
- providing programmes which are inclusive of Aboriginal children's culture, language and learning styles
- family and community involvement
- providing Aboriginal children with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in Standard Australian English
- addressing the disadvantages experienced by many young Aboriginal children.

Primary schooling in Western Australia provides a general elementary programme lasting seven years (up to and including Year 7). The main emphasis in early primary education is on developing basic language literacy and numeracy skills, health and social education, and creative activities. Upper primary schooling also focuses on developing these aspects, and provides additional opportunities to study other subject areas.

Students enter secondary school at Year 8 and typically undertake a general programme of study in the first two years. The core subjects are retained in later years, with students usually able to choose from a range of electives. There is a trend toward incorporating courses that suit the interests and needs of the students at a school, and an increasing amount of vocational education and training options have been incorporated into the secondary curriculum. Students completing Year 10 are usually eligible for Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses, whereas Year 12 completion is the minimum schooling requirement for entry into higher education and some other tertiary institutions.

SETTING THE CONTEXT – ISSUES IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

The educational experiences and outcomes of Aboriginal peoples compare poorly with those of the non-Aboriginal population. As a result, Aboriginal students can experience greater difficulties in negotiating transition points in school and beyond. Poor educational outcomes among Aboriginal peoples have been evident for many decades and are influenced by a number of factors not shared by other Australians. Among the most pronounced disadvantages affecting the education of Aboriginal people are: the geographical dispersion of the population; minimal use or knowledge of Standard Australian English (which accounts for significant proportions of Aboriginal children who begin school in remote parts of Western Australia); and a high degree of chronic health conditions. These factors have existed for many decades and have had a cumulative impact on the educational outcomes of successive generations.

It has been argued that past policies, actions and attitudes toward Aboriginal people in Australia have generated intergenerational educational (as well as broader social) disadvantage.[4] There have been several landmark decisions and actions that have shaped the educational circumstances of Aboriginal people to the current day. Some of these relate to the realm of education and yet some of the most profound (particularly negative) effects on Aboriginal education can be traced back to broader historical events from colonisation onwards. The 1967 Referendum marked an important shift in the way government responsibilities for Aboriginal affairs were aligned, and coincided with a greater investment in formulating policies (including education-related policies) specifically geared toward improving the social and economic circumstances of Aboriginal people in Australia.

Over the past half century, the philosophy underpinning Aboriginal education policy and practice has moved from exclusion and segregation to greater cultural inclusiveness.[5] However, it has been argued that some elements of these earlier policies are still retained in present-day policies and practice, and that Aboriginal education has not received the attention it deserves nor been understood sufficiently by those responsible for educating Aboriginal people in the school system.[4]

The systematic exclusion of Aboriginal people in Australia from mainstream society has been extensively documented and is only touched on briefly here; nonetheless researchers regard the denial of Aboriginal people from access to land, culture, language, citizenship, employment and schooling (and forced removal of children from their families) over the course of the past two centuries as crippling legacies for Aboriginal communities and critical determinants of the poor state of Aboriginal education evident today.[6]

The survey results show that having a close relative who has been directly affected by forced separation has a negative impact on a child's educational outcomes. While some children overcome this type of adversity, for others it can take many generations of continuous access to education for a family to be able to overcome disadvantage and function effectively.[7] This point is reinforced by anecdotal evidence from schools, which suggests that the involvement of Aboriginal parents in their child's education is shaped by their own experience, i.e. parents who have had poor educational experiences are generally less likely to get involved in their children's schooling.[8] In many cases, this is because they do not have the skills to assist their children with school work. Further, children can adopt an attitude that doing well at school is either: of little value; something to be ashamed of; or simply unattainable, particularly if the prevailing attitude of parents is that school has been of little value to them.[9] All of these issues can contribute to an intergenerational cycle of educational disadvantage.

The effect of cultural orientation on Aboriginal children is disputed. On the one hand, it is argued that Aboriginal ceremonial and social obligations limit school attendance rates,[10] while it is also held that a strong cultural orientation promotes resilience and better educational outcomes. Cultural differences can put Aboriginal children at educational risk before they first walk through the school gate — and once in the school environment, learning can be restricted by a lack of understanding on behalf of teachers and other students.[11]

The issue of racism has been an undercurrent in most of the discussion concerning risk factors for poor educational outcomes for Aboriginal peoples. Most of the policies (educational and otherwise) up until the 1970s have either explicitly or implicitly incorporated racist ideology. Racism can break down self-esteem and promote aggressive behaviours, and has been known to isolate Aboriginal children and young people from both mainstream society and their own culture and community.[12]

Some of the issues outlined here are discussed further in the sections on *Government policy* and *Aboriginal education programmes* below. These sections outline the current policy framework for educating Aboriginal and other students in the school system, and mention some of the important programmes and initiatives in place at present.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY

Prior to the 1960s, state governments had sole responsibilities for Aboriginal affairs, thus Aboriginal education policies differed across Australia. There was, however, a perception common to all state policies that Aboriginal people were inherently inferior and should receive minimal schooling.[13] This perception was consistent with the general policy of excluding Aboriginal people from contact with non-Aboriginal people and the specific policies in some states of excluding Aboriginal children from government-run schools which persisted into the 1950s. This ensured that accessing school education was, at best, likely to be difficult between colonisation and the 1960s. Indeed, estimates suggest that only a very small proportion of Aboriginal children in Australia in the 1940s were being educated in state schools. In total, only about a quarter were receiving any sort of formal education, mostly in institutions and particularly in Christian missions.[14]

The high number of Aboriginal children in Christian missions between the 1940s and 1970s was the result of earlier policies that effectively promoted racial assimilation. These types of overtones in Australian policy led to the practice of forcibly removing children from their families and placing them in missions and government-run institutions. The Western Australian government had the strongest backing to enforce these practices, as it was given guardianship of all Aboriginal children until 21 years of age. It has been well documented that the educational experiences of Aboriginal children in missions were far from ideal. Education often had a greater focus on Christian principles than formal education, with very little attention given to Aboriginal culture and languages.

While the exclusion of Aboriginal children from education was officially phased out by the 1950s, practices that effectively constituted exclusion have been reported into the 1970s. Education gradually became more accessible in the post-war period and coincided with an increase in the number of Aboriginal children attending state schools — however, participation was still mainly in primary schools, and levels of

school attendance and retention remained poor. In many respects, a similar statement about the degree of school engagement of Aboriginal people could be made today, suggesting that the legacies of decades of segregation from schooling and mainstream society have had a profound and long-lasting impact on the Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal-specific education policy was not afforded any notable attention by governments in Australia until around the 1970s, following the 1967 Referendum. This referendum provided the Commonwealth of Australia with the power to legislate on issues directly affecting Aboriginal peoples and led to a range of federal policy initiatives being implemented, often (but not always) run in conjunction with state and territory governments. It foreshadowed significant reform in Aboriginal education. Policy changes coincided with the introduction of the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (now ABSTUDY) in 1969 and the creation of the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1972. Both of these initiatives provided a strong impetus for improvements in participation and retention of Aboriginal students. These outcomes were seen as critical factors for improving skills and making Aboriginal self-determination a possibility.

The increased attention to Aboriginal education in the 1970s gradually gave rise to greater appreciation by Aboriginal people of the worth of school education and the perception that a secondary education was an advantageous pursuit. However, these views were undermined by poor job prospects for Aboriginal people and a discriminatory labour market. This often meant that the pathway of Aboriginal children from school to work was limited to low-skilled occupations.[15]

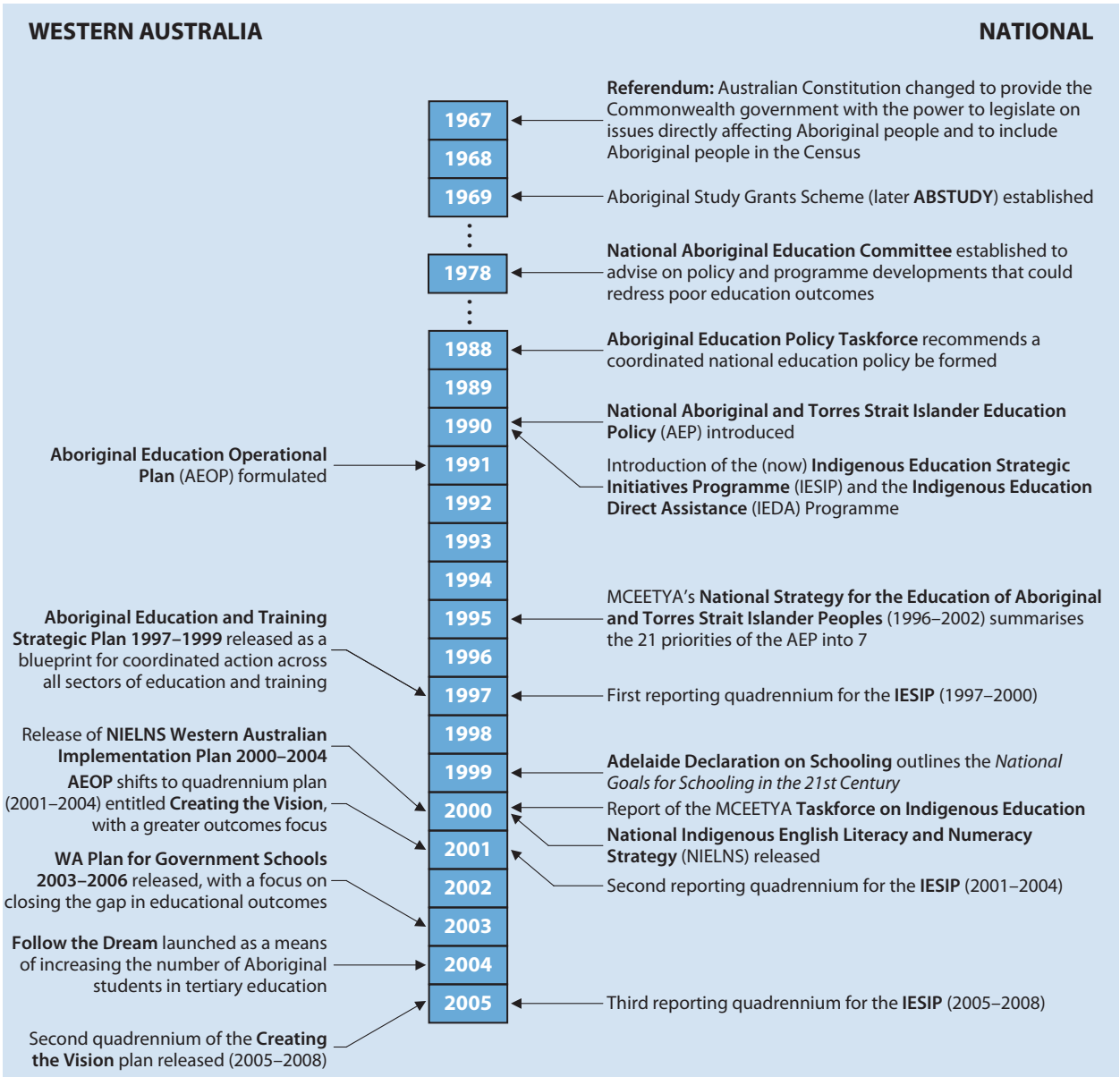
Throughout the 1970s and 1980s various inquiries — at the Commonwealth and state levels — and reviews concentrated on the state of Aboriginal education and quantified the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' participation, retention and performance.[16,17] Often, these inquiries and reviews concluded that problems were endemic, although minor improvements were being made. There began to be a greater recognition that progress in educational outcomes were being hampered by a raft of issues outside of the traditional sphere of education, including physical health issues such as eye and ear disease. The notion of a holistic approach to the problems facing Aboriginal education was gaining acceptance by policy makers.

The report of the 1988 Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force recommended a coordinated National education policy be formed.[16] The Commonwealth and states agreed to this the following year, which led to the formation of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (AEP) in 1990, a policy that still remains in place today, albeit having undergone several revisions. This was perhaps the most significant development in the history of Aboriginal education in Australia, and the first attempt to set direction in the area of linking policy, schools and communities. However, the goals stipulated in the AEP did not address the wider social environment in which Aboriginal children and young people lived and, therefore, did not fully consider that poor outcomes were embedded in a range of institutional, historical and socioeconomic factors.[4] Various reviews of Aboriginal education have suggested that these deficiencies in the approach to Aboriginal education to the end of the 20th century were due to either: a lack of understanding of the complexity of the problems and the difficulty that schools would have in implementing new strategies and programmes; a lack of commitment to sustainable change; or leadership that was ineffective in implementing the policies and strategies that had been formulated.[18,19]

The report of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce on Indigenous education in 2000 was perhaps the first formal acknowledgment of many of these deficiencies and issues. The taskforce highlighted that the broader disadvantage, i.e. outside of educational disadvantage, faced by Aboriginal people was affecting the ability of policy makers, service providers and Aboriginal people themselves to improve educational outcomes.[20]

Even with the introduction of a nationwide policy on Aboriginal education and an increased focus on Aboriginal children in the education sector, some have observed that efforts to improve the relative disadvantage of Aboriginal children have been hampered by the inadequate capacity of many schools to implement the policies, plans and programmes designed by governments. In addition, there has been criticism that the policy process itself has, at times, been crisis-driven and not adequately strategic in its focus, so that the key problem areas have not always been addressed.[4,19]

FIGURE 2.1: TIMELINE OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT



THE CONTEMPORARY PICTURE

The current paradigm for Aboriginal education policy development recognises that education policy cannot be developed in isolation from other areas that address social and economic wellbeing. This line of thinking is predicated on the notion that self-determination is a critical enabler in improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples. However, the success of self-determination itself can be undermined by a lack of educational skills to effectively manage the social and economic development that governments have put in place.[4]

At the national level, there have been recent changes to the way in which the broader arena of Aboriginal affairs is structured and administered. These changes, documented in the Australian Government statement on New Arrangements in Indigenous Affairs,[21] include the formation of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). The OIPC has been established to ensure a whole-of-government approach to policy development, including education policy. The delivery of programmes and services is now coordinated by the network of Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) which are managed by the OIPC.

National education policies

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is responsible for initiating, developing and monitoring the implementation of policy reforms which are of national significance and which require cooperative action by governments in Australia. These responsibilities extend to Aboriginal education and training. In the school sector, MCEETYA facilitates coordination and consultation between governments in relation to the development and implementation of policy. Through MCEETYA, all Australian governments have committed to improving education and training outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. In May 2005, MCEETYA agreed that bringing about improvements in the early literacy and numeracy skills of Aboriginal students should be the top educational priority for Australian governments.[22]

The AEP is Australia's national policy on Aboriginal education, and has been in place since 1990. The policy has been endorsed by the Australian, state and territory governments and essentially aims to achieve better educational results for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Some of the important tenets of the AEP include the enabling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity, and to provide all Australian students with an understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures. Meeting these goals is considered to be dependent on the professional development of staff, the inclusion of Aboriginal staff in decision-making, and the active involvement of Aboriginal teachers and teaching assistants in school matters.[10]

GOALS OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION POLICY (AEP)

The AEP has 21 long term goals, which are categorised into four major goals[23] These goals span all sectors, from early childhood to higher education:

- Major Goal 1 — Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making
- Major Goal 2 — Equality of access to educational services
- Major Goal 3 — Equity of educational participation
- Major Goal 4 — Equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

The goals and objectives of the AEP are consistent with the national goals for all students, articulated in the 1999 Adelaide Declaration on *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*. The *Goals* underscore all government initiatives in the education sector. While these 18 goals are applicable to all school students, they are particularly relevant to Aboriginal students. In addition, two of the goals have specific relevance for Aboriginal students — Goals 3.3 and 3.4 state that schooling should be socially just, so that:

> *'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students';* and
>
> *'all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians'.*[24]

These goals have an emphasis on lifelong learning as well as building the social and emotional skills of students. This broader focus recognises that social justice is predicated upon all students learning about Aboriginal cultures and therefore has a dual purpose for Aboriginal studies in school — improving the self-esteem of Aboriginal students and making the wider community more knowledgeable about Aboriginal peoples and their cultures.

Having a culturally inclusive schooling environment is seen as a remedy to the educational disadvantage of Aboriginal peoples. This issue is addressed and articulated in MCEETYA's *National Statement of Principles and Standards for More Culturally Inclusive Schooling in the 21st Century.*[5] In past years, the Indigenous Education, Employment, Training and Youth Taskforce (IEETY) formed part of MCEETYA's approach to achieving a more culturally inclusive educational environment (and improving educational outcomes in general) for Aboriginal students. While the IEETY Taskforce no longer exists, MCEETYA are currently devising a new structure for setting directions in Aboriginal education and training, including the development and implementation of strategic initiatives such as the *National Statement*.

MCEETYA research highlights that educational success is predicated upon two things:

- having teachers who are committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students and are able to tailor classroom experiences to meet individual and cultural differences
- learning environments that are both age and developmentally appropriate as well as culturally appropriate.[20]

Education policies in the Western Australian jurisdiction

The national policies set by the Australian Government are broadly applicable in each of the states and territories, and are complemented by state- and territory-specific policies. In Western Australia, the primary strategy for Aboriginal education in government schools is documented in the *Aboriginal Education Operational Plan* and its foundation planning documents, *Creating the Vision* and *Making it Happen*. These plans were developed by the (then) Department of Education to assist the acceleration of improvement in Aboriginal education and close the education divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The current plan covers the quadrennium 2005–2008 and has a strong 'outcomes focus' in line with the general shift to outcomes-based education. *Creating the Vision* supports the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* and the Western Australian *Plan for Government Schools 2003–2006*. *Creating the Vision* views Aboriginal students as 'mainstream' students, and is underpinned by a philosophy that recognises and supports Aboriginal young people's differences as strengths. To this end, there is a focus on culturally sensitive, supportive and nurturing environments to assist learning.[25]

In the Catholic education system, the guiding principles and procedures for Aboriginal education are stipulated in the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia's *Policy Statement on Aboriginal Education*.[26] This statement encapsulates many of the philosophies inherent in government school Aboriginal education policies — including a focus on reconciliation and social justice issues. The position of the Catholic education system on these issues is described more fully in the National Statement on *Educating for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation*.[27]

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Educational programmes that are appealing and appropriate can make schooling a more attractive proposition for Aboriginal students, and have been cited as contributing to increased enrolments and attendance in post-compulsory schooling years.

National programmes

As discussed above, the Australian Government has special responsibilities when it comes to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Australian Government funds the core of Aboriginal education and training programmes in Australia — these are designed to be strategic intervention programmes, which supplement general programmes. Programmes are administered by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), with funding appropriated through the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*.

While DEST provide funding for Aboriginal education and training programmes in government, Catholic and Independent schools, there are some differences in the

types of programmes that are administered between these school systems and between schools in different states and territories within the same school system. Some of these differences are touched on below.

One of the more important recent developments stemming from Aboriginal policy directions is the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP). IESIP is designed to improve literacy, numeracy, education outcomes, enrolments, and inclusion in decision-making, in line with the goals of the AEP. Along with the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) programme, the IESIP offers supplementary recurrent assistance to education and training providers (this includes organisations and education systems in the government and non-government sectors, although it is restricted to schools or systems with 20 or more Aboriginal students).[10] IESIP also includes a number of programme initiatives, such as the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) and English as a Second Language – Indigenous Language Speaking Students, among others.

MCEETYA sets the priorities for the IESIP, however, each education provider who receives funding through the programme determines the targets to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal people, in partnership with the Commonwealth. These agreements are known as Indigenous Education Agreements.

IEDA programmes have been established to improve Aboriginal community involvement in schooling. At the time of the WAACHS survey, Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees were an important mechanism for enabling parents to get involved in educational decision-making in the school and helping to ensure that Aboriginal people's interests and goals were attended to (although this approach has now been superseded — see section on *The Western Australian focus*, below).

The NIELNS forms part of the IESIP and aims to ensure that Aboriginal students attain levels of literacy and numeracy comparable to other students. In short, NIELNS focuses on six factors in trying to achieve the broad objective of educational parity. These include: improving attendance; overcoming hearing and nutrition problems; positive pre-school experiences; getting good teachers; using the best teaching methods (part of this is appreciating the importance of Aboriginal perspectives in relating to Aboriginal students); and achieving accountability.[28] Further, the NIELNS aims to ensure that all children leaving primary school should be numerate and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level. In the Catholic system, the Raising Achievement in Schools (RAISe) programme is an important whole-of-school literacy approach that has been widely implemented in schools in recent years.

The Western Australian focus

In the Western Australian jurisdiction, delivery of education programmes to Aboriginal students in government schools is supported by the Aboriginal Support Network, comprising the Indigenous Participation and Achievement Standards Directorate, district-based Aboriginal Liaison Officers, and school-based Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs).

ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER EDUCATION OFFICERS (AIEOs) AND ABORIGINAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS (ATAs)

AIEOs (government schools) and ATAs (Catholic schools) are employed in schools to provide support and assistance to Aboriginal students, carers, teachers and the school community through their knowledge, understanding and sharing of Aboriginal history, language and culture. The role of the AIEO is designed to help ease the barriers to educational outcomes that Aboriginal students may encounter in the education system. As such, they can have an important influence on the behaviour and performance of Aboriginal students.

In the government school system, the allocation of AIEOs is based on a formula which takes account of the size of the Aboriginal student population, the year that these students are enrolled in, and the level of social disadvantage in the school community (see section entitled *The socioeconomic status of schools* in Chapter 3).

For the remainder of this publication, Aboriginal student support officers in government and Catholic schools will be referred to as AIEOs.

The Catholic and Independent school systems work closely with the government in providing Aboriginal education before and after school entry. As such, the programmes and Professional Development activities tend to be implemented and accessed in all school systems. The Aboriginal Education and Training Council (AETC) is the state ministerial advisory body on Aboriginal education and training, and, among other roles, provides a forum to enable a consistent approach to Aboriginal education across systems in Western Australia.

In recent years, there has been a shift from a highly centralised system of programmes, with little scope for Aboriginal ownership, to a more devolved system where individual schools are key in the decision-making process. Locally-specific aspirant programmes are an important part of the make-up of Aboriginal education programmes in most Western Australian schools, although programmes developed for the entire school system are still employed. *Follow the Dream* is the main programme developed for Aboriginal students in Western Australian schools. It aims to help secondary school students get through high school and into university education.

Enabling the parents of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal communities to get involved in educational decision-making in schools, and ensuring that Aboriginal people's interests and goals are attended to, has been the focus of a number of Aboriginal education programmes in recent years. Establishing ASSPA committees in schools was previously the prime mechanism for stimulating community involvement. However, this approach has now been superseded by a Whole of School Intervention Strategy, which incorporates elements such as the Parent School Partnerships Initiative (PSPI).

ENGAGING ABORIGINAL PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING

At the time of the survey, Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committees were operating in most schools with Aboriginal students, with the aim of improving parental involvement in the educational decision-making process. The ASSPA scheme was operated by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and provided funding to school and pre-school based parent committees, enabling problems in Aboriginal education to be addressed at a local, school-specific level. Funding levels depended on the number of Aboriginal students in the school, and were provided under the terms of a binding funding contract that stipulated planned activities during the year. At the end of each year, ASSPA committees reported to DEST on how funds were spent and what activities were completed.[29]

In 2005, the ASSPA scheme was effectively superseded by the Parent School Partnerships Initiative (PSPI). The PSPI, like ASSPA, requires providers to report to DEST on planned activities and outcomes. The PSPI encourages parents of Aboriginal students, Aboriginal communities and schools to work together in addressing local barriers to education. Specifically, the PSPI aims to improve school attendance and literacy and numeracy skills, and increase Year 12 retention and the number of successful Year 12 completions.[30]

THE RELATIVE DISADVANTAGE OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section quantifies the degree of disadvantage that Aboriginal children experience in the Western Australian education system. Several robust measures of participation, retention and attainment in school education have been drawn upon to describe this disadvantage. These data are sourced from a mix of administrative and survey sources, primarily collected and/or disseminated by DET and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This description provides context to the WAACHS school, staff and student estimates that follow. The other chapters in this volume then describe some of the key antecedents and associations that may give rise to this disadvantage.

It should be noted that the WAACHS included a number of similar measures to those presented below. Despite scope and methodological differences with the WAACHS, the results reported in this section are consistent with survey results. This has enabled comparison between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, and across all schools in Western Australia and Australia. Time series data have also been presented and can, to a degree, provide an insight into how policy and other changes have impacted Aboriginal student outcomes over time.

PARTICIPATION AND RETENTION

Historically, Aboriginal children have relatively low levels of participation in the formal education system, from pre-school years to post-compulsory education. While this is partly true today, there has been significant progress in raising the participation levels of Aboriginal children in the last 30 years. There were few Aboriginal students who stayed on to Years 11 and 12 in the early 1970s, whereas participation rates of

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in primary and compulsory secondary education have been similar in recent years. At older age groups (especially at post-compulsory schooling ages), Aboriginal children are much less likely to be engaged in the school system than other children.[28] While the fact that almost all Aboriginal students in younger age groups are enrolled in school can be regarded as a positive outcome, it masks the reality that Aboriginal children enrolled in school have average rates of school attendance considerably lower than non-Aboriginal children (see Chapter 4 for more details on school attendance rates and the associations with school, carer and family factors).

Significant increases in the proportion of Aboriginal people participating in post-school education have been observed in recent decades also, particularly in TAFE. This reflects improvements in retention rates over time. However, many of these post-secondary students are enrolled in enabling and non-award courses, illustrating that schools continue to have problems servicing Aboriginal students.

In pre-school years, there are lower proportions of Aboriginal children enrolled when compared with non-Aboriginal children. This is true for both males and females.[31]

The following section uses data compiled by the ABS in order to set the context of school participation and retention across all schools in Western Australia. These data can also be used to compare the differences in participation and retention between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. For the purposes of comparability with the WAACHS data, the ABS data provided below relate to either 2001 or 2002. In addition, pre-school participation rate data have been sourced from the *National Indigenous Preschool Census*.

It should be noted that, in Western Australia, it is compulsory for a child to begin formal schooling from the beginning of the school year in which they turn six. At the time of the survey, compulsory schooling finished at the end of the year in which a child turned 15 years (these arrangements have since changed and are detailed in the section entitled *The Western Australian school system*, earlier in this chapter). However, the start and end ages of compulsory schooling differ between the state and territory jurisdictions of Australia.

Participation – All children

The school age participation rate is the number of students of a particular age expressed as a proportion of the total population of the same age. It indicates the proportion of the population who are enrolled at school at a given point in time.

In both Western Australia and Australia, age participation rates in school for all children remain close to 100 per cent at all ages from six years to 14 years (Table 2.1). Rates drop at age 15 years (to 90.4 per cent in Western Australia), coinciding with the age at which compulsory schooling ends. There is a marked drop in the participation levels at ages 16 years and onwards, with most 18 and 19 year-olds either in the work force, looking for work or studying at a tertiary institution.

While the rates of participation in the compulsory schooling years are generally higher in Western Australia than Australia, the reverse was true when considering post-compulsory schooling.

Participation – Aboriginal children

Of Aboriginal children aged 10–14 years in Australia in 2001, 87.2 per cent were participating in school compared with 98.3 per cent of all Australian children. A much lower proportion of 15–19 year-old Aboriginal people were in school (32.9 per cent) compared with all people aged 15–19 years (50.2 per cent) (Table 2.1).

In recent years, almost nine in every ten Aboriginal children aged four years attended pre-school (88.8 per cent) (Table 2.2). In Western Australia, school participation rates were relatively similar between Aboriginal and all school-aged children, up until the last few years of compulsory schooling (Table 2.3). Beyond the age of compulsory schooling, school participation rates among Aboriginal children were much lower than among all children. Aboriginal student school participation rates fell sharply after age 14 years, to 78.2 per cent (CI: 71.4%–84.4%) of 15 year-olds and 24.0 per cent (CI: 17.9%–30.7%) of 17 year-olds.

In the post-compulsory years, there was no difference in participation rates between males and females (Table 2.4). By level of relative isolation, school participation rates for 16–17 year-olds were highest in the Perth metropolitan area at 48.9 per cent (CI: 38.4%–58.7%) and lowest in areas of low or moderate relative isolation (29.7 per cent; CI: 23.2%–37.3%) (Table 2.5). See Chapter 8 for an analysis of the associations between school participation, retention and academic performance among Aboriginal young people.

Comparing school retention rates

An alternative measure of the degree to which children engage or participate in the school education system is the apparent retention rate. This is a measure of student progression through to the final years of school. They are described as 'apparent' because they estimate the proportion of students who continue studying to a certain year at school based on the respective cohort group at the commencement of secondary study (see *Glossary* for more details on *apparent retention rate*).

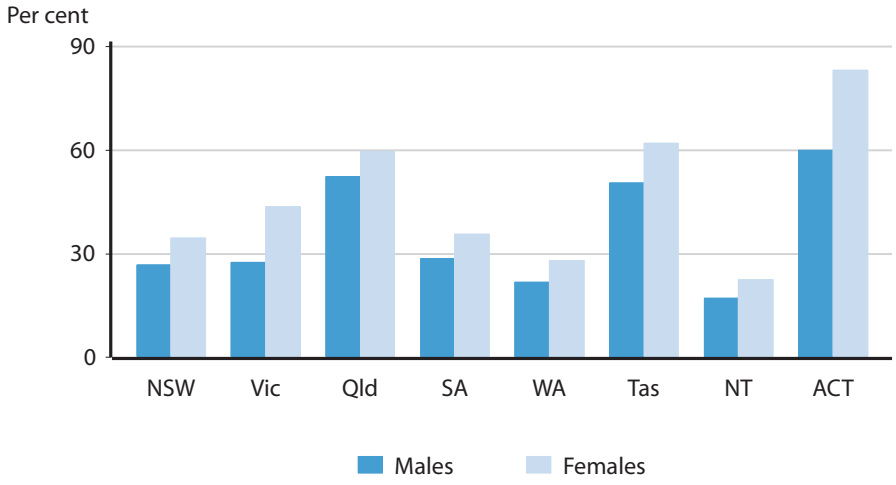
The majority of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in Western Australia that start secondary schooling (Year 8) continue through to Year 10 (89.8 per cent). The proportion of Aboriginal students who continue into the post-compulsory secondary schooling environment is substantially lower — dropping to around half (of those that started Year 8) by Year 11 (53.8 per cent) and a quarter by Year 12 (24.9 per cent). In contrast, about three-quarters (76.2 per cent) of non-Aboriginal students continued to Year 12 (Table 2.6).

As a result, while the ratio of the apparent retention rates of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people to Year 10 was 1.1 for both males and females in 2002, the ratio was 3.3 for males and 2.9 for females when considering Year 12 retention.

Apparent retention rates among Aboriginal students were relatively similar across all states and territories up to the end of compulsory schooling (with the exception of the Northern Territory, which has significantly lower rates). However, at Year 12, there was a marked difference in retention by state and territory. Apart from retention rates in the Northern Territory, retention rates for Aboriginal students to Year 12 in Western Australia have generally been the lowest among all states and territories (Figure 2.2). In 2002, around a quarter of Aboriginal students in Western Australia that had started secondary schooling in 1998 were attending Year 12, with more females (28.1 per cent) than males (21.7 per cent) staying on to Year 12. Year 12 retention rates were highest in

the Australian Capital Territory (69.5 per cent) and Tasmania (56.8 per cent), although these states/territories have a very small Aboriginal population. However, states/territories with relatively large Aboriginal populations also had considerably higher Year 12 retention rates than those reported in Western Australia (from 30.6 per cent in New South Wales to 55.9 per cent in Queensland).

FIGURE 2.2: ABORIGINAL SCHOOL STUDENTS — APPARENT RETENTION RATES TO YEARS 12 (FROM YEAR 7/8), BY STATE OR TERRITORY, 2002 (a)



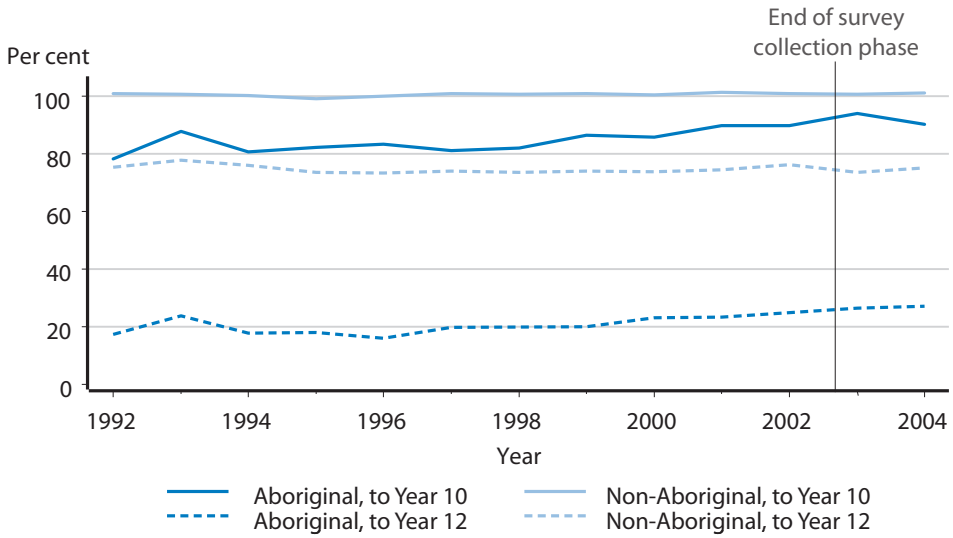
(a) The retention rates are for full-time students. The exclusion of part-time students from calculations has particular implications for the interpretation of results for South Australia. The small number of Aboriginal students in some jurisdictions (the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania) can result in large fluctuations in the apparent retention rates when disaggregated by sex and other variables.

Source: Table 2.7

Despite the divide in retention rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, modest improvements in the retention rates for Aboriginal students to Years 10 and 12 have occurred in Western Australia in recent years. Between 1992 and 2002, the apparent retention rate to Year 10 increased from 78.1 per cent to 89.8 per cent, while Year 12 rates improved from 17.2 per cent to 24.9 per cent — still around 50 percentage points lower than non-Aboriginal students (Table 2.8).

Figure 2.3 shows that, of those students who begin secondary schooling, the proportion of Aboriginal students who stay in the school system to Year 10 is about the same as the proportion of non-Aboriginal students who continue to Year 12.

FIGURE 2.3: ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL SCHOOL STUDENTS — APPARENT RETENTION RATES TO YEARS 10 AND 12 (FROM YEAR 8), BY YEAR



Source: Table 2.8

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Measures of school academic performance consistently indicate that Aboriginal students have lower levels of achievement than the non-Aboriginal student population. The reasons for this are multifaceted and complex and appear to be primarily related to the impact of other aspects of disadvantage which impact on students' capacity to undertake the academic tasks of the primary and secondary education systems.[32] Nonetheless, the Aboriginal student population has lower average levels of performance in national school benchmark tests and, when engaged in post-compulsory secondary education, are less likely to attain a Year 12 certificate.

It should be noted that, although the attainment data in this section focus predominantly on Western Australia as a whole, there are regional and community-specific differences. The geographic disparity of the Aboriginal population and differences in community types give rise to differences in socioeconomic status, cultural beliefs and values that, in turn, can create gaps in educational outcomes. As such, it is difficult to make generalisations about the types of educational problems that Aboriginal people face, and the reasons for those problems.

Years 3, 5 and 7 benchmark tests

Academic achievement in primary school years is a strong precursor to successful secondary school transition and performance. DET has aggregate results of student performance in national benchmark tests in Years 3, 5 and 7 across a range of subject areas, including reading, writing, spelling and numeracy. In short, the benchmarks represent the agreed minimum acceptable standard in a particular area of study. Students who do not meet these standards are considered to be at risk of not making sufficient progress at school.

At all year levels, and within each area of study, a lower proportion of Aboriginal students attained the required benchmark level. Achievement levels for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students tended to decline at higher year levels, although this was more pronounced among Aboriginal students. As a result, the disparity in the proportion of Aboriginal and all students who achieved national benchmarks was higher in Year 7 than in Years 3 and 5. As an example, in 2001, 70.5 per cent of Year 3 Aboriginal students achieved the national benchmark in numeracy compared with 91.0 per cent of all Year 3 students in Western Australia — a difference of 20 percentage points. This difference increased to 31 percentage points in Year 5 numeracy testing and 42 percentage points in Year 7 numeracy testing (Figure 2.4).

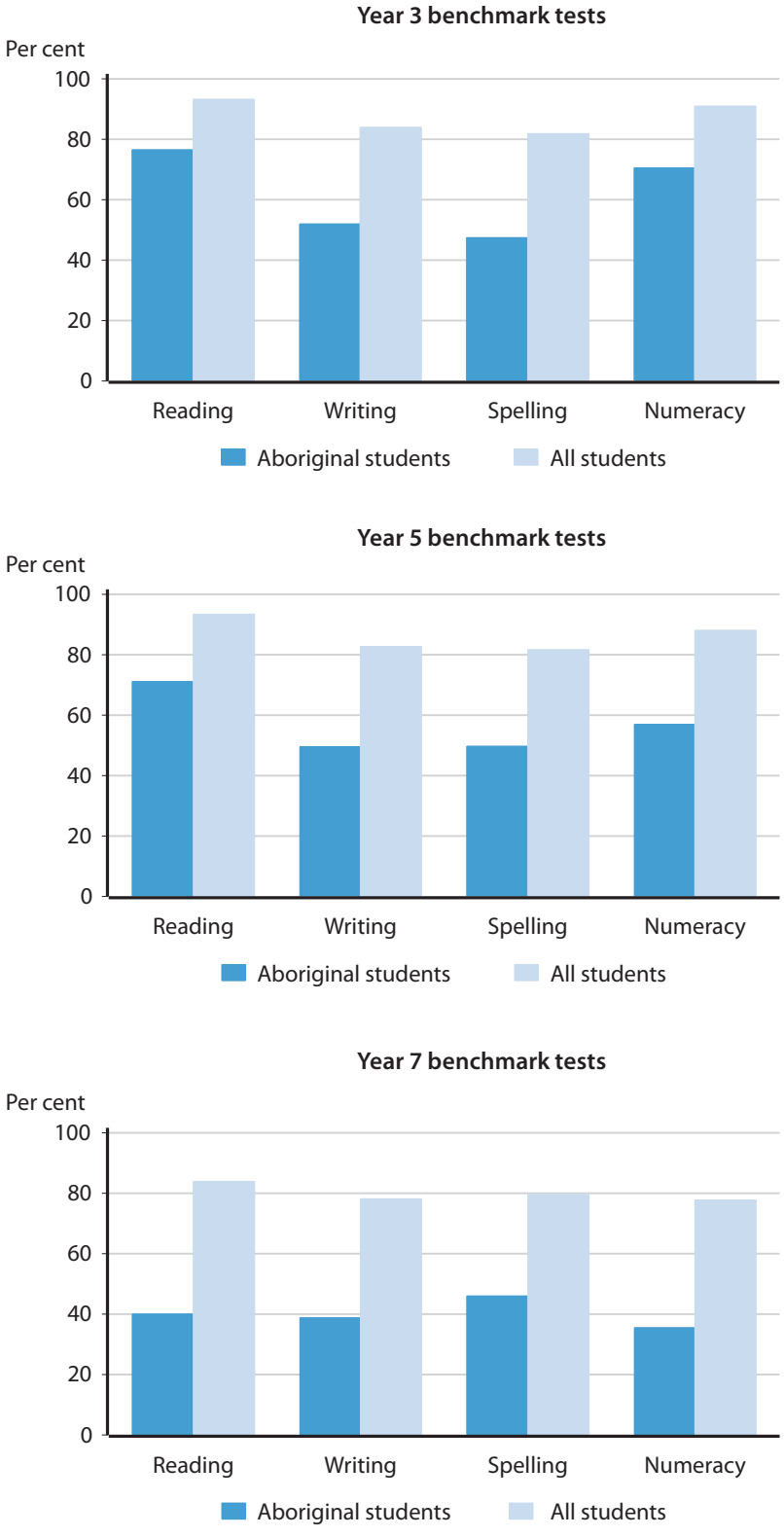
When compared with all students, the best relative results in Years 3 and 5 testing for Aboriginal students appeared to be in reading. While the best result in Year 7 was evident in spelling, the majority of Aboriginal students had still not met the benchmark (46.0 per cent).

Students achieving a Year 12 certificate

Another indicator of school academic performance is the proportion of students who successfully complete their schooling. The measure used here is the number of students who attain a Year 12 certificate (Western Australian Certificate of Education) as a proportion of those students who commenced Year 11 in the previous year.

In 2001, 22.2 per cent of Aboriginal students who had commenced Year 11 in 2000 (Government and Catholic schools) achieved a Year 12 certificate. The corresponding figure for non-Aboriginal students in Western Australia was 62.0 per cent.

FIGURE 2.4: PROPORTION OF (GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT) SCHOOL STUDENTS ACHIEVING NATIONAL BENCHMARKS IN READING, WRITING, SPELLING AND NUMERACY, 2001



Source: Table 2.9

ENDNOTES

1. Zubrick SR, Silburn SR, Prior MR. Resources and contexts for child development: Implications for children and society. In: Prior MR, Richardson S, editors. *No time to lose. The well-being of Australia's children*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press; 2005. p. 161–200.
2. Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. In: Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Australian social trends 2002*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics (Catalogue No. 4102.0); 2002.
3. Government of Western Australia. *Acts Amendment (Higher School Leaving Age and Related Provisions) Bill 2005*. Perth: Parliament of Western Australia; 2005.
4. Beresford Q. The Context of Aboriginal Education. In: Beresford Q, Partington G, editors. *Reform and resistance in Aboriginal education*. Perth: University of Western Australia Press; 2003. p. 10–40.
5. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. *National statement of principles and standards for more culturally inclusive schooling in the 21st century*. [Online] MCEETYA; 2000; [cited 2005 Nov 11]; Available from: URL: http://www.mceetya.edu.au/pdf/principl.pdf
6. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. *Bringing them home. Report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*. Canberra: HREOC; 1997.
7. Comer J. Cited in Finnegan W. *Cold new world: Growing up in a harder country*. New York: Random House; 1998.
8. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education Inquiry*. [Online] HREOC; 1999 [cited 2005 Dec 29]. Available from: URL:http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/rural_education/
9. Purdie N, Tripcony P, Boulton-Lewis G, Fanshawe J, Gunstone A. *Positive self-identity for Indigenous students and its relationship to school outcomes*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs; 2000.
10. Department of Education, Science and Training. *National report to Parliament on Indigenous education and training, 2003*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; 2005.
11. Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. *Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage: Key indicators 2003*. Canberra: Productivity Commission; 2003.
12. Gordon S, Hallahan K, Henry D. *Putting the picture together. Inquiry into response by government agencies to complaints of family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities*. Perth: State Law Publisher; 2002.
13. Bateman FEA. *Report of the survey of Native affairs*. Perth: Government of Western Australia; 1948.
14. Neville AO. *Australia's coloured minority: Its place in the community*. Sydney: Currawong; 1947.
15. Watts BH. *Aboriginal futures: Review of resources and developments and related policies in the education of Aborigines*. Brisbane: Education Research Development Committee; 1981.
16. Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force. *Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education and Training; 1988.
17. Government of Western Australia. *Report of the Western Australian Royal Commission into Aboriginal Affairs*. Perth: Government of Western Australia; 1974.
18. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. *A National strategy for the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 1996–2002*. Canberra: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs; 1995.
19. Northern Territory Department of Education. *Learning lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*. Darwin: Department of Education; 1999.
20. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. *Report of MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education*. Canberra. MCEETYA; 2000.

21. Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination. *New Arrangements in Indigenous Affairs.* [Online] Canberra: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs; 2004; [cited 2005 Nov 15]. Available from: URL: http://www.oipc.gov.au/About_OIPC/Indigenous_Affairs_Arrangements/default.asp

22. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. *Information Statement 18th MCEETYA meeting Canberra, 12–13 May 2005.* [Online] Canberra: MCEETYA; 2005. [cited 2005 Oct 3]. Available from: URL: http://www.mceetya.edu.au/meetings/meet18.htm

23. Department of Education, Science and Training. [Online] [cited 2005 Aug 9]. Available from: URL: http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/schools/indigenous/aep.htm

24. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. *The Adelaide declaration on National goals for schooling in the twenty-first century.* [Online] 1999 [cited 2006 Jan 5]. Available from: URL: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/national_goals_for_schooling_in_the_twenty_first_century.htm

25. Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). *National Report on Schooling in Australia.* [Online] 2001 [cited 2006 Jan 9]. Available from: URL: http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/anr2001/

26. Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia. *Policy Statement on Aboriginal Education Policy Statement 2 – C1.* [Online] Perth: Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia; 2000. [cited 2005 Dec 6]; Available from: URL: http://web1.ceo.wa.edu.au/pls/portal30/docs/FOLDER/CA_CATH_ED/CEO_REP_COMMISSION/POLICIES/SCHOOLANDCOMMUNITYOPERATIONS/2-C1%20ABORIGINAL%20EDUCATION.PDF

27. National Catholic Education Commission. *Education for justice truth and reconciliation: A new partnership with Indigenous peoples of Australia.* [Online] Canberra: National Catholic Education Commission; 1998. [cited 2005 Dec 6]; Available from: URL: http://www.ncec.catholic.edu.au/justice.pdf

28. Mellor S, Corrigan M. *The case for change: A review of contemporary research in Indigenous education outcomes.* Melbourne: Australian Council of Educational Research; 2004.

29. Department of Education, Science and Training. *A guide for Aboriginal student support and parent awareness (ASSPA) committees.* [Online] Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training; 2004. [cited 2006 Jan 5]; Available from: URL: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/publications_resources/profiles/guide_for_aboriginal_student_support.htm

30. Department of Education, Science and Training. *Indigenous Education Programme Provider Guidelines 2005–2008*, [Online] Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training; 2005. [cited 2005 Nov 11]; Available from: URL: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/programmes_funding/forms_guidelines/IEP_Provider_Guidelines_2005_2008/

31. Attending preschool. In: Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Australian social trends 2004.* Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics (Catalogue No. 4102.0); 2004. p. 98–100.

32. Department of Indigenous Affairs. *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report*. Perth; Department of Indigenous Affairs; 2005.

DETAILED TABLES

TABLE 2.1: CHILDREN AGED 0–17 YEARS — AGE-PARTICIPATION RATES OF STUDENTS (a), ALL SCHOOLS, 2001 — ADMINISTRATIVE DATA (per cent)

Student's age (years)	*Western Australia*	*Australia*
	All children	
5 or under	7.5	11.6
6	99.0	98.7
7	99.7	99.3
8	98.6	99.3
9	99.5	98.3
10	99.8	98.7
11	99.8	99.4
12	99.2	97.8
13	98.8	98.0
14	97.9	97.3
Total 10–14	**99.1**	**98.3**
15	90.4	92.1
16	75.8	81.4
17	41.3	62.9
18	5.5	12.9
19	1.5	1.7
Total 15–19	**43.3**	**50.2**
	Aboriginal children	
10–14	—	**87.2**
15–19	—	**32.9**

(a) Full-time students only.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia 2001, ABS Catalogue No. 4221.0, Canberra, 2002; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, June 1997 to June 2002, ABS Catalogue No. 3201.0, Canberra, 2003.

TABLE 2.2: ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AGED 4 YEARS — PRE-SCHOOL ENROLMENTS AND PARTICIPATION RATES (a), ALL SCHOOLS, 2002–2004 — ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Year	*Number of enrolments*	*Participation rate (%)*
2002	1 462	88.8
2003	1 562	—
2004	1 553	—

(a) Rates are calculated by dividing the number of children enrolled in pre-school in 2002 by the ABS Estimated Resident Population of 4 year-olds in 2001.

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, National Indigenous Preschool Census: Summary Report, 2005; Australian Bureau of Statistics (unpublished data).

TABLE 2.3: ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AND ALL STUDENTS AGED 5–17 YEARS — SCHOOL AGE PARTICIPATION RATES (WAACHS AND ADMINISTRATIVE DATA COMPARISONS)

Student's age (years)	*Aboriginal students (a) — WAACHS data*		*All students (b) — Administrative data*
	Participation rate	*95% CI*	*Participation rate*
5	92.6	(89.1 - 95.1)	—
6	99.5	(98.8 - 99.8)	99.0
7	99.3	(98.3 - 99.8)	99.7
8	99.7	(99.2 - 99.9)	98.6
9	100.0	(96.8 - 100.0)	99.5
10	99.7	(99.4 - 99.9)	99.8
11	99.2	(98.0 - 99.9)	99.8
12	98.4	(96.3 - 99.6)	99.2
13	95.1	(88.9 - 98.8)	98.8
14	92.2	(88.3 - 95.4)	97.9
15	78.2	(71.4 - 84.4)	90.4
16	50.5	(43.4 - 57.6)	75.8
17	24.0	(17.9 - 30.7)	41.3

(a) Refers to participation in pre-primary, primary or secondary school education. Includes those who were suspended from school at the time of the survey.

(b) These data relate to 2001. Rates are calculated using the 2001 ABS estimated resident population (ERP).

Source: Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia 2001, ABS Catalogue No. 4221.0, Canberra, 2003; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, June 1997 to June 2002, ABS Catalogue No. 3201.0, Canberra, 2003.

TABLE 2.4: ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AND ALL STUDENTS AGED 15–17 YEARS — SCHOOL AGE PARTICIPATION RATES, BY SEX (WAACHS AND ADMINISTRATIVE DATA COMPARISONS)

Student's age (years)	*Aboriginal students (a)—WAACHS data*		*All students (b) — Administrative data*
	Participation rate	*95% CI*	*Participation rate*
Males			
15	72.1	(63.1 - 80.6)	90.3
16	53.9	(44.9 - 62.5)	73.0
17	23.0	(14.9 - 33.1)	39.6
Females			
15	84.1	(71.2 - 92.2)	90.4
16	47.0	(35.9 - 57.5)	78.7
17	25.2	(16.6 - 35.7)	43.0
Total			
15	78.2	(71.4 - 84.4)	90.4
16	50.5	(43.4 - 57.6)	75.8
17	24.0	(17.9 - 30.7)	41.3

(a) Refers to participation in pre-primary, primary or secondary school education. Includes those who were suspended from school at the time of the survey.

(b) These data relate to 2001. Rates are calculated using the 2001 ABS estimated resident population (ERP).

Source: Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia 2001, ABS Catalogue No. 4221.0, Canberra, 2003; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, June 1997 to June 2002, ABS Catalogue No. 3201.0, Canberra, 2003.

TABLE 2.5: ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AGED 4–17 YEARS — SCHOOL AGE PARTICIPATION RATES (a), BY LEVEL OF RELATIVE ISOLATION (LORI)

Age group	*Number*	*95% CI*	*%*	*95% CI*
		LORI — None		
4–11 years	4 380	(4 070 - 4 710)	93.8	(90.8 - 96.3)
12–15 years	1 950	(1 700 - 2 230)	89.6	(83.0 - 94.4)
16–17 years	480	(370 - 620)	48.9	(38.4 - 58.7)
Total 12–17 years	**2 430**	**(2 160 - 2 730)**	**77.0**	**(71.1 - 81.9)**
Total	**6 810**	**(6 560 - 7 070)**	**87.0**	**(84.0 - 89.7)**
		LORI — Low/Moderate		
4–11 years	5 920	(5 410 - 6 470)	94.6	(92.2 - 96.4)
12–15 years	2 550	(2 230 - 2 920)	92.3	(89.3 - 94.7)
16–17 years	370	(270 - 480)	29.7	(23.2 - 37.3)
Total 12–17 years	**2 920**	**(2 570 - 3 310)**	**73.0**	**(68.7 - 77.0)**
Total	**8 840**	**(8 120 - 9 570)**	**86.2**	**(83.8 - 88.2)**
		LORI — High/Extreme		
4–11 years	2 710	(2 240 - 3 240)	94.3	(91.7 - 96.4)
12–15 years	1 300	(1 080 - 1 570)	92.4	(87.8 - 95.5)
16–17 years	190	(130 - 280)	35.7	(25.3 - 47.6)
Total 12–17 years	**1 490**	**(1 230 - 1 800)**	**76.9**	**(71.6 - 81.6)**
Total	**4 200**	**(3 510 - 4 960)**	**87.3**	**(84.5 - 89.8)**

(a) Refers to participation in pre-primary, primary or secondary school education. Includes those who were suspended from school at the time of the survey.

TABLE 2.6: ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL STUDENTS — APPARENT RETENTION RATES (a), 2002 (per cent)

	Aboriginal students			*Non-Aboriginal students*		
	Males	*Females*	*Total*	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
			Western Australia			
To Year 9	98.9	99.1	99.0	100.7	100.2	100.4
To Year 10	90.5	89.1	89.8	100.7	100.9	100.8
To Year 11	55.5	52.3	53.8	90.0	93.1	91.5
To Year 12	21.7	28.1	24.9	71.7	80.9	76.2
			Australia			
To Year 9	97.0	98.6	97.8	99.6	100.1	99.8
To Year 10	83.5	89.5	86.4	97.7	99.2	98.5
To Year 11	56.8	60.9	58.9	85.4	92.1	88.7
To Year 12	34.1	42.0	38.0	70.9	81.9	76.3

(a) The apparent retention rate is the percentage of full-time students who continued to Year 9, 10, 11 and 12 from respective cohort groups at the commencement of their secondary schooling (Year 7/8). Retention rates are affected by factors that vary across jurisdictions. For this reason, variations in apparent retention rates over time within jurisdictions may be more useful than comparisons across jurisdictions. Retention rates can exceed 100 per cent for a variety of reasons, including student transfers between jurisdictions after the base year.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia (unpublished data).

TABLE 2.7: ABORIGINAL AND NON-ABORIGINAL STUDENTS — APPARENT RETENTION RATES (a), ALL SCHOOLS, BY STATE OR TERRITORY, 2002 (per cent)

State/Territory	*Aboriginal students*		*Non-Aboriginal students*	
	To Year 10	*To Year 12*	*To Year 10*	*To Year 12*
		Males		
New South Wales	80.8	26.8	97.0	65.9
Victoria	77.8	27.5	96.5	73.7
Queensland	88.9	52.4	100.0	78.5
South Australia	70.9	28.6	94.8	61.9
Western Australia	90.5	21.7	100.7	71.7
Tasmania	98.8	50.6	98.9	66.8
Northern Territory	59.4	17.2	84.7	60.0
Australian Capital Territory	119.4	60.0	101.6	87.5
Australia	**83.5**	**34.1**	**97.7**	**70.9**
		Females		
New South Wales	86.6	34.6	98.1	76.1
Victoria	85.0	43.6	99.3	88.9
Queensland	97.9	59.6	101.7	86.7
South Australia	83.5	35.7	96.3	73.6
Western Australia	89.1	28.1	100.9	80.9
Tasmania	122.4	62.1	100.5	80.5
Northern Territory	63.3	22.6	84.4	70.0
Australian Capital Territory	117.2	83.3	98.0	89.1
Australia	**89.5**	**42.0**	**99.2**	**81.9**
		Total		
New South Wales	83.7	30.6	97.6	70.9
Victoria	81.5	34.8	97.9	81.2
Queensland	93.3	55.9	100.8	82.5
South Australia	77.1	32.0	95.5	67.6
Western Australia	89.8	24.9	100.8	76.2
Tasmania	108.3	56.8	99.7	73.5
Northern Territory	61.3	20.0	84.6	65.0
Australian Capital Territory	118.3	69.5	99.9	88.3
Australia	**86.4**	**38.0**	**98.5**	**76.3**

(a) The apparent retention rate is the percentage of full-time students who continued to Year 10 and 12 from respective cohort groups at the commencement of their secondary schooling (Year 7/8). Retention rates are affected by factors that vary across jurisdictions. For this reason, variations in apparent retention rates over time within jurisdictions may be more useful than comparisons across jurisdictions. Retention rates can exceed 100 per cent for a variety of reasons, including student transfers between jurisdictions after the base year.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia (unpublished data).

TABLE 2.8: ABORIGINAL STUDENTS — APPARENT RETENTION RATES (a), ALL SCHOOLS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, BY YEAR (per cent)

Year	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*
	To Year 10		
1992	74.1	82.9	78.1
1993	86.3	89.2	87.8
1994	80.1	81.3	80.7
1995	77.2	87.9	82.2
1996	84.0	82.7	83.3
1997	79.1	83.0	81.0
1998	82.1	81.9	82.0
1999	84.5	88.6	86.5
2000	83.5	88.1	85.8
2001	88.2	91.1	89.7
2002	90.5	89.1	89.8
2003	93.4	94.7	94.0
2004	90.0	90.5	90.2
	To Year 12		
1992	13.5	21.2	17.2
1993	25.7	21.4	23.7
1994	17.1	18.5	17.7
1995	16.4	19.6	18.0
1996	14.8	17.1	16.0
1997	16.6	23.2	19.7
1998	19.3	20.4	19.8
1999	17.0	22.9	19.9
2000	21.7	24.5	23.1
2001	22.5	24.1	23.3
2002	21.7	28.1	24.9
2003	25.6	27.0	26.3
2004	24.4	29.8	27.0

(a) The apparent retention rate is the percentage of full-time students who continued to Year 10 and 12 from respective cohort groups at the commencement of their secondary schooling (Year 7/8). Retention rates are affected by factors that vary across jurisdictions. For this reason, variations in apparent retention rates over time within jurisdictions may be more useful than comparisons across jurisdictions. Retention rates can exceed 100 per cent for a variety of reasons, including student transfers between jurisdictions after the base year.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia (unpublished data).

TABLE 2.9: ABORIGINAL AND ALL STUDENTS (a) — PROPORTION ACHIEVING NATIONAL BENCHMARKS IN READING, WRITING, SPELLING AND NUMERACY, 2001 (per cent)

Benchmark test	*Aboriginal students*	*All students*
	Year 3 benchmark test	
Reading	76.6	93.3
Writing	52.1	84.0
Spelling	47.5	81.9
Numeracy	70.5	91.0
	Year 5 benchmark test	
Reading	71.3	93.5
Writing	49.5	82.7
Spelling	49.7	81.8
Numeracy	56.9	88.2
	Year 7 benchmark test	
Reading	40.0	83.9
Writing	38.9	78.2
Spelling	46.0	79.6
Numeracy	35.5	77.8

(a) Includes government and non-government schools.