

Schooling

With schooling to Year 12, the opportunities for employment and further study are greatly enhanced. Giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the same opportunities as non-Indigenous students is vital. With these opportunities, students have a greater ability to engage in the economic, educational and political affairs of Queensland.

Overview

The Queensland Government is committed to addressing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy achievements as well as the gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent. Further trade, training and tertiary qualifications are also seen as essential to providing improved prospects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.

Below is an outline of Queensland's commitment under the COAG Indigenous reform agenda, as well as the measures which will be used to monitor progress, and the programs and services which have been delivered by the Queensland Government (in 2008/09) to address the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous school children.

Queensland's commitment under COAG

The key national COAG targets which address the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students on achievements at school are to:

- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment by 2020.

These targets are being addressed by the Queensland Government under a number of National Agreements. The agreements apply to all school children and outline expected educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school children.

The **National Education Agreement** (no specified timeframe) provides the majority of Australian Government funding for state schools. Its objectives include promoting social inclusion in schools and reducing the educational disadvantage of children, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The **Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities National Partnership** (2009–2015) funds reforms to improve student engagement, educational attainment and wellbeing in participating schools. Special emphasis is given to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Linked to this reform area is funding of \$2.41 million in 2009–2011 for the Queensland Government's Let's Stay Put Project which assists schools in Central, North and South East Queensland to work with highly mobile students.

The **Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership** (2009–2015) funds reforms to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are not achieving the same outcomes as non-Indigenous students. Key reform areas include effective and evidence-based teaching, strong school leadership, as well as monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed. In 2009–2010, the Australian Government will invest \$41.6 million in literacy and numeracy reforms in Queensland schools.

The **Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership** (2009–2013) funds reforms that include assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to enter the education workforce. It also funds incentives for high performing educators to work in schools with high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as well as provide support to teachers working in these schools.

The **Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership** (2009–2013) has an objective to develop a skilled and work ready Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce by increasing the educational attainment and engagement of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. It will fund careers and transition services for secondary students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It aims to at least halve the gap in Indigenous Year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020.



The **Closing the Gap Indigenous Education Strategy** replaces Partners for Success as the overarching strategy on Indigenous education in Queensland. The strategy aims to halve the gap in Year 3 reading and numeracy by 2012, close the gap in student attendance by 2013 and close the gap in Year 12 retention by 2013. The strategy is based on the view that a small number of targeted service lines will drive the transformational changes necessary to achieve the required improvements in Indigenous education. The strategy aims to complement ‘mainstream’ education and training initiatives, with targeted local and regional interventions that evidence and experience indicate will improve attendance, retention and attainment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The strategy will help schools create an environment of high expectations and promotes the priority that every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving.

The evidence

Literacy and numeracy

Percentage of students at or above the national minimum standard in reading, writing and numeracy, Years 3, 5, 7 and 9

Sound literacy and numeracy skills are critical to engagement in further education and economic activity and have been shown to be linked to positive health and wellbeing outcomes.²³

The literacy and numeracy outcomes presented in this report are based on results from the 2008 and 2009 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The first year of NAPLAN testing was 2008 and these data cannot be directly compared to outcomes from state-based testing conducted up until 2007.

²³ Zubrick, S.R., Silburn, S.R., De Maio, J.A., Shepherd, C., Griffin, J.A., Dalby, R.B., Mitrou, F.G., Lawrence, D.M., Hayward, C., Pearson, G., Milroy, H., Milroy, J. and Cox, A., 2006, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.

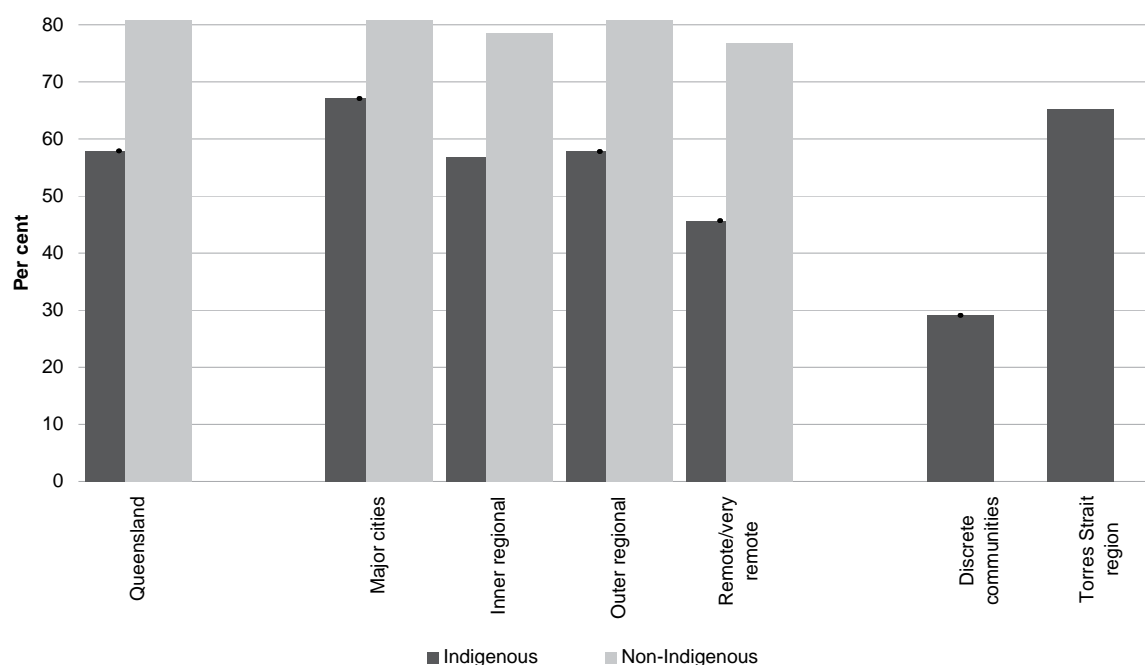
In Queensland in 2009:

- the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students estimated to be achieving test scores at or above the national minimum standard was markedly lower than that of non-Indigenous students in all learning areas, and for all grades tested (the proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving the national minimum standard ranged from 59.5 to 80.2 per cent compared with 87.1 to 95.9 per cent for non-Indigenous students - see Table A3)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student scores decreased significantly with remoteness for all learning areas tested and for all grades, with differences of up to 35 percentage points in the proportion of students with test results at or above the national minimum standard between metropolitan and very remote areas (see Table A4)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 7 and 9 students generally achieved test scores equivalent to, or lower than, their non-Indigenous peers two grades lower:
 - › the mean scale scores achieved by Year 9 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in each learning area were less than the scores achieved by Year 7 non-Indigenous students, for example, 506.4 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 9 students in reading, compared with 536.9 for Year 7 non-Indigenous students (see Table A3)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were less likely than non-Indigenous students to have achieved scores in the highest band in each grade and learning area. For example, less than one per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 scored in the highest possible numeracy band, compared with 4.0 to 8.4 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

Statewide, mean scale scores for reading for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Year 3 students increased significantly in 2009 compared with 2008 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: 327.9 compared with 309.5, non-Indigenous students: 390.0 compared with 375.9 - see Table A3). This was the only

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Figure 2. Proportion of 20-24 year olds having attained at least a Year 12 certificate or equivalent, Queensland, 2006.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006. Note: for technical reasons, remoteness regions were extracted using ABS remoteness classifications, rather than the most populous classification, hence regions are not directly comparable to those reported for other indicators.

significant increase in mean scale scores evident across all Year levels and these learning areas for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Participation Rates in NAPLAN Testing

In Queensland in 2009:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were more likely (from 2.1 to 3.1 times) to be absent from NAPLAN testing than non-Indigenous students for all learning areas and grades.

Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates

In 2006, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders aged 20-24 years:²⁴

- were less likely to have attained a Year 12 certificate or equivalent than non-Indigenous persons of the same age (57.9 per cent compared with 84.1 per cent - see Figure 2)
- had rates of attainment that were lower in the remote/very remote areas than in regional areas and major cities (ranging from 45.6 per cent in remote/very remote areas to 67.1 per cent in major cities - see Figure 2).

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey reported that between 2002 and 2008 there was an increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders aged 20-24 years whose highest year of school completion is Year 12 or equivalent (35.1 per cent in 2002 and 43.0 per cent in 2008). There was also an increase for non-Indigenous Queenslanders (from 71.2 per cent in 2002 to 77.7 per cent in 2008).

²⁴ Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006.



Queensland Certificate of Education

The Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) is Queensland's senior schooling qualification. It is a school-based qualification awarded to young people who are eligible at the completion of the senior phase of learning, usually at the end of Year 12.

In 2008, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 completing students:²⁵

- were significantly less likely than their non-Indigenous peers to be awarded a QCE (41.2 per cent or 608 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students compared with 77.9 per cent or 30,478 non-Indigenous students - see Table A5)
- were proportionately more likely to be awarded a QCE if from major cities (52.2 per cent) than from remote/very remote areas (30.2 per cent - see Table A5)
- were less likely to meet the numeracy and literacy requirements of the QCE than their non-Indigenous peers (see Table A5)
- were more likely to finish Year 12 with no qualifications (26 per cent or 384 students) than non-Indigenous students (9.4 per cent or 3,680 students - see Table A5)²⁶
- were more likely to have been awarded a VET or SAT qualification (i.e. a certificate or pass on a module) (62.3 per cent or 919 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students compared with 52.0 per cent or 20,332 non-Indigenous students).

Proportion of overall position (OP) eligible students who received an OP of 1 to 15

An overall position (OP) is a student's statewide rank based on overall achievement in Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) approved subjects.

²⁵ Source: Queensland Studies Authority: Year 12 outcomes 2008. Students receiving a Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement and those with a home address outside of Queensland were excluded from the following analyses.

²⁶ Students were considered not to have gained any Year 12 qualifications if they were not awarded or did not complete the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), the Vocational Education and Training (VET), the School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship (SAT), or the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBD).

In 2008:²⁷

- 22.6 per cent of Year 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were eligible for an OP compared with 62.6 per cent of non-Indigenous students
- 44.3 per cent of OP eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students received an OP of 1 to 15 compared with 72.3 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

Retention

Apparent retention rates show the proportion of students who continue on through the schooling system. These rates give a broad indication of participation in schooling and education.

Apparent retention rates from Year 8 to Year 10

Over the period 1993–2008:²⁸

- apparent retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students increased from 83.6 per cent in 1993 to 95.8 per cent in 2008, while rates for non-Indigenous students were relatively stable (around 100 per cent - see Figure A7).

Apparent retention rates from Year 8 to Year 12

Over the period 1995–2008:²⁹

- apparent retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students increased from 44.8 per cent in 1995 to 60.5 per cent in 2008, while rates for non-Indigenous students were relatively stable, ranging from 77.7 per cent to 82.8 per cent (see Figure A8).

School attendance

There is a demonstrated relationship between school attendance and student outcomes. A decrease in Year 7 attendance rates from around 100 per cent to 70 per cent has been associated with a reduction of between 50 and 100

²⁷ Source: Queensland Studies Authority: Year 12 outcomes 2008.

²⁸ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *Schools Australia 2008*, cat. no. 4221.0, Canberra.

²⁹ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, *Schools Australia 2008*, cat. no. 4221.0, Canberra.

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points in reading, writing and numeracy mean scale scores on NAPLAN testing.³⁰

In 2008:³¹

- attendance rates for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students were relatively stable through primary school in all three schooling sectors (Catholic, independent and state schools), and then generally decreased from Year 8 to Year 10 (see Table A6)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance rates in state schools were consistently lower than those of non-Indigenous students in all regions (metropolitan, provincial, rural and remote) and Year levels. Differences in attendance rates ranged between 2.9 and 21.7 percentage points (see Table A7)
- the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous student attendance rates tended to increase over Years 8 to 10, most markedly in remote regions (see Table A7).

Attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students changed little from 2007–2008 in most grades and regions. Where change was evident, rates generally decreased, particularly in remote areas over the period 2007–2008.

Key Queensland Government actions to close the gap

Literacy and numeracy initiatives

The Australian Government has provided \$2.41 million over two years to the Queensland Government, working in conjunction with James Cook University, to implement the **Let's Stay Put** pilot program in 11 low-SES (socio-economic status) schools with a significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student population. The pilot is being implemented to

³⁰ *Closing the Gap Education Strategy*, 'Every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving', 2008, Queensland Government.

³¹ Source: Regional rates, Education Queensland, Corporate data warehouse, 2009; Catholic and Independent sectors, *National report on schooling in Australia, 2008*.

address three areas related to mobile students. These include the professional development of teachers to understand the needs of students, specific intervention strategies for mobile students, and case management of individual students. Addressing these specific areas will assist in improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for this student cohort.

In addition, a range of **literacy and numeracy initiatives** will be undertaken in the future as part of Queensland's implementation of the **Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Agreement**. A number of initiatives under this National Partnership have already commenced in Queensland, including:

- the equivalent of 91 full-time Literacy and Numeracy Coaches have been appointed and trained to support 175 state schools
- NAPLAN results have been released to schools via OneSchool to allow item level analysis statewide
- regional principal forums have been conducted statewide to drive literacy and numeracy implementation plans and focus on literacy Leadership in National Partnership schools
- literacy and numeracy parent engagement materials have been published online
- the Summer Schools Initiative was piloted in September 2009, which engages students to develop and build on fundamental literacy and numeracy skills.

Western Cape College – Aurukun, Kowanyama State School, Lockhart River State School, Tagai State College and Cherbourg State School have been included as partnership schools, and they will receive additional support and training as part of a range of capacity building strategies under the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership.

Encourage and maintain involvement in learning

In 2008/09, the Queensland Government invested \$2.5 million in the second year of the \$10 million **Indigenous Education Support Structures** pilot program, which aims to boost Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' attendance, achievement and school completion



levels by working with students, their teachers and families. During 2008/09, the pilot was rolled out to school cluster sites located in Mount Isa, Cairns, Charleville, Cunnamulla, Rockhampton and Moreton.

In addition, the **Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in Schools** framework offers strategies to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives across all areas of school practice, giving all students access to a balanced educational curriculum. Eleven professional development workshops were held to train school staff in 2008/09.

To help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to complete secondary schooling or higher education, the Queensland Government offers a number of initiatives and services, such as:

- scholarships under the **Indigenous Education to Employment Scheme**. These scholarships assist students to complete their secondary education from Years 10, 11 and 12 in their local communities. Mentoring, financial assistance and work experience are offered throughout the duration of this scholarship
- the **Transition Support Service** provides support to students from the Torres Strait, Cape York and Palm Island to make the transition from the primary phase of schooling in their home communities to secondary schooling in large metropolitan or urban areas - 245 students were supported in 2008
- the **Remote Area Teacher Education Program** (a partnership with James Cook University, Tropical North Queensland TAFE and local Indigenous communities) assists and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from rural and remote areas in Queensland to access tertiary education and train as teachers in their home communities
- Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries scientists are also engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander science students to introduce them to possible **career**

pathways in science and provide them with a hands-on learning experience.

The Queensland Government has also made a commitment to double the number of **School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship** commencements by December 2009 to a total of 12,400. In 2008, 803 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people commenced a School-based Apprenticeship and Traineeship, compared with 411 in 2006.