State, Territory, Commonwealth and New Zealand Ministers with responsibility for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, met in Melbourne on 14 March 1997 for the sixth meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. The meeting was chaired by the Hon. Fred Finch, MLA, Minister for Education and Training, Northern Territory, who was the Chair of MCEETYA for 1997. The main outcomes of the meeting are summarised below.

**Literacy and Numeracy**

Ministers made a commitment to achieving the national literacy and numeracy goals: *that every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write, and spell at an appropriate level* by endorsing a national plan which includes the comprehensive assessment of all students by teachers as early as possible in the first years of schooling. The purpose of early assessment is to ensure that the numeracy and literacy needs of all students are adequately addressed and to intervene as early as possible to address the needs of those students identified as at risk of not making adequate progress towards the national numeracy and literacy goals. The plan also aims to use rigorous State-based assessment procedures to assess students against the Year 3 benchmark for numeracy, reading, writing and spelling for 1998 onwards and against the Year 5 benchmark as soon as possible. States and Territories will work towards providing comparable data on student achievements in these areas in 1999 on 1998 results.

Ministers also adopted a new sub-goal: *that every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years* (recognising that a very small percentage of students suffer from severe educational disabilities) as a way of giving focus to the key elements of the national plan, and agreed to begin reporting against the sub-goal for each year from 1998.

**National strategy in schooling to prevent paedophilia and other forms of child abuse**

Ministers adopted a national strategy in schooling to prevent...
paedophilia and other forms of child abuse. Key elements of the strategy include:

• the implementation of effective child protection education as an integrated part of ongoing health and personal development programs within the context of whole school approaches to student welfare;

• a commitment to interagency collaboration in child protection facilitated by common goals;

• the maintenance of information by employing authorities regarding certain agreed categories of employees, past employees, or applicants refused employment, and the sharing of information about their category status with other education authorities, using confidential processes and common and agreed procedures;

• police record checks for applicants for employment in school-based positions; and

• mandatory notification, either by legislation or by employer direction, for all school-based staff, of suspected sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect.