

6 Focus on geographically isolated students

6.1 Definition

Fair access to the opportunities provided by education is a key objective for all Australian governments and working towards achieving that objective is central to the funding and delivery of educational services for all States. Children living in geographically isolated areas are acknowledged as a particular group for whom assistance must be specifically targeted in order to achieve educational equity.

As outlined in the *National Report on Schooling in Australia: 1995*, for some years prior to 1996 significant effort had been expended towards achieving a national approach to the classification of geographic location. It was believed that such an approach would help education providers to more equitably meet the needs of children whose education was perceived as disadvantaged as a result of geographic isolation, by enabling the more precise targeting of assistance. However, no conclusive national agreement was reached.

At the June 1995 MCEETYA Taskforce on School Statistics (TOSS) meeting, agreement was reached that the ABS definitions of 'metropolitan' and 'non-metropolitan' (cut-off population 100,000) would be used as an interim measure to establish national consistency.

DEETYA submitted a paper to the October 1996 TOSS meeting setting out some criteria for the development of a classification of geographic location. Further work was undertaken following that meeting, aimed at developing a more precise classification of geographic location for use in this report, for which geographically isolated students would be a focus area. Options canvassed and considered during this process included:

- the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) developed and used by the ABS, and from which stem the 'metropolitan/non-metropolitan' classifications adopted by TOSS, which facilitated the reporting of Census and survey data statistics according to type of geographic location;
- the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification developed by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE) and others, which sought to classify

locations according to an index of remoteness conceptualised in terms of low population density and long distances between towns and cities; and

- the Griffith Service Access Frame (GSAF), a statistical model used to quantify the disadvantage of rural populations in accessing educational services, based on the premise that access is directly related to population size, distance and economic resources.

Although significant progress has been made towards a long-term national approach to the categorisation of geographic location, discussion and evaluation remain incomplete. It has been agreed, however, that different factors may come into play depending on whether a definition is to be used for resource allocation purposes or for reporting on students and their outcomes.

For the purpose of this 1996 report, an agreement was reached that the term *geographically isolated students* would be equated with those students who attend schools which attract funding under the Commonwealth's Country Areas Programme (CAP). As a result of that decision, information reported by States which does not relate specifically to this group of schools and their students may have been omitted from this section of the report, or have been referred to only briefly in the final section of the *National Overview*.

Operating in 1996 as part of the NEPS, the provision of CAP funding is aimed at helping alleviate the educational disadvantages experienced by students living in isolated areas, arising as a result of their restricted access to social, cultural and educational activities and services. The program seeks to ensure that country students have equitable access to quality education, intended to help them to achieve participation rates and outcomes at least equal to students in urban areas.

CAP funding enables resources to be shared, technology to be used to deliver support services to remote schools, students to take part in educational, social and cultural activities, and curriculum to be delivered especially to suit the needs of country children living in isolation. Since 1994, this funding program has been part of the NEPS, but from 1997 will operate as a separately identified element within the Special Learning Needs Programme.

The CAP has been both inter-systemic and community-based in its approach, with its target the improvement of educational opportunities, participation, learning outcomes and personal development of primary and secondary students in country areas in both government and non-government schools.

Table 36. Number of schools eligible for CAP funding and total number of schools, by category (and non-government affiliation) and level of school, by State, 1996

	<i>Schools eligible for CAP funding</i>				<i>All schools</i>			
	<i>Government</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Government</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>All</i>
New South Wales								
Primary	160	35	1	196	1,648	421	104	2,173
Secondary	21	0	0	21	388	130	23	541
Combined prim/sec	32	3	1	36	65	33	125	223
Special	0	0	0	0	85	6	25	116
Total	213	38	2	253	2,186	590	277	3,053
Victoria								
Primary	253	41	3	297	1,297	384	60	1,741
Secondary	34	4	0	38	281	93	17	391
Combined prim/sec	25	1	0	26	39	10	101	150
Special	2	0	0	2	83	6	8	97
Total	314	46	3	363	1,700	493	186	2,379
Queensland								
Primary	165	25	1	191	997	191	47	1,235
Secondary	18	2	1	21	189	64	17	270
Combined prim/sec	43	1	0	44	76	15	74	165
Special	0	0	0	0	52	0	2	54
Total	226	28	2	256	1,262	270	138	1,670
South Australia								
Primary	52	3	2	57	482	76	47	605
Secondary	2	0	0	2	82	14	11	107
Combined prim/sec	48	0	0	48	66	17	25	108
Special	0	0	0	0	21	2	2	25
Total	102	3	2	107	651	107	85	845
Western Australia								
Primary	126	8	2	136	510	107	42	659
Secondary	12	1	0	13	97	26	11	134
Combined prim/sec	34	2	6	47	95	15	52	162
Special	0	0	0	0	62	1	1	64
Total	172	11	8	196	764	149	106	1,019
Tasmania (c)								
Primary	23	2	0	25	150	26	10	186
Secondary	2	0	0	2	41	6	2	49
Combined prim/sec	14	0	0	14	27	6	19	52
Special	0	0	0	0	11	0	1	12
Total	39	2	0	41	229	38	32	299
Northern Territory								
Primary	63	1	0	64	88	7	8	103
Secondary	4	0	0	4	11	2	2	15
Combined prim/sec	29	0	0	29	39	(a)6	2	47
Special	1	0	0	1	7	0	0	7
Total	97	1	0	98	145	15	12	172
Australian Capital Territory (b)								
Primary	0	0	0	0	67	22	1	90
Secondary	0	0	0	0	26	5	1	32
Combined prim/sec	0	0	0	0	1	3	8	12
Special	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5
Total	0	0	0	0	99	30	10	139
Australia								
Primary	842	115	9	966	5,239	1,234	319	6,792
Secondary	93	7	1	101	1,115	340	84	1,539
Combined prim/sec	225	12	7	244	408	105	406	919
Special	3	0	0	3	326	15	39	380
Total	1,163	129	17	1,314	7,088	1,694	848	9,630

(a) Two of these schools are locally considered to be 'primary' only. However, they are included under the 'combined' category to maintain consistency with ABS definitions.

(b) ACT has no schools approved for CAP funding support. Therefore, under the agreed definition for this report equating geographic isolation with enrolment at CAP schools, no figures are included for the ACT.

(c) Includes Tasmanian School of Distance Education.

Sources: State departments of education, Commonwealth DEETYA and ABS Cat. No. 4221.0, *Schools, Australia*, 1996

6.2 Schools and teachers for geographically isolated children

Schools

Geographically isolated students attend CAP-funded schools, in all three school sectors, in all States except the Australian Capital Territory. However, as indicated in Table 36, non-government schools comprise less than ten per cent of CAP-funded schools, with the majority being Catholic.

CAP schools serve agricultural and pastoral areas, mining and fishing communities and other remote settlements. Many CAP schools serve as a key community focus for a large geographic area, with students often travelling long distances and for extended periods.

Less than 15 per cent of Australian schools received CAP funding support in 1996; their locations and prevalence reflecting the States' geography and settlement patterns. They included some eight per cent of New South Wales schools, almost 13 per cent of schools in South Australia and 15 per cent of those in Victoria. A lack of large urban centres, the predominance of small communities and scattered populations led to the inclusion of more than 40 per cent of Tasmanian schools and almost 60 per cent of those in the Northern Territory.

Because of their association with isolated locations and smaller country communities, CAP-funded schools were generally relatively small, widely distributed throughout the States and mostly primary or combined primary/secondary schools. Nationally, some 61.3 per cent of government CAP schools had less than 100 student enrolments and a further 25.7 per cent had less than 300. Over 80 per cent of independent CAP schools and almost 60 per cent of the Catholic CAP schools had less than 100 enrolments. All independent CAP schools and 96 per cent of the Catholic CAP schools were below 300 enrolments.

Teachers

The States generally faced greater difficulties in staffing isolated schools in 1996 than in staffing schools in capital cities or other urban areas. This was particularly true of subject areas where demand was high and teachers were able to be more selective in accepting teaching appointments. Senior secondary science and mathematics presented special difficulties, and provision of teachers for short-term contracts in isolated schools was a concern for some States.

Historically, country teaching has been characterised by a rapid turnover of staff in localities viewed unfavourably by prospective teachers, often because of their geographic isolation. This was reflected in many of the CAP schools, with teachers commonly serving only minimum periods of time before transferring.

While staff turnover was often a concern because it tended to replace existing teachers with staff who had fewer years of teaching experience, it led to the appointment of young teachers bringing new ideas, vitality and creativity to their teaching. For many of those teachers, the sense of social and professional isolation was often particularly difficult and a contributing factor to the problem of turnover itself.

Some States reported the generally younger age of teachers in their geographically isolated schools, but lack of limited specific information made it impossible to reach firm conclusions about the age profile of teachers. As was the case with Australian teachers across all States and all school types, significantly more female than male teachers were teaching in geographically isolated schools in 1996.

Education authorities employed a range of initiatives to address difficulties in staffing schools in remote areas and to assist in overcoming problems associated with teacher turnover. Research was undertaken into identifying teacher needs and determining strategies to help attract and retain teachers in isolated schools. Programs to support and better skill teachers, foster teacher networks and promote the positive aspects of teaching in geographically isolated areas were also commonly established.

Despite the inherent difficulties stemming from distance and isolation, considerable attention was paid to the professional development needs of teachers in remote areas. Problems of teachers needing to travel long distances to participate in programs were often addressed by basing activities in rural centres. Electronic linking was also a common means of addressing the need of isolated teachers for professional contact and development.

Some programs assisted teachers in isolated schools to better address their students' needs. In Queensland, for example, the Special Program Schools Scheme (SPSS) provided funds for 75 schools serving geographically isolated students, with initiatives including:

- quality professional development to challenge teachers' assumptions about poverty and education in rural and isolated areas and enhance teaching and classroom practices;

- support for teachers and schools to develop programs relevant and responsive to local needs;
- intervention to support literacy and numeracy; and
- skilling teachers to support students' learning.

The programs which most directly addressed the difficulties inherent in staffing isolated schools, however, were those providing a range of significant incentives for teachers to move to and remain in designated schools. For example:

- in Queensland, the Remote Area Incentive Scheme provided funding to benefit some 2,500 teachers living and working in isolated areas of the State;

- the Remote Teaching Service (RTS) in Western Australia offered teachers free accommodation, the transport of additional effects, preferential transfer and long service leave rights and substantial extra salary, in return for a commitment to remain at the school to which they were appointed for three years; and

- in South Australia, incentives provided to encourage teachers to transfer to and remain in isolated schools included a guaranteed right of return to the metropolitan area after four years teaching (three years in certain designated schools), the payment of a study allowance and extended paid leave (up to one year) following periods of continuous service in designated schools.

Table 37. Students (FTE) (a) enrolled at schools eligible for CAP funding, by category (and non-government affiliation), level of education and by State, 1996

	<i>Students - CAP funded schools</i>					<i>Students - all schools</i>		
	<i>Govt</i>	<i>Non-government schools</i>			<i>All</i>	<i>Govt</i>	<i>Non-govt</i>	<i>All</i>
		<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Indep</i>	<i>Total</i>				
New South Wales								
Primary	17,633	3,654	62	3,716	21,349	452,117	159,571	611,688
Secondary	9,668	184	13	197	9,865	308,920	145,812	454,733
Total	27,301	3,838	75	3,913	31,214	761,037	305,383	1,066,420
Victoria								
Primary	22,971	4,351	142	4,493	27,464	303,960	132,101	436,061
Secondary	12,918	920	0	920	13,838	213,922	127,385	341,307
Total	35,889	5,271	142	5,413	41,302	517,883	259,485	777,368
Queensland								
Primary	23,264	3,285	121	3,406	26,670	266,343	78,852	345,195
Secondary	8,820	421	34	455	9,275	147,287	76,678	223,965
Total	32,084	3,706	155	3,861	35,945	413,630	155,531	569,160
South Australia								
Primary	9,475	232	217	449	9,924	120,690	40,657	161,345
Secondary	4,171	0	0	0	4,171	59,466	28,230	87,696
Total	13,646	232	217	449	14,095	180,156	68,887	249,043
Western Australia								
Primary	14,609	1,253	336	1,589	16,198	145,837	43,262	189,099
Secondary	6,184	317	127	444	6,628	80,132	38,873	119,005
Total	20,793	1,570	463	2,033	22,826	225,969	82,135	308,104
Tasmania (b)								
Primary	3,642	253	0	253	3,895	36,100	11,113	47,212
Secondary	1,914	0	0	0	1,914	27,616	10,301	37,917
Total	5,556	253	0	253	5,809	63,715	21,414	85,129
Northern Territory								
Primary	8,808	300	0	300	9,108	20,203	4,901	25,104
Secondary	2,329	0	0	0	2,329	7,981	2,842	10,823
Total	11,137	300	0	300	11,437	28,184	7,743	35,927
Australian Capital Territory (c)								
Primary	0	0	0	0	0	22,431	10,511	32,942
Secondary	0	0	0	0	0	17,547	10,899	28,446
Total	0	0	0	0	0	39,978	21,410	61,397
Australia								
Primary	100,402	13,328	878	14,206	114,608	1,367,680	480,966	1,848,646
Secondary	46,004	1,842	174	2,016	48,020	862,860	441,021	1,303,892
Total	146,406	15,170	1,052	16,222	162,628	2,230,541	921,987	3,152,538

(a) Since FTE figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between the sums of component items and totals.

(b) Tasmanian Country Areas and Disadvantaged Schools funding for 1996 was amalgamated into one program and in terms of expenditure it is not possible to distinguish between the two. For the purposes of this table only, data has been compiled on the number of schools and students which would have been funded under the normal application of CAP eligibility criteria.

(c) ACT has no schools approved for CAP funding support. Therefore, under the national definition agreed for this report, equating geographic isolation with enrolment at CAP schools, no figures are included for the ACT.

Sources: State departments of education, MCEETYA, *National Schools Statistics Collection, 1996*, Commonwealth DEETYA and ABS Cat. No. 4221.0, *Schools, Australia, 1996*

6.3 Students attending CAP funded schools

A total of 162,628 FTE students were enrolled in CAP-funded schools in 1996, equivalent to some 5.2 per cent of the total 3,152,538 FTE students attending Australian schools. Of that total number, 146,406 FTE students or some 90 per cent of those attending CAP schools were enrolled at government schools. A further 15,170 FTE students (9.3 per cent of the CAP school total) attended Catholic schools and 1,052 FTE students (0.6 per cent of the total) attended independent schools. 114,608 FTE students (70.5 per cent of CAP school enrolments) were primary students.

There were significant differences between the States, in terms of both the percentage of total students attending CAP schools and the relative levels of enrolment in school sectors, although in all States government schools provided for the great majority of enrolments in isolated schools and independent schools for the smallest share of the three sectors. Table 37, for example, reveals that:

- in the Northern Territory, the least populous of the States with CAP schools, the percentage of total students (31.8 per cent) receiving their education through CAP schools was several times higher than the percentage in any of the other States; and
- New South Wales, the most populous of the States with CAP schools, had the smallest percentage of total students (2.9 per cent) receiving their education through CAP schools.

Indigenous students comprised a significantly larger percentage of the enrolments in government CAP schools than was the case in other schools. Around 15 per cent of those attending government CAP schools were Indigenous students, while they comprised marginally less than two per cent of students attending all government schools nationally. Within individual States, Indigenous student enrolments ranged from 66.5 per cent of students attending government CAP schools in the Northern Territory, to 1.6 per cent of CAP school enrolments in Victoria. Indigenous student enrolments were in the order of eight times the State average in CAP schools in both New South Wales and Queensland, but only 1.1 times the State average in Tasmania.

Limited reporting also indicated a higher percentage of students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds enrolled in CAP schools than was the case for students enrolled in non-CAP schools.

6.4 Issues of access, participation and outcomes

Student participation in education in isolated areas often requires additional time, effort and commitment on the part of students and their families than would generally be the case in an urban community. Additional physical effort and time are often required for travel between home and school in isolated areas; home study often has to compete with an appealing calendar of events occurring on the family property; and limited student numbers in most CAP schools make it more difficult for students to be involved in the range of experiences and options taken for granted by students and parents in a capital city and other urban locations.

Access

For the many widely-dispersed individual students living in geographic isolation, access to education appears to have been well served by distance education provisions available in each State. The range of courses available and the media and methodologies used to deliver those programs and to relate with the students and families involved, have done much to build on the strengths of isolated Australians and help them to achieve the desired educational outcomes.

Despite the generally small size of most CAP schools, State reports indicated a strong emphasis on providing students with a broad curriculum, supported by appropriate educational experiences, resources and staffing. There was generally a far more limited choice of school and school type than existed in larger urban and capital city locations.

Where conventional face-to-face programs were unable to meet the range of student needs and interests, students in isolated schools were assisted by means of distance education programs (as provided for individual students living in isolation) or through other innovative practices in using technology to deliver or to supplement educational services. These methodologies expanded student course options, but not always to the level taken for granted in large urban schools.

The application of electronic technology was initiated in many isolated schools across Australia, in both the government and non-government sectors, to address their isolation. Innovative practices included the provision of satellite programs for students and staff, the provision of access to the Internet and particularly to e-mail networks, and languages other than English (LOTE) access through telematics links with centres providing distance education.

As an example of the use of electronic technology to facilitate large-scale provision of materials, Victoria, through SOFNet, delivered high quality curriculum and professional development programs to schools, including those in geographically isolated locations. It was beamed live to classrooms via the Department's interactive educational television service. SOFNet was used by 91 per cent of schools, with 70 per cent doing so on a regular basis. Over 91,000 students were taught a language other than English through SOFNet and over 880 schools were enrolled in the Science and Technology Education in Primary Schools (STEPS) series on it.

Using a more individually-directed approach, the Internet provided material to assist teachers to improve student learning, access for students, teachers and parents to high quality education materials, and opportunities to join collaborative activities occurring at State, national and international levels. Even more personally focused, the use of e-mail by students in isolated schools enabled communication with peers and others with an ease and to an extent otherwise impossible.

Programs addressing disadvantage through restricted access to social, cultural and educational experiences included tours to regional and city cultural, social and sporting activities, excursions to regional and city schools, capital city visits, and the organisation of local visits by a range of performers and artists.

Initiatives were also devised to address the needs of particular groups of students. The Unicorn Project in Queensland, for example, was an independent school initiative supported as a means of targeting and providing learning opportunities for under-achieving gifted and talented students, with a specific focus on geographically isolated students. Indigenous students living in geographically isolated areas were the specific targets of a range of initiatives in different States, all seeking in some way to improve access to and participation in relevant educational programs.

Yet another approach was tried in Victoria, where the Department of Education had a service agreement in 1996 with a private education service provider to support rural schools. A number of developments across the Key Learning Areas (KLAs) provided curriculum enrichment for students and training and professional development for teachers in rural and isolated schools.

Students in isolated areas had a reasonable access to the primary years of schooling through Catholic primary schools but limited access to Catholic secondary schools

Year 9 students at Bwgcolman Community School, Palm Island, Queensland, record levels of erosion caused by a recent cyclone.

without boarding away from home. Catholic boarding schools provided a wide range of programs to support geographically isolated students.

Although relatively few independent schools were counted among the CAP-funded schools in 1996, schools in the independent sector adopted a variety of special programs to encourage participation by geographically isolated students. Among the examples reported were:

- the provision of scholarships, boarding bursaries and other financial assistance;
- isolated students were welcomed in boarding houses for short stays to encourage participation in extracurricular activities;
- some students were served through homestay or host family arrangements which provided personal attention; and
- students were encouraged to participate in excursions to experience cultural and sporting activities not available in their home communities.

Subject availability and choice

A range of general information has already been furnished about subject availability and the use of technology and resources, particularly by way of distance education, to improve student participation, access and outcomes. A limited number of States provided specific detail about the subjects undertaken by students.

Similarly little was reported by way of detailed attendance rate information, and the State reporting cannot readily be compared because of the nature of the data provided.

There was some agreement that schools servicing communities with high levels of itinerancy were likely to experience lower attendance rates than other schools. Isolated schools catering for large numbers of Indigenous students were also likely to witness student mobility and absence from school based on community cultural requirements. Attendance at schools servicing mining or fishing communities was affected by the peripatetic and/or seasonal nature of those industries, partly associated with family transience and partly with the association of high potential incomes with occupations open to those with limited education.

Aboriginal studies in a South Australian geographically isolated independent school.

Reporting from New South Wales indicated that students from CAP schools participating in the HSC were offered a variety of English, mathematics and science courses, ranging from general level courses to more challenging 3 unit and 4 unit courses. The fastest growing HSC courses in isolated schools included:

- 2 Unit Engineering Science (with nearly a three-fold increase from 1995 levels);
- Computing Studies - General;
- 1 and 2 Unit Music (Board) Course;
- 2 Unit Biology;
- 2 Unit Geography; and
- Mathematics in Practice.

A Queensland report on participation rates in year 12 subject areas among students in government schools indicated that:

- participation by isolated year 12 students was much higher for the science subject area, lower for subjects in health and physical education, social sciences and the arts, but much the same for mathematics and English; and
- gender differences in isolated schools largely reflected those in non-isolated schools, except there was a tendency towards lower participation rates for boys in business education and social sciences.

Attendance

Detailed information on attendance patterns of students enrolled in CAP schools was not provided by all States.

From the limited extent of quantified attendance information, New South Wales reported that the attendance rates of students below the age of 15 who were enrolled at geographically isolated schools (91.4 per cent attendance) were lower than the State average (93.2 per cent). There was very little variation between the attendance rates of senior students attending CAP schools when compared to the State average, and no significant gender difference in attendance rates in either group.

Reporting from South Australia provided attendance information related not to student ages, but to educational levels. Among primary students, attendance rates were definitely lower in CAP schools (90.3 per cent attendance) than across all primary schools (93.1 per cent attendance). Among secondary students there was, as found in New South Wales, little difference between the attendance rates for students in CAP schools and rates for the State as a whole, although in South Australia attendance rates for this group were marginally above the State average, while in New South Wales they were marginally lower.

Remaining until year 12

The proportion of country students not completing year 12 schooling was of general concern and was the target of specific comment from several States. In each instance where information was provided, the apparent retention rate to year 12 was markedly lower than the average for that State, although no evidence has been forthcoming to suggest that country students are inherently less able than their counterparts in large urban areas.

Western Australia reported that a 1993 inquiry had found retention rates were highest in the Perth metropolitan area and showed a progressive decline through small rural cities,

other rural areas, large remote towns to other remote areas. Due to their locations in the more isolated areas of the State, CAP schools were thus experiencing retention rates at the bottom of the range for the State.

In addition to the lower rate of overall retention through the high school years, the student dropout rate between the end of year 10 and the end of year 12 was also a focus of concern for that inquiry. The dropout rate was between 50 and 75 per cent for country schools (including, but not exclusively, the State's CAP schools), while it was approximately 25 per cent in metropolitan Perth.

Information from New South Wales indicated that changes in retention rates in CAP schools, which are evident from one year to another, approximately paralleled those for the full student population. Specifically within CAP schools, there were small increases in retention for both boys and girls from 1995 to 1996, with the retention rate for girls in CAP schools still significantly higher than for boys.

Reporting from Tasmania focused on research in 1996 indicating that the retention of students who were geographically isolated continued to be of concern. Tasmania indicated that there are plans to address retention concerns by means of programs developing stronger links between school, training and work. The key element of the planned approach will be a focus on local industries so that students do not have to leave home. Research had found this to be a major issue in the retention of isolated students at school.

Student outcomes

There were acknowledged disadvantages associated with accessing schooling in an isolated area, such as the inability to participate in the same range of extracurricular experiences available to metropolitan students, or interact with large populations of peers. However, State opinion was divided on the impact of geographic isolation on the outcomes for students.

New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia each reported a lower level of student performance in Statewide testing for students attending CAP-funded schools than for the student population as a whole. Reporting was based on the 1996 Basic Skills Test (BST) in New South Wales, the 1996 Year 6 Test, as well as year 12 performance, in Queensland and BST results in South Australia.

In contrast, Victoria indicated that there was no consistent pattern of lowered performance associated with attending a geographically isolated school in the primary years.

In those States where there was a lower level of performance reported in respect of students attending CAP schools, the difference between performance levels of students attending CAP schools and other students was generally small.

Reporting from the Queensland Catholic sector, however, indicated a significantly lower level of performance in the Year 6 Test in the areas of reading, writing and number.

Relatively little research was reported in the area of seeking to determine the directness of any link between student performance and geographic isolation. While there is certainly some evidence to support perceptions of lower average levels of student performance among those attending geographically isolated schools, factors other than isolation may be more responsible.

Limited information was provided by States in respect of the post-schooling destination of students from geographically isolated schools. However, New South Wales indicated that half of the isolated students who sat for the 1995 HSC went on to further education or training in 1996.

6.5 Beyond CAP schools

While this report has focused on schools receiving CAP support, that program does not represent the full extent of the 1996 commitment to the educational support of students living in geographic isolation. Other support programs existed and considerable financial, human and physical resources were committed at Commonwealth and State levels to benefit students undertaking their education in rural and remote areas. In many instances, students attending isolated schools in 1996 had their educational opportunities enriched through input from a number of those programs.

National programs

To help meet the needs of the more isolated and socioeconomically disadvantaged rural students undertaking secondary education in country areas, particularly in years 11 and 12, the Commonwealth's Capital Grants Programme supported the provision and improvement of student hostel accommodation. To be eligible, the student's home location, or that of the hostel, had to fall within the DPIE standard classification "isolated, remote or agricultural", equating to a non-metropolitan zone with a local population of less than 10,000.

In terms of direct financial assistance, the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme was a Commonwealth program providing help to the families of children who,

Table 38. Year 12 completion rates (a), by locality (b), by State and gender, 1996 (p) (per cent)

Part A:	<i>Urban</i>			<i>Rural</i>			<i>Remote (c)</i>			<i>Total (d)</i>		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
New South Wales	64	72	69	51	66	58	52	74	62	61	72	66
Victoria	64	78	71	51	71	60	38	65	51	60	76	68
Queensland	59	68	63	59	69	64	60	73	66	59	68	63
South Australia	60	71	65	49	69	58	45	55	50	57	70	63
Western Australia	57	69	63	40	60	49	39	49	44	53	66	59
Tasmania	71	87	79	49	71	59	59	67	63	58	77	67
Northern Territory	43	45	44	55	64	59	18	28	23	32	38	35
Australian Capital Territory	86	87	86	(e)	(e)	(e)	(e)	(e)	(e)	86	87	86
Australia	63	73	68	52	68	60	44	57	51	59	72	65

Part B:	<i>Metropolitan</i>			<i>Non-metropolitan</i>			<i>Total (c)</i>		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
New South Wales	64	72	69	51	66	58	61	72	66
Victoria	64	78	71	50	71	60	60	76	68
Queensland	59	68	63	59	69	64	59	68	63
South Australia	60	71	65	48	68	58	57	70	63
Western Australia	57	69	63	40	56	48	53	66	59
Tasmania	71	87	79	49	71	59	58	77	67
Northern Territory	43	45	44	22	32	27	32	38	35
Australian Capital Territory	86	87	86	(e)	(e)	(e)	86	87	86
Australia	63	73	68	51	67	58	59	72	65

Part C:	<i>Capital city</i>			<i>Rest of State</i>			<i>Total (d)</i>		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
New South Wales	68	78	73	50	63	56	61	72	66
Victoria	64	78	71	51	72	61	60	76	68
Queensland	61	70	65	57	67	62	59	68	63
South Australia	60	71	65	48	68	58	57	70	63
Western Australia	57	69	63	40	56	48	53	66	59
Tasmania	71	87	79	49	71	59	58	77	67
Northern Territory	43	45	44	22	32	27	32	38	35
Australian Capital Territory	86	87	86	(e)	(e)	(e)	86	87	86
Australia	64	75	70	51	65	58	59	72	65

(p) Preliminary.

(a) Figures are estimates only. They express the number of year 12 completions (year 12 certificates issued by State education authorities) as a proportion of the estimated population that could attend year 12 in that calendar year.

(b) Definitions are based on Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification (1995) developed by the DPIE. Urban/metropolitan includes Darwin, Townsville/Thuringowa and Queanbeyan.

(c) Remote comprised approximately three per cent of the 15-19 year old population in 1996 and, as a result, relatively small changes in the estimated resident population or in the numbers of completions annually can lead to apparently substantial changes in the completion rates from year to year.

(d) These totals differ slightly from the State totals in Table 51 because there are postcodes which do not attract an SES value. These include postcodes at GPOs, postcodes indicating roadside mailboxes, and developing areas which have recently been given postcodes.

(e) All of the ACT is defined as urban.

Source: Commonwealth DEETYA (derived from data provided by State education authorities and the ABS)

because of geographic isolation or disability, were obliged to live away from home to attend school, to study by correspondence or to live in a second family home to attend school. There were 2,905 primary students, of whom 70.4 per cent lived at least 56 kilometres from the nearest appropriate government school, receiving support under the scheme in 1996. At the secondary level, 6,917 students received AIC Scheme support, with 77.6 per cent living beyond the 56 kilometre distance from school. Slightly more boys than girls received support through the AIC Scheme in 1996.

Geographically isolated Indigenous students were also able to receive funding support through ABSTUDY to enable them to continue their secondary education. Although this scheme did not base its support on the isolated locations of recipients, around 30 per cent of beneficiaries were from remote areas, with another 38 per cent from rural areas.

The Education Network Australia (EdNA), a national process of cooperation and collaboration which aims to maximise the benefits of information technology for Australian education and training, had considerable benefits for geographically isolated students. One of its key components, the EdNA Directory Service, is a World Wide Web site providing a 'one-stop shop' directory of on-line information of broad educational interest. The EdNA Directory Service, available free of charge on the Internet, permits access to quality curriculum resource material which would not otherwise be available to rural and remote students. EdNA also covers other aspects of technology in education, including satellite communication, CD-ROMs, television and audioconferencing, all of which offer benefits for isolated students.

State-based initiatives

Most State-level initiatives addressing concerns about the education of geographically isolated students appeared to focus on issues of access to appropriate education programs providing choices for students. Access to educational programs and support for geographically isolated students was achieved by such means as:

- the maintenance of local schools, even in circumstances when they were very small and their operation may have been uneconomic using other criteria;
- the provision of distance education courses to individual students living in isolation and, in many circumstances, to support and extend the curriculum options available to students attending other isolated schools, often using computer-based communications technology;

- the provision of additional staff to small country schools to provide curriculum balance and flexibility;
- the extension of incentive schemes to benefit teachers living in isolated areas, benefiting students by attracting teachers in a wider range of subject areas and with a higher level of teaching experience to move to and remain longer in small communities;
- the use of electronic technology (including Internet access, telematics and satellite links) to provide access to specialist subject offerings, to information, to experienced teachers and to student interaction;
- the provision of student welfare, special education, student counselling, itinerant teacher services, equity and curriculum from district-based personnel;
- encouraging the provision of sufficient numbers of appropriate boarding places and providing support for students compelled by geographic isolation to board away from home in order to attend school, including the pursuit of close links between boarding schools and home communities and families; and
- the contracting of private education providers to provide support and curriculum enrichment to rural schools.

Specific additional provisions were reported in a number of States to support the education of Indigenous students enrolled at geographically isolated schools. They included:

- the employment of Indigenous teachers, teacher aides and other Indigenous people to foster improved student attendance, and to support homework and resource centres and other programs;
- the development of Indigenous language and culture programs, with input from community language speakers and elders;
- the development and implementation of programs which fostered parent involvement and participation in school communities and education programs;
- the provision of special English language and numeracy programs, as well as specially-focused ESL help for Indigenous students with an Indigenous language or dialect as their first language; and
- special encouragement and support to enable Indigenous students to complete year 12.

Some other issues of major concern in respect of isolated students were difficult for States to address effectively. The

Table 39. Year 12 completion rates (a), by locality (b) and gender, Australia, 1991–1996 (per cent)

Year	Urban			Rural			Remote (c)			Total		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
1991	66	77	71	61	76	68	50	64	57	63	75	69
1992	65	74	70	61	74	67	52	65	58	64	74	69
1993	66	76	71	60	74	67	54	64	58	64	75	69
1994	66	76	71	57	71	64	51	65	58	63	74	68
1995 (r)	64	75	69	54	70	62	46	59	52	61	73	67
1996 (p)	63	73	68	52	68	60	44	57	51	59	72	65

(r) Revised.

(p) Preliminary - subject to finalisation of 1996 estimated resident population.

(a) These figures are estimates only. They express the number of year 12 completions (year 12 certificates issued by State education authorities) as a proportion of the estimated population that could attend year 12 in that calendar year.

(b) Definitions of urban, rural and remote in this table are based on Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification (1995) developed by the DPIE. Urban includes Darwin, Townsville/Thuringowa and Queanbeyan. These location classifications are not directly comparable to 'geographic isolation' as defined in this report in terms of eligibility for CAP funding support.

(c) Remote comprised approximately three per cent of the 15–19 year old population in 1995 and, as a result, relatively small changes in the estimated resident population or in the numbers of completions annually can lead to apparently substantial changes in the completion rates from year to year.

Source: Commonwealth DEETYA (derived from data provided by State education authorities and the ABS)

limitations of post-school options, for example, were reported by a number of States, with decreasing local options for employment and limited options for post-secondary education (without moving to a capital city or other large urban centre) being the major concerns. The lack of post-school options was also seen as contributing to the decreasing retention of senior secondary students.

Another particularly intransigent problem, for which no general solution has been suggested, was the itinerancy that characterises both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in some areas, the former for cultural and the latter for economic reasons, making their schooling discontinuous.

Student outcomes

While there was no 1996 collection of truly compatible national data on student outcomes according to geographic locations, data collected by State accreditation authorities provide a view of year 12 completion rates, sorted according to different geographical location criteria.

Although no in-depth analysis is possible from this information, it can be concluded, for example, that:

- the completion rates for girls exceeded the rate for boys in all geographic locations;
- metropolitan students generally out-performed non-metropolitan students; and

- for each State, completion rates for students in capital cities were greater than for students attending school elsewhere in their State; in some instances the difference was considerable.

It is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the relative completion rates of students living in remote areas from the data in Table 38. Although the mean completion rates for this group were certainly lower than the rates for both urban and rural students in four States, in the others they were higher than those of rural students and, in Queensland, the completion rate for remote students exceeded that for both other groups. In addition, the very limited number of students counted as remote under the definition used in Table 38 means great care must be exercised in undertaking any comparisons with that group.

In the same way, any comparisons over time involving the remote student category, as presented in Table 39, must also be undertaken with care. There is a clear general trend for urban students over the period 1991–96 to have higher year 12 completion rates than the other two groups and for rural students to have a higher completion rate than remote students. However, in terms of changes over time, it is possible to indicate only that there appears to be a slight downward trend in the completion rates for each of the three student groups in the period 1991–96. This trend is in line with the retention rate trends reported earlier in this report.