

## 7 Other equity issues and achievements

### 7.1 National Strategy for Equity in Schooling

The National Strategy for Equity in Schooling (NSES) was approved by Commonwealth and State Ministers in 1994 and released in 1995. It represents a national consensus on priorities, goals and expected outcomes for the identified priority student groups, supports the common and agreed priorities for action and provides the means to assess the nation's progress towards achieving those priorities.

The NSES was established to help ensure the provision of additional support and resources to improve the educational outcomes of six categories of students whose participation and range of educational outcomes were significantly lower than those for the population as a whole. Throughout 1996 there was a continuing national effort to provide the necessary support and assistance to students from each of the six categories of disadvantage identified by the NSES.

The students whose participation and range of educational outcomes are generally significantly lower than those of the population as a whole and who need additional support and resources to improve their educational outcomes are:

- students with disabilities, difficulties in learning and/or emotional or behavioural disorders;
- students at risk of dropping out of school;
- students from low SES backgrounds or living in poverty;
- Indigenous students;
- students from non-English speaking backgrounds who need assistance in the area of English as a second language; and
- students who are geographically isolated.

These six groups are not mutually exclusive and specific strategies are required to help counter the cumulative effects on students' learning of multiple disadvantage.

Of the six NSES student categories, the additional educational support provided for geographically isolated children, addressed through the previous section of this report, was the key focus for reporting on equity in 1996.

The NSES aims to improve access, participation and educational outcomes for students who are disadvantaged. In doing so, it seeks to enable all young Australians to share fairly in the benefits of a high-quality school system.

To help establish the pathway towards achieving the goals of improving access, participation and completion for all identified priority groups and maximising their outcomes, the NSES identifies five priority areas for strategic action:

- curriculum and assessment;
- teaching;
- awareness and commitment among the education community;
- supportive school environment; and
- optimal use of resources.

A review process was incorporated within the NSES, enabling its effectiveness to be assessed and nationally reported. To this end, as part of their commitment to the strategy, school authorities participate in annual reporting and monitoring of agreed performance measures consistent with the framework developed for the *National Report*.

### 7.2 Achieving gender equity goals

The *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* was introduced in 1987 to redress poor participation and performance of girls in secondary education generally, and particularly in mathematics and the sciences, which limited their post-school education, training and career options. The subsequent review of the policy led to the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97*.

Implementation of the National Action Plan was overseen by the National Advisory Committee on the Education of Girls and, more recently, by the Gender Equity Taskforce established by MCEETYA. The Commonwealth and States are represented on the Taskforce, along with non-government school authorities, parents and unions.

The Taskforce's report, *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, endorsed by MCEETYA in July 1996, identifies strategic areas and directions for action on understanding the process of construction of gender, curriculum, teaching and learning, violence and school culture, post-school pathways, and supporting change. The report provides a framework for systems and schools to report on school policies and practices in relation to these strategic directions.

### 7.3 Work towards defining equity target groups

Efforts during 1996 towards the further definition of target groups focused on geographically isolated students, in preparation for this *National Report*, as geographically isolated students had been identified as one of the 1996 focus areas. Additional work is required to achieve national agreement on a definition of geographic isolation that is capable of ready application (see Section 6 for details).

### 7.4 Expenditure on equity target groups

Expenditure by system and school authorities on equity target groups in each State included funding provided by the Commonwealth through elements of NEPS as summarised in Table 49. There was also significant additional expenditure from within system/authority resources on initiatives to benefit target group students.

Although some States and individual school sectors have been able to provide a breakdown of the additional expenditure applied to the education of target groups, compartmentalisation of funding in this manner was not possible for all authorities.

#### New South Wales

Continued efforts were made in government and non-government schools to increase access to, and participation in, the full range of schooling and educational experiences for students in targeted equity groups. The extent of that commitment in the government school sector is evident from the levels of additional expenditure devoted to those groups of students in 1996 by the New South Wales Department of School Education.

**Table 40. Expenditure on equity target groups as set out in NEPS agreements, government schools, New South Wales, 1996 (\$ million)**

Special education	339.3
Indigenous students	20.8
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds	73.8
Rural education	58.7
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	47.0
Other equity programs, including gender equity	6.9

Source: Department of School Education, NSW

#### Victoria

The School Global Budgets are the funds, either salary credits or cash payments, allocated to individual Victorian government schools for a year. These account for 90 per cent of the Department of Education's school education budget. Entitlements under elements are arrived at by formulae using quantitative information such as numbers of students as well as characteristics of schools and students.

There are six elements:

- core (comprising leadership and teaching, teaching support, premises and other costs);
- students with disabilities and impairments;
- students with special learning needs (literacy, students at risk and socioeconomically disadvantaged students);
- students speaking English as a second language;
- rurality (comprising additional staffing credits for small non-metropolitan schools) and isolation (additional payments for rural schools with high administrative costs); and
- priority programs (initiatives that are central to government priorities and are targeted at specific school communities; they include CAP funds).

**Table 41. School Global Budget funding, government schools, Victoria, 1996 (\$ million)**

<i>SGB component</i>	<i>Payments to schools</i>
Core	1,933.516
Disabilities and Impairments (a)	143.273
Special Learning Needs (b)	30.935
English as a Second Language (c)	34.155
Rurality and Isolation	24.798
Priority Programmes (d)	61.147
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,227.824</b>
(a)	Includes funding for special schools and students with disabilities in mainstream schools.
(b)	Includes socioeconomically disadvantaged, students at risk and literacy funding.
(c)	Includes funding for language schools and centres, and new arrivals, as well as support for ESL students in mainstream schools.
(d)	Includes funding from Commonwealth for Country Areas Programme and Koorie Educators (teacher aides).
Note:	There is additional expenditure on school education that is not included in the School Global Budget.

Source: Department of Education, Victoria

## Queensland

As part of a commitment from the Department of Education to maximising the educational outcomes for all students, significant levels of funding were made available from State government sources to support target groups of students in government schools. Funding from key Commonwealth programs was also directed towards improving outcomes for students in target groups.

Expenditure on target groups of students attending non-government schools in Queensland involved funding provided through a number of Commonwealth programs, as well as significant amounts from the resources of the schools themselves. Only the details of Commonwealth funds used by the schools to support target groups are available.

**Table 42. Additional expenditure on equity target groups (all sources), government schools, Queensland, 1996 (a) (\$ million)**

Students with disabilities	48.2
Students at risk	0.8
Indigenous students	11.8
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds	6.7
Disadvantaged gifted and talented students	0.2
Geographically isolated students	5.9
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	7.0

(a) These figures do not include State funding of special and distance education teaching at a higher average cost than in regular schools.

Source: Department of Education, Queensland

**Table 43. Expenditure from Commonwealth funds on target groups, non-government schools, Queensland, 1996 (\$ million)**

	<i>Catholic schools</i>	<i>Indep. schools</i>
Students with disabilities	0.4	n/a
Students at risk	0.2	0.1
Access - support and intervention	1.0	0.4
ESL students	1.6	0.3
Geographically isolated students	0.4	(a)
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	0.7	(a)
School language and literacy	0.2	0.4

(a) Expenditure less than \$0.1 million.

Source: Department of Education, Queensland

**Table 44. Expenditure on projects to benefit equity target groups, independent schools, South Australia, 1996 (\$'000)**

	<i>Project cost</i>	<i>C'wealth grant</i>
ESL - general	169	57
Special education support	401	135
Disadvantaged schools	31	26
Students at risk	39	32
Early literacy	15	12

Source: Department for Education and Children's Services, South Australia

## South Australia

In South Australian government schools, the Department for Education and Children's Services is committed to maximising educational outcomes for all students; this was one of the objectives driving the Department's operations in 1996, including the resourcing of schools. It is therefore difficult to calculate total funding of initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for specific subgroups over and above mainstream funding. The complexity is compounded by the absence of a common and agreed definition of 'equity funding', and by the reality that students in subgroups often encounter multiple educational disadvantage, making relative allocations difficult to ascertain.

Expenditure by independent schools in South Australia in support of programs to improve the outcomes of students in the target groups included funding provided by way of Commonwealth grants as well as significant additional spending. Among the target groups assisted, in excess of 1,100 students in 33 schools were provided with assistance under ESL General Support and more than 500 students in 77 schools were provided with Special Education Support.

In 1996, expenditure in Catholic schools to support equity initiatives amounted to some \$5.5 million. The key targets of this funding were special education (29 per cent of total) and programs providing ESL support (26 per cent).

## Western Australia

The Education Department met the special educational needs and interests of those students for whom the normal school environment or common curriculum is unavailable or inappropriate by means of alternative educational programs and learning experiences, and the provision of additional support, complementation or extension of the curriculum.

Commonwealth funding inputs to and student participation in targeted programs in government schools in 1996 are described in Table 45.

**Table 45. Commonwealth funds applied to equity target groups, government schools, Western Australia, 1996 (\$'000)**

	<i>Funds</i>	<i>Students</i>
Priority Schools Programme	6,013	52,267
Priority Country Areas Programme	2,393	23,612
Students with disabilities	473	5,070
Students at risk	529	292
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds	6,022	2,506
Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme	5,990	14,612

Source: Education Department of Western Australia

Some 13,800 students attending 283 Catholic schools were also assisted through initiatives funded through NEPS. Of those assisted, 74 per cent were primary students. The greatest number of students (5,762 students, or nearly 42 per cent of the total) benefited from initiatives under the DSP. A total of 4,921 students attending 60 schools were assisted through ESL General Support, while 1,931 students attending 16 schools were helped through the CAP.

The additional needs of target group students attending independent schools in Western Australia were partly met through Commonwealth NEPS funding (summarised in Table 49). Individual schools were required to provide significant additional funding from within their own resources to help address student needs within the target groups. Schools in country areas and those in lower socioeconomic areas found it especially difficult to fully address the needs of their students.

**Table 46. Administration of NEPS funding to assist target groups, independent schools, Western Australia, 1996 (\$'000)**

	<i>Funds allocated</i>
ESL students - two components	620
Disadvantaged schools	70
Students at risk	80
Country areas	125
Special education	674
Early literacy	48

Note: The figures above include both supplementation and three sector-based initiatives undertaken to support schools in the areas of ESL support, special education and early literacy support.

Source: Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia

## Tasmania

In 1996, the total funding available to NEPS target groups in government schools was \$85.6 million. Of this figure, the State contributed \$71.7 million and the Commonwealth \$13.9 million. The Commonwealth contribution comprised \$6.06 million in specific equity funding, together with \$22,000 for community languages, \$812,000 in IESIP funding, and \$66,098 in Vocational Education and Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme (VEGAS) funding. Commonwealth recurrent funding of \$6.9 million was specifically earmarked within the Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development's allocative mechanism for distribution to schools on the basis of socioeconomic disadvantage and rurality measures.

## Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Department of Education sought to ensure that students with special education needs and interests were able to fulfil their educational potential through the provision of significant additional financial support. Much of the funding to support the range of programs was provided through Commonwealth equity funding initiatives.

NEPS funding made available to the Catholic Education Council enabled initiatives in special education, schools support, ESL, disadvantaged schools and CAP to be implemented. Catholic Aboriginal schools continued to have access to NEPS funding through the Northern Territory government. Other cross-sector initiatives also supported students in Catholic schools.

Services for supporting targeted students through NEPS-funded programs continued in urban schools. The priorities set for the Catholic sector were those of the Commonwealth

**Table 47. Funding applied to special purpose programs according to NEPS guidelines, government schools, Northern Territory, (\$'000) 1996**

	<i>Funds administered</i>
Disadvantaged schools	1,284
Country areas	547
Projects of Territory-wide significance	139
Special education	739
ESL	926
Early literacy	129
Transition support	101
Students at risk	106

Source: Northern Territory Department of Education

*A visually impaired student reads from a book of Braille made by the Visually Impaired Resource Centre at Ludmilla, NT.*

Government, with an emphasis on the improvement of the literacy and numeracy levels of targeted students.

Funding support provided to independent schools assisted them to undertake a range of initiatives to help students in target groups, with a focus on students with disabilities, those with special needs, students at risk and students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

## Australian Capital Territory

In 1996, a total of \$27.3 million, including funds from both Commonwealth and State sources, was spent on equity programs in government schools. Table 48 summarises that expenditure.

A total of \$1.35 million was spent in Catholic schools on equity programs. Of that amount, the Commonwealth provided some \$1.1 million under several equity funding programs, while the Catholic Education Office contributed \$220,000 and the ACT government provided some \$16,000 specifically to assist students with disabilities.

In independent schools, Commonwealth funding of \$16,600 was used to assist target group students. Of that amount, \$11,900 was provided to assist six students with disabilities at two independent schools.

## 7.5 Achieving equity goals for students in target groups

### Students with disabilities

In 1996, under NEPS, the Commonwealth initiated the Transition Support - Special Schools Component for non-government special schools, to assist schools where the majority of students with disabilities are residential at facilities administered by the school. This initiative aimed to assist with the recurrent costs of providing programs that

**Table 48. Funding for equity programs (all sources), government schools, Australian Capital Territory, 1996 (\$ million)**

	<i>C'wealth</i>	<i>ACT govt</i>
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds	0.9	1.8
Students with disabilities	0.8	12.3
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	0.1	1.1
Students at risk	(a)	8.7
Indigenous students	0.4	0.3
Isolated students	(a)	(a)
Girls and boys	(a)	(a)

(a) Expenditure less than \$0.1 million.

Source: ACT Department of Education and Training

satisfy the specific learning needs of these students. Grants for these programs particularly focused on integrating students with disabilities in residential care back into mainstream schooling, further education or training.

The Commonwealth also announced a review of its funding arrangements for special education in schools. The review is investigating means of improving the operation and effectiveness of Commonwealth support for students with disabilities. It is being informed by a consultative group which includes representatives from both the government and non-government education sectors and is expected to be completed in September 1997.

Information from States and sectors detailed a broad range of programs and initiatives directed towards achieving equitable outcomes for students with disabilities. The most commonly reported trend was the provision of various means and levels of support to enable the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream education and their inclusion in peer-age classes.

The support put in place in schools across the States and sectors in order to facilitate this integration included:

- professional development programs, for teaching and other staff in mainstream schools and classes, to develop classroom and curriculum strategies to support the inclusion of students with a range of abilities;
- support from specialist staff, including psychologists, speech pathologists, visiting teachers trained in working with students with specific disabilities, occupational therapists and others needed to assist in programs to develop physical movement skills;
- providing specialised buildings, furniture and equipment, including computers and other electronic technology;

**Table 49: National Equity Programme for Schools, funding by program, sector and State, 1996 (\$'000)**

	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>NT</i>	<i>ACT</i>	<i>Australia</i>
<b>Government schools</b>									
ESL	35,738	24,331	6,875	6,396	6,022	690	1,372	1,307	82,730
Special education	9,918	7,332	7,135	2,667	4,071	1,299	565	595	33,581
Disadvantaged schools	21,267	14,969	7,141	5,312	6,013	2,593	1,284	56	58,635
Country areas	3,510	2,035	3,369	1,639	2,393	523	586	0	14,055
Students at risk	2,077	1,181	833	352	529	207	106	0	5,285
Early literacy	2,466	1,744	890	603	673	280	129	69	6,853
Transition support (a)	236	203	209	101	95	54	101	63	1,063
Students with disabilities	1,731	1,160	716	986	473	257	150	131	5,604
<b>Total</b>	<b>76,943</b>	<b>52,955</b>	<b>27,168</b>	<b>18,055</b>	<b>20,268</b>	<b>5,903</b>	<b>4,293</b>	<b>2,220</b>	<b>207,806</b>
<b>Catholic schools</b>									
ESL	9,655	8,731	1,897	1,408	1,964	183	165	452	24,455
Special education	5,456	4,153	1,293	479	2,002	309	250	441	14,383
Disadvantaged schools	3,202	3,733	753	419	606	131	56	19	8,919
Country areas	468	297	411	10	295	29	5	0	1,515
Students at risk	586	410	211	67	139	45	32	0	1,490
Early literacy	689	611	163	91	180	24	17	33	1,808
Students with disabilities (b)	1,198	539	403	178	121	28	36	31	2,534
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,253</b>	<b>18,474</b>	<b>5,132</b>	<b>2,652</b>	<b>5,306</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>55,103</b>
<b>Independent schools</b>									
ESL	605	941	407	167	620	54	167	4	2,965
Special education (c)	10,013	8,933	4,896	2,759	1,129	624	102	352	28,808
Disadvantaged schools	331	149	38	29	70	3	28	0	648
Country areas	5	25	44	6	125	0	0	0	205
Students at risk	207	146	89	34	80	37	32	0	625
Early literacy	177	133	41	19	48	8	9	0	435
Transition support - special schools	1,645	348	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,993
Students with disabilities (d)	1,093	1,137	387	428	233	80	22	74	3,454
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,076</b>	<b>11,813</b>	<b>5,903</b>	<b>3,441</b>	<b>2,305</b>	<b>806</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>39,134</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>112,273</b>	<b>83,241</b>	<b>38,203</b>	<b>24,148</b>	<b>27,879</b>	<b>7,458</b>	<b>5,214</b>	<b>3,627</b>	<b>302,044</b>

Note: This table summarises assistance granted in respect of calendar year 1996. Discrepancies between this table and the funding table in the Commonwealth chapter are due to the following:

- (i) funds paid to non-school organisations under the Special Education Schools Support Component are treated as non-government payments in this table;
- (ii) figures in the Commonwealth chapter table, which are derived from accountability reports supplied by clients, include offsets from previous years' funds not accounted for in this table; and
- (iii) totals may differ slightly from the sum of component elements due to rounding.

(a) Joint government/non-government program.

(b) Catholic systemic schools.

(c) Includes Special Education Schools Support and Intervention Support funds paid to non-school organisations and Capital Support funds paid to centres.

(d) Includes Catholic non-systemic schools.

Source: Commonwealth DEETYA

- transport assistance, including the funding of taxis and special buses;
- training note-takers to support secondary-aged deaf or hearing-impaired students;
- modifying curriculum and implementing programs appropriate to the needs of students with a range of disabilities; and
- involvement of parent volunteers to assist in classroom and other programs involving their children.

Integration of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms required careful assessment of their educational needs and the negotiation of curriculum and support programs to meet those needs on an individual basis. The provision of individualised programs in an environment with appropriate support structures in place helped students with disabilities to progress educationally, experience improved self-esteem, adjust socially and participate more fully in schooling. Students with disabilities also served as a focus of concern and care for other students, who learned to accept individual differences by providing that care.

Particular attention was paid to needs of very young children with disabilities and developmental delay. Specially-focused professional development programs for preschool and child care staff, reviews of preschool speech and language programs, early intervention playgroups, special units within preschools and early entry to preschool for children affected by a hearing impairment, were among the initiatives assisting very young children with disabilities.

For students in the postcompulsory years of schooling, for whom transition from schooling and the undertaking of programs oriented to the needs of young adults were appropriate, further specialised approaches were in place. Teachers were supported in developing curriculum units for students with disabilities, improvements were made to vocational education and transition practices, parents were encouraged to participate in investigations of post-school pathways and school leavers were helped to obtain supported workplace employment.

Initiatives were also put in place to address the compounded needs of geographically isolated students with disabilities and of Indigenous students with disabilities.

## Students at risk of dropping out of school

Students in this target group commonly had levels of literacy significantly below the average for their age, were absent from school more frequently than other students, or

were more likely than other students to display behaviour that was unacceptable in a school/classroom setting. Many exhibited all three characteristics, compounding the difficulties facing those seeking to improve the level of outcomes for target group members.

Other characteristics of students in this target group, reported from data collected in Western Australia, included high incidences of low socioeconomic background and learning difficulties, with lesser incidences of physical disability, substance abuse problems and other factors.

Programs in several States designed to assist these students directly targeted the significant literacy problems many of them exhibited, as a means of increasing the opportunities for success in schooling and providing more positive alternatives to absenteeism and inappropriate behaviour. Literacy difficulties were recognised as principal contributors to behavioural and attendance problems for many students.

As the factors contributing to a student being 'at risk' were frequently complex, involving perhaps educational, social, economic and welfare factors, the approaches taken in addressing the needs of 'at risk' children also needed to be complex. A holistic, inter-disciplinary approach was often adopted. Nationally, initiatives to address the needs of these students included:

- establishing working/learning environments external to the normal classroom;
- the development of carefully focused literacy and numeracy programs, to help bridge existing gaps in the abilities of students and possibly employing the services of specialist teachers;
- developing specialist pastoral care programs for students; and
- establishing alternative and extension programs in areas attuned to student interests and/or vocational leanings, providing challenge and stimulus with a strong likelihood of success.

Where attempts at prevention during the primary years had proved unable to fully address 'at risk' characteristics, intervention programs were commonly introduced at junior secondary level, with student literacy difficulties again a prime target.

Although programs did not always succeed in modifying inappropriate student behaviours and improving poor attendance rates, outcomes for many students included:

- improved literacy and numeracy skills;

- higher student self-esteem and greater pride in personal appearance;
- wider participation in and contribution to school life, including better relationships with staff and more acceptance of academic learning;
- improved attendance at school and an increased likelihood to remain beyond year 10; and
- the acquisition and extension of a range of personal/vocational skills.

## Indigenous students

Following the *Commonwealth's Response to the Review of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (AEP) and decisions made at the December 1995 MCEETYA meeting supporting a cooperative approach to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians, 1996 saw not only the conclusion of the extended second triennium of the AEP but also a new legislative and administrative framework for the Commonwealth's principal funding program for Indigenous education.

During 1996, the Commonwealth undertook extensive trilateral discussions with State departments of school education and of vocational education and training, with non-government education providers and with Indigenous education consultative groups. The aim was to negotiate Indigenous Education Agreements which would focus on improving Indigenous education outcomes and targeting specific education priorities for action during the third triennium of the AEP.

The year was therefore important not only in progressing the Commonwealth's response to the AEP Review, but also in the restructuring of its principal supplementary assistance program, AESIP, to take a stronger focus on educational outcomes. The restructured program, the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP), will come into effect at the beginning of 1997.

Work on the new program and its administrative mechanisms had to be done concurrently with administering AESIP in the form it had taken since 1990, with the focus on financial inputs for strategies and agreed operations. The new arrangements were built on MCEETYA Ministers' agreement in late 1995 to reaffirm their commitment to the policy, to pledge their endeavours to increase their financial efforts to improve Indigenous education, and to set priorities for action during the 1997–99 triennium. These priorities include improving Indigenous education outcomes and achieving outcomes which are equitable with

*The NSW Aboriginal Policy was released to promote educational achievement in the context of learning about Aboriginal Australia.*

those of the non-Indigenous community, with specific targets for improving and measuring attainment in literacy, numeracy and employment by Indigenous Australians.

To progress these and other priorities, the Commonwealth also developed a comprehensive set of performance indicators designed to assist the cooperative task of ensuring that targets would be clearly stated, capable of being measured on an annual basis, able to be monitored and able to be reported through reliable databases. This work and the trilateral negotiations to establish the new arrangements enabled some 1997–99 Indigenous Education Agreements to be completed before the end of 1996.

Underlying efforts to address the educational needs of Indigenous students was the acknowledgment that they were often among the most disadvantaged students in Australian schools through their membership of multiple target groups. Many experienced the compounding impacts of geographic isolation, socioeconomic disadvantage and a language background other than English, which tended to place them at significant risk of not completing their secondary schooling. Programs which addressed each of those areas of disadvantage did much to assist Indigenous students to improve the outcomes of their education.

Aims commonly incorporated in State plans and initiatives in respect of Indigenous students included educating all students about Indigenous Australia, as well as addressing the educational needs of Indigenous students through:

- increasing the priority accorded to schooling by Indigenous students and their families and communities;
- attaining levels of student achievement commensurate with the whole student population; and
- increasing the retention of Indigenous students to senior secondary years and particularly to year 12.



Central to the success of initiatives dealing with education about Indigenous Australians and of programs seeking to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students, was consultation with and involvement of Indigenous people. As key examples:

- local Indigenous elders and other community members were instrumental in providing large numbers of students with positive information about the history, culture and lifestyles of Indigenous Australians and in facilitating the teaching of Indigenous languages;
- the employment of Indigenous workers in schools provided role models as well as encouragement and understanding for Indigenous students, facilitated ongoing professional development for staff and significantly improved home/school liaison; and
- the involvement of Indigenous parents and community members in school programs increased their children's level of interest in schooling as well as their attendance.

## **Students needing assistance with English as a second language**

Programs to support the educational needs of students in this target group gave direct language support to students, provided professional development activities for educators to enable them to better address the needs of those students, or facilitated communication and liaison between schools and their non-English speaking school community members.

Intensive, direct support to students was provided through programs addressing the needs of newly arrived students, from junior primary to senior secondary level. These programs included strategies such as:

- withdrawal from the normal classroom, to build language proficiency in both 'survival' and 'interpersonal' language, in addition to oral and speaking skills;
- respecting the cultural heritage that is a vital part of each student's background;
- weekly community excursions;
- curriculum orientated toward the socialisation process within Australian society; and
- the use of bilingual aides to improve communication and to acknowledge all languages.

These programs aimed to facilitate rapid acquisition of functional English language skills, to assist students to integrate into mainstream schooling, where trained ESL

teachers could provide ongoing support. Outcomes for students were improved ESL proficiency levels, gains in the ability to communicate with other class members through oral language and increased motivation based on increased levels of understanding and confidence. To assist students who were remote from a centre offering such a program, additional support was made available through their local school.

ESL students in mainstream schools, whether born overseas or in Australia, benefited from being taught and provided with linguistic support by ESL teachers and bilingual support staff. ESL teachers also provided other classroom teachers with inclusive strategies to assist these students. Programs of ESL instruction continued to foster literacy and communication skills, improved students' capacity to succeed in other subject areas and provided a recognised subject option for students. ESL students attending a school without an ESL teacher were often able to access assistance through visiting teacher programs or teachers appointed to support clusters of schools.

ESL initiatives occurring in schools in 1996 which involved or led to direct support for students included:

- provision of staffing for individual and group withdrawal for support, in-class support and parallel teaching;
- in-classroom support and advice on content, planning and implementation of focused programs;
- annotations to units of work and preparation of additional support materials in key learning areas;
- creating a support network for teachers in remote areas;
- provision of ESL classroom activities and resources for teachers and print and non-print materials for students;
- where a substantial portion of a school's enrolment was from a particular cultural background, some instruction for technical subjects was conducted in the home language (for example, mathematics in Arabic, or Australian history in Indigenous languages);
- encouragement of peer teaching and assistance; and
- computer-assisted learning programs.

Specific support for the ESL needs of Indigenous students for whom English was a second or even third language was reported by South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory. Specific activities and emerging trends relevant to ESL and Indigenous students included:

- coordination and presentation of accredited and non-accredited ESL programs for teachers of Indigenous

students, in both Indigenous communities and urban settings;

- the appointment of ESL support staff specifically for the support of students attending Anangu schools;
- adoption of a curriculum focus on language and literacy;
- recognition of Aboriginal English as a legitimate teaching and learning language;
- targeted ESL professional development in the area of Aboriginal English; and
- the effective and efficient utilisation and training of Aboriginal Education Workers.

Programs of professional development were provided for ESL teachers and other support persons from all school sectors, geographic locations and roles within the area of ESL provision. Courses addressed key ESL areas and sought to improve ESL practice in schools, ensuring the closest possible alignment of student outcomes to student needs.

However, the major focus of ESL professional development activities in 1996 was on ESL in the Mainstream training to better equip mainstream, non-ESL specialist teachers to work more effectively with ESL students. This training provided teachers with an awareness and understanding of language issues and the language-related needs of all students and, in particular, those from language and cultural backgrounds other than English, improving support for

them in all school contexts. Nationally, teachers from all three school sectors took part in this type of training.

The importance of close links between schools and their non-English speaking parents and other school community members was acknowledged nationally. Many schools were a focus for community activities, as well as the principal source of education provision, so developing strategies to include the parents and family members of ESL students in school activities and decision-making helped reinforce those roles and benefit the students concerned. For several States, an important means of achieving these closer links was to employ people in a liaison/consultation role with local communities with particular language needs.

## Geographically isolated students

Geographically isolated students were a special focus area in this report and detailed information appears in Section 6.

## 7.6 Attendance and retention of students in target groups

Information on attendance and retention of students from target groups was not universally reported, so national analysis is not possible for target groups. However, data summarising the apparent retention rates for Indigenous students was reported nationally and provided in Table 50.

**Table 50. Apparent retention rates of full-time Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to years 10, 11 and 12, all schools, by State, 1996 (per cent)**

State	Indigenous students			Non-Indigenous students		
	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
New South Wales	79.2	47.6	31.0	96.6	78.8	68.4
Victoria	94.2	74.0	35.2	96.0	88.1	75.5
Queensland	83.2	62.2	45.6	100.2	87.3	77.8
South Australia	63.1	39.6	20.3	94.3	87.7	69.3
Western Australia	83.3	43.5	16.0	99.9	86.9	73.2
Tasmania	109.3	64.7	35.4	96.2	68.9	53.6
Northern Territory	33.0	17.3	8.5	92.0	74.3	58.9
Australian Capital Territory	105.7	109.7	58.3	98.3	103.2	91.5
<b>Australia</b>	<b>75.8</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>29.2</b>	<b>97.3</b>	<b>84.3</b>	<b>72.4</b>

Note: Retention rates in excess of 100% may result from a net increase in interstate migration. The apparent retention rates for Indigenous students are also affected by an increased propensity over time to identify as Indigenous.

Source: Commonwealth DEETYA

Nationally, apparent retention rates to each of years 10, 11 and 12 were significantly lower for Indigenous students than for non-Indigenous students. However, the differences between the two student groups became more noticeable with each increase in year level. The apparent retention rate for Indigenous students was almost 78 per cent of the rate of non-Indigenous students at year 10, but had dropped to 56 per cent of the non-Indigenous rate in year 11 and to only 40 per cent of the comparable rate in year 12.

In New South Wales, students attending CAP schools (geographically isolated students) and those attending schools which received Disadvantaged Schools Programme (DSP) funding (socioeconomically disadvantaged students) had lower rates of attendance than average levels for the State. The differences were more marked in DSP schools. However, there was no significant difference between the attendance of boys and girls in these two categories. It was also noted that the incidence of absenteeism sometimes increased on Mondays and Fridays. Absenteeism also increased when there were family difficulties and some absences from school were attributable to geographically isolated students attending family or community functions.

Apparent retention rates to each of years 10, 11 and 12 for students in DSP-funded schools were lower than rates across all schools. Rates for this group have also decreased since 1994, in line with the overall decrease. The apparent retention rate for girls attending DSP schools remained significantly above that for boys over the period 1994–96. Rates for Indigenous students decreased from 1994 to 1996, only partly reflecting the decrease in retention rate for the total population. The decline for Indigenous girls in particular from 1995 to 1996 is concerning and will be monitored.

Apparent retention rates for students supported by CAP funding have approximately paralleled those for the full student population. However, there were small increases for boys and girls in CAP schools from 1995 to 1996, and the apparent retention rate for girls in CAP schools remained significantly higher than for boys.

The apparent retention rates for Indigenous students attending government schools in Queensland in 1996 increased relative to the rate in 1995. However, it remained well below the rate for the total student population.

Reporting on behalf of Catholic schools in South Australia indicated that students in target groups were absent from school on more days than non-target group students. Secondary students in target groups were absent from

school for more days each year than primary students.

There was no clear pattern of difference in the absentee rates of boys and girls across the target groups.

In Western Australia, where 77.8 per cent of reported cases of students at risk in government schools had had numerous unexplained absences in semester 1, projects in place led to some positive impacts on attendance patterns. A third of those targeted by Students at Risk (STAR) programs for whom data was available improved their attendance.

Retention, participation and achievement levels for Indigenous students remained matters of concern for all sectors in 1996. In government schools, 82.3 per cent of Indigenous students were retained to year 10, 93.0 per cent in Catholic schools and 85.1 per cent in other non-government schools. The respective rates to year 11 were 39.6 per cent, 48.3 per cent and 93.0 per cent and, to year 12, had dropped to 15.8 per cent, 17.8 per cent and 20.5 per cent.

The Northern Territory provided information on apparent retention rates for low SES, Indigenous and geographically isolated students in the government school sector. Of the three target groups, apparent retention to each of years 10, 11 and 12 was highest for low SES students, followed by those students who were geographically isolated and Indigenous students. There was a significant decline in the apparent retention of boys in the three groups after year 10, while a comparable drop occurred for girls after year 11. Differences in the apparent retention of boys and girls to year 12 were minimal in each of the three groups. However, apparent retention to year 12 of students in these three groups was only between one-third and one-fifth of the rate for the total student population in the Northern Territory.

Apparent retention rate information was also provided for Indigenous students attending Northern Territory independent schools. Apparent retention rates for these students changed little from year 10 (at which point they were significantly higher than in government schools) to year 11, then dropped markedly from year 11 to year 12, where they mirrored rates in government schools. At years 10 and 11, the apparent retention rates for boys was greater than for girls, but at year 12, those relative positions had reversed.

The Australian Capital Territory provided apparent retention rate details for students with disabilities, Indigenous students and students whose language background was not English and who were attending government schools.

**Table 51. Year 12 completion rates (a), by socioeconomic status (b), State (c) and gender, 1996 (p) (per cent)**

<i>State</i>	<i>Low socioeconomic status deciles</i>			<i>High socioeconomic status deciles</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	57	67	62	73	83	78	61	72	66
Victoria	50	66	58	70	85	77	61	77	68
Queensland	53	61	57	70	80	75	59	69	64
South Australia	45	60	52	72	85	78	57	70	63
Western Australia	39	52	45	64	73	68	51	64	57
Tasmania	48	66	57	92	107	99	58	77	67
Northern Territory	13	14	13	(d)	(d)	(d)	27	31	29
Australian Capital Territory	(e)	(e)	(e)	90	93	91	86	87	86
<b>Australia</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>65</b>

(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) The IRSED has been used to calculate SES on basis of postcode of students' home addresses. 'Low' SES is the average of the lowest three deciles and 'high' is the average of the top three SES deciles.

(c) For the completion rates presented in this table, population deciles are calculated from the national 15–19 year old population. State SES completion rates are based on national population deciles. For example, first decile rates are calculated for those postcode districts in a State which are part of the first national decile.

(d) On the basis of this index, Northern Territory has no high SES deciles.

(e) On the basis of this index, the Australian Capital Territory has no low SES decile.

(f) Some States have higher TAFE participation rates, which affects their year 12 completion rates.

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

Because of extremely high levels of migration of students from interstate and from the non-government sector, it is not appropriate to make a detailed analysis of the information provided. However, it is evident that apparent retention rates to year 12 for both students with disabilities and Indigenous students are far lower than for the total student population.

## 7.7 Completion to year 12

As indicated in Tables 51 and 52, 65 per cent of the potential year 12 population in 1996 received a year 12 certificate. The overall completion rate varied from 86 per cent of students in the Australian Capital Territory to 29 per cent of students in the Northern Territory. Data collected by the States do not permit a national perspective on completion to year 12 by students in each NEPS target group, but from the information included in Tables 51 and 52, a range of meaningful comments are possible.

### Completions by gender

The information presented in Table 51 indicated that the rate of year 12 completion was higher for girls in every State than for boys, and in some States the gender

difference was extremely large. From that table it is also apparent that girls from high SES background completed year 12 at a far higher rate than girls from low SES backgrounds.

As indicated in Table 52, the higher rate of completion by girls in 1996 maintained a trend evident over the past several years. Further, while a comparison of national year 12 completion rates for the period 1992 to 1996 reveals an overall decline, the rate of completion dropped less for girls than for boys. The change was, however, marginally more noticeable for girls from low SES backgrounds.

### Completions by socioeconomic status

Table 51 indicates that students from high SES backgrounds tended to complete year 12 at a higher rate than did students from low SES backgrounds. In 1996, some 77 per cent of students from high SES backgrounds completed year 12 compared with only 56 per cent of low SES students.

As already indicated, Table 52 reveals an overall decline in completion rates from 1992 to 1996, although high SES students consistently had higher rates than low SES students. The decline over the period was minimal for those from high SES backgrounds.

**Table 52. Year 12 completion rates (a), by socioeconomic status (b) and gender, Australia, 1992–1996 (p) (per cent)**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Low socioeconomic status deciles</i>			<i>High socioeconomic status deciles</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>
1992	55	65	60	74	84	79	64	74	69
1993	57	66	61	74	85	80	64	75	69
1994	55	66	60	74	85	79	63	74	68
1995	53	65	59	73	83	78	61	73	67
1996 (p)	50	62	56	72	83	77	59	72	65

(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) The ABS's IRSED has been used to calculate SES on basis of postcode of students' home addresses. 'Low' SES is the average of the lowest three deciles and 'high' is the average of the top three SES deciles.

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

## Completions by location

Information has already been provided in Section 6.4 in respect of 1996 student completions to year 12 according to location, with further perspectives provided by way of Table 38 and the commentary on it which appear in Section 6.5. Variations in completion rates during the period 1991 to 1996, again identified according to student location, are documented in Table 39 and the comments which follow it.

## 7.8 Transition

While it has not been possible to present a comprehensive view of the transition of target group students to post-completion options, reporting from New South Wales with regard to the 1996 post-school destinations of 1995 year 12 students provides some insight, including:

- more than half the candidates for the HSC were girls;

- one in every five students undertaking year 12 at a DSP school in 1995 was enrolled at a university in 1996;
- 40 per cent of the total DSP students sitting for the 1995 HSC enrolled in some form of training in 1996;
- 16 per cent of all CAP students sitting for the HSC in 1995 enrolled at a university for 1996, with a further 37 per cent of CAP candidates enrolled in some form of training in 1996;
- of the Indigenous students, nearly 40 per cent were either enrolled at a university or some form of training in 1996; and
- a larger percentage of CAP and Indigenous students were unemployed and not in any form of education or training in 1996.