

Chapter 2

Meeting the national goals for schooling

This chapter provides a national perspective on the progress made during 1999 by schools and education authorities towards their achievement of the Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia. The information used in the compilation of the chapter has been provided by government and non-government schools and school authorities, according to an agreed information framework.

Responsibilities for schooling in Australia

During 1999, schooling was provided in approximately 9,600 institutions distributed throughout each of Australia's States and Territories. The Constitution of Australia allocates primary responsibility for school education to State and Territory governments, all of whom provide and manage government schools as well as supporting non-government schools.

Government schools operate under the direct responsibility of the relevant State or Territory Minister, while non-government schools are established and operate under conditions determined by government registration authorities. Many non-government schools have some religious affiliation, most commonly with the Catholic Church and 19.7 per cent of all students and 64.9 per cent of non-government students are enrolled in Catholic schools.

Within each State and Territory, Ministers, departments, statutory authorities and individual schools (particularly in the case of non-government schools) variously determine policies and practices in such matters as curriculum, course accreditation, student assessment and certification, resource allocation and utilisation, and teacher employment and professional development.

The Commonwealth's policies and programs for schools are administered through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). Through DETYA, the Commonwealth provides supplementary funding to both

government and non-government school authorities to support agreed priorities and strategies. The overall result is that government schools receive the majority of their funding from State and Territory governments, and less from the Commonwealth, while non-government schools receive the majority of their government funding from the Commonwealth and less from the relevant State or Territory.

The Commonwealth also has some specific responsibilities for the provision of financial assistance to students and for Australia's international relations in education, as well as shared responsibilities for schooling in Australia's external territories of Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Norfolk Island.

The structure of Australian schooling

Schooling in Australia is compulsory for children from the ages 6 to 15 (16 in Tasmania). However, the majority of children start school when they are younger than six and remain at school beyond the age of 15. In most states, children start full-time schooling at around the age of five, when they enrol in a kindergarten or preparatory year. Commonly, the majority of these students will have already had some part-time school or preschool experience. After the preparatory year, primary education lasts for either six or seven years, depending on the State concerned (see Figure 2.1).

In 1999, there were approximately 1.89 million primary school students in Australia, 73.1 per cent of whom were enrolled in government schools.

Secondary schooling is available for either five or six years according to the State arrangements as set out in Figure 2.1. Students normally commence secondary school at about age 12. In 1999, there were approximately 1.34 million Australian secondary school students, 64.8 per cent of

Figure 2.1 Primary and secondary school structures, by State and Territory, 1999

| School year level | NSW, VIC, TAS, ACT | SA, NT | QLD, WA |
|-------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| 12 | Secondary | Secondary | Secondary |
| 11 | | | |
| 10 | | | |
| 9 | | | |
| 8 | | | |
| 7 | | | |
| 6 | Primary | Primary | Primary |
| 5 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 1 | | | |
| Pre-year 1 | Kindergarten (NSW, ACT) Preparatory (VIC, TAS) | Reception (SA) Transition (NT) | |

whom were enrolled in government schools. Most government schools are coeducational, but a significant proportion of non-government schools are single-sex schools.

Some features of the structure of Australian schooling in 1999 were as follows:

- There were 9,590 schools in Australia, which represented a decline of 4.2 per cent since 1990. In the same period, the number of government schools fell by 520, while the number of non-government schools rose by 103.
- The number of special schools was 312, which represented a fall of almost 30 per cent from the 444 which operated in 1990.
- There were 3.227 million full-time students in Australian schools. This represented an increase of 0.87 per cent on the number enrolled in 1998.
- The proportion of students enrolled in non-government schools continued to rise in all States and Territories other than Tasmania. In 1999, 30.3 per cent of students

were enrolled in non-government schools compared to 30.0 per cent in 1998.

- The total number of teaching and non-teaching staff (in full-time equivalents) employed in Australian schools was 276,287, which represented an increase of 3.8 per cent on the number employed in 1998.
- There were 215,724 teaching staff (in full-time equivalents) employed in Australian schools and this resulted in an average of 14.9 students per teacher in government schools, 16.3 per teacher in Catholic schools and 13.1 per teacher in independent schools.
- Females comprised 78.0 per cent of the teaching staff in primary schools and 54.1 per cent in secondary schools. This compares with 77.5 per cent and 53.5 per cent respectively in 1998.

The national goals for schooling in Australia

In April of 1989, Education Ministers from all States, Territories and the Commonwealth, met as the Ministerial Council in Hobart and agreed to a set of national goals. In the preamble to the Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia, the Ministers advised:

The following ten national goals for schooling form the basis for cooperation and collaboration between schools, States and Territories and the Commonwealth. They are intended as a set of objectives, which will assist each school and each system in the development of specific objectives and strategies, including objectives and strategies in the areas of curriculum and assessment. The goals have been agreed by Education Ministers to guide their cooperative effort in enhancing schooling in Australia. Ministers look forward to future development and refinement of these goals in response to the changing needs of the community. The goals will be reviewed from time to time by the Australian Education Council, using consultative processes involving both government and non-government schools, parents, teachers and the community.

The goals remained unaltered until 1996, when Ministers, meeting as the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), agreed to the addition of a further goal regarding literacy. This National Report has been prepared on the basis of the revised set of goals, which are set out on page ix and which

applied in 1999. During 1999, Ministers agreed to a new set of goals to apply from the start of the year 2000.

Review of the national goals

At the tenth MCEETYA meeting held on 22–23 April 1999, Council:

- endorsed the Statement of Australia's National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century
- affirmed its commitment to national reporting of comparable educational outcomes
- agreed that the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century provide an appropriate framework for such reporting
- agreed that the following six areas from within the goals provide a basis for the first stage of reporting:
 - literacy
 - numeracy
 - student participation, retention and completion
 - vocational education and training in schools
 - science
 - information technology
- noted the need to develop indicators of performance for civics and citizenship, and enterprise education
- agreed to the establishment of the MCEETYA National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce to progress action relating to the national reporting of comparable educational outcomes.

The National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce (NEPM Taskforce) was established shortly thereafter and provided with terms of reference that required it to:

- oversee and coordinate the work of any other groups concerned with the reporting of nationally comparable outcomes of schooling
- develop key performance measures as the basis for national reporting in the agreed areas outlined above
- identify areas where it may be appropriate to establish national targets or benchmarks, in relation to the agreed key performance measures which assist State and school-level planning and reporting for improvement

- identify and recommend to MCEETYA any additional agreed areas for the national reporting of comparable educational outcomes.

The taskforce was established with representation from education authorities in all States and Territories, the Commonwealth, and Catholic and independent schools, along with representatives from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Taskforce on School Statistics and the Productivity Commission. In its first year, the taskforce established sub-groups to undertake detailed work in the designated priority areas of participation, retention and completion, information technology and science. It also established a sub-group to consider issues related to the development of consistent national definitions of equity target groups.

The taskforce has developed a set of draft principles to guide its work. The draft principles state that the primary purposes of nationally comparable reporting are school and systems improvement, improvement of student learning outcomes and accountability. In addition, the principles state that national reporting should be manageable at State and school levels and not impose unreasonable burdens on schools or systems. Consistent with these principles, the taskforce began developing a timetable to identify a proposed cycle for reporting. The timetable will take account of the fact that, although some areas such as literacy and numeracy should be monitored annually, other key learning areas may be reported on and monitored less frequently.

During 1999, the preparation of nationally consistent definitions to be used in the process of national reporting was an important element of the work of the taskforce. It endorsed the use of the ABS standards pertaining to both the identification of sex and to the identification of Indigenous persons. As well, the taskforce commissioned work to develop nationally consistent definitions to be used for nationally comparable reporting of outcomes in the areas of:

- socioeconomic disadvantage
- geographic location
- language background, culture and ethnicity of students.

The taskforce also began work on the priority area relating to student participation, retention and completion. It became clear that the reporting of achievement in this area would need to extend beyond the boundaries of schooling to encompass the post-compulsory education and training

system more generally, as well as entry to the labour market.

There was a general concern that existing measures and longstanding statistical collections do not adequately reflect recent developments in education systems across Australia, such as:

- closer integration between general and vocationally specific education programs
- introduction of flexible pathways to enable students to obtain education and training qualifications with seamless pathways from one qualification to another
- introduction of certification arrangements which are more portable between different learning environments and sectors
- recognition that provision of lifelong learning opportunities is a major requirement for individuals to achieve ongoing employment within a rapidly changing labour market.

The NEPM Taskforce commissioned the development of a framework to provide a conceptual basis for deriving nationally comparable measures of student participation, transition, retention and completion/attainment. The framework developed by the consultants was endorsed by the NEPM Taskforce at its meeting in December, 1999 as providing an appropriate construct of the dimensions against which performance should be measured. The key features of the framework are highlighted in Figure 2.2.

Over the past few years there has been an increasing focus by schools and school systems on providing programs that enable students to develop a greater understanding of the work environment, to foster enterprise skills and to acquire vocationally oriented skills and knowledge. A highly successful example in the senior secondary years is the Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools program. Ministers have identified VET in Schools as a priority area for nationally comparable reporting of student outcomes.

Initial work on identifying performance data on a State and Territory sector basis was previously undertaken jointly by the Taskforce on School Statistics and the VET in Schools Taskforce. Subsequent to the 1999 meeting of MCEETYA, the VET in Schools Taskforce established an Expert Reference Group on Performance Measures in Vocational Education and Training in Schools to provide advice on a range of issues, including key performance measures as the basis for national reporting. Building on the work of this group, the taskforce began developing a group of core key

performance measures to be used for the purposes of nationally comparable reporting of student outcomes. The core measures will form the first stage of nationally comparable reporting on VET in Schools for the period 2001–04.

Figure 2.2 Framework of conceptual basis for national reporting, student participation, retention and completion/attainment

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| <p>A The Framework is person-centred rather than educational institution-centred.</p> <p>B The Framework applies to all Australians aged 6 to 24 years.</p> <p>C The framework has three key stages which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compulsory schooling (ages 6–14) • transition from schooling (ages 15–19) • attainment and continuous learning (ages 20–24). <p>D The performance measures for each of the key stages derive from the key policy questions for each stage. The key policy questions for each of the stages are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory schooling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all children enrolled and attending compulsory schooling? • Transition years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are young people in transition doing in relation to education and work? • Are some of their activities unlikely to lead to satisfactory pathways to employment or further education and training? • Attainment and continuous learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What qualifications are being achieved by young adults? • Are young adults continuing to participate in structured learning? <p>E The measures of learning relate to structured learning which could lead to a recognised qualification or completion of schooling.</p> |
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The importance of science and technology to Australia's future in a global economy has been recognised by MCEETYA and science has been included as a priority area for national reporting. As part of its work on possible approaches to the measurement of students' performance in science, the Science Sub-group considered a number of international studies in which Australia has participated

over the past 30 years and studies which are currently in train. These included the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which will measure 15-year-olds' performance in science; and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, sponsored by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, which will assess students in years 4 and 8. The taskforce has advised Ministers that data obtained from Australian students' participation in PISA would provide an appropriate nationally comparable measure of performance in science at the end of the compulsory years of schooling.

In considering the ages of students, or stages of schooling, at which students' performance in science should be measured for national reporting purposes, the NEPM Taskforce has agreed that there may be a need for measures at both the primary and secondary levels. Its initial discussions have identified the following stages of schooling for consideration:

- Year 3: to give a basis for early intervention
- Year 6/7: to cover the transition between primary and secondary education
- Year 10: to mark the end of compulsory schooling.

In choosing to include information technology as a priority area for national reporting, Ministers acknowledged the increased application of information and communication technology and changes to the way work is organised demand a workforce committed to lifelong learning and capable of using a wide range of information skills. Students now in Australian primary and secondary schools can expect to work and live in environments requiring competence in computer use and convergent technology. For schools, the challenge is to equip young Australians not only with information technology skills in the broadest sense but also with the ability to cope with change and accept innovation.

The taskforce has commissioned a research project to assist it in formulating views on a number of matters, including the type and number of key performance measures to be

developed, the levels of schooling to which such measures might apply, and the scope of the measures.

The national goals and this report

For the purpose of reporting progress against the national goals, the goals have been divided into three groups, as follows:

- 'excellence goals'
Goals 1, 2, 4 and 5 are grouped together for this purpose because they each place emphasis on the achievement of excellence and high standards. These goals are concerned with students achieving the maximum possible benefit from their education as it relates to their personal development, employment prospects and participation in further education and training.
- 'equity goal'
Goal 3 is about the provision of equality of educational opportunity and calls upon Australian educators to pay special attention to the needs of the disadvantaged groups and individuals in our schools.
- 'skills goals'
Goals 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 are each concerned with the acquisition of skills in particular areas. As such, they provide the basic framework for the content aspect of the curriculum for Australian schools.

Focus areas for 1999

The Ministers believe that it is not practical to attempt to report comprehensively on every aspect of schooling, each year. Instead they have chosen to report in detail on a number of focus areas each year. For 1999, the first two focus areas are derived from the 'skills goals':

- student outcomes in literacy
- student outcomes in numeracy.

The third focus area is from the 'equity goal':

- the education of indigenous students.