

Chapter 2

The national goals for schooling

In April 1989, education Ministers from all States, Territories and the Commonwealth, met as the Australian Education 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 co-operation 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 co-operative 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, agreed to the addition of a further goal regarding literacy. The new goal was further amended to include numeracy, resulting in a set of national goals for schooling for 1998 as listed on page vii.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide a national perspective on the progress made by schools and education authorities towards achieving the national goals for schooling

Review of the national goals

Considerable progress was made with a review of the national goals in 1998. The review process was formally begun in 1997, but had its origins at the MCEETYA meeting in Adelaide in December, 1995. At that time, Council noted that New South Wales would coordinate a national forum to discuss the implementation of national statements and profiles and outcomes-based approaches to curriculum, assessment and reporting in schools.

The forum was held in Sydney in October 1996 and, at its conclusion, a report was prepared for the June 1997 meeting of MCEETYA. Included in that report was the following statement relating to the national goals:

There was a consensus within the Forum to reaffirm a commitment to national goals of schooling and to examine the common and agreed goals of schooling in Australia, endorsed by Ministers in 1989, to ensure that they reflect current and ongoing developments.

Such an examination should build upon the experiences of States and Territories, schools and professional associations and draw upon consultation with teachers, parents, other stakeholders and the wider community.

Council noted the progress that had been made and agreed to a recommendation that began the process of reviewing the goals. Council established a representative taskforce which commenced work immediately and produced a first draft of a new set of goals, entitled 'The Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century'. The Taskforce also examined the relationships between

these goals and appropriate targets so that progress in implementing the goals could be monitored.

The Taskforce presented a progress report to Ministers at the April 1998 meeting of MCEETYA. At that time Council:

- agreed to the release of the proposed Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century for a period of six months of public debate and comment
- noted those existing agreed national targets and agreed that the Taskforce would examine them further in relation to the above goals and report back to Ministers
- agreed to the Taskforce identifying areas for new targets and developing draft targets for consideration by Ministers
- agreed to the production of a consolidated goals and targets statement, also for consideration at the next Council meeting, having regard to the outcomes of the six-month period of public debate and comment recommended above.

In order to facilitate the process of public consultation, the Taskforce produced a discussion paper in June 1998. The release of this paper gave rise to an extensive and comprehensive period of consultation at national, State and local levels. The Taskforce also undertook the development of agreed definitions for the key terminology proposed for both the goals and the targets.

The issue of targets proved to be a difficult one for the Taskforce. Targets already existed in some areas of schooling (for example, literacy, numeracy and training levels). However, there appeared to be very little consistency or agreement across Australia in terms of what purposes targets serve, in what areas they might be set, and how targets relate to the much broader area of performance indicators and measurement. Nevertheless, the Taskforce made good progress and, by the end of 1998, was well on the way to finalising a draft of the new statement of goals to be presented to Ministers in 1999.

The national goals and this report

Because the review of the national goals was not complete by the end of 1998, this report has been written in terms of the original set of goals. The one exception to this general rule is in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The original national goals include Goal 6a:

To develop in students ... the skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing

In March 1997, Ministers agreed to a new national goal:

That every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.

The new goal was enhanced by the addition of a sub-goal:

That every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years.

This new and expanded goal for literacy and numeracy has been used in the preparation of 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 and 10 are 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 1998

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 1998, the first three focus areas are derived from the ‘skills goals’. They are:

- student outcomes in literacy
- citizenship education
- education in the arts.

The fourth focus area is from the 'excellence goals':

- vocational education and training in schools.

The fifth focus area is from the 'equity goal' and concerns:

- provision for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

System and school objectives and priorities

The national goals represent widespread agreement about the underlying and fundamental purposes for schooling in Australia. However, it is not unusual for authorities, systems and individual schools to identify particular objectives and priorities from time to time. These priorities, usually derived from the national goals, express the particular emphases that schools and systems wish to apply during the period in question. They may originate from government policy, from a particular set of beliefs or philosophy which underlies the school or system, or from a contract or agreement with the local community being served by the school.

An analysis of the objectives and priorities that operated in schools and systems in 1998 reveals some common elements in a large proportion of the nation's schools. Foremost among these were the following:

- improving the standards of literacy and numeracy being achieved by students
- providing resources and professional development in the area of information technology
- meeting the needs of particular groups of students identified as disadvantaged
- focussing on the early years of schooling
- increasing the levels of retention of students into post-compulsory schooling and then into higher education and training
- extending vocational education in schools and creating improved links with business and industry
- improving teaching and learning through the provision of professional development for teachers

- strengthening the partnership between schools and parents by improving communication, reporting and the creation of opportunities for parent participation in schools
- emphasising the creative arts learning area.

The Commonwealth's objectives for schooling

A further influence on the objectives being pursued by Australia's schools is derived from the policies and practices of the Commonwealth government. While not having direct responsibility for school education, the Commonwealth works in partnership with States and Territories, as well as with non-Government authorities, in the pursuit of mutually agreed objectives.

For the Commonwealth, a strategic goal was to ensure that the education and training system was responsive to changing circumstances and provided young people with the necessary foundation for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and a broad range of options to pursue in their personal and working lives. Through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), the Commonwealth establishes a national policy framework for improving the quality of school-level education, vocational education and training, higher education and young people's transition to the workforce.

The Commonwealth's highest priority in 1998 was the improvement of the literacy and numeracy skills of all young Australians, given that the attainment of appropriate literacy and numeracy skills is a prerequisite for achievement in all subsequent education and training and is critical to successful participation in the labour market.

The Commonwealth's other priorities in 1998 were:

- assisting schools to prepare young people for the transition from school to employment or further study
- supporting choice in schooling
- supporting students' participation in programs and activities which foster the development of entrepreneurial, innovative and adaptive behaviour
- improving the levels of educational attainment of educationally disadvantaged students and those with special learning needs

- increasing the rate of improvement in Indigenous students' educational outcomes
- supporting civics and citizenship education in schools with the aim of ensuring that all students leaving school are prepared for informed and responsible participation in civic life
- supporting the development and professionalism of teachers and principals in order to assist them in meeting the increasing demands of educational, social, economic and technological change
- developing and implementing a strategy for the delivery of drug education in schools.