

Chapter 6

NEW SOUTH WALES

Overview

During 1998, both government and non-government school sectors continued to grow, with an increase of seven schools and 7,300 students since 1997. In 1998, New South Wales had 3,075 schools and over one million students.

Government schools

The sesquicentenary of public school education in NSW was celebrated in 1998. Activities were held throughout the year to mark the occasion, and promote the achievements of the last 150 years.

In 1998, government schools benefited from substantially increased resources to ensure that the highest quality teaching and learning continued to be delivered. During 1997–98 the NSW government's recurrent outlays on school-related activities were \$4,773.7 million with capital outlays of \$134.4 million.

Table 6.1 Schools and students in New South Wales, 1998

| <i>Schools</i> | <i>Govt</i> | <i>Catholic</i> | <i>Ind</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|
| Primary | 1,649 | 424 | 114 | 2,187 |
| Secondary | 390 | 129 | 19 | 538 |
| Primary/secondary combined | 65 | 32 | 136 | 233 |
| Special | 83 | 7 | 27 | 117 |
| Total | 2,187 | 592 | 296 | 3,075 |
| <i>Students</i> | | | | |
| Primary | 454,104 | 120,776 | 44,009 | 618,889 |
| Secondary | 309,295 | 102,501 | 50,871 | 462,667 |
| Total | 763,399 | 223,277 | 94,880 | 1,081,556 |

Source: ABS Cat. No. 4221.0, *Schools Australia* 1998

Key priorities of the State government included promoting the dedication of staff, the performance of schools and the work of students. The key planning document for government schools, *Agenda 98*, included the following objectives:

- **Effective Lifelong Learners:** This objective focussed on five areas: improving literacy, numeracy and technology skills; implementing the new Higher School Certificate (HSC); better preparing students for employment; improving student physical fitness; and expanding programs in the creative and performing arts.
- **Responsible and Caring Citizens:** This objective was addressed by the following initiatives: maintaining good discipline and effective learning, promoting civic responsibility and community values in students, supporting students through child protection education and procedures, and developing students' environmental awareness, understanding and action.
- **Quality Teachers and the Best Technology:** The focus under this objective was on working with the profession to support teachers and teaching through a range of training and development programs, refocussing school leadership training and development, supporting the effective use of computers to improve learning and using new technology to help staff do their jobs.
- **Well-informed and Involved Parents:** The focus of this objective included school improvement and accountability through school annual reports, and improving the reporting of student progress to parents through the Basic Skills Test and the English Language and Literacy Assessment.
- **A Fair Go for All:** The specific equity issues addressed under this objective were improving the school experiences of students with special education needs, advancing Aboriginal education and reconciliation programs, addressing the educational needs of students in regional and

remote communities and improving opportunities in the middle years of schooling.

Catholic schools

Catholic schools operate as Church institutions, with religious aims and an ethos that serve local communities or parishes. They are registered providers of education operating within a framework of government laws and regulations.

The schools are classified for administrative and grant purposes as systemic or congregational (non-systemic). Systemic schools are administered by autonomous diocesan education structures, of which there are 11 in NSW. Congregational schools are independent of the diocesan administrative structures, although under the authority of the diocesan bishop, and operate as autonomous schools administered by boards of management or religious orders. Specific priorities for Catholic schools for 1998 included:

- supporting each school as a Catholic faith community
- making social justice central to the policies and practices of each school
- developing each student's ability to learn, to think critically and creatively and to communicate effectively
- developing curricula in each school which are focussed on the student and structured around key learning areas and their stated outcomes
- developing programs and structures in each school which cater for students with special needs
- providing for post-compulsory students in the context of the changing roles and relationships between secondary and tertiary education and industry.

Independent schools

In 1998, there were 296 independent schools operating in NSW with 94,880 students. Independent schools reported a wide variety of key objectives in 1998, the most common being:

- providing a positive environment for students that will enhance learning opportunities and encourage them to reach their potential
- developing efficient learning and study skills
- developing curriculum across a wide range of subjects, including numeracy, literacy and information technology

- developing students' leadership skills and sense of citizenship
- providing staff development with a particular focus on new professional skills, teacher evaluation and excellence in teaching.

Major developments

Testing basic skills

During 1998, NSW schools participated in Australia's most comprehensive basic literacy and numeracy testing program. The NSW Basic Skills Test was undertaken by students in years 3 and 5 in all NSW government schools, schools in 10 of the 11 NSW Catholic dioceses and over 100 independent schools within NSW and overseas. In 1998, almost 200,000 students in years 3 and 5 (including over 125,000 government school students) sat the Basic Skills Test in literacy and numeracy.

In 1998, all government schools and 35 non-government schools participated in the English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) program for year 7. In addition, 90 per cent of the schools participating in the 1997 program chose to re-test year 8 students in order to evaluate students' progress. As a result, a record 120,000 students in years 7 and 8 sat the ELLA.

Reporting student achievement

In 1998, parents received more information about schools than ever before with all government schools releasing annual reports. The annual school report provides schools with an opportunity to report on the past year's achievements and to outline major directions and priorities for the ensuing year. In the report, schools emphasised their effectiveness in providing for the needs of their students, and demonstrated the quality of their performance in relation to student outcomes. Literacy and numeracy results were a major feature of the reports.

By analysing these performance reports, departmental staff were able to identify under-performing schools in order to provide them with additional resources, and to develop specific targets to ensure school improvement.

The Minister reports to Parliament annually on the performance of all schools in NSW. The Department of Education and Training accounted to the Parliament and people of NSW on the success of implementing *Agenda 98* through the department's annual report.

Review of the Higher School Certificate and School Certificate

Students sitting for the School Certificate in 1998 were provided with new, clearer and more detailed statements of their achievements in all subjects. These reports on student results are designed to give students, parents and teachers a more comprehensive picture of each student's skills and knowledge.

The reform of the School Certificate also included the introduction of new statewide external tests for year 10 students in English, mathematics, science, Australian history, geography, civics and citizenship. In November over 18,000 year 10 students from 745 schools sat the new School Certificate tests in English literacy and mathematics. Around 80 per cent of schools volunteered to trial the science test, which will be compulsory in 1999, and about 45 per cent of schools trialled tests in Australian history, geography, civics and citizenship, which will be compulsory by 2002.

Following the review of the HSC, students will study new curricula in 2000 that better reflect the education and training needs of the future. One focus will be the strengthening of vocational studies for senior secondary students through courses that are fully recognised by industry. Other changes include ensuring that all schools can offer advanced study that challenges and tests all students.

Status of teachers

The State government continued to increase the status of teachers and teaching through substantial salary increases and an innovative salary packaging program. Government teachers have received record salary increases of a minimum of 17 per cent since 1995, making NSW teachers the highest paid in Australia. The rate of pay for a senior teacher is now \$50,175 per annum, up from \$42,016 in 1995 – representing a total salary increase of almost 20 per cent. A beginning teacher now commences on a salary of \$35,143 compared to \$29,750 in 1995. These salary increases have cost more than \$532 million since 1995.

In 1998, the Department of Education and Training implemented a salary packaging scheme which recognised the professional status of teachers and provided further recognition of their standing in the community. Teachers can tailor their salary packages to their individual needs by selecting from an extensive range of benefit options provided

by the scheme such as personal computers, tertiary education fees and motor vehicle leases.

Modernisation of secondary comprehensive education

During 1998, NSW undertook a number of initiatives in relation to multi-campus schools, the extension of open learning and the establishment of joint educational campuses. One example of these developments is the Nirimba Education Precinct in western Sydney. This precinct contains a campus of the University of Western Sydney, a TAFE campus, a government senior high school and a Catholic senior high school.

In March 1998, the Minister for Education and Training announced the formation in western Sydney of the Nirimba collegiate group of schools. The group comprises three existing local high schools – Quakers Hill, Riverstone and Seven Hills – as well as Wyndham College in the Nirimba Education Precinct. The group is designed to maintain comprehensive high-quality education in existing schools and increase curriculum choice in years 11 and 12. This will be achieved by the existing local schools concentrating on years 7 to 10, while Wyndham College caters for years 11 and 12 students.

Similar approaches were being trialled within the Catholic sector. The amalgamation of two secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Canberra–Goulburn provided the opportunity to pursue a middle school concept on one campus involving years 7 and 8. All NSW Catholic secondary schools considered instituting elements of the model to facilitate more effective social integration of primary students.

The Department of Education and Training is currently planning a \$22 million multi-campus school at Dubbo and a \$15 million multi-campus school at Mt Druitt. Both projects will include a senior college and will be linked to a TAFE institute and a university.

Technology

NSW's use of technology in schools is world-class. Since 1997, all schools in NSW have been connected to the Internet. This is three years ahead of the USA's target (2000) and five years ahead of the United Kingdom's (2002). The Computers in Schools Program has seen \$186 million expended to provide 90,000 computers and related equipment to schools.

A distinctive feature of the NSW Computers in Schools Program is that the computers are leased for a three-year period and then replaced. This ensures that schools have the most up-to-date equipment.

Specialist training has been provided for more than 15,000 teachers on the use of computers in the classroom and \$30 million was provided to schools to use flexibly in employing specialist computer coordinators and technicians, and improving networking and cabling resources. The call centre help-desk received more than 30,000 calls during the year.

The NSW HSC On-Line site is a unique resource which has been established by the NSW Board of Studies to provide a wide range of curriculum materials and resources across a large range of subjects. This Internet site recorded 45,000 'hits' a day and provided study and exam tips for HSC students.

Delivery of education and training services

In December 1997, the NSW TAFE Commission, the Department of Training and Education Co-ordination and the Department of School Education were amalgamated to form the Department of Education and Training. The new department has commenced an ambitious program of reforms designed to improve education and service delivery across the State, expand subject choice and pathways, and link resourcing to performance.

Focus areas

Literacy

Improving the literacy outcomes of students was a key priority for all sectors of schooling in NSW. Key developments in literacy during 1998 included:

- the development and distribution to schools of the NSW English K–6 syllabus by the NSW Board of Studies. The syllabus aims to develop students' ability to use language effectively, enable critical reflection on how language works and encourage the development of a positive attitude towards learning English
- a focus on monitoring and improving student outcomes in literacy by NSW independent and Catholic schools. In addition to the Basic Skills Test for years 3 and 5 students, Catholic schools used the ELLA for year 7 students. These assessment instruments, as well as the

First Steps Development Continuum, were used to identify children at risk and to put intervention strategies in place.

- distribution of the teaching resource *Focus on Literacy: Spelling* to all primary and secondary school teachers. This document provides directions for the systematic and explicit teaching of spelling to students in K–10
- increased involvement of parents in literacy programs. The State Government's Parent Literacy program was implemented in government schools to develop the role of parents in their children's acquisition of basic literacy skills. In Catholic schools a 'parents as partners' approach has been encouraged through initiatives such as publishing parent information guides and holding information sessions.

This year was the second year of the implementation of the \$200 million NSW State Literacy Strategy, Australia's most comprehensive literacy strategy. The strategy is designed to improve the literacy skills of primary and secondary students and includes a range of initiatives such as:

- the Reading Recovery Program: Over 400 specialist Reading Recovery teachers have been appointed and a further 620 teachers have been trained in Reading Recovery techniques. More than 22,000 year 1 students have participated in the program, with over 90 per cent of students improving to the point where they no longer need additional support. In 1998, a total of 6,179 low-achieving students improved their reading and writing skills by participating in the program
- the Basic Skills Test in literacy for students in years 3 and 5 and the ELLA for students in year 7: Teachers use the results of these tests to gauge students' progress and to identify students' literacy needs
- the Literacy Plus program for students in year 7: This program supports students identified by the ELLA as requiring assistance to improve their literacy skills so they may undertake secondary school curriculum with confidence. These students are often from disadvantaged groups and include Indigenous students, students with disabilities and students from low socioeconomic areas
- support for literacy in the middle years of schooling: Middle years literacy projects focussed on years 5–8 and the transition of students from primary to secondary school, to ensure continued growth in literacy development
- the teaching of literacy in key learning areas throughout secondary school.

Table 6.2 Basic Skills Test – percentage of students in skill bands, government and Catholic schools, 1998

| | <i>Year 3(a) literacy %(c)</i> | <i>Year 5(b) literacy %(c)</i> |
|--------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Band 6 | n/a | 21 |
| Band 5 | 14 | 27 |
| Band 4 | 22 | 28 |
| Band 3 | 27 | 16 |
| Band 2 | 24 | 6 |
| Band 1 | 14 | 1 |

(a) Approximately 60,000 government and 15,000 Catholic year 3 school students sat the test in 1998 (this equates to approximately 93 per cent of government and 86 per cent of Catholic school students).

(b) Approximately 57,000 government and 14,000 Catholic year 5 school students sat the test in 1998 (this equates to approximately 93 per cent of government and 82 per cent of Catholic school students).

(c) Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: NSW Department of Education and Training

The 1998 Basic Skills Test showed that 86 per cent of students in year 3 (band 2 and above) and 92 per cent of students in year 5 (band 3 and above) could demonstrate competent or higher level skills.

In government schools 90 per cent of the schools participating in the 1997 ELLA program chose to re-test year 8 students in order to evaluate the students' progress. The results of this testing demonstrate significant improvement between years 7 and 8. In particular, students who were targeted for additional assistance following low scores in year 7 had a higher rate of improvement than other students when retested in year 8.

Citizenship education

During 1998, the NSW Board of Studies completed work on three new syllabuses incorporating the study of civics and citizenship education into the K–10 curriculum. A human society and its environment syllabus for years K–6 was distributed to primary schools at the end of 1998 for implementation in 1999. New syllabuses in history and geography Stages 4 and 5 (years 7–10) were also distributed for implementation commencing with year 7 in 1999.

The development of these three syllabuses has been one aspect of the government's commitment to the strengthening of civics and citizenship education in the NSW curriculum. A School Certificate test in Australian history and Australian geography incorporating civics and citizenship has been

introduced into the School Certificate. This test will be mandatory for all School Certificate candidates by 2002.

The Discovering Democracy program provided a range of civics and citizenship-related opportunities for teachers and students across all school sectors during 1998, including the following:

- over 1,300 teachers attended workshops on the Discovering Democracy program held by the NSW Discovering Democracy Professional Development Committee
- an advanced professional development course for primary teachers was developed and trialled. The course will be developed by coalitions of universities and professional teachers associations across the State in 1999
- over 50 schools were provided with grants for the incorporation of Discovering Democracy materials into school programs. A further round of grants is planned for 1999. Negotiations are continuing for the development of a website to publish the products of the school grants.

Civics and citizenship education was enhanced in all school sectors through parliamentary education in the classroom, school activities such as seminars, visits to Parliament and contact with local Members of Parliament (State and federal), student constitutional conventions and the democratic election of prefects and student bodies. Other initiatives which supported civics and citizenship education in 1998 included:

- an international civics and citizenship education project jointly conducted by the NSW Department of Education and Training, the British Council (Australia) and the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Using the Internet, this project links schools in NSW with schools in Wales to explore the theme of civics and citizenship
- joint activities with the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board to celebrate 21 years of anti-discrimination legislation in New South Wales
- the delivery of anti-racism education programs such as the Whole School Anti-Racism project training program, which was attended by teams of teachers, students, parents and community members from 211 government schools.

The arts

In accordance with the *Education Act 1990* (NSW), primary schools must provide all students with knowledge, understanding and experiences in visual arts and music in each year of primary school. The Office of the Board

of Studies completed work on the creative arts K–6 draft syllabus in November 1998. The syllabus includes dance, drama, music and visual arts. Following the review of the HSC, development of the syllabuses for Stage 6 (years 11 and 12) visual arts, music, drama and dance began in 1998.

NSW has a strong history of showcasing student achievement in the arts. During 1998, students from government, Catholic and independent schools had their achievements recognised in HSC exhibitions and presentations, including ARTEXPRESS, Encore, On Stage and Call Back:

- ARTEXPRESS exhibited more than 200 artworks submitted by students for the 1998 HSC visual arts examination. The exhibits were selected from the top 10 per cent of the 9,291 submitted artworks. ARTEXPRESS exhibits at the Art Gallery of New South Wales; the State Library of New South Wales; College of Fine Arts, University of NSW; and in David Jones' store windows. Seven regional art galleries are also hosting a touring collection of ARTEXPRESS works
- the Encore 98 Concert at the Sydney Opera House demonstrated the sophisticated achievements of HSC music students. Encore displayed a repertoire of superb quality in both the exemplary solo and ensemble pieces. The program represented the full range of musical expression in the HSC music syllabuses and featured 25 exemplary works from student performers and composers
- On Stage 98 represented a selection of outstanding exhibitions and performances produced by 1998 HSC drama students. In 1998, 3,335 students chose to study drama for the HSC. Of these students, 116 were represented in On Stage. Thirteen performances were staged at the Seymour Theatre. The program included Writers On Stage, a new initiative in 1998 that showcased a reading of two outstanding scripts submitted as individual projects for the HSC.

Other arts projects which impact across the school sectors include preparations for major events in the years 2000 and 2001, including the Sydney 2000 Olympic Band, the Pacific Schools Games Orchestra, Sing 2001 and Dance 2001.

Opportunities for students in the arts during 1998 were improved by:

- the distribution of State funding to regional conservatoriums and music centres through the Department of Education and Training's Performing

Arts Unit. This process will lead to closer cooperation between conservatoriums and their local schools

- the alignment of areas of arts education with special events, celebrations and international relations.
NSW school students were encouraged to participate in a wide range of major public performances and exhibitions that have a high profile both within NSW and internationally. Special events in which students have participated or will participate include Australia Day, Anzac Day, visits by overseas heads of State, the Olympic Arts Festivals, the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and the Pacific School Games
- the continued involvement of students from all school sectors in music and drama performances, and exhibitions of student's work in visual arts both in-school and through programs such as the Shakespeare Globe Festival, music eisteddfods, the Rock Eisteddfod, concerts and other performances.

Vocational education in schools

Undertaking vocational courses as a part of the HSC enhances employment prospects as well as providing articulation to TAFE and university. In 1998, there were over 46,000 enrolments from students in years 11 and 12 in dual-accredited vocational education courses. Over half of these enrolments were in the high-growth areas of Tourism and Hospitality, and Business and Clerical studies.

In 1998, the State government continued to implement the recommendations of the review of the HSC. The review strongly supported vocational education in schools and recommended a strengthening of its provisions. This included bringing all vocational education and training (VET) courses within a coherent curriculum framework under broad industry groupings, consistent with the NSW Strategic Vocational Education and Training Plan.

In NSW, secondary school students have a range of VET options, including dual-accredited vocational HSC courses developed by the NSW Board of Studies, dual-accredited VET courses developed by TAFE and part-time traineeships.

Professional development and teacher education are a key component of the implementation of VET in schools.

Initiatives in 1998 included the following:

- a total of 650 secondary school teachers from the government, Catholic and independent sectors were trained

to deliver vocational education and training in schools under the Secondary Teachers Education Program

- a Bachelor of Vocational Education and Training (Secondary Conversion) course was developed in conjunction with Charles Sturt University to enable people with vocational qualifications and experience to become qualified to teach VET subjects in schools
- a total of 251 teachers from government, Catholic and independent schools were trained at Lidcombe College of TAFE to deliver the content-endorsed Furniture course in their schools.

In addition to VET programs in years 11 and 12, students from all school sectors also had access to a wide range of programs and initiatives which provide them with knowledge and skills relevant to the world of work including:

- enterprise education activities such as Practice Firms, Young Achievement Australia's Business Skills Program, Australian Business Week Program and the Australian Quality Council's E-Team Program
- employment and training information forums, careers markets and tertiary education seminars
- advisory services for students and school leavers during the January school vacation which provided educational counselling and information to young people on employment, further education and training options.

Access to VET and broader work-oriented programs in all school sectors was strengthened in a variety of ways. These include the following:

- students in isolated rural areas and community care schools (schools attached to Juvenile Justice Centres) were given improved access to VET, with year 10 students undertaking a range of TAFE-delivered courses as part of their School Certificate
- within the Catholic sector, secondary schools were clustered to broaden students' access to a range of dual-accredited vocational education courses
- over 600 government school students identified as being at risk of being unemployed upon leaving school were assisted to develop individualised school-to-work plans in a pilot project
- independent schools linked with TAFE colleges, ran career seminars and developed links with service providers and business networks

- approximately 70,000 government secondary students were involved in some form of workplace learning.

Provision for socioeconomically disadvantaged students

The needs of socioeconomically disadvantaged students within NSW are addressed through both program delivery and curricula development. Within the development of the School Certificate and HSC curricula, more equal and equitable outcomes among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds will be achieved, with high standards being expected of all students. The new curriculum structure for the HSC has been designed to ensure that all students are challenged to achieve high academic standards, irrespective of the course they have chosen.

In government schools, assistance to socioeconomically disadvantaged students is targeted through the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP). This program identifies and assists schools serving communities with the highest concentrations of low socioeconomic status families. In 1998, there were 479 schools participating in the program (about 20 per cent of government schools).

In 1998, there were 154,074 students and 10,800 teachers in these schools.

Literacy is a particular focus of the DSP. In 1998, three projects were implemented in DSP schools across the State to improve students' literacy outcomes:

- Talking Our Way into Literacy, which provides a focus on the teaching of talking and listening as key components in student literacy development
- The Teaching of Reading, which explores a range of frameworks for programming the effective teaching of reading at various stages of schooling
- Literacy in Subjects and Key Learning Areas, which provides school communities with the opportunity to develop and explore a range of teaching and learning strategies based on the particular language features of a subject and of key learning areas.

Principals, teachers and parents from all DSP schools meet in networks of schools twice a year to identify good practice and to look for solutions to issues specific to their contexts. In 1998, two series of program support and review meetings were organised around the State, involving 483 principals, 776

executive staff, 1,241 teachers and 699 parent and community members.

DSP schools reported that of the students sitting for the HSC in 1998, 54 per cent were the first in their families to sit for the HSC or its equivalent. Students from DSP schools were placed 257 times on the 1998 HSC course order-of-merit list, coming first or equal first in ten subjects.

The Catholic sector has provided assistance to socioeconomically disadvantaged students since the establishment of Catholic education in 1820. Catholic schools have the authority to waive fees, and it is policy that no child be excluded because of non-payment of fees. An index of socioeconomic disadvantage is used to target specific funding to schools serving socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Specific assistance includes the employment of pastoral care workers and outreach programs that directly support students and their families.

Commonwealth-funded capital projects

Government sector

In 1998, the Commonwealth provided \$73.689 million towards capital projects in NSW.

Thirty-one capital projects funded by the Commonwealth were completed both physically and financially during 1998. The most common types of work undertaken and facilities

provided were: the construction of new primary and secondary schools in growth areas; upgrading of existing facilities; and the provision of halls, gymnasiums, libraries, additional classrooms and specialist facilities in existing schools where the facilities met a priority need.

Catholic sector

In 1998, the Commonwealth provided \$21.4 million towards building projects in NSW Catholic schools.

Twenty projects funded by the Commonwealth were completed both physically and financially in 1998. The most common types of work were: the provision of classrooms and specialist facilities for new primary and secondary schools in population growth areas; the upgrading and refurbishment of older secondary schools to meet current curriculum requirements; the provision of libraries in primary schools; the upgrading of small rural schools, particularly the provision of staff and student facilities; the extension of junior secondary schools to senior secondary.

Independent sector

In 1998, the Commonwealth provided \$6.6 million towards capital projects in the NSW independent sector. Twenty-nine capital projects funded by the Commonwealth were completed both physically and financially during 1998. The most common type of work undertaken and facilities provided were the construction of classrooms, science laboratories and technical facilities. Two-thirds of the facilities constructed catered for existing student needs, while the remaining one-third was for new student places.