



## Chapter 10

# WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## Overview

### Government sector

In August 1998, 764 government schools enrolled 69 per cent of all persons in the State aged 4 and 5 years, 74 per cent of all persons aged 6–14 years and 28 per cent of all persons aged 15–19 years.

The apparent retention rate to year 12 in 1998 of the original 1994 year 8 cohort (excluding senior college, international and private students) was 59.6 per cent, compared with 58.3 per cent in 1997, and 51 per cent of year 12 students satisfied the requirements for secondary graduation (48.5 per cent in 1997).

### Outcomes-focussed education

Government schools are required to provide learning environments that are appropriate to the needs of both students and society and respond to the legitimate requirements of government and the community for adequate accountability. To meet these requirements, quite profound change is occurring in the nature of teaching and learning and the manner in which the effectiveness of that learning is assessed.

Schools are introducing an outcomes-focussed approach, using Curriculum Council's Curriculum Framework and the Education Department's Student Outcome Statements and policies on assessment and reporting to parents. The Outcome Statements describe typical learning progress in relation to the general outcomes described in the Curriculum Framework. The introduction phase extends to 2003.

### Curriculum relevance

Society is now subject to constant and increasingly rapid change in the nature of work and social relations and schools must continue to respond by providing curriculum that is relevant and comprehensive, and addresses the needs of all

students. To do so within the context of organisational structures devised to meet earlier demographic patterns is difficult. Therefore, through the Local Area Education Planning process, current provisions by groups of schools are examined, instead of those of individual schools, and proposals are developed for more effective and efficient curriculum delivery through a range of strategies, including school amalgamations, closures and rebuilding.

This process also provides opportunities to use new forms of schooling, including middle schooling, which addresses the special needs of young adolescents.

### Students at risk

A significant number of students in mainstream schools are at risk of failing to achieve satisfactory educational outcomes. 'At risk' students include those subject to disadvantage because of disability, learning or behavioural disorder, socioeconomic status, location, ethnicity, language background or gender. These disadvantages may be manifested in dysfunctional behaviours, including alienation and truancy, which are addressed by the department in concert with other government agencies.

In June 1998, the Minister for Education announced the Making the Difference strategy, which targets students at educational risk in government schools.

The strategy, which is being implemented over a five-year period, identifies the following areas for attention:

- policy implementation
- retention and participation
- health and well-being
- curriculum
- improved service delivery.

Making the Difference has three phases:

- **1998–1999:** Awareness. The strategy is introduced to districts and schools.
- **1999–2002:** Implementation. Schools identify and develop processes for early identification and put in place strategies for addressing the needs of students at risk.
- **2002–2004:** Consolidation.

Making the Difference focuses on both prevention and early identification/intervention, with programs addressing the individual needs of students, and groups all programs and resources currently directed towards students who are not achieving to their full potential and applies them in a more coordinated and strategic manner.

All government schools are required to implement identification and intervention programs.

They are able to link to other government and non-government agencies, as well as the wider community, to develop appropriate programs, which are being phased in as introductory professional development for principals and teachers is completed.

The State government is committing \$3.1 million annually over the period 1998–2002 for implementation, mostly to fund local initiatives.

The strategy will be evaluated during the implementation process, with a final report to be prepared in 2004.

## Human resources

The 1997 decision of the WA Equal Opportunity Tribunal that existing policies governing promotional transfers were discriminatory has had major implications for the department's staffing process.

Its commitment to statewide equity of provision has been affected by the introduction of a full merit selection process for the appointment of school administrators: the staffing of schools in less-favoured locations has become more difficult and thus the case has been strengthened for the provision of special incentives to encourage teachers to take up promotional appointments in rural and remote areas.

While the quality of school principals is arguably higher than at any time in the history of the department, the demands being placed on them, including human resources and asset management and the implementation of

outcomes-based education, necessitate special provisions being made for their continuing professional development. To this end, the department began in 1998 to develop a dedicated

facility for the dissemination of best practice among principals.

## Student retention

The upward trend in retention rates experienced in the early 1990s has not been maintained. However, retention may increase again in the future due to changes to upper school courses expected to occur as a result of a Curriculum Council review of course structures and certification and the entrance requirements of TAFE institutions and universities.

## Vocational education and training

The most effective vocational education and training (VET) addresses the needs of both students not intending to progress to post-secondary education and those seeking entry to TAFE or universities.

The value of VET in providing students with structured experience of the world of work has been well proven since it became a department priority in 1997, but participation so far has been dominated by students not intending to progress to post-secondary education.

It is desirable that all students, irrespective of intended post-school destination, be able to participate in VET and earn credits for both VET-related studies undertaken in schools and TAFE institutions and structured work experience.

## Information technology

The coming knowledge-based society will demand of all its members a high level of competence in dealing with information and information technology. All students must have access to adequate opportunities to develop their abilities to use computers and information networks.

This is acknowledged by the State government by its decision to fund very substantial increases in the number of computers in primary and secondary schools.

## Catholic sector

In 1998, there were 151 Catholic schools in WA, 142 of them coeducational. Five were solely for boys and four for girls. Fifteen schools were combined primary–secondary schools, while 28 were secondary and 108 primary.

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) is appointed by the Bishops and is responsible to them. Its purpose is:

- to develop and evaluate policy where it has been determined by the Bishops to apply to Catholic education as a whole
- to act on behalf of each diocesan Bishop in specified matters relating to Catholic schools.

The second of these functions is exercised through the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, which has a central office at Leederville and regional offices in Broome, Geraldton and Bunbury.

Responsibility for the financial operations of Catholic schools lies with local school boards.

## Independent sector

There are 113 non-Catholic independent schools in the State, educating 32,363 students. Choice and diversity are important issues to independent schools and there are wide differences among these schools, which are spread throughout the huge area of Western Australia.

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) has a membership of 111 schools and attempts to cater for the differing needs of these schools. It also administers Commonwealth funding grants to non-member schools.

The largest proportion of independent schools falls into Commonwealth funding categories 6–10, yet the largest number of students are in schools in categories 11 and 12, with the second largest group in schools in categories 1–3.

School populations range from fewer than 30 to more than 1,200 students.

Teachers from independent schools and staff from the AISWA secretariat participate in more than 150 committees involved in consultation and decision-making on mainly educational matters. Staff also vigorously support their respective professional associations, often filling executive roles and providing leadership in them.

The independent sector enjoys a collegial relationship with both the Catholic and government sectors.

There is evidence of increasing cross-sectoral interaction in consultative groups, professional development, networks, VET clusters and use of facilities (for example, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching, a cross-sectoral initiative, was opened in 1998).

# Major developments

## Government sector

There were a number of significant developments in government education in WA.

The performance of all year 3 students was assessed against national literacy benchmarks. Provisional results indicated that in reading, 79 per cent of females and 73 per cent of males met or exceeded the benchmark; in writing, 81 and 71 per cent; and in spelling 85 and 75 per cent. Provisional results for Indigenous students in each area assessed were, respectively, 33, 39 and 47 per cent, and for students with a language background other than English, 67, 72 and 79 per cent.

There was a further increase in the range and uptake of VET: 3,823 years 11 and 12 students in 100 schools participated in VET programs.

The Curriculum Improvement Program was introduced and teachers began to engage with the outcomes-focussed approach to teaching and learning. In many schools, general understandings about the Curriculum Framework and the Outcomes and Standards Framework (which consists of the department's Student Outcome Statements and its policies on assessment and reporting) developed and planning for implementation was undertaken.

A new policy on student behaviour management was released. It will be used in all government schools by the end of 1999. Part of the Making the Difference strategy, the policy focusses on developing positive environments in schools and encouraging good behaviour, but also provides for sanctions such as the suspension or exclusion of students.

A resource package for mainstream teachers working with students with disabilities was trialled and distributed. It provided specialised curriculum delivery strategies, technical advice and information on individual education plans and general disability support services. A district service centre was established to provide statewide consultancy and equipment support for students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

By the end of 1998, Internet access was available to virtually all schools, as was participation in the department's wide-area network EdNet. The Messaging and Information Directory Access for Schools project provided schools with enhanced access to email and other electronic facilities. The Internet in the Curriculum training program was developed, while best

practice arising from the Innovation in the Classroom project was disseminated and Technology Focus schools conducted practicums for other schools. A learning technologies planning guide was developed.

All eligible children were offered eight sessions per week of pre-primary education. Over 3,000 additional places were provided in the kindergarten program and planning was undertaken to ensure that from February 1999 all children turning 4 years of age could be guaranteed access to two sessions per week in the department's kindergarten program. Planning was finalised for the transfer of responsibility for the provision of kindergarten places from Family and Children's Services from the beginning of 1999. A common funding model was implemented that subsidised fees paid by parents of children at community kindergartens to ensure that the maximum annual fee for government and community kindergartens would not exceed \$40. With the agreement of local Indigenous communities, nine preschools providing specifically for 4-year-old Indigenous children were transferred to the management of local government schools.

A draft literacy strategy and a 'Literacy Net' were developed to assist children experiencing difficulties with literacy learning in P-3. Professional development on the use of the Net was provided to more than 200 schools and trialling was undertaken of the 4-7 phase of the Net.

There were further increases in the number of students studying a language other than English (LOTE). Under the LOTE 2000: New Horizons policy, 99,000 students in 660 schools were enrolled in at least one LOTE.

New Technology and Enterprise courses for years 11 and 12 continued to be developed and trialled and supporting resources were produced.

A range of Indigenous education initiatives included the establishment of education centres at Perth and Geraldton to support education districts in achieving the outcomes and targets of Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme and the department's Aboriginal Education Operational Plan. This initiative is expected to improve operational and field linkages with other agencies. The position of district coordinator was established in 11 districts to assist districts and schools achieve improved outcomes in Indigenous education and address the specific needs of Indigenous students. Train-the-trainer workshops facilitated introduction of the Aboriginal Studies K-10 curriculum, as well as initiatives to improve local

Indigenous participation in the teaching of Aboriginal Studies. Both Coordinators and Aboriginal Liaison Officers received training in delivery of the cultural-awareness package *Our Story*, which promotes knowledge and understanding of Indigenous cultures and experiences to assist departmental employees to work more effectively with Indigenous students and parents. A curriculum resource, *Time for Talk*, was produced to help teachers meet the oral language needs of Indigenous students in a culturally sensitive manner and to acknowledge the oral basis of Indigenous culture. District councils were established in all education districts to enable Indigenous people to advise on issues affecting Indigenous education and to ensure that Indigenous perspectives were incorporated into local decision-making processes. To improve prospects for Indigenous employment with the department, a specialised employment and career education plan was developed.

## Catholic sector

In preparation for introduction of the Curriculum Framework, 113 schools participated in an extended workshop, while 500 school leaders attended the Collaborative Leadership conference and major teacher conferences were held in the science, mathematics, English, LOTE and health and physical education learning areas.

CECWA approved the establishment of two special education centres for students with high support needs. Operations will commence in 1999.

Implementation of the Aboriginal Studies curriculum developed by the Education Department began.

Structured workplace learning involved over 800 students in 26 schools.

## Independent sector

Planning for the implementation of the Curriculum Framework continued. Each teacher received all Framework materials, which include major learning outcomes in the overarching statement and in each learning area.

With the announcement of the State government's Computers in Schools Program and, to a minor extent, the Commonwealth government's Surplus Computers for Schools Programme, most schools began developing technology plans to improve facilities and to encourage the embedding of technology into the curriculum. AISWA is managing both programs.

The elimination of the Satisfactory Performance requirement for tertiary entrance in WA has had a dramatic effect on the

type of subjects being taken by students in years 11 and 12. An appreciable number of students dropped the sixth Tertiary Entrance Examinations (TEE) subject to take only five subjects or to take up a non-TEE or VET subject, sometimes for only part of the year. This affected both staffing and timetabling.

Although participation in the literacy testing of year 3 students in 1998 was not compulsory for independent schools, about 45 per cent of AISWA member schools did so. Some 20 schools also joined a specialised literacy project organised as part of the sector's professional development for supporting the national goals for literacy and trialled the Monitoring Standards in Education package developed by the Education Department. This project was one of three action research trials which were underway in 1998. Details of the trials are to be published in 1999 to support individual independent schools.

## The 1998 focus areas

### Government sector Student outcomes in literacy

In December 1998, the Minister for Education announced that four out of five year 3 students had reached or exceeded expected achievement levels in the statewide literacy assessment (WALA), conducted in August 1998. The assessment was a major component of the State government's response to the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. The benchmark was established by the Education Department, using national guidelines. The final, nationally agreed benchmark level is unlikely to vary significantly from the estimated level.

Parents of students who took part in the WALA received their children's results as part of end-of-school year reports. WA was the only State to report against the benchmarks to parents in 1998.

WALA results are expected to help teachers, principals, students, parents, district directors and a range of education specialists to focus on students who need most help. In 1999, principals will be required to develop targeted intervention strategies for students who did not achieve the required benchmarks.

Government schools have access to a wide range of resources and strategies to improve literacy, including initiatives targeting students and professional development for teachers. These include First Steps, which is used by around 70 per cent of primary schools; specific literacy and reading intervention programs; and programs for Indigenous students and students with a language background other than English.

New programs are also expected to contribute to literacy improvements, and include:

- Literacy Net, which began by providing additional support to teachers in the early childhood years, and included strategies for identifying students experiencing literacy difficulties and measuring their progress against literacy checkpoints; the Net will be progressively extended to year 10
- the Aboriginal Education Operational Plan, under which schools receive a grant for every Indigenous student, with additional incentive-based funding allocated for student retention and graduation; part of this program focusses specifically on improving the literacy levels of Indigenous students
- the employment, from 1999, of extra teachers to achieve class sizes of 24 or fewer in years 1 to 3 by 2003, enabling greater individual attention to be given to students at educational risk.

### Languages other than English

Monitoring Standards pilot testing in Italian and Indonesian was conducted in 1997 and analysed in 1998.

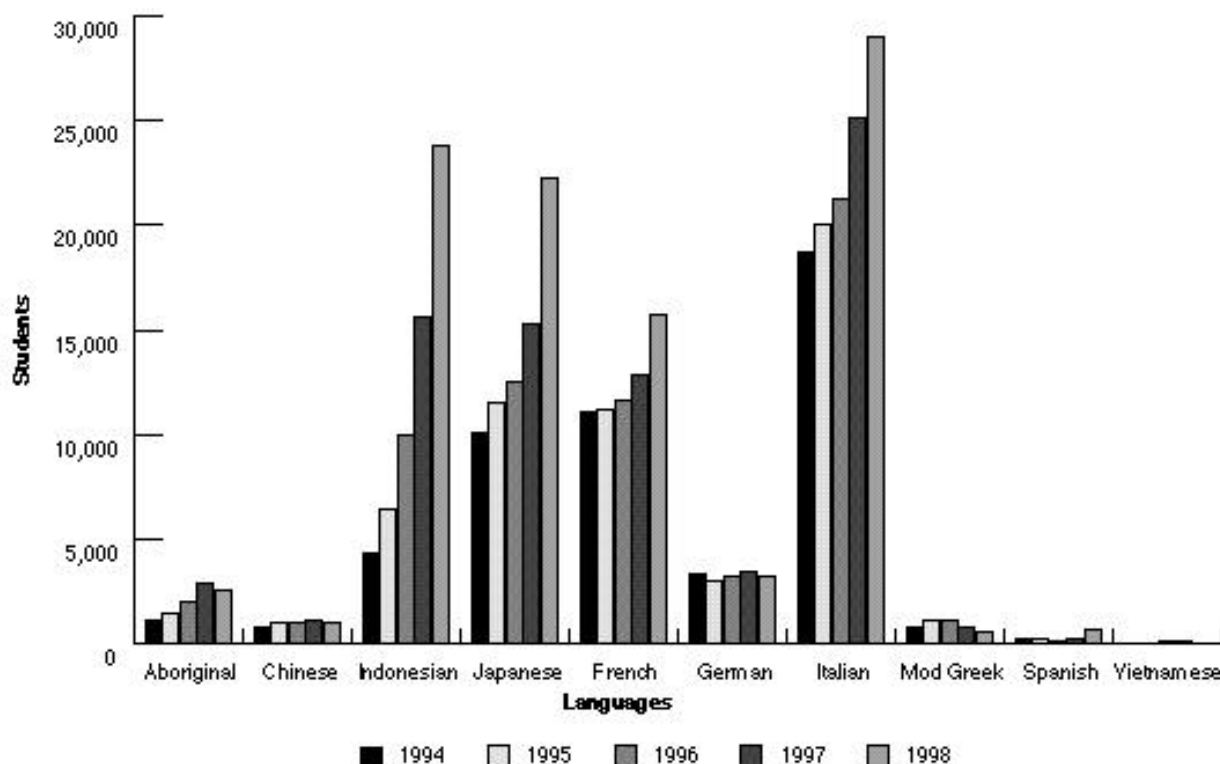
It involved assessment of the achievement in the viewing and reading, listening and responding, writing and speaking strands of a sample of year 7 students studying either of these languages.

**Table 10.1 Monitoring Standards in Education, LOTE, students achieving at or above level 2, WA, 1997 (per cent)**

<i>Strand</i>	<i>Indonesian</i>	<i>Italian</i>
Listening and responding	70.5	43.7
Viewing and reading	81.9	99.4
Speaking	86.5	93.9
Writing	58.7	63.0

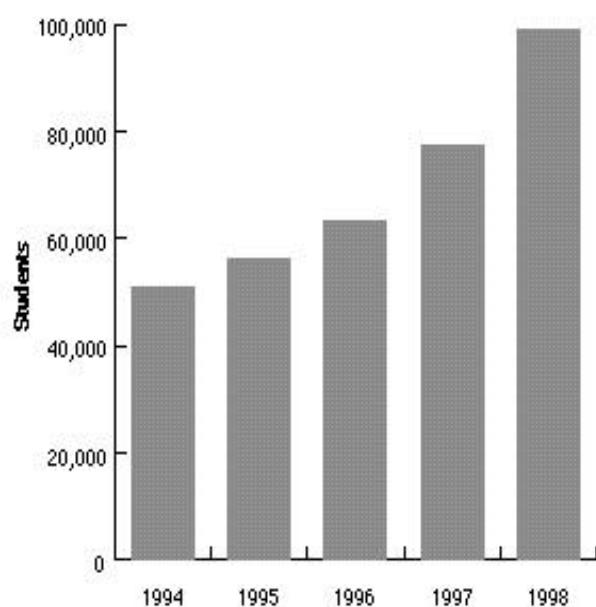
Source: Education Department of WA

Figure 10.1 Student participation by LOTE, government schools, WA, 1994–98



Source: Education Department of WA

Figure 10.2 Total participation in LOTE studies, government schools, WA, 1994–98



Source: Education Department of WA

In identifying a sample of students for this testing program, it was not possible to find sufficient students who had studied a LOTE continuously from year 3 to year 7. Therefore four years of study was decided upon. The sample for Italian consisted of 338 students who met the criterion of four years of continuous study of the language for 60 minutes per week. For Indonesian, 162 students met the criterion.

Most students demonstrated competence at level 2 of the LOTE student outcome statements. The greatest variation in results was demonstrated in the listening and responding and speaking strand, particularly in the listening component.

### Information technology

In 1998, the State government announced two initiatives aimed at improving the ratio of computers to students available in schools. The first, which commenced in 1998, allocated \$10.9 million over four years, and aimed to halve the previously existing ratio of students to centrally funded computers in primary and secondary schools.

A second initiative allocated another \$100 million (\$80 million for government schools and \$20 million for non-government schools) to further improve the ratio. Funds for this project

will be disbursed to schools over the next four years, with the first allocation being provided in February 1999.

While not all of these funds will be spent on equipment, collectively these allocations are expected to result in an estimated 34,000 additional computers being made available to students in government schools.

Principals will have flexibility in the way they spend the funds, provided that each school achieves the government's required computer ratio in 2002.

## Vocational education and training

Over all, VET provisions in 1998 were characterised by the following positive features:

- the use of effective funding and curriculum models
- a growing awareness in schools and communities of the need for programs to address students' post-school options
- extensive professional development, including the Certificate IV in Workplace Training Category 2, which was completed by over 500 teachers
- maintenance of cordial relationships with small business, thus maximising structured workplace learning opportunities
- closer alignment of Australian Student Traineeship Foundation funding with school sector funding
- concessions under the new staffing formula for schools offering VET.

However, there is uncertainty about schools becoming registered training organisations and fully implementing the Australian Recognition Framework, and the shift from module accreditation to competency standards – 1999 will be a transitional year in the movement from a focus on curriculum (through the national training modules) to recognition of training providers and the use of the National Training Packages (NTP). The NTPs contain competency standards and will be the basis for assessment.

Other issues of concern include long-term recurrent funding, the costs of providers for off-the-job learning and the difficulties faced by university-bound students in taking VET.

## Independent sector

### Student outcomes in literacy

The AISWA Literacy Plan, developed to support schools within the sector, has been highly successful.

Following a literacy launch in June 1998, a full-time Literacy Program Officer was appointed, and the *AISWA Literacy Support File* was prepared and distributed to schools. This file contained details of research undertaken by universities, on behalf of AISWA:

- *Trialling P-3 Literacy Assessment – Tools and Methods* (Edith Cowan University)
- *MSE Trialling of Literacy Assessment Materials* (Edith Cowan University)
- *Developing Whole School Literacy Plans* (Curtin University of Technology).

Preparation of a junior secondary intervention package commenced in 1998, through additional Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs literacy funding, which will provide an appropriate range of tools and mechanisms for teachers.

AISWA also participated in a K-1 literacy project (funded by the Australian Council for Educational Research), which involves sharing outcomes and the use of the Monitoring Standards in Education package.

A detailed professional development plan was prepared to meet the Commonwealth requirements and provided to schools where it proved valuable.

## Languages other than English

There was a marked increase of schools offering and students studying Indonesian, with 5,070 students at 37 schools participating, compared with 4,958 students at 26 schools taking French.

This indicates a shift in LOTE preference and there are implications for schools, such as the supply of experienced staff for the teaching of Indonesian and the oversupply of teachers of German (12 schools and 1,274 students) and Japanese (17 schools and 2,600 students).

AISWA has initiated a Language Assistants program, employing assistants to support schools within a cluster arrangement.

## Information technology

The professional development of teachers and the training of new teachers in the use of IT (and especially of on-line technologies) is a major concern. Students today are 'Net students' and they use technology constantly in their daily lives. Teachers have to accept that students will learn



differently and that they have developed different skills, and in some cases to higher levels than their teachers.

## **Vocational education and training in schools**

In 1998, the growth in the number of independent schools involved in VET continued.

The approach taken by most independent schools was to form clusters with other independent and Catholic schools. The number of clusters increased from two in 1997 to six in 1998 and the number of independent schools involved in the clusters grew from 19 at the end of 1997 to 22 in 1998. Three additional schools delivered individual school programs addressing the needs and training requirements of their students.

The number of students accessing VET also showed marked growth, with increases of 160 per cent in the number of year 11 and 256 per cent in the number of year 12 students undertaking both structured work-based learning and formal VET qualifications compared with 1997.

The range of industry areas available to students doubled, from ten in 1997 to 20 in 1998.

## **Commonwealth-funded capital projects**

In 1998, the Commonwealth provided \$21.786 million toward capital projects in WA government schools. Of the 17 capital projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during the year, the most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided were the construction of general teaching areas, the completion and provision of technical work areas in secondary schools and the upgrading of library and administration facilities in primary and secondary schools.

The Commonwealth provided \$5.5 million towards capital projects in Catholic schools. Of the 26 capital projects funded in part by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during 1998, the most common type of work undertaken was the provision of general learning areas in primary and secondary schools.

In 1998, the Commonwealth provided \$2,216,988 toward capital projects in independent schools. Nineteen capital projects supported by Commonwealth funds were completed both physically and financially. The most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided were general learning areas for primary and secondary students, student and staff amenities, multipurpose rooms for primary students, and administration facilities for primary and secondary schools.