

Introduction

The purpose of the National Report

In April 1989, State and Territory Ministers for Education, together with the Commonwealth Minister agreed to a set of Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia. At the same time the Ministers determined that there should be an annual national report on schooling in Australia which would inform the Australian people on progress towards the achievement of these national goals. It was envisaged that the report would also:

- provide commentary on the operation of school systems and participation of students in schooling
- report on the school curriculum
- describe student outcomes
- summarise the application of financial resources to schools
- report on school topics of national interest
- highlight important national and state initiatives in schooling
- provide an authoritative source of information and a sound basis for informed comment on various aspects of schooling.

The *National Report on Schooling in Australia: 1999* has been prepared with these purposes in mind as well as to provide a means whereby schools and systems can satisfy their educational accountability requirements. It describes the progress made during 1999 towards the achievement of the national goals for schooling in the approximately 10,000 schools across Australia's eight States and Territories.

The structure of the report

To a large extent, the *National Report on Schooling in Australia: 1999* follows the structural pattern that was used for the 1998 report. It describes developments in schooling during 1999, including areas of special interest (focus areas), previously agreed by Ministers. It also provides analysis of and comment on what was achieved in schools during the year, notes where progress needs to be made and examines prospects for the near future. An appendix presents contextual information on schooling in Australia, along with detailed data tables.

The 1999 Report differs from previous editions in that some of its content was the subject of a preliminary report that was published earlier in 2000. Ministers agreed to the early publication of the preliminary report dealing with the year 3 national benchmark reading results, because they considered the information it contained was of such significance that its release to the Australian people should not be delayed.

The report consists of three parts, including appendices.

Part 1: National overview

This part begins with a brief summary of the key developments, achievements and matters of national significance, and provides the reader with a summary and overview of the major issues of 1999. It then provides a national perspective on the performance of schools and education authorities in 1999. Particular attention is paid to the topics of special importance, or focus areas agreed to by the Ministers. The last chapter in this part is national in its perspective and provides a summary of progress in Australian schooling in 1999 against the national goals for

schooling. It describes both achievements and under-achievements, and offers some analysis of, and commentary on, prospects and opportunities for the near future.

Part 2: State/Territory and Commonwealth reports

This part contains a chapter from each of the States and Territories as well as one from the Commonwealth. The State and Territory chapters each present a brief account of schooling during 1999, as well as comment on the context, structure, responsibilities, objectives and financing in both the government and non-government sectors of schooling.

The Commonwealth chapter explains the Commonwealth's role in, and objectives for, Australian schooling. It also provides an outline of its policy and program initiatives in 1999. Included in this part is an account of the Commonwealth funding arrangements for schools in 1999.

Part 3: Appendices

Appendix 1: Statistics presents contextual information on schooling in Australia together with the statistics which underpin the information provided in the text. It is organised under the following headings

- context
- statistical tables
 - schools and students
 - teachers and teaching
 - resourcing
 - equity

Appendix 2: 1999 Year 3 and Year 5 Reading National Benchmark results.

Appendix 3: Publications provides a list of the major publications relevant to school education in Australia that were released by education authorities during 1999.

Responsibility for the report

This report is printed under the authority of the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). To facilitate the preparation of the report, the Council has established a taskforce with representation from each State and Territory as well as from the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations and the National Catholic Education Commission. The taskforce has responsibility to prepare recommendations for the Council concerning the content and structure of the report. In addition, together with the MCEETYA Secretariat, the taskforce is required to oversee the production of the report once the content has received Ministerial approval.

State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers with responsibility for schooling in 1999 were:

New South Wales	The Hon. John Aquilina, MP
Victoria	The Hon. Phillip Gude, MP (to October 1999) The Hon. Mary Delahunty, MLA (from October 1999)
Queensland	The Hon. Dean Wells, MLA
South Australia	The Hon. Malcolm Buckby, MP
Western Australia	The Hon. Colin Barnett, MLA
Northern Territory	The Hon. Peter Adamson, MLA
Tasmania	The Hon. Paula Wriedt, MHA
Australian Capital Territory	Mr Bill Stefaniak, MLA
Commonwealth of Australia	The Hon. Dr David Kemp, MP

The Chair of MCEETYA in 1999 was The Hon. Malcolm Buckby, MP.