

Chapter 12

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Context and structure of schooling

In 1999, schooling in Western Australia was delivered in the context of the *State's Education Act 1928* (which is to be replaced in 2001 by the new School Education Act passed by Parliament in 1999), the *Curriculum Council Act 1997*, the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century, and sector-specific policies and guidelines.

Government schools generally enrol students K–7 (primary), K–10 (district high and remote community), 8–10 (high) or 8–12 (senior high), while non-government schools are more commonly structured as K–7 or K–12.

In August 1999, there were 1,038 schools in the State with 316,609 students. The 765 government schools enrolled 227,232 students and the 273 non-government schools 89,377 students.

The non-government sector included 157 Catholic schools, as well as 12 Anglican schools, ten Baptist, eight Uniting Church, seven Seventh Day Adventist, 79 affiliated with various other religious denominations or with no religious affiliation. There were 60 community preschools with 3,073 students and 19 independent preschools with 612 students.

Some 1,100 students received approved home tuition.

Specialised government educational facilities included six residential agricultural schools and colleges, six Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, 69 education support schools and centres, two senior colleges and two senior campuses.

Priority objectives

Government sector

Priority objectives are described by the current Education Department strategic plan, the Plan for Government School Education 1998–2000, and include the establishment of an outcomes and standards-based approach to curriculum in all schools; the enhancement of teaching as a profession; the provision of greater scope for decision-making at the school level; and the more efficient and effective use of resources.

In pursuit of these objectives, the following initiatives were undertaken during 1999:

- the use in schools of Student Outcome Statements in each learning area, together with overviews and work samples. Professional development and curriculum materials were provided to support teachers in implementing the Curriculum Council's Curriculum Framework and Department's Outcomes and Standards Framework
- wider access by students and school staff to computers, on-line services and the Internet
- continuation of reforms to early childhood education that will involve a 25 per cent increase in the length of the pre-primary school week, a doubling of the length of the kindergarten program, changes to the cut-off dates for school entry, development of flexible entry and progression procedures, and the reduction of class sizes in the early years of schooling
- integration of programs and services for students at educational risk under the Making the Difference strategy

to improve educational outcomes, with a focus on early identification, prevention and intervention

- more vocational education and training options in years 11 and 12 to better meet the needs of post-compulsory students and the encouragement of schools to become Registered Training Organisations
- further development of the Centre for Professional Excellence at Fremantle to promote professional development for all teachers and provide facilities for professional associations, and establishment of a Leadership Centre at Leederville for present and aspiring school administrators
- staffing reforms in the areas of merit selection, promotion, mobility, permanency, career structures, grievance procedures and staffing formulas
- strengthened quality assurance provisions that included the reporting of standards in student literacy and numeracy achievement against national benchmarks. District directors of schools worked with principals to review schools' performance, which was reported both to individual school communities and to the department's corporate executive. All staff were required to participate in performance management processes
- local area education planning, which enabled groups of school communities to coordinate the provision of student access to a wider range of programs and services through the more effective and efficient use of resources.

Catholic sector

Priorities for Catholic schools included:

- improved student outcomes in literacy and numeracy
- implementation of the Curriculum Framework
- more effective pedagogy through the use of collaborative learning
- increased access to vocational education and training options for post-compulsory students.

Independent sector

For the surveyed independent schools, priority objectives in 1999 were:

- a focus on literacy and numeracy practice and assessment
- planning for the Curriculum Framework
- provision of an environment in which students could develop their full potential

- development of plans to extend information and communications technology into teaching and learning – embedding it in the curriculum
- provision of integrated learning (especially student-centred)
- provision of opportunities for leadership and citizenship training.

Significant developments

All sectors

Reports

At the request of the Minister for Education, a cross-sectoral report on middle schooling was prepared by the Department of Education Services. The Curriculum Council continued the review sought by the Minister of post-compulsory schooling provisions.

Outcomes-focused education

Under the Curriculum Council Act, all schools in the State are required to use the Curriculum Framework developed by the Council to structure, deliver, assess and report on the outcomes of schooling. Schools have until 2004 to do so.

The Framework establishes the basic principles upon which schooling is based by outlining the broad learning outcomes that students are expected to achieve, emphasising an encompassing view of curriculum, an explicit acknowledgement of core values, inclusion, flexibility, integration, breadth and balance, and a developmental approach that recognises that students develop and learn at different rates and in different ways, constructing new knowledge and understandings in ways which link their learning to their previous experiences.

At the same time, the Framework provides students and their parents with a clear sense of the direction of students' learning, and, through appropriate assessment and reporting procedures, of how students are progressing. Education is seen as the shared responsibility of students, teachers, parents, tertiary educators and the community.

To meet the requirements of the Curriculum Council Act, very significant 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-focused approach that uses the Curriculum Framework and, in the case of government and some non-government schools, the Education Department's Outcomes and Standards Framework (OSF).

The OSF consists of Student Outcome Statements and policies on assessment and reporting. It was developed to enable teachers and schools to plan, monitor and report progress in achieving the outcomes described in the Curriculum Framework.

Government sector

Local management of schools

The Education Department has been progressively devolving decision-making to the local level for more than ten years. The Plan for Government School Education 1998–2000 focuses on improving flexibility, diversity and choice.

A number of strategic initiatives already provide scope for local management: for example, local area education planning enables school communities to work together to provide students with access to a wider range of curriculum choices, specialist programs and quality facilities; and the Curriculum Improvement Program increases curriculum opportunities available to students, with schools making local decisions about implementing the Curriculum Framework and the OSF.

The new School Education Act provides for school-based decision-making and allows school councils to have a greater role in areas such as local sponsorship and advertising and approving school charges within specified limits.

Participating in a trial of extended local management are four senior and community high schools, one district high school, eleven primary schools, two education support centres and three remote community schools.

During the second half of 1999, these schools prepared their new decision-making structures for the 2000 school year. During the trial, consultants will evaluate its impact on school operations and the final report of the evaluation will be presented to the department's corporate executive to assist decision-making on the extension of increased local management to other schools.

Information and technology

The State government's Computers in Schools project allocated \$10.96 million over four years to halve the

previous ratios of students to centrally funded computers in government primary and secondary schools. Funded from the proceeds of the sale of the Dampier-to-Bunbury natural gas pipeline, the Learning Technologies initiative provided an additional \$80 million to government schools (and \$20 million to non-government schools) to further improve these ratios.

Funding for the first year of the program was delivered as part of school grant payments in February 1999. Funding is on the basis of both student numbers and needs, to accommodate socioeconomic and geographic differences between schools. It is intended to contribute to the achievement of a minimum of one computer for every ten primary students and one computer for every five secondary students by 2002. Computers must be less than four years old or a functional equivalent.

All government schools completed their plans for expenditure of this funding over 1999–2002, addressing integration into the curriculum, teacher competence, educational software, hardware and connections.

Rapid developments in information technology and telecommunications, accompanied by deregulation and changing cost structures for services, require large organisations such as the Education Department to take important decisions in relation to telecommunications that address the current and likely future needs of users and the effectiveness and efficiency of existing and emerging technologies.

In May 1999, the department established a project to develop a telecommunications strategy that would be responsive to school and community needs and take advantage of both new technologies and deregulation. The project is examining the present and future telecommunications needs of schools (with special attention being given to the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education), district offices and the central office.

Making the Difference

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; and improved service delivery. During 1999–2002, schools identify and develop processes for early identification and put in place strategies for addressing the needs of students at risk. The State

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

Making the Difference focuses on both prevention and early identification/intervention, with programs addressing the individual needs of students. All programs and resources currently directed towards students who are not achieving to their full potential are grouped and implemented in a more coordinated and strategic manner. All government schools are required to implement identification and intervention programs.

Schools are able to work with 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 strategy will be evaluated during the implementation process, and a final report will be prepared in 2004.

Local area education planning

By the end of 1999, the local area education planning (LAEP) process for most government schools was almost completed, with district directors finalising draft plans for improving opportunities for the delivery of schooling in the districts. School communities continued to make significant contributions to this planning process.

So far, the process has mainly involved the rationalisation of secondary provisions, by amalgamating or closing senior high schools, changing senior high schools to middle schools, and building new secondary schools with either separate or distinct middle and senior schools.

Catholic sector

Together with a continuing emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills in students, a range of opportunities was offered to teachers to enhance their teaching skills and keep abreast of new developments. These included implementation of the Curriculum Framework, changing teaching and learning strategies, cross-curriculum issues, implementation of values in the curriculum, assessment and reporting issues, subject-specific information and issues, the influence of the post-compulsory review and continued changes to vocational education.

A particular focus was the implementation of the Curriculum Framework. A major task undertaken in relation to this was the development and publication of *a Matrix for Action and Reflection – Implementing the Curriculum Framework* and

the commencement of a project to develop progress maps for each learning area. The results of the project are to be piloted in schools in second semester 2000.

Centrally based professional development addressed many of these areas. In addition, consultants worked with administrators and teachers in schools to assist them to develop and implement professional development plans that met the needs of their staff.

Annual conferences continued to be effective means of providing professional development, especially in addressing issues related to specific learning areas. These were offered in health and physical education, science, English and mathematics.

Independent sector

During 1999 there were a number of significant developments:

- Planning for the implementation of the Curriculum Framework was a priority for all schools and many professional development programs focused on changing learning and teaching programs to reflect an outcomes approach.
- The Computers in Schools program continued and schools began to implement technology plans to improve facilities and to encourage the embedding of technology into the curriculum.
- Although literacy population testing was not compulsory for independent schools, about 70 per cent of Association of Independent Schools member schools with students in years 3 and 5 participated. The cost of testing remained a major concern, as the schools themselves had to contribute to the costs. Schools used either the WA Literacy and Numeracy Assessment tests, to which the sector had provided input, or the joint Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs–Australian Council for Educational Research project.
- A school review established that almost half of the students at an all-girls school who were not university bound were studying a traditional academic curriculum. The school vigorously addressed the issue by adopting the INSTEP workplace-learning program. Now the school provides all its students with vocational and academic pathways, an initiative that has been widely welcomed.
- The adoption of middle schooling practices is an emerging trend in combined primary and secondary

schools. Teaching techniques in middle schooling more closely resemble those of upper primary and schools are directing professional development to this area in recognition of different learning styles. A significant number of teachers attended the middle schooling conference organised by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching following the release of the report *Planning for Middle Schooling in Western Australia*.

Professional development and teacher education

Government sector

Professional development

The Centre for Excellence in Teaching coordinated the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers in all schools sectors, while the Leadership Centre assisted the professional development of senior administrators in government schools. Staff professional development is now the responsibility of individual government schools and teachers are required to commit a specific number of hours in and out of school time each year to the process.

Teacher education

Issues of greatest concern included the attraction to and retention in the teaching profession of quality graduates and the staffing of rural and remote schools, particularly in certain secondary learning areas. A further problem is the ageing of teachers.

Catholic sector

Professional development

With the introduction of the Curriculum Framework, the core work of the primary and secondary consultants was to provide support to schools during the implementation process.

By the end of 1999, 81 primary schools had developed improved pedagogy and student communication, thinking and team skills using collaborative learning.

All schools accessing Commonwealth Literacy and Numeracy Programme Funds received professional development on whole-school literacy and numeracy planning. A number of schools were supported in the

development of a whole-school approach to students at risk in literacy and numeracy through the formation of collaborative school teams, as were teachers of students with special physical or intellectual learning needs.

Teacher education

During 1999, a number of strategies were reviewed to address the undersupply of teachers to rural and remote school locations.

The Kimberley Calling project, which includes a video as part of a full recruitment program conducted in both WA and Victoria, continued. Plans are under way to include New South Wales in 2000. Over the last three years all Kimberley schools have started the school year without vacancies and suitable staff not employed in the Kimberley often took positions offered in Pilbara schools.

Independent sector

Teacher education

In general, the recruitment of teachers in independent schools is not a problem, except in some rural and remote areas. There are no learning area vacancies. However, there are fewer applicants with the ability to teach higher level sciences and mathematics than in the past. Given the gradual increase in numbers of students enrolled at independent schools, it is expected that the demand for teachers in this sector will grow.

Commonwealth-funded capital projects

Government sector

Of the 13 capital projects in government schools funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during 1999, the most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided were the construction of new and replacement schools, the provision of general teaching areas and technical work areas and the upgrading of library and administration facilities in both primary and secondary schools.

Commonwealth funding in 1999 was \$22.3 million, compared with total capital works expenditure of \$107.6 million in 1998–1999.

Catholic sector

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$5.6 million toward the cost of capital projects in Catholic schools. Of the five capital projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during 1999, the most common types of work undertaken and facilities provided were the construction of general-purpose learning area facilities in primary schools, the science laboratory in a secondary school and the upgrading of library and teaching facilities.

Independent sector

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$2.3 million toward the cost of capital projects in independent schools. Of the 37 capital projects completed both physically and financially during 1999, 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 in primary and secondary schools.