

Chapter 14

NORTHERN TERRITORY

The successful delivery of many aspects of education to all students in the Northern Territory is a result of the high level of collaboration between the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE), the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and the Association of Independent Schools in the Northern Territory. In particular, this collaboration included the development and implementation of the Northern Territory Literacy Plan and the Northern Territory Numeracy Plan and a number of intervention and professional development programs.

Structure and context of schooling

In the NT, almost 25 per cent of the population is of school age, and of these, approximately 35 per cent are Indigenous. Education services are provided to a diverse multicultural and multilingual population, many living in remote centres – more than half the schools and a quarter of students are located in remote areas with varying degrees of access disadvantage. These students are predominantly Indigenous but schools in urban and rural areas also

have significant Indigenous enrolments, averaging 10–30 per cent. In some schools 75 per cent are Indigenous. Many of these students suffer from poor health, including otitis media, and come from families of low socioeconomic status, which are limited in their capacity to support their children's education.

There are more than 50 Indigenous languages spoken by students and one-third of Territorians between 5 and 17 years of age speak one or more of over 60 languages other than English as their first language.

Other major issues that continued to affect schooling in the NT were:

- the itinerant nature of the population – many Indigenous people move for a variety of reasons and others seek employment opportunities, educational opportunities for their children or move for family reasons
- the high turnover of the teaching population – teachers come from all States of Australia and overseas and often only stay for a short time, especially in the isolated communities
- the attendance, participation and retention rates of Indigenous students – the participation rate for these students is similar to others at the primary level, but unacceptably low at the secondary level and Indigenous attendance rates for students from non-urban schools are consistently 13–16 per cent lower than those for students at urban schools
- the cost of service delivery, including distance education, as students are widely dispersed across the NT and the diverse range of languages and cultures of the student body necessitates additional curriculum and language support staff and resources.

Government schools

In 1999, there were 151 government schools in the NT with full-time enrolments of 28,487 students. This represents

Table 14.1 Number and percentage of students by education sector and level of education, Northern Territory, 1999

	<i>Government</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Primary students</i>				
No.	20,626	3,441	1,557	25,624
%	80.49	13.43	6.08	
<i>Secondary students</i>				
No.	7,861	1,466	1,815	11,142
%	70.55	13.16	16.29	

Source: Northern Territory Department of Education

over 77 per cent of all school enrolments in the Territory. Secondary schools cater for students in years 8–12 except in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, where they cater for years 7–12, and a range of programs are provided for secondary students in remote communities throughout the Territory.

The core business of education in the NT is to deliver high-quality relevant student learning in a safe non-threatening environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Following the Education Review conducted in 1998, a flatter management structure was established and all possible resources redirected to schools to ensure the optimisation of quality outcomes for students early in 1999. The review also led to changes in the departmental culture to facilitate and value the education of children and the work of teachers while continuing to recognise that parents are essential partners in education.

Catholic schools

In 1999, there were nine Catholic urban schools (Darwin and Alice Springs), one rural school (Katherine) and five remote schools located throughout the NT. One of the remote schools continued to offer mainstream secondary schooling. Of the urban and rural schools, two were secondary, six were primary and two were both secondary and primary, (one of which offered secondary education for the first time in 1999).

Independent schools

In 1999, there were 3,373 full-time students enrolled in 16 independent schools. This represents almost 9.2 per cent of student enrolments in NT schools and a 6 per cent increase in enrolments for the sector since 1998.

The relatively small population of the NT and its dispersion necessitate cooperative arrangements among the schooling sectors. This cooperation proved notably effective in the implementation of the joint-sector Northern Territory Literacy Plan and Northern Territory Numeracy Plan, as well as the further development and implementation of vocational education and training (VET) programs.

Three schools continued to implement middle school arrangements, which involved an integrated, student-centred approach in years 7 – 9. One school achieved the successful transition of year 10 students into a senior school program with years 11 and 12. These developments took place in schools that cater for both primary and secondary years and cut across the usual division of

primary, secondary and senior students in NT government schools. Changes announced as a result of the Northern Territory Review of Curriculum undertaken during 1999 will provide greater flexibility that will facilitate these developments.

Priority objectives

Government schools

The NTDE's mission in 1999 was to ensure access to quality education for all clients and provide the best possible resources to support the achievement of learning outcomes. The critical success factors identified in *The Department's Plan 1997–1999* related to educational outcomes, access to education services, client focus and resource management, and included the following objectives:

- to have a learning outcomes framework consistent with national and Territory goals and to develop and maintain processes whereby learning outcomes are improved
- to improve equity in education opportunity and ensure optimal participation in educational programs
- to provide services and deliver programs in response to identified client needs and to maintain an effective partnership between the department and its clients
- to allocate resources in accord with the department's mission and customer needs, to ensure all departmental policies are coordinated and reviewed to minimise duplication of services and ensure cost-effectiveness, and to use department-controlled assets effectively.

Catholic schools

The major objectives for schooling in the Catholic sector were to:

- prepare students for full lives as active Christian members of society, provide an effective educational environment, foster positive human relationships, encourage students to develop self-esteem and a sense of social responsibility and respond to parents' requests regarding educational provision for their children
- improve the participation, retention and achievement of all students, including Australian Indigenous students, as well as those with physical disabilities, of low

socioeconomic status, with language difficulties and those living in geographically isolated areas

- support teachers through professional development activities and provide students with the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, an appreciation of creative arts and a framework which provides a reference for judgement in matters of ethics and morality
- provide schools with facilities that meet the educational needs of Indigenous people and support them in their move towards self-determination while ensuring cultural integrity and provide a full range of educational opportunities T-12 for all students within the Catholic education system, including adult education courses.

Independent schools

The year was one of continued growth within the independent schooling sector in the NT and saw the opening of the Nhulunbuy Christian School, the first independent school in Nhulunbuy.

Priorities for independent schools in 1999 included:

- literacy and numeracy
- improving attendance and retention rates for Indigenous students
- professional development
- vocational education
- developing the educational use of information technology.

Strategies to improve attendance and retention included the provision of a daily bus service for 30 students living 100 kilometres north of Alice Springs, the employment of Indigenous staff connected to the families of the school, measures to improve boarding programs, and assistance and support for families seeking private board for students.

Significant developments

Government schools

The major outcome of the 1998 review was the decision to refocus departmental functions on schools and teacher support, with the aim of achieving better outcomes for students. The significant developments that follow are a direct outcome of this review.

Indigenous education

The greatest challenge for the NTDE is to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students in partnership with Indigenous people and other agencies. The Indigenous Education Branch was therefore established to refocus policy and program delivery to ensure a more consistent and structured approach for improving literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal students.

Additionally, in 1999, the Hon. Bob Collins, assisted by a small team, undertook a comprehensive independent review of the delivery of education to Indigenous students in the NT. Key recommendations arising from this review provided for the involvement and ownership by Indigenous people of educational services for their children. Other recommendations, 151 in all, addressed a range of issues that included system testing, school and system reporting, recruitment, retention, professional development and performance management of principals and other staff, and catering for students with special needs. A full account of the review is published in the document *Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory*.

At the end of 1999, the government established a taskforce of chief executive officers to guide a strategic planning and costing exercise to be conducted by the Indigenous Education Branch. Agencies represented on the taskforce are the Department of the Chief Minister, NT Treasury, Territory Health Services, Territory Housing, the Department of Local Government and the Department of Education. It was anticipated that a strategic plan setting out immediate, medium-term and long-term strategies in a five-year plan would be ready for Cabinet endorsement early in 2000. The plan will aim at achieving full impact over a 20-year period.

Curriculum review

A task group was appointed to redesign curriculum functions and review assessment and certification. The review was designed to identify the core functions and frame the work of the Northern Territory Board of Studies and the new Curriculum Services Branch.

After considerable consultations with stakeholders, the review report was finalised and presented to the Minister for School Education. Stakeholders were then given another opportunity to examine the report and respond to the task group's recommendations. The Minister and the executive board of the department considered the feedback from over

1,200 stakeholders before a final decision about the report recommendations was made. Ninety-three per cent of the respondents were supportive of the recommendations and the Minister then signed off on 83 of the 84 recommendations on 14 October 1999.

The most significant changes expected as a result of the review are:

- an improved model of curriculum provision
- assessment and certification that is relevant and responsive to the needs of students and the community but realistic about workloads for classroom teachers.

The recommendations will be implemented through the establishment of a range of projects in Schools Services Division in which teachers and other stakeholders have opportunities for involvement.

Cluster schools

To provide a flatter management structure and direct educational support and leadership to schools, the position of superintendents was replaced by a cluster school arrangement.

This model also enabled closer links between schools and the department executive and provided opportunities for principals to develop educational leadership skills, knowledge of the Northern Territory public sector and management skills. Based on a geographical cross-sector grouping of schools, the model maximises opportunities for local decisions about priorities and enables schools to be creative and take high levels of initiative in tailoring their school programs to best meet the needs of their students. There is provision for the future development of cross-cluster groups with a particular sector interest, such as early childhood education, secondary education or open learning.

Seven clusters were created across the NT, and within each cluster, some principals take on Portfolio Principal roles which are linked to a director from each branch of the department. This concept is designed to improve principals' level of understanding of operational parameters and to allow them to have input into the decision-making of the department as a whole. Group school arrangements generally apply to small schools and Group School Principals are appointed to provide additional support to these schools.

During 1999, the Cluster Schools model was designed and implemented on an interim basis. Full implementation and evaluation will occur in 2000.

International services

Due to political and social instability in Indonesia, the number of teacher and student exchanges to that country were reduced considerably – only one school excursion took place instead of the usual eight or nine. Nevertheless, the hosting of Indonesian exchange participants carried on at full strength and the department continued to provide off-shore services to the Batu Hijau International School.

Interest in China increased significantly, as did the number of fee-paying Chinese students in 1999. A study tour consisting of 54 participants visited China in addition to other ongoing exchange arrangements and several Chinese delegations came to observe our education system. Links with Japan were reinforced through continued participation in the Monbush Rex guest teacher program, reciprocal school visits and eight fee-paying study tours.

Other activity in Asia included the biennial South East Asia and Pacific Region Educational Administrator's and Manager's Symposium in Taiwan in December 1999.

Five principals visited Oxford for five weeks of professional development under the United Kingdom Links Program. They spoke at several conferences and worked with staff in a number of schools. The British Council has since confirmed that it will expand the program and send eight principals to the NT for Stage 2 in 2000.

In association with the European Council of International Schools (ECIS), workshops were conducted to assist experienced senior educators become accreditors in the ECIS Accreditation Program. As a result, three educators were selected to join teams to review International Schools in Hanoi and Brussels.

As part of a departmental restructure and realignment of priorities, a comprehensive review was conducted of International Services Branch during the second half of the year. The result is pending.

Catholic schools

Significant initiatives during 1999 in Catholic schools included:

- development of religious education (RE) focus schools and information technology (IT) focus schools to promote improved teacher take-up of curriculum and methodology issues in these areas, and to encourage better student learning outcomes

- delivery of programs of leadership training and leader formation for key teachers in schools, including Indigenous school leadership teams
- development of language teaching and learning policies in remote Aboriginal community schools to promote a clear understanding of language learning outcomes in both Standard Australian English and the vernacular
- attainment of Quality Endorsed Training Organisation status for CEO VET programs
- implementation of cross-cultural awareness programs in urban schools
- conclusion of the review of priorities and new outcome strategies for Indigenous education in the context of submissions to the Collins Review on Indigenous education in the NT
- implementation of a policy on school improvement planning in each urban school
- restructure of the Catholic Education Council to include increased Indigenous membership.

Independent schools

Intersectoral activities included a program for Literacy Week and planning for VET programs at the Territory and regional levels, as well joint delivery through school clusters. One independent secondary school and the nearby Catholic secondary school instituted a joint school–industry link program with funding made available under the School to Work Program.

Independent schools worked with the NTDE in the development of a new system of school review that will provide a transparent system of accountability and quality assurance. The sector also participated in a review of NT government assistance to non-government schools.

All schools made specific provision for Indigenous students, who comprise a quarter of the independent sector's enrolments. They also contributed to the Collins Review of Indigenous Education in the NT and commenced discussion and follow-up of its recommendations.

The schools recognised the importance of creating partnerships with Indigenous families and communities and continued to develop processes to improve communication and increase Indigenous involvement in formal and informal decision-making. One school developed an Indigenous Language and Culture Program which enabled staff, students and elders to return to their Traditional Country to gather new cultural knowledge and stories for

documentation and learning in the school. The school also implemented a program of Aboriginalisation with the result that in 1999, 90 per cent of teachers were Indigenous. Another school employed an Indigenous artist-in-residence.

Professional development and teacher education

Government schools

Professional development

In line with the NTDE's strategic directions, detailed in *Schools Our Focus*, professional development shifted in 1999 from a central process of applying for specific activities through a centralised calendar of programmed events to a more school- and needs-based focus. A Professional Development Committee was established to oversee priorities and funding.

Traditionally, teachers new to the NTDE at the beginning of each year were introduced to the department through an orientation program. A new initiative in 1999 was the provision of teacher orientation workshops, which were delivered throughout the year and in all regions.

The department continued to further develop school leaders through participation in public sector management training programs such as the Public Sector Management course and the Executive Development Program. A new 12-month accredited leadership development program targeting Assistant Principals was organised and implemented in partnership with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment.

In 1999, the NTDE provided 16 staff with three months leave as part of the Employee Development Scheme, 15 staff with Australian Full-Time Scholarships, one Indigenous Full-Time Study Award and 36 teachers with Remote Study Assistance (leave with full pay). It also continued to deliver international training with links with education leaders in South-East Asia and the Pacific through the Leadership in Action course and the Management and Educational Leadership Training Series.

Over 1,400 staff attended cross-cultural awareness courses and the open access schools generally recorded a significant increase in the number of professional development activities for teachers relating to the teaching of specialist courses.

Further professional development was provided for teachers through such projects as the ESL Teacher Development project, First Steps Literacy Development and the NT Literacy and Numeracy Support Program. The last involved:

- dissemination of information to schools and the community about outcomes profiles and benchmarks and the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan
- provision of support for early childhood teachers in the identification of appropriate assessment strategies which support good practice and at the same time meet the assessment requirements of the system
- provision of assistance in the implementation of the NT Multi-age Assessment Program.

Teacher education

The NTDE is unable to rely on an adequate supply of suitable graduates from the Northern Territory University (NTU) and is therefore highly dependent on recruitment of teachers interstate. It is represented on and contributes to NTU working parties on teacher education, training and quality issues and meets biannually with the senior executive of the NTU Faculty of Education to share information and develop strategies to provide quality teacher education programs at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Catholic schools

Professional development

A major initiative in professional development took place at the school level with support from the personnel at the CEO – the establishment of RE and IT focus schools. The RE program comprised centrally held workshops for leaders in the focus schools and local workshops for staff. The programs for professional development in IT focus schools were designed at the school level.

The sector conducted a cross-cultural education program entitled ‘Walking and Working toward Reconciliation’, which addressed issues for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. A program of leadership training was also provided for Indigenous leadership teams from remote Indigenous schools.

The Catholic education sector continued to provide both formal and informal professional development for all staff across curriculum areas including English as a second language, Indigenous languages, First Steps English Literacy Program, inclusive curriculum and catering for diversity in the classroom.

Teacher education

The Catholic sector advertises locally and nationally for most teaching positions. The majority of teachers, including those both recently graduated and those with many years experience, come from interstate and to a lesser extent from overseas. The sector encourages secondments from other Catholic sectors for teachers going to remote Indigenous community schools. Hence newly appointed teachers are mostly graduates from tertiary institutions outside the Territory.

Teachers who have been in Territory schools for several years access studies from the NTU and other Australian universities offering open and distance education. Personnel from the Catholic sector have liaised with the NTU, encouraging local graduates to apply for positions in Catholic schools.

The sector draws on the services of the Australian Catholic University for graduate and postgraduate programs for leaders in Catholic schools.

Independent schools

Professional development

Professional development was a priority for all schools. Staff were involved in programs at the school and joint-sector levels, particularly in relation to the implementation of literacy and numeracy strategies. Programs offered included First Steps, ESL in Anangu Schools, and Scaffolding Reading and Writing. One school used the experiences of an author to examine approaches to the teaching of English, while others worked in clusters, sharing professional development activities. In mathematics, schools offered programs provided by the Mathematics Teachers Association as well as by consultants. One school centred activities on the development of mathematics profiles. Professional development in the area of vocational education involved the training of workplace assessors, joint activities in the local area and short-term industry placements for teachers.

Commonwealth-funded capital projects

Government sector

In 1999, the Commonwealth provided \$2.79 million under the General element of the Commonwealth Capital Grants

Programme. This grant provided supplementary funding for the NT. The funds were used to upgrade and extend two existing urban schools. Both projects commenced in 1999 and have either been completed or are expected to be completed in time for the start of Term 1, 2000.

The type of other work undertaken generally included the upgrading of existing teaching spaces, enhancement of support facilities such as libraries and provision of additional teaching spaces in schools.

All projects were within the electorate of the NT and were managed by the relevant school councils, who were encouraged to facilitate Indigenous employment and training opportunities whenever possible.

Non-government sector

The Commonwealth provided \$682,369 towards capital projects for the Northern Territory Block Grant Authority.

Of the \$601,177 of capital projects funded by the Commonwealth and completed both physically and financially during 1999, the type of work undertaken and facilities provided were the construction of and refurbishment of general learning areas for secondary schools and the provision of resources for computer and library areas. In primary schools, hardcourts and an oval to accommodate expanding primary schools were supported, along with upgrades which provided disabled toilets and safe drop-off/pick-up zones.