

# 6 Focus on Indigenous students

## 6.1 An overview

There were 96,807 Indigenous students enrolled as full-time students in Australian schools in 1997. Information in the MCEETYA National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC) indicates the enrolment of a further 703 part-time Indigenous students, representing 327.9 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, in Australian schools.

A closer examination of some of the key statistical information included in Tables 6A, 6B and 6C about the involvement of Indigenous students in Australian schools indicates that:

- Indigenous students comprised 3.1 per cent of full-time students in 1997, and a similar percentage of total FTE student numbers;
- 87.7 per cent of all full-time students in this population attended government schools in 1997, where they comprised 3.8 per cent of all students;
- Indigenous students comprised around 1.3 per cent of full-time students in non-government schools in 1997;
- 69.3 per cent of full-time Indigenous students were undertaking primary schooling, compared with 58.5 per cent of the total student population;
- 5.3 per cent of full-time Indigenous students were undertaking studies at year 11 or year 12, compared with 12 per cent of all Australian students; and

- 50.8 per cent of full-time Indigenous students attending government schools were boys, while 49.1 per cent of those attending non-government schools were boys.

The number of full-time Indigenous students attending Australia's schools grew from 92,667 in 1996 to 96,807 in 1997, representing an increase of 4.5 per cent. From 1994 to 1997, there was a 16.1 per cent increase in the number of Indigenous students attending school over the three years — an average of almost 5.4 per cent per year. The total number of male and the total number of female Indigenous students attending both government and non-government schools increased in each year from 1994 to 1997.

## 6.2 Indigenous school students: outcomes

### Introduction

All Australian governments have recognised that the country's Indigenous people are the most educationally disadvantaged group in the community. Indigenous people participate in and attain significantly less from education than the rest of the Australian population, which impacts adversely on their economic and social well-being.

Aimed at achieving educational equity for Indigenous Australians by the year 2000, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) was agreed by all governments in 1989.

A National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples was undertaken in 1993 and 1994 to assess the progress of the AEP in improving educational access, participation and outcomes for Indigenous people. The results of this review were published in 1995.

Table 6A. Indigenous students, by category of school, level of education and gender, by State, 1997

	<i>Government schools</i>				<i>Non-government schools</i>			
	<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>		<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
New South Wales	8,510	8,025	4,294	4,268	771	799	339	367
Victoria	1,479	1,453	723	711	87	104	75	113
Queensland	8,270	7,992	3,271	3,238	782	807	758	738
South Australia	2,084	2,054	598	659	152	159	54	69
Western Australia	4,693	4,550	1,776	1,732	1,059	1,022	426	402
Tasmania	1,063	975	694	737	152	165	93	106
Northern Territory	4,363	4,037	970	1,018	489	543	568	616
Australian Capital Territory	196	202	110	109	45	38	23	32
<b>Australia</b>	<b>30,658</b>	<b>29,288</b>	<b>12,436</b>	<b>12,472</b>	<b>3,537</b>	<b>3,637</b>	<b>2,336</b>	<b>2,443</b>

Source: MCEETYA, *National Schools Statistics Collection, 1997*

**Table 6B. Full-time primary (a) Indigenous students, by year of education and category of school, by State, 1997**

	<i>Pre Yr 1</i>	<i>Yr 1</i>	<i>Yr 2</i>	<i>Yr 3</i>	<i>Yr 4</i>	<i>Yr 5</i>	<i>Yr 6</i>	<i>Yr 7</i>	<i>Ungr.</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>New South Wales</b>										
Government	2,626	2,483	2,385	2,295	2,172	2,093	1,929	n.a.	552	16,535
Non-government	253	276	251	189	208	183	198	n.a.	12	1,570
<i>All schools</i>	<i>2,879</i>	<i>2,759</i>	<i>2,636</i>	<i>2,484</i>	<i>2,380</i>	<i>2,276</i>	<i>2,127</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>564</i>	<i>18,105</i>
<b>Victoria</b>										
Government	500	446	413	465	368	338	380	n.a.	22	2,932
Non-government	34	34	23	25	29	21	22	n.a.	3	191
<i>All schools</i>	<i>534</i>	<i>480</i>	<i>436</i>	<i>490</i>	<i>397</i>	<i>359</i>	<i>402</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>3,123</i>
<b>Queensland</b>										
Government	n.a.	2,661	2,579	2,469	2,196	2,122	2,105	2,048	82	16,262
Non-government	n.a.	232	242	240	218	200	216	219	22	1,589
<i>All schools</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>2,893</i>	<i>2,821</i>	<i>2,709</i>	<i>2,414</i>	<i>2,322</i>	<i>2,321</i>	<i>2,267</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>17,851</i>
<b>South Australia</b>										
Government	609	521	524	513	498	496	467	459	51	4,138
Non-government	52	40	54	38	29	39	24	35	0	311
<i>All schools</i>	<i>661</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>578</i>	<i>551</i>	<i>527</i>	<i>535</i>	<i>491</i>	<i>494</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>4,449</i>
<b>Western Australia</b>										
Government	n.a.	1,451	1,411	1,324	1,371	1,245	1,243	1,198	0	9,243
Non-government	n.a.	317	300	278	281	280	262	231	132	2,081
<i>All schools</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>1,768</i>	<i>1,711</i>	<i>1,602</i>	<i>1,652</i>	<i>1,525</i>	<i>1,505</i>	<i>1,429</i>	<i>132</i>	<i>11,324</i>
<b>Tasmania</b>										
Government	280	331	292	330	285	227	287	n.a.	6	2,038
Non-government	40	55	41	40	49	39	53	n.a.	0	317
<i>All schools</i>	<i>320</i>	<i>386</i>	<i>333</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>334</i>	<i>266</i>	<i>340</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2,355</i>
<b>Northern Territory</b>										
Government	1,317	1,275	1,205	1,019	991	874	793	812	114	8,400
Non-government	157	149	144	112	130	117	114	103	6	1,032
<i>All schools</i>	<i>1,474</i>	<i>1,424</i>	<i>1,349</i>	<i>1,131</i>	<i>1,121</i>	<i>991</i>	<i>907</i>	<i>915</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>9,432</i>
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>										
Government	64	58	57	55	43	58	62	n.a.	1	398
Non-government	9	12	13	8	13	9	19	n.a.	0	83
<i>All schools</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>481</i>
<b>Australia</b>										
Government	5,396	9,226	8,866	8,470	7,924	7,453	7,266	4,517	828	59,946
Non-government	545	1,115	1,068	930	957	888	908	588	175	7,174
<b>All schools</b>	<b>5,941</b>	<b>10,341</b>	<b>9,934</b>	<b>9,400</b>	<b>8,881</b>	<b>8,341</b>	<b>8,174</b>	<b>5,105</b>	<b>1,003</b>	<b>67,120</b>

n.a. not applicable.

(a) As from 1990 students in special schools have been allocated to either primary or secondary education on the basis of age – primary if 12 years of age or under and secondary if over 12.

Source: MCEETYA, *National Schools Statistics Collection*, 1997

Table 6C. Full-time secondary (a) and total Indigenous students, by year of education and category of school, by State, 1997

	<i>Yr 7</i>	<i>Yr 8</i>	<i>Yr 9</i>	<i>Yr 10</i>	<i>Yr 11</i>	<i>Yr 12</i>	<i>Ungr.</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total primary &amp; secondary</i>
<b>New South Wales</b>									
Government	1,966	1,903	1,787	1,234	731	428	513	8,562	<b>25,097</b>
Non-government	164	152	147	115	68	50	10	706	<b>2,276</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>2,130</i>	<i>2,055</i>	<i>1,934</i>	<i>1,349</i>	<i>799</i>	<i>478</i>	<i>523</i>	<i>9,268</i>	<b>27,373</b>
<b>Victoria</b>									
Government	352	318	298	208	140	92	26	1,434	<b>4,366</b>
Non-government	27	28	25	24	28	10	46	188	<b>379</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>379</i>	<i>346</i>	<i>323</i>	<i>232</i>	<i>168</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>1,622</i>	<b>4,745</b>
<b>Queensland</b>									
Government	n.a.	1,824	1,678	1,373	896	642	96	6,509	<b>22,771</b>
Non-government	n.a.	362	377	326	268	152	11	1,496	<b>3,085</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>2,186</i>	<i>2,055</i>	<i>1,699</i>	<i>1,164</i>	<i>794</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>8,005</i>	<b>25,856</b>
<b>South Australia</b>									
Government	n.a.	428	344	250	133	53	49	1,257	<b>5,395</b>
Non-government	n.a.	34	28	30	19	11	1	123	<b>434</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>462</i>	<i>372</i>	<i>280</i>	<i>152</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>1,380</i>	<b>5,829</b>
<b>Western Australia</b>									
Government	n.a.	1,118	1,030	783	393	151	33	3,508	<b>12,751</b>
Non-government	n.a.	179	160	183	119	64	123	828	<b>2,909</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>1,297</i>	<i>1,190</i>	<i>966</i>	<i>512</i>	<i>215</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>4,336</i>	<b>15,660</b>
<b>Tasmania</b>									
Government	335	289	327	260	131	82	7	1,431	<b>3,469</b>
Non-government	45	51	40	40	12	11	0	199	<b>516</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>340</i>	<i>367</i>	<i>300</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>1,630</i>	<b>3,985</b>
<b>Northern Territory</b>									
Government	n.a.	319	247	153	196	70	1,003	1,988	<b>10,388</b>
Non-government	n.a.	326	181	107	60	26	484	1,184	<b>2,216</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>n.a.</i>	<i>645</i>	<i>428</i>	<i>260</i>	<i>256</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>1,487</i>	<i>3,172</i>	<b>12,604</b>
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>									
Government	53	49	37	31	25	23	1	219	<b>617</b>
Non-government	6	15	15	5	9	5	0	55	<b>138</b>
<i>All schools</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>274</i>	<b>755</b>
<b>Australia</b>									
Government	2,706	6,248	5,748	4,292	2,645	1,541	1,728	24,908	<b>84,854</b>
Non-government	242	1,147	973	830	583	329	675	4,779	<b>11,953</b>
<b>All schools</b>	<b>2,948</b>	<b>7,395</b>	<b>6,721</b>	<b>5,122</b>	<b>3,228</b>	<b>1,870</b>	<b>2,403</b>	<b>29,687</b>	<b>96,807</b>

n.a. not applicable.

(a) As from 1990 students in special schools have been allocated to either primary or secondary education on the basis of age – primary if 12 years of age or under and secondary if over 12.

Source: MCEETYA, *National Schools Statistics Collection, 1997*

The Review recognised considerable improvement in Indigenous peoples' education and training participation and outcomes, but showed that these improvements were uneven. There were also still marked gaps between the educational achievements of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. For example, while the proportion of Indigenous students staying to year 12 had risen markedly since 1989, in 1993 it was still less than half the rate for Australian students as a whole.

Acting on behalf of their States and the Commonwealth, education Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the AEP in 1995 and nominated priority areas for action leading up to the next century. The priorities identified for school education include the development of sound foundation competencies, particularly in literacy and numeracy, as well as the involvement of Indigenous parents in their children's education, the development of culturally inclusive curricula, the employment of Indigenous staff, the provision of appropriate professional development for staff involved in Indigenous education and the involvement of Indigenous Australians in educational decision-making.

Under the terms of the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) — the program providing the bulk of Commonwealth supplementary funding for Indigenous education — all States have agreed to monitor and report annually on progress in achieving improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students. All States, as well as other education providers in receipt of IESIP funding, have set performance indicators to measure progress in each of the MCEETYA priority areas throughout the 1997–1999 funding triennium, and have established baseline data and targets for improvements in each year of the triennium.

1997 is the first year in which education providers have reported on their Indigenous education outcomes against those performance indicators and annual targets. The information which follows is drawn from those reports except where otherwise indicated.

## Access to education

The National Review identified many factors contributing to the educational disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people. For example:

- education systems may not adequately accommodate students' cultural needs, values and backgrounds;
- people in remote localities may have limited access to educational services;
- many Indigenous children have special learning needs because English is not their first language; and

**Table 6D. Proportion of Indigenous students by location of school, government schools, by State, 1997 (per cent)**

	<i>Location of school</i>	
	<i>Remote (a)</i>	<i>Non-remote</i>
New South Wales	23	77
Victoria	12	88
Queensland	26	74
South Australia	40	60
Western Australia	54	46
Tasmania	1	99
Northern Territory	79	21
Australian Capital Territory	0	100

(a) 'Remote' is defined in the *Indigenous Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989*. It includes criteria covering distance from and access to large population centres, as well as cultural factors.

Source: Commonwealth DEETYA.

- poverty, ill health and low self-esteem can limit the participation of many Indigenous people in education.

While these factors provide challenges to all education providers, it must be noted that Indigenous people's circumstances vary widely between and even within States. As Table 6D illustrates, for example, the provision of adequate education services for Indigenous people in remote locations is a particular challenge in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia.

The language background of Indigenous students also varies across States. As Table 6E shows, education providers in the Northern Territory, and, to a lesser extent, Western Australia and Queensland, must cater for larger numbers of Indigenous children whose families may not speak English at home, or at all, and whose first experience of having to communicate extensively in Standard Australian English may occur only on their entry to preschool or school.

## Participation

As the National Review reported, while a high proportion of Indigenous five-year-olds — mainly children living in remote areas of Australia — were apparently not participating in education, overall primary school participation rates appeared to be improving. However, significant numbers of Indigenous secondary students were not completing the compulsory years 8 or 9 and around a quarter of those who started secondary school had left before the end of year 10.

**Table 6E. Indigenous Australians who most often speak a language other than English at home, by State, 1996**

	<i>Number of Indigenous people in the State who most often speak a LOTE at home (a)</i>	<i>Per cent of State Indigenous population who most often speak a LOTE at home (a) (b)</i>
New South Wales	3,147	3.1
Victoria	1,591	7.4
Queensland	11,934	12.5
South Australia	2,576	12.6
Western Australia	10,031	19.7
Tasmania	169	1.2
Northern Territory	29,534	63.8
Australian Capital Territory	135	4.7
<b>Australia</b>	<b>59,117</b>	<b>16.7</b>

(a) Specified as Australian Indigenous languages and other languages (including 'inadequately described' and 'non-verbal so described'). Does not include people whose language spoken most often at home was not stated.

(b) Of those who responded to the relevant Census question.

Source: ABS National Census of Population and Housing, 1996

The number of Indigenous students in primary education grew by some 14.7 per cent from 58,516 students in 1994 to 67,120 students nationally in 1997. In the same period, the number of Indigenous students in full-time secondary education grew even more rapidly, from 24,895 students in 1994 to 29,687 students in 1997, a growth of 19.2 per cent. Indigenous students had represented only 2.7 per cent of the full-time student population in 1994, but that had increased to 3.1 per cent by 1997.

## Attendance

There is evidence from past studies, including the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) report *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in the Early Years* (1992), that attendance at school is less regular among Indigenous students than others. The NBEET report, which refers to attendance as a critical issue in achievement, cites evidence of an overall year-round attendance of slightly less than 70 per cent among Indigenous students.

All government and Catholic school systems who reported on school attendance in 1997 under their IESIP agreements, advised that attendance rates of Indigenous students were lower than those of non-Indigenous students, in most cases markedly lower. In Western Australia for example, where Indigenous students make up 5.6 per cent of the student population, it is estimated that up to 30 per cent of students who are enrolled in but not attending government schools

(including those not attending at all and those playing truant) are thought to be Indigenous.

There appear to be a number of reasons for the lower average attendance rates of Indigenous students. These include cultural and family obligations, mobility for employment, poverty, ill-health and student or parental choice, as well as suspensions and exclusions. Irrespective of the causes, low attendance can cause difficulties for students in keeping up with their schoolwork, and for schools and teachers in catering for the needs of students who have fallen behind.

School systems use different definitions and methodologies to describe attendance, and the data provided cannot be compared across jurisdictions. A useful and valid comparison, however, is between the rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students within each system. For example:

- in Western Australian government schools, Indigenous primary school students attended on average for 84 per cent of the time compared with the non-Indigenous student average of 93 per cent. At secondary level, the rates were 81 and 92 per cent respectively;
- during the preschool and compulsory years of schooling, the average absence from government schools in the Australian Capital Territory as measured in classes with Indigenous students was 32 days for Indigenous students, and 15 days for non-Indigenous students;
- in Tasmanian government schools, the average daily rate of absence in 1997 was 8.3 per cent for Indigenous students but only 5.7 per cent for non-Indigenous students; and
- the average attendance rate of Indigenous students at Northern Territory Catholic schools was 70 per cent compared with 92 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

A number of independent schools, particularly those in remote areas, reported the impact of poor attendance on their ability to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous students in 1997, notably in literacy and numeracy. At the same time, however, independent schools reported improved attendance by their Indigenous students in 1997 over 1996 levels, with the implementation of specific strategies addressing locally identified causes of poor attendance. Strategies ranged from the provision of transport services and breakfast and lunch programs, to enhanced cultural programs supported by local community members and the implementation of vocationally-oriented and practical courses of interest to older students.

In the absence of comparable data, it cannot be determined whether improvements are being made in reducing

avoidable absences of Indigenous students. Such comparisons should be available in future years.

## Achievement in literacy and numeracy

Competence in English literacy and numeracy are the key foundation skills for successful progress of a student through compulsory education and into further education or work. Research undertaken in the past few years has confirmed that, on average, Indigenous students have significantly lower literacy and numeracy skills than non-Indigenous students, with consequential effects on other educational attainment.

### National surveys and research

The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples reported work done by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in 1994, which estimated that three times as many Indigenous primary school students suffered literacy problems as did other students. This disadvantage was particularly acute for Indigenous students in remote Australia. In the cities, ACER found that around 35 per cent of Indigenous primary school students had significantly lower literacy and numeracy achievement; but in rural and remote locations this figure was 43 per cent. The proportion of other Australian students with significantly lower than average literacy and numeracy achievement levels was estimated at 16 per cent in both urban and rural and remote locations.

The National School English Literacy Survey (NSELS) was conducted in 1996 by ACER to collect reliable baseline data on the literacy achievements of Australian school children in years 3 and 5. A special Indigenous sample of 700 students was included. The survey findings relating to Indigenous students were that:

- students in the Special Indigenous Sample had very low average levels of English literacy achievement (3 to 4 year levels below students in the Main Sample);
- there is a wide range in the literacy achievements of the highest and lowest achieving Indigenous students, with evidence that the lowest achieving year 3 Indigenous students make little or no progress over the following two years;
- students in the Special Indigenous Sample had relatively high rates of absence from school and this higher rate of absence appears to be a factor in the lower literacy achievements of these students;

- English literacy achievements of Indigenous students increases with the frequency of speaking English at home. (About 30 per cent of Indigenous students sampled do not normally speak English at home.)

It is worth noting, however, that the Special Indigenous Sample of the NSELS was not fully representative of all Indigenous students. The sample included only students in schools with at least five Indigenous students in each of years 3 and 5, and a significant proportion of the students lived in rural and remote parts of the country.

Further information on the NSELS is provided in section 10 of the National Overview.

During the course of the NSELS survey, ACER's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Advisory Committee proposed further research on the acquisition of English literacy skills by Indigenous students. This work, funded by the Commonwealth, was undertaken during 1997. The report *Enhancing English Skills in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*, to be released in May 1998, will provide valuable information on effective strategies being used by some schools for developing English literacy skills in Indigenous students.

The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) provides recent comparative data on achievement levels of Indigenous students in mathematics and science. During 1994–95 over half a million students worldwide, including 30,000 in Australia, undertook the TIMSS maths and science tests. Three cohorts were tested: nine-year-olds, 13-year-olds and year 12 students. TIMSS sampled additional Australian schools in order to supplement the number of Indigenous students in the sample, with the aim of ensuring that the results obtained for this group were accurate.

Each TIMSS cohort comprised students in two adjacent grades. For example, the nine-year-old cohort was made up of students in years 3 and 4 (in the ACT, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania) or years 4 and 5 (in Queensland, SA, WA and the NT), enabling TIMSS to measure the increase in student performance between school grades.

TIMSS test scores for Indigenous middle primary students in mathematics and science were significantly lower than the corresponding results for non-Indigenous students. The picture was similar for the 13-year-old junior secondary students. Table 6F compares the test scores of Indigenous students and all students for both Population 1 (the 9-year-olds) and Population 2 (13-year-olds). 'Upper' and 'lower' grade refers to the two year levels tested for each cohort.

**Table 6F. Mean scores of Indigenous and all Australian students in mathematics and science, TIMSS Populations 1 and 2, 1994-95**

<i>Population 1 (a)</i>		<i>Mathematics</i>	<i>Science</i>
Indigenous students	Upper grade	486	500
	Lower grade	447	456
All Australian students	Upper grade	546	562
	Lower grade	483	510
<i>Population 2 (b) (c)</i>			
Indigenous students	Upper grade	436	441
	Lower grade	428	429
All Australian students	Upper grade	530	545
	Lower grade	498	504

(a) nine-year-old students

(b) 13-year-old students

(c) Includes data from additional sample of schools with high Indigenous enrolments.

Source: Australian Council for Educational Research

In both mathematics and science the improvement in mean performance scores between school grades for nine-year-old Indigenous students was lower than for other Australian students and lower than for most other countries. There was an even smaller increase in the case of Indigenous 13-year-olds, adding to evidence from other sources that educational disadvantage of Indigenous students appears to increase as they move on to higher year levels.

### State literacy and numeracy assessments

Information from government and non-government school authorities on the literacy and numeracy achievement of their Indigenous students in 1997 provides further evidence that Indigenous students, on average, have significantly lower English literacy and numeracy skills than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Some authorities have been able to provide comparative data on 1996 and 1997 cohorts, but it is not possible to draw conclusions about trends from such short-term data. Monitoring over several years is required to account for the time-lags involved before educational indicators respond to the implementation of new educational and culturally inclusive strategies and programs.

The data on literacy and numeracy which follows gives a picture of the comparative skill levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. As education authorities use different approaches to testing achievement in numeracy

and literacy, apply different instruments and test different populations, comparisons between school systems on the basis of these data are not valid.

### Literacy assessment data

In common with experience nationally, the literacy scores of Indigenous students in New South Wales in 1997, as shown in Table 6G, were 5.0 percentage points below those of non-Indigenous students at year 3 and 5.4 percentage points lower at year 5. The mean test score for literacy had improved between 1996 and 1997 for Indigenous students at year 3 (as had the score for non-Indigenous students). The mean score for year 5 Indigenous students was unchanged from 1996 to 1997.

As Table 6H shows, in 1997 approximately 30 per cent of Indigenous students in year 3 in Victoria achieved at the two highest levels in reading compared with 58 per cent of all year 3 students, a gap of around 28 percentage points. In 1996 this gap was 22 percentage points. In year 5 reading, the equivalent gap in 1997 was approximately 29 percentage points, a decrease from the 1996 figure of 32 percentage points.

In writing, the gaps between Indigenous students and all students achieving at the two highest levels in both year 3 and year 5 were greater than for reading, but in both cases the gaps narrowed over the period 1996-97 — in the case of year 3 writing only fractionally but in the case of year 5 writing, from 36 percentage points to 31.

In reporting on Basic Skills Test outcomes in South Australia (Table 6I), a direct comparison was made of the percentage of year 5 students, including Indigenous students, needing special literacy intervention. While it is evident that Indigenous students represented a disproportionately high percentage of this group, it must be noted that the percentage in 1997 was significantly improved in comparison with 1996.

**Table 6G. Mean test scores for literacy, Basic Skills Test, year 3 and year 5, government schools, New South Wales, 1996 and 1997**

	<i>Year 3</i>		<i>Year 5</i>	
	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>
Indigenous students	44.3	44.7	51.2	51.2
All students	49.3	49.7	56.3	56.6

Source: 1997 IESIP Performance Report, Department of School Education, New South Wales

**Table 6H. Performance in literacy and numeracy of Indigenous and all students, Learning and Assessment Project Tests, year 3 and year 5, government schools, Victoria, 1996 and 1997 (percentage of students achieving CSF Levels) (a)**

Level of achievement	Performance in Literacy				Performance in Numeracy			
	1996		1997		1996		1997	
	Indigenous students	All students	Indigenous students	All students	Indigenous students	All students	Indigenous students	All students
	<i>Year 3 Reading</i>				<i>Year 3 Number</i>			
CSF Level 1	31.1	10.7	29.7	10.4	16.8	7.4	17.2	5.9
CSF Level 2	39.4	37.8	40.8	31.7	46.5	34.4	36.9	30.3
CSF Level 3	26.9	35.5	22.9	40.0	31.0	51.3	40.0	53.5
CSF Level 4	2.6	16.4	6.6	17.9	5.6	6.9	5.8	10.2
	<i>Year 5 Reading</i>				<i>Year 5 Number</i>			
CSF Level 2	31.0	9.9	30.1	9.4	34.2	11.7	37.1	13.3
CSF Level 3	39.4	28.9	46.3	37.7	55.2	54.5	49.6	52.2
CSF Level 4	26.9	47.7	19.9	36.7	8.1	26.4	12.9	27.2
CSF Level 5	2.6	13.5	3.7	16.3	3.5	7.4	0.4	7.3
	<i>Year 3 Writing</i>				<i>Year 3 Measurement</i>			
CSF Level 1	32.9	9.3	30.2	8.3	14.7	5.4	9.8	2.1
CSF Level 2	49.3	40.0	44.0	33.4	37.9	26.3	48.3	31.6
CSF Level 3	14.2	37.5	21.6	42.3	40.9	54.9	38.3	58.2
CSF Level 4	3.6	13.2	4.2	16.0	6.5	13.4	3.7	8.1
	<i>Year 5 Writing</i>				<i>Year 5 Measurement</i>			
CSF Level 2	31.0	9.8	31.5	8.1	33.5	14.4	19.1	4.3
CSF Level 3	40.6	25.6	49.1	41.6	55.0	58.5	71.6	66.9
CSF Level 4	24.9	46.1	14.7	33.2	10.8	22.7	7.6	22.4
CSF Level 5	3.4	18.5	4.8	17.1	0.8	4.5	1.8	6.4

(a) Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) Level 1 is the standard expected for students on completion of the first (preparatory) year of schooling; Level 2 to the end of year 2; Level 3 to the end of year 4; Level 4 to the end of year 6; and level 5 to the end of year 8.

Source: 1997 IESIP Performance Report, Department of Education, Victoria

**Table 6I. Proportion of year 5 students identified by Basic Skills Test as requiring special literacy intervention, government schools, South Australia, 1996 and 1997 (per cent)**

	1996	1997
Indigenous students	69	62
All students	31	28

Source: 1997 IESIP Performance Report, Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia

**Table 6J. Mean test scores for numeracy, Basic Skills Test, year 3 and year 5, government schools, New South Wales, 1996 and 1997**

	Year 3		Year 5	
	1996	1997	1996	1997
Indigenous students	47.1	46.4	53.7	53.8
All students	53.5	52.0	60.0	60.0

Source: 1997 IESIP Performance Report, Department of School Education, New South Wales

*Numeracy assessment data*

In 1997, as indicated in Table 6H, approximately 46 per cent of Indigenous students in year 3 in Victoria achieved at the two highest levels in number compared with 64 per cent of all year 3 students, a gap of around 18 percentage points. In 1996, this gap was 23 percentage points. In year 5 number, the equivalent gap in 1997 was approximately 21 percentage points, a slight decrease from the 1996 figure of 22 percentage points.

In measurement, the equivalent gaps between Indigenous students and all students achieving at the two highest levels in both year 3 and year 5 increased slightly over the period 1996–97 — at year 3 level from 21 to 24 percentage points and at year 5 level from 16 to 19 percentage points.

As was the case with mean literacy scores, the numeracy scores of Indigenous students in New South Wales in 1997, as shown in Table 6J, were noticeably below those of non-Indigenous students at both year 3 and year 5. Unlike the outcome for literacy, the mean test score for numeracy for Indigenous students at year 3 declined from 1996 to 1997

(again in common with the score for non-Indigenous students). The mean score for year 5 Indigenous students, however, rose marginally from 53.7 to 53.8.

Western Australia also reported mathematics outcomes for Indigenous students below those of non-Indigenous students. The difference was far more noticeable at year 10 than at either year 3 or year 7 (Table 6K).

## Retention

The apparent retention of Indigenous students in schools from the commencement of their secondary schooling through to years 10, 11 and 12 remains at levels which are significantly below the retention of other Australian students. Table 6L compares national Indigenous and non-Indigenous apparent retention rates to years 10, 11 and 12 over the past six years.

It is important to note that this data covers only students in schools. Students enrolled in senior secondary courses in TAFE colleges are not shown here, and will appear in the data as having withdrawn from schooling.

As Figure 6A illustrates, between 1994 and 1997 the apparent retention rate for Indigenous students to year 12 fell from 32.5 per cent to 30.9 per cent at the same time as the non-Indigenous rate fell from 75.6 per cent to 72.8 per cent. This represented a slight narrowing of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous rates, from 43.1 percentage points in 1994 to 41.9 percentage points in 1997.

The apparent retention rate to year 11 for Indigenous students was lower in 1997 than it was in 1993, but higher than the 1995 figure. This is in line with the trend in non-Indigenous retention. At 80.6 per cent, retention of Indigenous students to year 10 in 1997 was higher than in both 1993 (78.5 per cent) and 1995 (76.5 per cent).

**Table 6K. Results of Monitoring Standards in Education survey in mathematics, years 3, 7 and 10, government schools, Western Australia, 1997 (per cent)**

Year	Benchmark level	Benchmark met or exceeded	
		Indigenous students	Non-Indigenous students
Year 3	Level 2	67	94
Year 7	Level 3	73	94
Year 10	Level 4	37	83

Source: 1997 IESIP Performance Report, Education Department of Western Australia

**Table 6L. Apparent retention rates (a) of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to years 10, 11 and 12, all schools, Australia, 1992 to 1997 (per cent)**

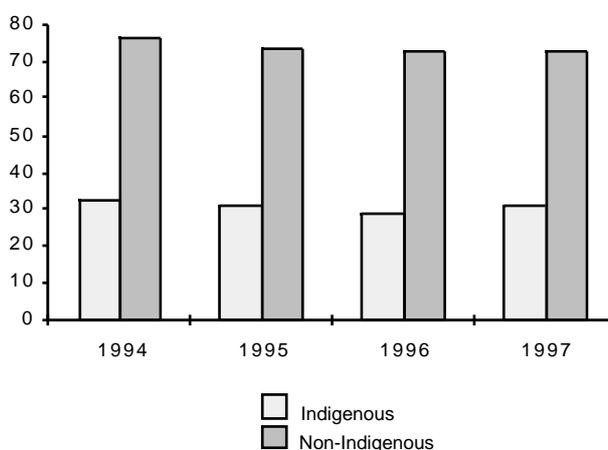
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
<i>Year 10</i>						
Indigenous	83.0	78.5	78.6	76.5	75.8	80.6
Non-Indigenous	99.4	98.8	97.4	96.9	97.3	97.6
<i>Year 11</i>						
Indigenous	(b)	52.0	47.5	48.8	47.2	49.6
Non-Indigenous	(b)	88.2	86.3	84.1	84.3	85.3
<i>Year 12</i>						
Indigenous	(b)	(b)	32.5	30.6	29.2	30.9
Non-Indigenous	(b)	(b)	75.6	73.2	72.4	72.8

(a) Retention rates in excess of 100 per cent may result from a net increase in interstate migration. Apparent retention rates for Indigenous students can also be affected by an increased propensity over time to identify as Indigenous.

(b) National data not available.

Source: DEETYA, derived from NSSC

**Figure 6A. Apparent retention rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to year 12, all schools, Australia, 1994 to 1997 (per cent)**



Source: DEETYA, derived from NSSC

The size of the gap between the apparent retention rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students increases from year 10 to year 12. For example, while Indigenous retention to year 10 in 1997 was 83 per cent of the non-Indigenous rate, for year 11 this figure was 58 per cent and for year 12, 42 per cent. This indicates that a higher proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students leave school during the course of their year 11 or year 12 studies.

Table 6M sets out year 10, 11 and 12 retention rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by State for 1997, with columns of numbers and percentages of retention rates

for year 12 non-Indigenous and Indigenous students. The Table shows that there is considerable variation in the rates among the States. Extreme caution should be taken in interpreting this. It needs to be borne in mind that small numbers of Indigenous students in some States may result in variations in retention from year to year, which may not accurately reflect the longer term trend.

It should be noted that apparent retention rates in excess of 100 per cent might result from a net increase in interstate migration or by students repeating a year level. For example, in the Australian Capital Territory, students from surrounding areas of New South Wales often move into the ACT's senior college system after year 10.

Apparent retention rates for Indigenous students can also be affected by an increased likelihood for students, as they become older, to identify themselves as Indigenous. This trend is much more evident in urban areas than in non-urban areas. The Northern Territory is characterised by high levels of enrolments of Indigenous students living in non-urban areas and living traditional lifestyles. In addition, the increasing divergence of Indigenous population in certain States as indicated in the 1996 Census will also reduce the comparability of Indigenous apparent retention rates.

Further, there are contextual and cultural factors which may result in differences between enrolment patterns of urban and rural locations, which are highlighted in the case of Indigenous students, especially in relation to choice and availability of senior secondary school education or vocational education and training. These factors may affect apparent retention rates, especially when combined with associated variables such as socioeconomic status and English language proficiency.

In the case of the Northern Territory, 1,487 students are excluded from this derivation of apparent retention rate as year level is not classified for these students. This limits the interpretation of apparent retention rate as an indicator of holding power of the Northern Territory school system for five years from commencement of secondary education.

Comparison of the data in Table 6M with retention rates for 1996 (published in the 1996 *National Report*) shows that apparent retention rates of Indigenous students to year 12 increased between 1996 and 1997 in all but one State. While three of the eight States showed decreases in their Indigenous apparent retention rate to year 10 from 1996 to 1997, and five showed decreases in the apparent retention rate to year 11, the net effect nationally was an increase in Indigenous students at all three year levels.

**Table 6M. Apparent retention rates (a) of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students to years 10, 11 and 12, all schools, by State, 1997(b) (c), and numbers of non-Indigenous students and Indigenous students to year 12**

	Year 10 1997		Year 11 1997		Year 12 1997			
	<i>Indigenous Non-Indigenous</i>		<i>Indigenous Non-Indigenous</i>		<i>Indigenous</i>		<i>Non-Indigenous</i>	
	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>Nos</i>	<i>per cent</i>	<i>Nos</i>
New South Wales	76.3	97.1	47.4	79.6	32.1	478	67.9	53,054
Victoria	94.7	96.8	69.4	89.1	46.6	102	76.5	45,384
Queensland	89.9	99.4	63.4	87.4	47.2	794	79.1	33,882
South Australia	67.5	94.3	39.5	87.2	19.5	64	67.8	11,749
Western Australia	81.0	100.9	44.5	88.7	19.7	215	74.0	17,564
Tasmania	108.3	96.3	50.9	74.4	49.0	93	58.8	3,957
Northern Territory	48.3	86.8	28.8	95.6	9.4	96	62.0	1,030
Australian Capital Territory	120.0	99.9	97.1	103.8	90.3	28	91.7	4,282
<b>Australia</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>97.6</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>85.3</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>1,870</b>	<b>72.9</b>	<b>170,902</b>

(a) Year 12 apparent retention rates measure the proportion of students who appear to have been retained to year 12 from the commencement of their secondary school studies and are reported by States on the assumption that they are studying at year 12 level in school. The calculation is based on the cohort of students in the system at the commencement of secondary schooling in relation to those in year 12 in the current year. Ungraded students are not included, even though they may have been graded at the year of commencement of secondary schooling.

(b) These derived statistics are based on full-time enrolments only.

(c) These figures include both government and non-government school enrolments—84,854 (ie 87.7 per cent) of the total number of 96,807 Indigenous enrolments in Australian schools in 1997 were in government schools.

Source: DEETYA, derived from *National Schools Statistics Collection*

**Table 6N. Grade progression ratios for years 8 to 12, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, Australia, 1996 to 1997 (per cent)**

	<i>Indigenous</i>	<i>Non-Indigenous</i>
Year 8 to year 9	94.4	99.9
Year 9 to year 10	83.3	98.0
Year 10 to year 11	65.5	87.7
Year 11 to year 12	65.5	86.4

Source: DEETYA, derived from *ABS Schools Australia 1997*

## Grade progression

Data on the grade progression ratios of Indigenous students from years 8 to 12 provides further information on the points at which Indigenous students leave schooling. Grade progression describes the proportion of students in a grade who move on to the next grade the following year.

As Table 6N shows, a significant number of Indigenous students do not complete the compulsory years of schooling. Only 94.4 per cent of Indigenous students progressed from year 8 in 1996 to year 9 in 1997, a loss of 399 students, and at the next grade level only 83.3 per cent progressed from year 9 to year 10, equivalent to a loss of 1,030 students. These figures, of course, do not account for those Indigenous students who have left school prior to the commencement of year 8, including those living in remote locations and communities who have no access to secondary schooling locally and who do not travel away from home to study or study through distance education.

The year 11 to 12 grade progression ratios confirm that a considerably higher proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students leave school after commencing senior school studies.

## Subject choice

There is evidence that Indigenous students in the post-compulsory years have much lower enrolments in the physical sciences than other Australian students, and that lower enrolments also occur in LOTE, mathematics and economics and business. Subjects in which Indigenous students are enrolled in higher proportions than other students include the arts, technology and health and physical education. The ACER study *Subject Choice in Years 11 and 12* (1994) also found that, proportionally, enrolment of Indigenous females in economics and business subjects and of Indigenous males in technical subjects is higher than for other students.

Subject participation by Indigenous students is also affected by location. In examining the interaction of Indigenous background and location, the ACER study found unexpectedly low levels of enrolments in the physical sciences, maths and computing studies, and correspondingly heightened levels in technical studies and biological and other sciences for Indigenous students in ‘provincial or other city’ locations – that is, in towns of more than 25,000 – when compared with Indigenous enrolments in capital cities and rural areas.

## Year 12 achievement

In addition to the fact that proportionally fewer Indigenous students are retained in schooling until year 12, data on year 12 results in 1997 provided by education authorities supports the contention that a much lower proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous students achieve academic results which qualify them to enter higher education. The data does not permit differentiation between those who choose not to study towards higher education entrance (although the reasons for this are an issue in themselves) and those who try but do not achieve the required level, but it nevertheless suggests that typically, Indigenous students have a lower chance than their non-Indigenous counterparts of entering university direct from school.

*Tasmanian government schools:* in 1997, 23 per cent of Indigenous year 12 students gained a Tertiary Entrance Score compared with 30.7 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

*Northern Territory government schools:* 22 per cent of Indigenous students enrolled in year 12 received a Northern Territory Certificate of Education in 1997 in comparison with 50.5 per cent of non-Indigenous students. However, the 1997 figure represented an increase over the 19.7 per cent of Indigenous year 12 students certificated in 1996.

*NSW Catholic schools:* in 1997, 29 per cent of Indigenous students who completed year 12 qualified to attend university compared with 67 per cent of non-Indigenous students.

## 6.3 Other key changes and developments

Progress was made in Australian schools during 1997 in other priority areas for Indigenous education. Notable developments occurred, for example, in the employment of Indigenous teachers, the involvement of Indigenous parents and community members in educational decision-making and in culturally inclusive curriculum.

## Employment of Indigenous people

The employment of Indigenous teachers and education workers in schools provides Indigenous students with mentors who better understand and can better accommodate their cultural backgrounds in the education process.

Indigenous staff make the school environment more welcoming for Indigenous students and provide positive role models. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (or their equivalent) provide classroom-based support for teachers, undertake home-school liaison and personal counselling and raise the cultural awareness and sensitivity of their workplaces. They are often the vital link between the Indigenous community and the school and bring invaluable cultural perspectives to what can sometimes be perceived by Indigenous people as an alien institution.

The presence of Indigenous staff in schools also enhances the understanding of non-Indigenous students and staff about Indigenous peoples, an important step in the reconciliation process and in improving relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

A number of education authorities reported increases in their Indigenous employment levels in 1997. At the same time, anecdotal evidence from both systemic and independent providers suggests that the supply of Indigenous teachers and teacher aides may not be meeting the current level of demand.

The NSW government school system reported an increase in the number of Indigenous people employed centrally on a permanent basis from 298 FTE professionals and 372 FTE para-professionals in 1996 to 427 and 383 respectively in 1997.

In Queensland, government schools increased numbers of Indigenous teachers from 191 in 1996 to 231 in 1997, and employed an additional 335 Indigenous teacher aides in 1997 (including both permanent and casuals, not FTE).

Numbers of Indigenous people employed permanently in South Australian government schools rose from 105 in 1996 to 143 in 1997, an increase from 0.6 per cent of the total permanent workforce to 0.9 per cent. Casual employment of Indigenous people also rose, from 164 to 195, representing an increase from 5.9 per cent of total casual staff to 7.2 per cent (not FTE).

While the Northern Territory government school system reduced the number of Indigenous professionals employed from 111 FTE in 1996 to 108 in 1997, as a proportion of

total professionals this remained at 4.6 per cent. Over the same period the number of Indigenous people employed as Aboriginal Assistant Teachers, Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers and Literacy Workers increased from 322.6 to 340 FTE.

## Involvement of parents and community in decision-making

The involvement of Indigenous parents and community members in school activities and decision-making assists Indigenous students in a number of ways. It can increase the interest of parents in their children's education and the level of support provided for learning and attainment; it can enhance students' sense of belonging; and it can assist the school in providing more culturally appropriate and sensitive responses to the needs of their Indigenous students.

Queensland increased the number of government schools which had Indigenous parent and community advisory committees from 630 in 1996 to 820 in 1997, Western Australia from 346 to 389, South Australia from 255 to 276 and the Northern Territory from 132 to 143.

The proportion of Catholic schools with Indigenous enrolments that had Indigenous advisory committees in 1997 was reported at 65 per cent in NSW, 53 per cent in Queensland, 100 per cent in Western Australia, 54 per cent in South Australia and 63 per cent in the ACT.

## Culturally inclusive curriculum

During 1997, much progress was reported in the development and implementation of culturally inclusive curriculum in Australian schools, ranging from the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in particular subject areas to the provision of Indigenous studies units in the primary, junior secondary and senior secondary curricula.

The examples provided below cannot be used to make comparisons between providers. Each provider has its own definitions of an Indigenous studies course, and the level of Indigenous perspectives included in other subject areas will vary.

- The Queensland government system expanded the number of preschools and schools implementing aspects of the P-12 Aboriginal studies and Torres Strait Islander studies from 19 in 1996 to approximately 200 in 1997. Fifteen schools were trialling the year 11 and 12 Board of Senior Secondary Studies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies course in 1997, an increase of six schools since 1996.

- In NSW all government primary and secondary schools include Indigenous perspectives in their curriculum and the number of government secondary schools offering Indigenous studies courses rose from 60 in 1996 to 68 in 1997. The NSW Catholic system reported that 41 per cent of its schools offered Indigenous studies programs in 1997 and 81 per cent offered Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum.
- The Northern Territory government system maintained the proportion of its schools offering Indigenous studies at 87 per cent in 1997, while the Catholic system there reported 54 per cent of schools offering Indigenous studies.
- In South Australia the government system increased the proportion of its schools offering Indigenous studies from 64.7 per cent in 1996 to 74 per cent, with the South Australian Catholic system also achieving an increase from 66.1 per cent to 69.4 per cent.

## Conclusion

During 1997, as a result of the restructuring of IESIP, 56 providers of school education services to Indigenous people in government and non-government systems and in independent schools across the nation commenced reporting on their Indigenous education outcomes to the Commonwealth. The purpose of the reporting is to enable the national monitoring of the progress of the AEP in achieving improved educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

For many providers this has meant monitoring and recording their own Indigenous education outcomes in a

number of areas for the first time, and many established new data collection mechanisms and assessment processes during 1997 for this purpose. In some instances data collection systems require further improvement to ensure the reporting of reliable information that can be used to monitor progress over time. Nevertheless, the information provided for 1997 represents a large step forward from earlier years when non-availability of data severely limited an objective assessment of how Indigenous students were faring at school.

The monitoring of outcomes both nationally and at the individual provider level will assist all of those involved in providing school education services to Indigenous people to recognise their current level of performance and identify effective strategies for improvement.

It is still difficult to make valid comparisons of the performance of State and Territory government education providers in Indigenous education other than at the broadest levels. Diversity of education systems and different delivery arrangements mean that limited data can be gathered on a uniform basis. Now, through MCEETYA, State and Territory systems are moving towards the collection and reporting of comparable data on key education indicators such as literacy and numeracy achievement. Progressively, the expansion of uniform statistical reporting will enable individual providers to compare their performance with others, and help to identify problem areas that need to be addressed. It will also enable all governments to assess the progress being made in achieving the goals of the AEP.