

Responses to Issues
Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in New South Wales

1. Is parental engagement a key component of the *Transition to Year 7* program being rolled out across New South Wales schools? What strategies have been put in place to involve parents in transition to high school programs in the 30 public schools where the *Transition to Year 7* program is in place?

The New South Wales Government's *Transition to Year 7* initiative provides \$11.5 million over four years to support the transition of Year 6 students in government primary schools into Year 7 at government high schools.

Phase 2 of this initiative is now underway, with 246 secondary and central schools and their partner primary schools involved this year. In 2010 and 2011 every government secondary and central school in the state will be on the program.

The Government has identified the following key outcomes for this initiative:

- establishing high school orientation and induction programs in every New South Wales government primary and secondary school
- introducing taster classes for Year 6 students, particularly in specialist secondary school science laboratories and design and technology classrooms
- improving data and information transfer on each student's academic and social strengths and areas for development
- improving pastoral care programs, including the use of home rooms for Year 7 where appropriate
- establishing a designated transition coordinator in every New South Wales secondary and central school to manage the pastoral care, induction, orientation and data exchange programs.

Funding to schools is provided on the following conditions:

- Funding is by way of a tied grant paid to the secondary school for shared use between the secondary school and its partner primary schools.
- Schools can use funds flexibly to best meet the transition needs of students within their particular school contexts.

In relation to parental engagement as a key component of the *Transition to Year 7* initiative, while not specifically stated in the Government's list of key outcomes (above), it is widely recognised that effective engagement and participation of parents must be an essential ingredient for the successful transition of students from primary school to high school.

In relation to the first 30 schools to have received funding under the Government's *Transition to Year 7* initiative in mid 2008, initial feedback from a number of these schools indicates a definite focus on the engagement of parents in the transition process and a strong desire to improve and extend that engagement.

Schools participating in the *Transition to Year 7* initiative in 2008-2009 report a variety of strategies at the local level to inform and engage parents. These include:

- Year 6 parent information sessions at primary schools, either during the day or in the evening
- High school information sessions at primary school Parents and Citizens meetings
- Parent open days and information nights at the high school
- Primary school parents attending high school performances etc
- BBQs for primary school parents and their children
- Parent participation in activities during high school orientation days, e.g. welcome ceremonies, lesson observations, morning teas
- High school meetings for new parents during Term 1 Year 7, either during the day or in the evening
- BBQs for Year 7 parents and their children
- Specific targeted activities for Indigenous parents to encourage participation and partnerships
- Close consultation with parents who have students at risk, students with special needs etc
- Parent orientation programs, for example "How to help your child in Year 7"
- Parent workshops to encourage parent participation and support.

2. To what extent are specific procedures in place as part of the *Transition to Year 7* Program for Aboriginal children with disabilities and are peer support/mentoring programs a standard component of the *Transition to Year 7* Program?

It is important to note that the *Transition to Year 7* initiative does not clearly state any specific requirements for the transition of Aboriginal students and children with disabilities. The funding is provided to schools on the understanding that schools will use their funds flexibly "to best meet the transition needs of students within their particular school contexts". This requirement covers Aboriginal children and children with disabilities, as well as the other children who are transitioning into high school.

In relation to Aboriginal children, there are also other initiatives and strategies in operation within the state to support improved primary-secondary transition. The *Schools in Partnership* initiative and the related *Targeted Aboriginal*

Students Strategy and *Targeted School Initiative* have been established to assist schools in specifically improving the literacy, numeracy and participation outcomes of students. There are currently 43 schools participating in these initiatives.

In addition there are two other programs – *Kids Excel* and *Youth Excel* – that involve whole of government early intervention strategies that aim to improve Aboriginal children and young people’s educational outcomes. *Youth Excel* in particular focuses on improved primary-secondary transition and attachment to high school. There are currently 14 schools involved in these initiatives.

In relation to children with disabilities, the Department’s Disability Programs Directorate offers the following information:

“Under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education (2005)* the NEW SOUTH WALES Department of Education and Training is required to provide access to and participation in education for people with a disability on the same basis as those who do not have a disability. The Department is strongly committed to its obligations in this regard, demonstrated through its policies and a comprehensive range of inclusive services and programs.

In addition to the Transition to Year 7 initiative, the Department provides a wide range of specialist services and programs for supporting students with disability, including support for their transition from primary to secondary settings.

The *Integration Funding Support* program supports students with a confirmed disability who are enrolled in regular classes. The program provides funding to supplement existing school and regional resources. Funding may be used in a range of ways to meet the needs of students and the school, including additional teacher or teacher aide time and training and development activities for school personnel. Formal review of support for students through this program is required at key transition points, including transition to Year 7.

(Link:

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/programs/disability/supportdocument.pdf>)

Specialist classes are available for students with confirmed disabilities in regular schools and special schools.

A range of specialist services support the work of teachers. These include itinerant support teachers with expertise in specialist areas such as transition, and Disability Program Consultants who provide advice on programming and assessment of learning programs and information on appropriate support to access the curriculum, including transition.

In addition, the Department is currently implementing a new initiative in 2009 in 265 schools across the state through an additional \$9 million for students with special needs and their teachers. These funds have enabled the

Department to establish an additional specialist teacher, known as a School Learning Support Coordinator, in these schools. As part of their role, the School Learning Support Coordinators model exemplary classroom practice when tailoring learning for students with complex additional learning needs, including those starting school, moving from primary to secondary and moving to post school destinations. The new coordinators are also receiving substantial training in a range of areas relevant for supporting students with complex additional learning needs.

(Link:

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/programs/disability/slscinfo.pdf>)

The transition of students with disabilities from primary to secondary settings requires careful planning, sharing of information and close liaison between schools and families. To ensure that adequate time is allowed for this to occur, review meetings are held by the end of Semester 1 for students with a disability who are expected to move to another setting at the end of the year. This planning time may need to be significantly increased in some circumstances, depending on the educational needs of the particular students. The school principal is responsible to ensure that planning for transition from primary to secondary school occurs as required.

The learning support team in each school plans the way that students with a disability are supported and may also contribute to planning for student transition to Year 7.”

In relation to peer support and peer mentoring it is important to note that specific transition strategies have not been specified within the *Transition to Year 7* initiative. Schools are encouraged to use their funds flexibly to most effectively meet the needs of the individual students in their care. While the significant value of peer support and peer mentoring is widely recognised, they are but two or the many strategies that have been identified to support student transition in terms of improved social competence and personal self-confidence, more effective data and information transfer, improved curriculum and pedagogy alignment and support for students in managing their own learning.

3. How much funding has been provided to implement the Department’s middle years strategy “Our Middle Years Learners – Engaged, Resilient, Successful”?

Treasury allocates the budget in terms of Primary and Secondary education. Middle years funding is not a specific allocation. The principal has discretion in the use of staffing and global funding allocations. Decisions are made about the use of these allocations in consultation with the school’s staff and community, and in line with the endorsed school plan.

4. To what extent have strategies in the middle years strategy been implemented across NEW SOUTH WALES schools?

All schools have incorporated specific middle years actions in their school plans. Schools have determined the specific emphasis according to the determined needs of their particular context. Transition, Self Assessment and professional learning are examples of particular actions schools have implemented. In 2008 there was a Middle Years Conference attended by more than 300 Departmental teachers and principals from across the State.

5. The Department's middle years strategy is from 2006-2009. Will this strategy be evaluated and are there plans to develop a new middle years strategy?

The Department's middle years strategy then implemented 2006-2009 is in its final year. Processes were established at the outset of the strategy to monitor progress. Evaluation is not anticipated until the end of the cycle. In the meantime the Department has already set in train a comprehensive process for reviewing the strategy and has implemented a plan to refresh and sharpen the strategies in line with the Office of Schools Plan. The renewed strategy will be implemented in 2020.

6. Some evidence to the Inquiry has identified a need for a unique student identifier that goes across the three schools sector in New South Wales. A unique student identifier would assist when students change schools, particularly in relation to student history. Has the Department considered this issue? What would be required to introduce a common student identifier

The value of a unique student identification number has been acknowledged within the Department of Education and Training for almost a decade and as a result, a new computer enrolment system was subsequently designed by the Department's Information Technology Directorate and introduced into all government schools in March 2008.

This enrolment system, the Enrolment Registration Number system (ERN) uses a nine digit student identification number (SRN) which is allocated to a student when they first enrol in a New South Wales government school. Supporting ERN and the SRN is a database of enrolment information which can then be accessed by any government school, should a student seek enrolment at that other school at a later time.

The value of ERN is that it was intentionally designed for use in government schools, TAFE and the Catholic and Independent schools sectors, but its use is currently limited to government schools only, possibly due to available funding. TAFE currently do use nine digit student enrolment numbers but

these do not relate or link to the nine digit ERN numbers being used by the government school sector.

One possibility is that a unique student identifier may be implemented as a part of the work program of the recently established Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). At this point in time the national Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy provides identity codes for students involved in testing at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. These codes are unique within each jurisdiction and in New South Wales will provide the basis for tracking student progress over time across the years of testing.

An alternative approach to the provision of a unique student identifier is to support a framework to assist with the transfer of information between systems and schools. The Interstate Student Data Transfer Note (ISDTN) and Protocol is a joint initiative between the Australian Government, State and Territory Education Departments, and the independent and Catholic education sectors. All education authorities (including the non-government sector) agreed to implement, from 1 January 2006, a national system for the transfer of student information between schools when children move from one state to another. This national system enhances the ability of the student's new school to place and support that student in a timely manner and with the assistance of accurate information from the student's previous school. The national system is based on using a common "Interstate Student Data Transfer Note" and set of protocols. This website contains all documents associated with the ISDTN. See

http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/interstate_student_data_transfer_note,12095.html

7. What quality teaching initiatives are in place or planned for teachers of middle years students and how will they be evaluated? Are they part of the Australian Government's Quality Teaching program?

The *New South Wales Department Education and Training Quality Teaching* model is the key framework for quality teaching in NEW SOUTH WALES public schools. It is a key strategy for school leaders and teachers to use in creating learning environments that are relevant and engaging for students. A requirement of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's *Office of Schools Plan 2009-2011* is that all professional learning programs provided for school leaders and teachers incorporate the *New South Wales Department Education and Training Quality Teaching* model.

Based on research the *New South Wales Department Education and Training Quality Teaching* model identifies three dimensions of teaching that are linked to improved student learning and engagement outcomes:

- teaching that is fundamentally based on promoting high levels of intellectual quality

- teaching that is soundly based on promoting a quality learning environment
- teaching that develops and makes explicit to students the significance of their work.

Schools have participated in the *Quality Teaching Action Learning* projects and provide regular progress reports documenting their achievements. Three external reports document evaluative analyses of the successful conduct and achievements of the projects. These reports are published at <http://www.qtp.nsw.edu.au/resources/er.cfm>

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training has participated in a longitudinal research study with the University of Newcastle, *Systemic Implications of Pedagogy and Achievement in New South Wales Public Schools*. This research explored the relationship between teacher professional learning and the quality of teaching and student achievement.

Initial findings include:

- that teachers use the *New South Wales Department Education and Training Quality Teaching* model as a framework for collegial discussions on student performance, particularly engagement and deep understanding
- improvements in student performance are strongly linked to the dimension of *Intellectual quality*
- raising the intellectual quality of pedagogy significantly benefited the achievement of students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) descent and students from low socio-economic status backgrounds
- a significant improvement in authentic achievement for both ATSI and non-ATSI students occurred when assessment tasks reflected elements of the *New South Wales Department Education and Training Quality Teaching* model.

The Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate is developing the interactive, online *Classroom Teacher Program*. This program is a key strategy to ensure equity of access to and consistency of quality professional learning and support for teachers in achieving and maintaining accreditation with the New South Wales Institute of Teachers at Professional Competence. The program aligns each teacher's learning with the Professional Teaching Standards and has an explicit focus on engaging all students in learning.

New South Wales Department of Education and Training professional learning programs designed to assist teachers to meet the needs of students in the middle years include:

- *Facilitating Counting On in the Middle Years*
- *Implementing Counting On in the Middle Years*

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- *Engage, Enrich, Extend - A Middle Years' Project*
- *Literacy in the middle years- Planning professional learning forum*
- *Literacy in the middle years- Reflection professional learning forum*
- *Early career teacher induction – Literacy*
- *The quality of teaching makes the difference*
- *What Counts: the quality of teaching makes the difference-numeracy*

These programs are registered with the Institute of Teachers as '*Institute Registered Professional Development*' and incorporate the elements of the *New South Wales Department Education and Training Quality Teaching* model.

From 2006 to 2009 the *Quality Teaching in the Middle Years* initiative has been supporting the professional learning of primary and secondary teachers of students in Years 5 to 9.

This initiative, funded by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, has focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning in five Australian Government priority areas: English/Literacy; Mathematics/Numeracy; Science/Technology; Civics/Citizenship; and Health Education.

Supported by academic partners, senior project officers and/or regional consultants, school project teams have applied the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's *Quality Teaching* model and strengthened collegial networks within communities of primary and secondary schools.

Action learning processes have been used by all project teams to reflect on current teaching practice, share existing expertise within and across schools, and improve teaching strategies and assessment procedures.

Participation of project team members has been, and continues to be, evaluated against the following project outcomes: Teachers have strengthened the currency and depth of:

- their pedagogical knowledge and skills
- their learning area knowledge and understandings.

Evaluation data is collected and analysed at least twice each year, and the progress and achievements of all projects, including team members' achievement of the project outcomes, is reported to the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and the Australian Government's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in June and November.

8. What programs are in place or are planned for students in the middle years who experience problems with literacy? How widespread and effective are these programs?

The Department offers two major professional learning programs, in addition to regional professional learning and school-based activities to support literacy in the middle years. The programs are, *Literacy in the middle years* and *Early career teacher induction program: Literacy Middle Years*. *Literacy in the middle years* is a literacy professional learning program for middle years teachers in primary and high schools that has been operating since 2005. This is a 36 hour course, registered for accreditation with the NEW SOUTH WALES Institute of Teachers.

Learning communities receive intensive support via face-to-face professional learning forums, videoconferences, online resources and regional consultants in ongoing action research to improve the literacy outcomes of students in the middle years. Program resources have been adapted by regional literacy consultants across the state as they work with teachers of students in the middle years of schooling. Learning communities from all 10 regions have participated in the project, and are involved for three years.

2006	12 learning communities	57 schools	168 teachers
2007	14 learning communities	59 schools	285 teachers
2008	14 learning communities	56 schools	204 teachers

In 2008, teachers attending the Term 1 and Term 4 forums were asked to complete evaluations of professional learning, as well as contribute to focus group interviews conducted in Term 4.

- More than 89% of participants agreed that participation in *Literacy in the Middle Years* was effective in catering for teacher professional learning needs.
- More than 89% of participants agreed that participation in *Literacy in the Middle Years* resulted in positive changes to teacher practice.
- 94% of participants would recommend participation in the *Literacy in the Middle Years* professional learning course to their colleagues.

The *Early career teacher induction program: Literacy Middle Years* was produced in 2008 to support teachers of Stage 3 and Stage 4 classes to assist students to achieve syllabus outcomes by incorporating literacy teaching practices. This is a fifteen hour course, registered for accreditation with the NEW SOUTH WALES Institute of Teachers.

9. The New South Wales Government had a State Literacy Plan in place for 2006-2008. How successful has this plan been in meeting its student achievement and implementation indicators? Is a subsequent plan being developed, and what is the process for developing the plan?

(a) How successful has this plan been in meeting its student achievement and implementation indicators?

The success of the 2006-2008 State Literacy Plan was measured by:

- Improvement in student literacy achievements:
 - The 2007 Year 3 Literacy mean of 51.2 was the second highest recorded since testing began in 1996.
 - In 2005, 45% of Year 3 students were in the top two bands. In 2007, this figure had increased to 48% of Year 3 students.
 - In 1996, 47% of Year 5 students were in the top two bands. In 2007, this figure had increased to 53% of Year 5 students.
 - In 2006, the Year 7 mean for the English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) test was 88.8. This increased to 89.0 in 2007.
 - In 2006, the Year 8 mean for ELLA was 89.5. This increased to 90.0 in 2007.
 - In 2007, the Overall Literacy means and the Writing means were the highest ever achieved for Year 7 and Year 8 students.
- Biannual reporting 2006-2008 on implementation of the Plan at both State Office and Regional level.

Regional reports indicated that regions supported and monitored school literacy achievement against agreed targets which aligned with system-wide targets.

State Office Directorate reports showed that programs were developed that aligned to the strategic actions of the Plan. For example, Curriculum K-12 Directorate:

- Developed the Literacy K–12 Policy.
- Developed the state-wide *Best start* kindergarten literacy assessment and associated professional learning.
- Conducted focused professional learning programs such as *Literacy on track* and *Literacy in the middle years* to support schools with implementation of the State Literacy Plan and Literacy K–12 Policy.
- Developed an early career teacher induction program for teachers of middle years students.

- Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate provided training for teachers across the state in using the SMART package to analyse assessment data.

(b) Is a subsequent plan being developed and what is the process for developing the plan?

The framework for planning by State Office Directorates within the Office of Schools is the Office of Schools Plan 2009-2011. This plan identifies literacy as one of six priority areas. There are outcomes, strategies and indicators articulated for each priority.

Strategies are implemented through key actions. In the case of literacy, these actions have been shaped by external factors, such as the National Partnership Agreement: Literacy and Numeracy and the Auditor-General's report, "Improving Literacy and Numeracy in New South Wales Public Schools", as well as student performance data and feedback from regions and schools.

Through a process of planning meetings and performance discussions, the Learning and Development portfolio has established the key actions that will be implemented to support improvement in student literacy achievement in New South Wales public schools for 2009-2011.

10. In October 2008 a performance audit of the NEW SOUTH WALES Department of Education's literacy and numeracy program was conducted by the New South Wales Audit Office, which recommendations does this Department plan to implement?

The Director-General of Education and Training, Mr Michael Coutts-Trotter, wrote to the Auditor-General on 3 October 2008, confirming that the Department accepted all the recommendations.

Four project teams, each led by a Director within the Office of Schools, have been tasked with the implementation of the recommendations. The teams report to a high level coordination group, convened by the A/General Manager, Learning and Development.