

Submission

No 88

## INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

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**Submission by the Department of  
Education, Employment and Workplace  
Relations (DEEWR)  
to  
The NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into  
Children and Young People 9-14 Years in  
NSW**

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This submission provides information on the services and support provided to young people between the age of 9 and 14 by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

## Overview

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has interest in young people aged 9-14 years on a number of fronts;

- The Department has primary responsibility for people between the ages of 9 and 14 at the Commonwealth level for the purposes of childcare, early childhood education, school education and youth transitions.
- The Department's focus on early childhood education, from four to eight years of age. This has a direct impact on the 9-14 year life stage, setting learning foundations prior to the transition to adolescence and young adulthood.
- The Department also has policies and programs for young people aged 15-24. These programs will be directly and immediately impacted by the experiences of children in the 9-14 year age group.
- The Department's employment and workplace relations policies and programs also have a direct impact on the life circumstances of children. Employment policy and programs impact the socio-economic circumstances of the family and workplace relations policy dictates the ways in which parents work and, therefore, able to care for and connect with their children.

The Department is the only Commonwealth agency able to follow the life course of individuals throughout early childhood learning, school education, career development, training, higher education and employment. The Department's work in these areas has a direct impact, through its policies and programs which enable individuals to participate fully in Australian society, both socially and economically.

The middle years (9-14) are a vital period of development for young people. It is during this period of early adolescence that young people begin to develop their individual identities and values which will stay with them through to adulthood.

Evidence suggest that young people who utilise ('exercise') their brains by learning to order their thoughts, understand abstract concepts, and control their impulses are laying the neural foundations that will serve them well for the rest of their lives<sup>1</sup>.

It is important that young people during this period of are able to access high quality education and develop strong foundation skills in areas such as literacy and numeracy to encourage higher school retention rates, lead to improved employment opportunities, enhance engagement in society and support future economic prosperity.

The vast majority of young people are healthier and better educated than previous generations and levels of unemployment much lower than in recent decades. However transitions through early childhood, the middle years, adolescence and adulthood are not always easy and can be especially difficult for disadvantaged groups and

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<sup>1</sup> Giedd JN, Blumenthal J, Jeffries NO, et al. Brain development during childhood and adolescence: a longitudinal MRI study. *Nature Neuroscience*, 1999; 2(10): 861-3.

communities. The Australian Government is committed to building a strong and inclusive economy which reduces inequalities between the least advantaged groups and communities and the rest of society in relation to access to education, training transition support, career development and employment.

## Introduction

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) welcomes the NSW Inquiry into Children and Young People Aged 9-14 years in NSW. The middle years (9-14 years) mark a challenging period of transition for children and young people: educationally, emotionally, socially and physically. Children and young people in the middle years are faced with significant choices which can affect their later educational and career directions.

DEEWR takes a national leadership role for education, training and employment, with a number of policies, programs and initiatives that impact on, and contribute to, the lives of young Australians. Through the Education Revolution the Australian Government aims to provide universal access to a high quality education from the earliest age, world-class teaching and learning in schools, and effective training and ongoing learning opportunities in universities and the workplace. Following this strategic direction, a number of recent initiatives have been aimed at giving all Australian children and young people, including those aged 9-14 years, the best foundation for their future.

The 2008 Federal Budget announced funding of \$577.4 million over four years to deliver the election commitment for a National Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy. The National Action Plan will deliver new national approaches to lift the literacy and numeracy performance of all students, starting with those schools and students most in need of help. The Australian Government has also allocated funds over four years to expand intensive literacy and numeracy programs to assist Indigenous students who are underachieving.

This submission discusses the needs of young people in many different areas of their lives, in relation to the Terms of Reference, including education, geographical isolation, the employment of parents and disadvantage in many forms. Information is provided to the committee regarding the programs and policies that DEEWR has developed, or contributed to, in relation to those needs.

This submission makes reference where possible to New South Wales children and young people in the appropriate age group. However as policies and programs operate at a national level and across varying age groups, it has not always been possible to separate specific NSW programs. It should also be noted that this particular age group of 9-14 years is not a widely adopted age group in most data collections (10-14 years is more commonly used). Hence, it is difficult to always refer specifically to this particular age group. Some of the programs discussed in the body of this submission may cover children of different age ranges, but the information is believed to be relevant and useful to the Inquiry.

## **Term of Reference Number 1: The needs of children and young people in the middle years i.e. between about nine and fourteen years of age**

### **Educational needs**

The middle years are a complex time for students, while learners themselves are dealing with a number of complexities as they progress from late childhood to early adolescence, so too the curriculum becomes increasingly specialised, as do the languages and literacies associated with the ways meaning and knowledge are constructed and used<sup>2</sup>.

In addition, the nature and definition of literacy is changing as a broader repertoire of knowledge, skills and capabilities are required than at any time in the past. Terms such as ‘multiliteracies’<sup>3</sup> and ‘technoliteracies’<sup>4</sup> have entered into the discussion of what it means to be literate in this century.

In the last decade there has been an emergence of an international middle schooling movement in response to the need to reform what happens in the middle years<sup>5</sup>. It is also acknowledged that the area of middle years education is under-researched<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, Australian researchers are working in this area of education, and regular conferences on middle years education are held around Australia through organisations such as the Middle Years of Schooling Association (MYSA).

The middle years of schooling do however present opportunities to engage students; to offer meaningful interventions to aid students in continuing their education and making informed career choices; and to help children and young people to make smooth transitions into further education, training and employment.

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<sup>2</sup> Christie, F, ‘Literacy education in contemporary Australia’, *Learning Matters*, 1998

<sup>3</sup> The New London Group, ‘A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Features’, *Harvard Educational Review*, 1996

<sup>4</sup> Lankshear, Colin, Ilena Snyder and Bill Green. *Teachers and TechnoLiteracy: Managing Literacy, Technology and Learning in Schools*. St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 2000

<sup>5</sup> Hattam, R and Prosser, B, *Connecting curriculum with student lifeworlds*, paper presented at 3<sup>rd</sup> International middle Years of Schooling Conference, Adelaide, 2006

<sup>6</sup> For example: Hardingham, R, Middle Years of Schooling Association (MYSA) Newsletter, 2002.

### *Engagement of Middle Years Children in Science and Maths Education*

There is a need to address the disengagement of children in this age group in science and maths education<sup>7</sup>. Research shows that experiences before the age of fourteen years largely determine whether students will continue to study maths and science in the post-compulsory years and go on to pursue careers in these fields. The middle years, therefore, are critically important, highlighting the need for interventions to improve and to make more relevant and interesting students' educational experiences during this period of their schooling.

International benchmarks suggest that Australia's performance in maths and science<sup>8</sup> is slipping. Skills shortages in these areas (including maths and some science teaching) are increasing. More students need to study these subjects in the senior secondary years and at the tertiary level, not only to address skills shortages, but to also ensure that students develop a broad range of key skills that will maximise their options and life choices.

### *National Curriculum*

The Australian Government has committed to the development of a rigorous, world-class national curriculum for all Australian students from kindergarten to Year 12, starting with the key learning areas of English, mathematics, the sciences and history.

National curriculum will be developed for all children from Kindergarten to Year 12 and will be implemented in all Australian primary and secondary school from 2011. This will mean that young people aged from 9 to 14 years will benefit directly from this initiative.

The development of a national curriculum will provide clear and explicit agreement about the curriculum essentials that all young Australians should have access to, regardless of their socioeconomic background or the location of their school.

Eighty thousand school aged students start school each year in a new state or territory. The National Curriculum will facilitate student mobility and educational consistency, so that students are faced with the least amount of disruption to their studies.

It will ensure that all young Australians are equipped with the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities to thrive and compete in a globalised world. The development of a continuum of learning in literacy and numeracy skills, ranging from basic competence in the early years of schooling, will be a foundation of the national curriculum.

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<sup>7</sup> Greg McPhan, Will Morony, John Pegg, Ray Cooksey, Trevor Lynch, *Maths? Why Not?* Report prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008

<sup>8</sup> Programme for International Assessment (PISA), OECD, 2006 Report  
[http://www.pisa.oecd.org/document/2/0,3343,en\\_32252351\\_32236191\\_39718850\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.pisa.oecd.org/document/2/0,3343,en_32252351_32236191_39718850_1_1_1_1,00.html)



### *The Digital Revolution*

The Digital Education Revolution will bring substantial and meaningful change to teaching and learning in Australian schools. It will prepare students for further education and training, jobs of the future and to live and work in a digital world. Among the initiatives that are likely to directly benefit middle years children are:

- The Fibre Connections to Schools initiative will contribute to the provision of fibre-to-the premises (FTTP) broadband connections to Australian Schools.
- The development of web portals, which will allow parents to participate in their child's education through on-line access.

### **Access to Education**

In 2001 the MCEETYA Taskforce on Rural and Remote Education, Training, Employment and Children's Services developed the National Framework for Rural and Remote Education.

The framework was underpinned by the following principles:

- Students and families living in rural and remote Australia have specific needs which are the direct result of living in particular geographic locations.
- There is a high degree of variability in the characteristics of rural and remote communities, both within and between States and the Northern Territory
- The needs of rural and remote students should be met through local commitment and ownership as well as through predictable and sustained government initiatives.
- The provision of quality education in rural and remote Australia requires creative and flexible approaches that utilise leadership capacity at all levels, innovative technology and methodology, and whole of government approaches.

DEEWR has developed and administered a number of programs to assist geographically isolated students from remote and rural locations in a variety of ways. Some programs offer assistance to schools and school communities, while others assist in providing remote and rural families with an alternative to boarding schools or distance education for their children.

The *Non-Government School Term Hostels (NGSTH) Program* began in 2005 and its objective is to assist non-government hostels to provide a high standard of care to rural and remote primary and secondary students residing at the hostels. In 2007, 6 hostels in NSW accommodated 140 students, of these 60 were aged 9-14 years. It is expected that the program will assist a similar number of hostels and students in 2008.

The *Country Areas Program (CAP)* contributes funding in support of rural and geographically isolated students. Funding is to assist schools and school communities to improve the educational outcomes and opportunities of students who are educationally disadvantaged because of their geographical isolation.

The 2007 Budget provided a capital injection of \$15.3 million to assist non-government boarding schools, particularly those in remote and regional areas, to urgently replace aged and deteriorating facilities to meet the growing demand for high quality educational opportunities for Indigenous students.

The \$15.3 million complements a further \$50 million, also announced in the 2007 Budget, for the refurbishment and construction of boarding and related facilities to support Indigenous boarders at non-government schools.

The NSW Catholic Block Grant Authority received \$2.6 million and the NSW Independent Block Grant Authority received \$600,000 for eligible schools in their jurisdictions under the \$50m *Indigenous Boarding Infrastructure Program (IBIP)*

## **Safety and Wellbeing**

The National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF) was developed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in 2003. It incorporates existing good practice and provides an agreed national approach to help schools and their communities address issues of bullying, harassment, violence, and child abuse and neglect. It is a collaborative effort by the Australian Government and State and Territory government and non-government school authorities and other key stakeholders. It presents a way of achieving a shared vision of physical and emotional safety and wellbeing for all students in all Australian schools.

The Framework recognises the need for sustained positive approaches that include an appreciation of the ways in which social attitudes and values impact on the behaviour of students in the school communities. Such approaches encourage all members of the school community to: value diversity; contribute positively to the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others; act independently, justly, cooperatively and responsibly in school, work, civic and family relationships; and contribute to the implementation of appropriate strategies that create and maintain a safe and supportive learning environment. It is underpinned by a set of guiding principles and related key elements or approaches that schools can put in place to effectively provide a safe and supportive learning environment.

National level reporting by states and territories on the implementation of the NSSF occurs through the Annual National Report (ANR) on Schooling in Australia. The 2005 ANR indicates that schools across all jurisdictions have moved to implement the NSSF. There is now greater awareness of the importance of promoting and sustaining safe learning environments to protect the safety and wellbeing of students.

## **Economic Needs**

In Australia, relatively little is known about how children particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds perceive both themselves and their economic needs.

Through an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grant, DEEWR is jointly funding and working in collaboration with the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales and other service providers, namely Mission Australia and the Smith Family, in undertaking a research project 'Making a Difference: Building on Children's Perspectives of Economic Adversity'. This project will survey the views of disadvantaged children (aged 11-17 years) on their relationships with family, peer groups, school, community and other institutions of importance to them including their aspirations and plans for the future.

This project is closely aligned with two key goals: a healthy start to life and strengthening Australia's economic and social fabric. It is expected that the findings of the project will generate a new understanding of the nature and consequences of contemporary economic adversity from the perspective of children. Evidence from the study will help inform Commonwealth and State policy development and improve the efficiency of service provision and practice across a range of spheres.

The project will run from 2007-2008 to 2009-2010.

## **Term of Reference Number 2: the extent to which the needs of children and young people in the middle years vary according to age, gender and level of disadvantage.**

### **Age**

In terms of age, 9 to 14 years mark an important period of transition for children and young people. This transition is most often characterised by changing circumstances, for example moving from primary to secondary education.

These ‘middle years’ are also very important for laying future foundations in relation to further education, career decisions and inclusion in the wider community.

#### School Participation by Age Group

The Australian Bureau of Statistics figures below show school participation rates for NSW students in 2007<sup>9</sup>:

NSW – 2007 14 year olds 97.8%

NSW – 2007 15 year olds 93.1%

NSW – 2007 16 year olds 80%

As can be seen from the figures above participation rates begin to decline for students after the age of 14 years. This is obviously due in part to employment opportunities, for example apprenticeships, becoming available to young people as they meet the age requirement to enter the workforce. However, while employment opportunities may account for some of this decline in school participation, some young people experience barriers to continuing their education. Barriers can include behavioural issues, disability, mental health issues, drug/alcohol substance abuse and literacy/numeracy issues.

Under TOR 3 there is a discussion of Australian Government programs that support children and young people to become more resilient, and to make successful transitions through school and from school to further education.

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<sup>9</sup> *Schools, Australia 2007*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No. 4221.0

## Gender

Research into gender differences between Australian students has generally shown a link between attitudes to school and gender, for example the findings of Slade and Trent<sup>10</sup>, who reported that boys often find school a hostile, irrelevant and boring imposition that interferes with their lives outside school. It appears that boys are more likely than girls to act on a negative attitude towards school and leave.

In a study conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)<sup>11</sup> school achievement, as measured by literacy and numeracy achievement at age 14, was also found to have a substantial effect on early school leaving, which was larger than other individual-level background and school factors such as socio-economic status, geographic location and school type. The influence of school achievement also operates on early school leaving through the effect it has on students' satisfaction with school (especially among boys) and attitudes to achievement (especially among girls).

### *Success for Boys Program*

The Success for Boys program was one of two initiatives developed in response to the Inquiry into Boys Education and Training, conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training in 2002. The other initiative was the Boys Education Lighthouse Schools (BELS) Project, which was conducted in 2003-2005.

The Success for Boys program provided funding of \$19.4 million to 1600 schools across Australia over 2006 and 2007. The aim of the program was to assist schools to access evidence-based professional learning intended to improve boys' learning outcomes and engagement with school.

## Disadvantage

Every child will have unique needs, in education, as in other areas. However, it is possible to identify various groups of children whose needs may be categorised according to their type of disadvantage:

- students with disabilities;
- Indigenous students;
- students with learning difficulties;
- students with a language other than English;
- low socioeconomic students;
- students from remote/rural areas;
- children with caring responsibilities

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<sup>10</sup> Slade, M and Trent, F, 'What the boys are saying', *International Education Journal*, 2000

<sup>11</sup> Marks, GN and Fleming, N, *Early School Leaving in Australia: findings from the 1995 LSAY Cohort*, report produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research, 1999

These groups, and others, may require targeted assistance to help them achieve their full potential. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has a number of targeted, as well as broader, initiatives and interventions in place to address a number of these areas. Some of the programs that may be of interest to the Committee are:

### *Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs*

The Australian Government is making a significant contribution to support the most educationally disadvantaged students through the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN) program. An estimated \$2 billion will be provided nationally to schools specifically to improve the literacy, numeracy and other learning outcomes of disadvantaged students, including those with disability or learning difficulty.

In 2008, the Schools Grant element of the LNSLN Program will provide an estimated \$470.5 million to support the most educationally disadvantaged students.

The Non-Government Centres Support element of the LNSLN Program is to assist in improving the educational and learning outcomes of children with a disability who receive services provided by non-government centres. This funding may assist school aged children with severe disabilities by improving their access to educational programs or assist children with disabilities in residential care.

### *Helping children with autism*

The Australian Government is providing targeted support for young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), their parents, carers, teachers and other professionals through the *Helping children with autism* package. This package is being implemented through the departments of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Health and Ageing (DoHA), and Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

The two components of the package being delivered by DEEWR are:

- Professional development for teachers and other school staff to support school students with ASD to achieve better educational outcomes; and
- Workshops, information sessions and online workshops for parents and carers of school students with ASD.

The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium have been awarded the contract to deliver these two initiatives.

### *The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)*

Indigenous educational funding is provided by the Australian Government is supplementary to mainstream funding, and is intended for strategic interventions that will accelerate improvements in Indigenous student learning outcomes.

Despite improvements over the past decade, unacceptable disadvantage remains. Gaps persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student outcomes across the education and training sectors.

Ministers of Education have agreed that the national goal should be for all students to achieve at least the benchmark level of performance. While most students do achieve at least the benchmark in reading, writing and numeracy, a significant proportion of Indigenous students in Years 3, 5 and 7 do not.

### *Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS)*

ITAS provides targeted tutorial assistance to Indigenous students in school, vocational training and education, and tertiary education.

The components applicable to children and young people aged 9-14 years are:

- ITAS In-Class Tuition (ICT) is literacy and/or numeracy tuition which is arranged by any education provider (a school or school system) to improve literacy and/or numeracy skills for Indigenous students at key points of their schooling.
- ITAS RIS provides supplementary tuition for Indigenous school students who leave their remote community to attend school in a non-remote location or to attend a remote boarding school.

### *English as a Second Language – New Arrivals Program*

This program provides funding to state and territory government and non-government education authorities to assist with the cost of delivering intensive English language tuition (ELT) for eligible newly arrived migrant primary and secondary students.

The program aims to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes of students who have recently arrived in Australia, whose first language is not English, and whose proficiency in the English language is determined, at the local level, to require intensive assistance to enable them to participate fully in mainstream classroom activities.

## **Terms of Reference Number 3: the activities, services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience**

The middle years are a challenging time for children and young people as they enter a period of rapid change emotionally, physically and intellectually and move from dependent children to independent young people. DEEWR provides a number of programs and initiatives which provide opportunities for children and young people to develop resilience.

### **Early Intervention**

YouthLinx is a prevention and early intervention program that supports young people aged 11 to 16 and their families, to build self-reliance, strengthen family relationships and encourage community involvement.

To achieve this, YouthLinx services use the following key strategies:

- Provide access to innovative and structured activities, as well as positive peer support to young people mainly outside school hours and during school holiday periods.
- Provide practical support and guidance to families, and where appropriate, to provide referrals.
- Provide services that are responsive to the needs of the local community.

Annual funding for YouthLinx is approximately \$7 million per financial year, servicing on average 100 programs across Australia.

In NSW between 2006-07 YouthLinx provided the following services:

- 29 services operating (including one indigenous specific and one CALD specific program)
- 2,500 families supported through YouthLinx (including 388 indigenous & 609 CALD)
- 30,600 young people attended a YouthLinx activity
- 29,900 young people attended a YouthLinx drop-in session
- 21,800 young people attended a YouthLinx event



Resilient young people and families are those with access to the skills and resources needed to withstand individual stresses and conflict. Resilient communities are those that pull together and share resources so as to provide a better response to those who are in need<sup>12</sup>.

Early intervention is about taking action for young people and their families to prevent further harm before difficulties become long term and increasingly severe problems such as early school leaving, homelessness, youth crime and drug addiction develop.

YouthLinx is focused on prevention programs in communities where risk factors (for example, poverty, social isolation) have been identified and in early intervention with specific target groups where risks (such as family breakdown, poor experiences of school, or racism) have been identified. YouthLinx services provide a generalist service and use positive activities to engage young people and build up their protective factors, such as belonging to friendship groups, strengthening supportive parenting, and developing problem-solving skills.

A strong connection to family is one of the most important protective factors for young people in the 11 to 16 age group. Traditionally many youth services have worked with young people with very little connection to their parents beyond gaining permission for particular activities such as excursions.

There is a strong body of research evidence indicating that programs that adopt whole-of-family approaches, working with parents and children/young people concurrently, are more effective in achieving long-term benefits to their relationships. Whole-of-family approaches are also inclusive of fathers, grandparents and other caregivers.

YouthLinx services use a variety of approaches to provide activities.

The most common are:

- Drop-in combined with structured activities (some drop-in is provided but structured activities are organised including crafts, discos, sporting teams, theatre productions, camps, bands) that focus on opportunities to provide family support through advocacy, referral and information, skill development and provision of skilled practical assistance;
- Specialised programs targeting specific groups and a structured program to meet individual needs (such as young people with disabilities, behavioural problems or school resisters) that focus on opportunities to provide family support through advocacy, referral and information, skill development and provision of skilled practical assistance; and
- Community development/youth empowerment programs (working with groups of young people and/or their families to develop/take action within the community; undertaking broader strategies to strengthen community responsiveness to young people and their families) that focus on opportunities to provide family support through advocacy, referral and information, skill development and provision of skilled practical assistance.

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<sup>12</sup> Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce Report, *Putting Families in the Picture: Early intervention into Youth Homelessness*, 1998

Services are encouraged to work closely with schools in their community to create awareness of the program and establish schools as referral points.

## Values Education

The goal of Values Education Program is to make values education a core part of Australian Schooling. The program was initiated by the Australian Government with a *Values Education Study* commissioned in 2002. This qualitative study involved a literature review, action research in 69 Australian schools and research focus groups incorporating parent, student and teachers views on values education. The results of the *Study* were released in 2003.

To inform the stated program goal, the 2004 Budget appropriated \$29.7 million for a variety of values education initiatives. A MCEETYA endorsed *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools* was released in 2005, based on the results of the *Values Education Study*.

Funding was made available for the following activities:

- Clusters of schools showcasing good practice approaches in the Values Education Good Practice Schools Project (VEGPSP) Stage 1 and 2;
- Values Education Forums in all schools (managed by States and Territories);
- Drug Education Forums in all schools (managed by States and Territories);
- Professional Learning and Curriculum Resources;
- A website, [www.valueseducation.edu.au](http://www.valueseducation.edu.au);
- Partnership projects with peak parents, teachers, teacher educators and principals;
- An annual national values education forum; and
- A research project with the University of Newcastle examining the links between values education and student learning outcomes and classroom ambience.

These activities are run through cross-sector arrangements and involve all years of schooling, including the middle years.

#### Outcomes:

Whilst it is not possible to report on specific schools and school ages the evidence that has been drawn from the research including that conducted in NSW schools indicates that as a result of values education operating within a school, the following outcomes for the school community are enhanced:

- Teacher practice;
- Classroom climate and ethos;
- Student achievement;
- Student attitudes and behaviour;
- Student resilience and social skills;
- Increased intellectual depth of teacher and student understanding;
- Development of improved relationships of care and trust; and
- Enhanced partnerships with parents and the community

#### *Career Advice Australia (CAA)*

The initiative commenced in 2006 to support all young Australians aged 13 to 19 years to make successful transitions through school and from school to further education. The key elements of the program are:

- A national network of Local Community Partnerships (LCPs). LCPs facilitate the implementation of three career and transition programs.
  - The Structured Workplace Learning Program;
  - The Career and Transition Support Program; and
  - The Adopt a School Program
- Support for young people at risk of not progressing through school and onto further education, training or employment and active participation in the community.
- Quality career development services for schools, teachers and career advisors
- Industry leadership at a regional and national level

In the year ending December 2007 in NSW 43,692 young people (13-19 year olds) were supported through Structured Workplace Learning and 9,239 young people (13-19 year olds) were supported through Adopt A School.

#### *Youth Pathways*

This program is targeted at young people aged 13 to 19 years who are most at risk of not making a successful transition through school and from school to further education, training, employment and active participation in the community. Youth Pathways aims to reduce the number of those young people who leave school early and are not working or in education 12 months after leaving school. By keeping them engaged or re-engaging them in education, Youth Pathways aims to increase the number of young people completing Year 12 or its equivalent.

The assistance provided to each participant is specific to their individual needs. Each participant receives an assessment that determines the barriers that limit their opportunities to participate in education, training or work, followed by appropriate individual assistance.

Youth Pathways has been set up to help the most at-risk young people make it through school to the end of year 12 (or its equivalent), and beyond that to further education, training or employment, and active community life. This can be either within school or in non-school-based education. Between January 2006 and May 2008, Youth Pathways has assisted 19,280 young people in NSW, with 1399 (7.3 %) aged 12-14 years (inclusive).

### *Connections*

Connections – (formerly The Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM)) provides an education and personal development programme for young people aged 13 to 19 who are disconnected from mainstream schooling. Connections offers flexible, accredited education and training options delivered in supported community settings. It is based on partnerships and positive relationships between young people and their families, community service agencies, schools, governments at all levels and business.

## **Drug Education**

Through the *National School Drug Education Strategy* (NSDES) the Australian Government has developed a range of age-appropriate drug education resources aimed at developing students' skills, knowledge, values and attitudes and in promoting resilience in students. The *Resilience Education and Drug Information (REDI)* suite of resources supports school students in developing skills to face the challenges they will meet on a daily basis. The resources provide teachers with a wealth of quality activities that reinforce resilience messages about belonging and being connected and outline lessons for developing resilience skills such as making decisions; thinking and feeling positively about oneself; being assertive and managing relationships.

The *REDI* resources consist of *REDI for Parents*, *All REDI for the Early Years of Schooling*, *One and All* – Middle Primary, *The Big Move* – Upper Primary, *My TV* – Lower Secondary, *On the Edge* – Upper Secondary and professional development materials for teachers and the school community.

*The Big Move* is a set of classroom resources for upper primary students that helps build students' resilience and enhance their own capacities for health and wellbeing; and develop students' knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable informed and health-promoting responses to drug-related information and situations.

*My TV* is a set of classroom resources for students in lower secondary schools that explore issues of drug use, in particular alcohol, tobacco and cannabis. They emphasise the development of resilience and skills addressed include decision-making, self-talk, finding information, being assertive, forming and maintaining relationships and expressing one's needs and opinions, both in spoken and written language.

In addition, *Rethinking Drinking – You're in Control* is an alcohol education resource for lower-middle secondary school students. It was updated and redeveloped to include culturally inclusive material, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The resource provides effective, accurate and relevant alcohol education for students in Years 8-10 within the context of the school Health and Physical Education curriculum. It also sets out to equip teachers and parents to prevent and reduce the harms which young people experience in relation to drinking alcohol. The resource addresses the issues of reducing harm, promoting responsible choices and resilience building.

Schools and school communities can play a key role in providing support and encouraging connectedness for students as they cope with the challenges and stresses associated with personal and social development. The NSDES promotes a comprehensive approach to drug education involving a whole of school response which addresses programs, the school environment and relationships with the broader school community. Schools are encouraged to provide a multi-dimensional response that seeks to foster positive social networks and support structures within which young people have clear expectations as well as opportunities to participate in the life of the school and the broader community.

## **Term of Reference Number 4: the extent to which changing workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, including possible changes to workplace practices which have the potential to benefit children and young people in the middle years**

While the terms of reference for this inquiry are focused on the needs of children, TOR 4 extends this focus to parents. It specifically relates to the extent to which changing workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, in terms of potential benefits to children and young people of this age group.

The Australian Government is pursuing an early childhood reform agenda that focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education and child care. The objective is to develop a world-class system of integrated early learning and child care where, among other things, cost does not present a barrier to participation and services meet the needs of working parents.

Key initiatives under this early childhood reform agenda include:

### **New early learning and child care centres**

An accessible early learning and child care system helps facilitate important social and economic outcomes. Children can benefit from improved educational and developmental outcomes. Parents benefit from being able to return to work, which plays a critical role in facilitating workforce participation.

### **New Child Care Centres \$114.5 million**

In order to increase the supply of quality child care, the Australian Government will establish up to 260 early learning and child care centres by the end of 2013-14, to be located mainly on school, TAFE, university or other community land. The focus is to increase the availability of quality child care for families in areas of child care need.

This initiative will provide families with greater access to high-quality child care and integrated care and early learning for preschool-age children.

## **Universal Access to Early Learning**

The Australian Government has committed to providing all children with access to a quality early learning program delivered by a university qualified teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling.

The intention is to deliver early learning programs in a range of settings, including long day care, in order to meet the needs of developmental experiences.

## **Affordability of Child Care**

Improving affordability of child care is an important part of delivering the Government's early childhood agenda. This in turn will facilitate parents' participation in the workforce or further training, thereby optimising their capacity to contribute to Australia's economic future.

The Government is providing greater assistance to families with child care costs in a more timely manner.

*Child Care Tax Rebate \$1.6 billion*

Increasing the rate and frequency of the Child Care Tax Rebate from 30 to 50 per cent of out of pocket costs, increasing the cap from \$4354 to \$7500 per child (indexed), and making payments every quarter instead of annually will reduce the child care cost burden on parents. Moving to quarterly payments will mean families receive the money much closer to when they need it, helping them to meet their regular child care expenses.

## **Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Act 2008**

The Australian Government will be introducing legislation into the Parliament later this year to establish a new workplace relations system to become fully operational from January 2010. As a first step, the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Act 2008* was passed by the Parliament and came into effect from 28 March 2008. The workplace relations reforms will provide support for parents and for young workers entering the labour market.

The new workplace relations system will provide a stronger and fairer safety net of minimum wages and working conditions comprising ten National Employment Standards (NES) and modern awards.

As well as guaranteeing maximum hours of work, annual leave, sick leave and carer's leave, the NES will provide improved family friendly entitlements with flexible options for parents. The NES will improve unpaid parental leave arrangements, so that both parents can use separate periods of up to 12 months' unpaid parental leave. Alternatively one parent can request up to an additional 12 months of leave from their employer. The NES will also introduce a right for parents to request flexible working arrangements until their child reaches school age. Employers will only be able to refuse requests for extended unpaid parental leave and flexible working arrangements on reasonable business grounds.

The NES will also improve personal/carer's leave by providing that paid carer's leave is no longer capped at ten days per year. This provides flexibility for parents of school age children to use their accrued sick leave entitlements for caring purposes.

## **Workplace participation**

Workforce participation is a foundation of social inclusion; it creates opportunities for financial independence and personal fulfilment.

The Australian Government is reviewing all employment services, including the impact of participation requirements for parents who experience difficulty in meeting those requirements.

While the rules in this area are currently being examined closely, the current arrangements are outlined below. From July 2006, parents receiving income support generally have part-time participation requirements once their children reach school age. In most cases, parents are expected to work or look for work of at least 15 hours per week. In some instances, full-time study can meet participation requirements for parents.

Parents who are required to look for part-time work do not have to accept or continue in a job if it involves working outside school hours and they cannot find suitable child care. Where formal child care is not available, informal arrangements such as care by family or friends or allowing an older child to be unsupervised for a time may be considered. However, if the parent decides that this is not appropriate, then they do not have to take or continue in the job.

Some parents have expressed concern about participation requirements during the school holidays. Special arrangements have been put in place for the long school holidays. These provide that parents will generally have three fortnights before which they need to recommence their usual hours of employment.



In addition, a range of exemptions from participation requirements exist in recognition of the different family and personal situations parents face. Some of these exemptions are automatic and others are assessed by Centrelink on a case-by-case basis. For example, exemptions exist for parents who provide home schooling of their children, are registered and active foster carers or caring for a dependent child with a disability.

## **Family Friendly Workplaces**

Over the last two decades, measures to assist workers with family responsibilities have become a more pronounced feature of the Australian workplace. The entitlement to paid leave for caring purposes is becoming increasingly widespread, as are arrangements for paid parental leave.

The use of flexible working time arrangements is the most common resource for Australian workers who are combining work and family obligations. Just over half of families with one or more children under 12 use family friendly provisions to enable them to care for their children<sup>13</sup>.

Similar findings emerged from the New South Wales ABS survey which showed that some 70 per cent of those who used a specific work arrangement to enable them to care for any dependent used either flex-time, time off in lieu, an informal arrangement or part-time work<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Child Care*, 2000, Cat. No. 4402.0

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Managing Caring Responsibilities and Paid Employment*, NSW, October 2000, Cat. No. 4903.1

## **Term of Reference Number 5: Any other matter considered relevant to the inquiry by the Committee**

The Committee may be interested in the following case study that demonstrates the success of a whole of Government Approach to targeted intervention and support of rural/remote communities in order to deliver better outcomes for children and young people in a number of interconnected areas: health, education, families and communities.

### **Case Study – Murdi Paaki**

In December 2007, a five-year Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) trial in the Murdi Paaki region of far west New South Wales came to a close. This trial saw two lead government agencies, the Australian Government's then Department of Education, Science and Training (now the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) and the NSW Government's Department of Education and Training, work in partnership with the 16 major Indigenous communities of Murdi Paaki to explore innovative ways of doing business and delivering services.

A key premise of the Murdi Paaki COAG trial was that all jurisdictions agreed to share responsibility to improve service delivery for Indigenous Australians in the region, based on community identified priorities. Indigenous communities across the region agreed to four key regional priorities, the following three may be of particular interest to the committee:

- improving the health and well being of children and young people;
- improving educational attainment and school retention; and
- helping families to raise healthy children.

In addition to these regional priorities, with the support of government, each of the 16 Indigenous local governance structures - Community Working Parties, developed individual Community Action Plans. These plans formally identified community level priorities, and also established a framework for how communities would work with governments to address these priorities through the trial.

Although diverse in their content, these action plans had a consistent focus on improving the educational outcomes of children and young people as well developing their resilience by focussing on creating healthier individuals, families and communities.

To address the identified local and regional priorities, 29 Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) were signed during the life of the Murdi Paaki COAG trial. A breadth of community initiatives were established through SRAs ranging from:

- improving young people's access to sporting facilities through projects such as the Weilmoringle Community Pool and the Enngonia Sporting Oval;
- encouraging young people to re-engage in education and training such as the Brewarrina re-engaging Indigenous youth project;

- building youth leadership skills through programs such as the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young Leaders Project; and
- encouraging young people to engage with their communities through community activities such as the Bourke Yaamma Festival and the establishment of youth centres such as the Gulargambone Youth Centre.

As a result of these projects some communities in the Murdi Paaki have achieved some very tangible benefits in education, health, law and justice, and economic development. While not every indicator has moved, there have been some significant outcomes.

In 2007, an Australian National Audit Report on service delivery cited Murdi Paaki as one of the most successful COAG trials and identified: improved literacy for Indigenous students in Years 3 and 5, and an overall reduction in a number of crime indicators, including an 8.3% decrease in domestic violence; and significant health improvements.

Provided below is an overview of key education data over the life of the Murdi Paaki COAG trial.

#### Education

The data reveals some improvements in education attainment, participation and retention rates during the trial period.

The data reveals that, for example:

- from 2005 to 2006, the number of Murdi Paaki Indigenous students in the lowest literacy band in Years 3 and 5 decreased by 16% and 6% respectively, and the number in the higher literacy bands increased by 3% and 7%;
- similar gains were made in numeracy - Murdi Paaki Indigenous students have shown greater rates of improvements than Indigenous students in other parts of NSW and students in NSW;
- Year 7 English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) test results show an 8% increase in Indigenous students achieving national benchmarks in writing, and a 4% increase in reading, from 2006 to 2007; and
- Indigenous enrolments in TAFE increased by 14% between 2002 and 2006, from 1480 to 1718.

## Conclusion

Access to education and foundation learning in the middle years of a young person's life are key to the future social and economic success and productivity of individuals. It is in the period of early adolescence 9 – 14 that young people begin to develop their individual identities and values which will stay with them through adulthood. This is a period of development which leaves the young person vulnerable to external influences, in a time when they look to their families and peers for support, guidance and example. It is also a period where the significant hormonal and cognitive changes taking place afford a significant opportunity to support these young people.

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring services and support are available for young people to ensure they develop skills of resilience and are given opportunities to develop healthily and ultimately reach their full potential.

The Department is committed to providing opportunities through its policies and programs to ensure individuals have the skills and support they need to participate as productive members of our society.