

Submission

No 109

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

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**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 9-14
YEARS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

ALL YOUNG PEOPLE AGED FROM 9 TO 14

1 What would you consider to be the priority issues for children and young people aged 9 to 14 years?

The issues of greatest priority for children and young people aged 9 to 14 years to the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) are currently:

- Attendance of students at school;
- Student Wellbeing;
- Successful student transition from primary to secondary school;
- Keeping children safe; and
- Engagement in schooling.

2 Are you aware of any effective programs relating to these issues?

2.1 Attendance of students at school

- In South Australia the Absenteeism Task Force, established in 2002 by DECS, monitors current attendance patterns for all compulsory age students (between 6 and 17 years of age) and the implementation of the DECS Absenteeism Action Plan. The task force meets quarterly to identify issues, recommend strategies, monitor the effectiveness of these strategies and provide advice to the Government. The task force has representation from parents and principal associations, DECS, Department of Health, Department for Families and Communities, SA Police and the Australian Education Union (SA Branch).
- All Government schools are required to implement an Attendance Improvement Plan which describes attendance outcomes, strategies to achieve the outcomes and how the analysis of attendance data can inform the continuing improvement in attendance rates.
- The implementation of a uniform electronic system of student leave passes for schools with secondary students has provided significant support to schools in monitoring and following up on student movements during the school day. This system was made available for use in primary schools in 2007.
- In May 2007 all Government schools were provided with a software package (School Matrix – Enhanced Student Attendance System) containing programs to make it easier for schools to record and monitor student absences, including access to improved absence reports.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between DECS and South Australian Police formalise a partnership to address non-attendance issues at local community level. School and police personnel work together in a consultative role with parents/carers to re-engage truanting students with their learning.
- Indigenous students are a focus of DECS with a number of strategies and processes to support improved attendance. These include:
 - Development of individual learning plans for every Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student;
 - School and district monitoring procedures for transition from primary to secondary school;
 - Introduction of the electronic database, the Indigenous Student Support System (ISSS), to assist all district offices in monitoring and response planning with sites;

- Expansion of the Temporary Transfer Trial for students who move between schools temporarily for a variety of reasons.
- The Confidential Transfer Guidelines are being developed by DECS for all Government schools to use when supporting continuation of education for children of re-locating families who seek confidentiality in regard to their location e.g. domestic violence victims.

2.2 Student Wellbeing

- Goal 3 in the [DECS Statement of Directions 2005-2010](#) is to improve learner engagement and wellbeing. A target associated with this goal was the development and implementation of a Learner Wellbeing Framework for Birth to Year 12. Wellbeing refers to children and students' physical, social and emotional welfare and development. Evidence suggests that these elements are integral rather than incidental to learning. Children will find it difficult to engage with learning programs if they are distracted by significant physical, social and emotional issues. Staff in all sites play an important role in fostering wellbeing so that each child and student is able to achieve their best and enjoy their educational experience.
- Principles underlining the DECS Learner Wellbeing Framework are:
 - Wellbeing is central to learning and learning is central to wellbeing.
 - Educators make a positive contribution to learner wellbeing.
 - Wellbeing is built on the strengths of individuals, groups and communities working together.
- Other strategic policies related to student wellbeing are:
 - Multiculturalism Policy
 - Diversity in schools and preschools
 - Bullying and harassment at school: advice for parents and caregivers
 - Bullying: the national (MCEETYA) approach to its elimination
 - Bullying: the national safe schools framework
 - Bullying: cyber bullying and e-crime

These policies are available at:

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/policy/default.asp?id=21925&navgrp=61>.

2.3 Successful student transition from primary to secondary school and student wellbeing

2.3.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Students

- Special arrangements exist for the transition of primary students to secondary school who have an ATSI background. The Enter for Success Program allows ATSI students to enrol in any secondary school of their choice in South Australia. As part of the program, all secondary schools are required to provide them with appropriate support to ensure that they are accepted, engaged and succeed in the education programs at a school.

2.3.2 Special interest schools

- Special interest secondary schools in music, language, agriculture, performing arts, sports and accelerated learning for gifted students are provided for secondary students. This provides an opportunity for students to foster their specific talents thereby enhancing their wellbeing and satisfaction at school.

2.3.3 Research

- In 2004 a group of Flinders University researchers, school, district and central office staff collaborated to explore and implement initiatives to building wellbeing in school communities. This Southern Schools Project Group was awarded a grant from the Australian Research Council (ARC) to

undertake research and interventions aimed at improving wellbeing in schools and communities. The project runs from 2007-2009.

- The partners included in the ARC-Linkage research project entitled *Building the Capabilities of School Communities to Improve their Wellbeing* are: Aberfoyle Park High School, Blackwood High School, Christies Beach High School, Flagstaff Hill School, Wallara District Office (DECS), DECS Central Office, and Flinders University.
- As part of the component of the project entitled Living and Learning at school the researchers delivered questionnaires to almost 1400 Year 7, 8 and 9 students to collect evidence about wellbeing in their overall life at school, transitions to high school, learning strategies and motivations, the prevalence of bullying, their strategies for coping with bullying, and issues of friendships and popularity. In 2008 the researchers have been working with partner schools on classroom based programs to promote academic, social and emotional wellbeing. Two programs are being developed: 1) a program with year 8 home groups focusing on developing strategies for coping with bullying, and 2) a program with a Year 9 class for developing strategies for motivational and cognitive self-regulation of learning.

2.3.4 Keeping Children Safe

- *Keeping them Safe* is the South Australian Government's program to reform the South Australian child protection services and systems. Government agencies are involved in collaboration and cooperation to improve and strengthen our child protection system for children and their families. The *Keeping them Safe* initiative provides details of the across government response to keep all children safe. Information is available at: <http://www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au/Default.aspx?tabid=270>.
- DECS in collaboration with the Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) and the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA), have established two committees to provide advice to the three schooling sectors and the Minister for Education in regard to bullying, harassment, violence and child protection:
 1. *The Coalition to decrease bullying, harassment and violence in South Australian schools*. Internationally recognised researchers Professors Phillip Slee and Ken Rigby and Drs Barbara Spears and Shoko Yoneyama are members of this committee.
 2. *Inter-sectoral Child Protection Reference Group*.
- All Government schools are required to have:
 1. Developed an anti bullying policy as part of their student behaviour management policy and
 2. Implemented the MCEETYA *National Safe School Framework*.
- A requirement of teacher registration is the completion of a one day *Mandated Notification Training* program and a criminal history check.

2.3.5 Engagement in schooling

- The four year (October 2003-December 2007) School Retention Action Plan funded by the State Government at a cost of \$28.4 million was developed to increase school retention rates. The Plan was developed following consultation with teachers, young people, South Australian Government agencies, local government, community organisations and business. Since the beginning of the Plan, over 14,000 young people, including more than 2,000 Aboriginal young people, have been involved in School Retention Action Plan programs. The Plan was monitored by the Social inclusion Board and information is available at:

<http://www.socialinclusion.sa.gov./page.php?id=31>. The School Retention Action Plan has provided a unique demonstration of how educational opportunities may be enhanced so that all young South Australians can experience success. Evaluation reports are available on the link provided above.

- Among the most effective programs were the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs), which find local solutions to keep young people in school, study or training. ICANs focus on young people between 12 and 19 years of age at risk of not completing their schooling or have already disengaged from school. Information is available at: <http://www.ican.sa.edu.au/>
- ICANs have been set up in four regions:
 1. Northern Metropolitan Adelaide
 2. Southern Metropolitan Adelaide
 3. North-West Metropolitan Adelaide
 4. Upper Spencer region (consists of the three communities of Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Whyalla).
- In the 2008 State Budget, \$5 million has been provided over four years to enable the continuation of these four successful ICANs.
- As part of the ICANs initiative, students can enrol in designated schools in the Flexible Learning Option (FLO) Program, which provides options to enable disengaged young people to successfully re-engage with educational pathways.
- A FLO enrolment allows schools to provide students with individualised case management and a broader educational program through a Flexible Learning Plan (FLP), thus facilitating successful outcomes. Through the Flexible Learning Option (FLO) the student remains actively engaged on a meaningful and accredited/recognised learning and earning pathway throughout the full school year. In order to achieve this successfully it is expected that specialised case management services will be provided to address the identified individual barriers.

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SPECIAL GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED FROM 9 TO 14

A. Students under the Guardianship of the Minister

Context:

Approximately 450 of the 1000 students under the Guardianship of the Minister who attend Government schools are in years 4 to 9 (9 to 14 years old).

Research conducted in collaboration with Families SA (*Statistical Report: Children and Young People under Guardianship of the Minister 2007 in South Australian Government Schools*) indicates that these students as a group are significantly below the state average in literacy and numeracy and more likely to be suspended or excluded from school due to violent and disruptive behaviour at school. However, the number of students who did not miss a day of schooling is above the state average for this group and those who missed more than 10 days in total throughout the year is slightly above the State average.

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) works in collaboration with Families SA to ensure that children and young people under the Guardianship of the Minister do have equal access to support and services available to children with strong family networks. Information regarding the support of children and young people under the Guardianship of the Minister in schools and preschools can be accessed at:

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/speced2/default.asp?id=25660&navgrp=2305>

1. What would you consider to be the priority issues for children and young people aged 9 to 14 years?

- Students under the Guardianship of the Minister remaining engaged in schooling to the end of year 12 or until they transition to education, training or employment.
- The provision of a stable home for students in care.
- Providing a stable school life so these students can develop and maintain friendships.

2. Are you aware of any effective programs relating to these issues?

Rapid Response: Whole of Government services for children and young people under the Guardianship of the Minister is part of the SA Government's *Keeping them Safe* commitment to the reform and renewal of South Australia's child protection system. Information is available at:

<http://www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au/Default.aspx?tabid=850>

Rapid Response aims to ensure that children and young people under the Guardianship of the Minister have equal access to support and services available to children with strong family networks. The Rapid Response Action outlines the commitments from agencies including education. DECS meets its commitments under Rapid Response by ensuring all children and young people under the Guardianship of the Minister have an Individual Education Plan and that DECS shares the educational outcomes of this group with Families SA.

- Extensive training of DECS (over 1500 personnel) and Families SA staff has been conducted in the implementation of Individual Education Plans.
- Counsellors in schools and district personnel have been trained in SMART (Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma) conducted by the Australian

Childhood Foundation <http://www.childhood.org.au/smart/>. This training provided to 1200 DECS personnel is recognition of the significant trauma that many of these children and other children have experienced in their life. The aim is to equip teachers with the skills to deal with the consequences resulting from such trauma.

- DECS works closely with the Office of the Guardian in regard to the education of this client group and accepts advice on how DECS can improve its services to this cohort of students. This includes trouble shooting individual concerns. Information is available at: <http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au/cgi-bin/wf.pl>
- *The Report of the Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry - the Mullighan Report* has been released. The implications for education are currently being considered. Information is available at: <http://www.service.sa.gov.au/ContentPages/sagovt/mullighaninquiry.aspx>
- Protocols have been developed between DECS and Families SA for when a student in care with high needs transitions from one school to another.
- DECS provides additional funding to support children and young people under the guardianship of the Minister who are Indigenous and/or have a disability and/or significant behavioural issues.
- Significant funding has been provided from the State Government with the aim of keeping children safe including funding for early intervention to keep children out of care and providing additional care places.

B. Students who are Carers

Context:

Young Carers are young people under the age of 25 who take a significant role and/or responsibility for the care of a person in their family, either a sibling or a parent, who is suffering from chronic physical or mental illness, disability, or who is frail aged. The ABS 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers indicated that in South Australia there are 30,000 young Carers of whom 14,800 are under 18 years of age. Those under 18 have an average age of between 12 to 13 years. As this group does not self identify it is difficult to estimate the exact number of young carers who attend school. Information is available at: (<http://www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au/Default.aspx?tabid=2104>)

1. What would you consider to be the priority issues for children and young people aged 9 to 14 years?

- Young Carers and their level of engagement in schooling.

2. Are you aware of any effective programs relating to these issues

- DECS is a partner to the Australian Research Council Linkage Project: Young Carers: Social Policy Implications of the Care-Giving Responsibilities of Children and Young Adults, a three year research project led by the University of New South Wales, Social Policy Research Centre.
- Working in partnership with the South Australian Network of Services for Young Carers (SANSYC) <http://www.sansyc.net.au/Welcome.html>

C. Students from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background

Context:

Approximately 3500 of the 7600 students from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background who attend Government schools are in the age range 9 to 14 years old. Approximately 4.6% of the total DECS student population are from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.

1. What would you consider to be the priority issues for children and young people aged 9 to 14 years?

- The number of Aboriginal students not achieving the literacy and numeracy benchmark is an issue of concern.

2. Are you aware of any effective programs relating to these issues?

- All Aboriginal students from Reception to senior secondary school will have an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) developed to ensure that the four areas of achievement namely, literacy, numeracy, attendance and behaviour management are addressed and regularly monitored for progress.
- Those Aboriginal students identified at risk by DECS district staff have their ILP regularly updated to include individualised strategies to address issues affecting attendance and appropriate behaviour. This is consistent with the Australian Government's policy commitment that every Indigenous student will have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to be updated twice per year for every year of schooling up to year 10.
- The Indigenous Student Support System (ISSS) is a web based application which enables DECS districts and state office to better support Aboriginal students by monitoring student performance outcomes. The data within the system is updated from the Education Department Schools Administration System (EDSAS) daily and includes the data related to enrolment, attendance, behaviour management and literacy and numeracy testing results. As of January 2008, ISSS was available to all districts. Data and information collected via this system is analysed and used to implement targeted intervention strategies.
- The Enter for Success Program allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students to enrol and be accepted into any secondary school of their choice in South Australia. As part of the program, all secondary schools are required to enrol ATSI students and provide them with appropriate support to ensure that they are accepted, engaged and succeed in the education programs at a school.

D. Students with Autism or Asperger Syndrome

Context:

Approximately 500 (or 50%) of the 1000 students with Autism or Asperger Syndrome who attend Government schools are in the age range 9 to 14 years.

1. What would you consider to be the priority issues for children and young people aged 9 to 14 years?

- Early detection of students with mental health issues.
- Early intervention of students have diagnosed mental health issues.
- School attendance is an issue for this cohort of students.

2. Are you aware of any effective programs relating to these issues

- An across Government Agency Group has been developed to ensure coordinated service pathways for students with Autism or Asperger Syndrome.
- DECS initiated Flexible Learning Option (FLO) Programs provide options for young adults with Asperger Syndrome.
- DECS has negotiated with Flinders University to run Graduate Certificate Courses in Autism Spectrum Disorder at Masters Level for over 40 teachers. HECS is paid by DECS with release days for attending some lectures.
- Private Providers with expertise in Autism or Asperger Syndrome have been funded to work in schools in developing the capacity of school staff.

- Promoting the wellbeing of all of the people who make up school communities is an issue of national importance. Recognising this importance, in 2004 a group of Flinders University researchers, school staff and DECS staff joined together to investigate and act upon initiatives to build wellbeing in school communities. This Southern Schools Project Group was awarded a grant from the Australian Research Council to undertake research and interventions aimed at improving wellbeing in schools and communities. The project runs across the period 2007-2009. One aspect of this research is related to students with Asperger Syndrome. The researchers have conducted interviews and focus groups with parents/caregivers, students and teachers to find out more about the experiences of students with Asperger Syndrome, and the experiences of their teachers and parents. The results from these interviews and focus groups will provide information that leads to school-based interventions will address the issues of concern that are raised. This project also includes researchers and teachers working with individual students.

E. New Arrival Students and those from English as a Second Language (ESL) background

Context:

457 DECS students aged 9 to 14 are new arrivals to Australia who have generally arrived within the previous 12 months. The total English as a Second Language (ESL) cohort in this age range is 4157 students out of a total of approximately 18,000 ESL students who attend Government schools.

Around 60% of the 457 DECS new arrivals are attending departmental New Arrivals Program (NAP) centres (48 primary students, 215 secondary students). Of the refugee group, 80% are attending a NAP centre.

Families from a refugee background may experience:

- Limited understanding of the Australian financial, legal and schooling system. This can lead to poverty and disadvantage for the children.
- Family breakdown and/or intergenerational tension.
- Different child rearing practices than existed in their previous society or family which can be confusing for parents and their children.
- A struggle with a new cultural context along with the complexity of settlement with insufficient support.
- Poor English skills so unable to reinforce English at home.
- Problems with transport for their children to attend school.
- Mental health issues relating to trauma, family breakdown and adjustment to a new culture.

Students from a refugee background may experience:

- Limited prior education;
- Gaps in skills;
- Limited first language literacy; and
- Behaviour issues in response to trauma.

Students on temporary visas may experience:

- Reluctance to invest in their education and future pathways.
- A change in the teaching and learning practices from their home country to Australia.
- Difficulties in setting long terms goals as their prior experiences have been unstable.
- A disrupted family structure.

1. What would you consider to be the priority issues for children and young people aged 9 to 14 years?

- A need for appropriate and accessible curriculum and teaching practices in a supportive environment.

2. Are you aware of any effective programs relating to these issues

- Access to primary and secondary school NAP centres for the first 12 to 18 months of schooling to enable new arrival students to develop English language skills and understand schooling in the South Australian context.
- Students in non metropolitan schools attract an additional teaching resource for 12 months for intensive English language assistance.
- ESL Programs support students in NAP centres and mainstream schools. More information can be accessed at <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/curric/pages/ESL>.

These programs include:

- The appointment of bilingual school support officers providing support for students in acquiring cultural and linguistic understandings.
- The appointment of Community Liaison Officers and interpreting and translating services providing support for families to engage with the school.
- An in-service professional development course for teachers of new arrivals (Teaching ESL New Arrivals course) and for mainstream teachers of ESL learners (Teaching ESL Students in Mainstream Classrooms and the Language and Literacy courses).
- Transport of students attending New Arrivals Program centre to support their attendance.
- Research into issues for new arrivals.
- Working with schools on developing a multiple strategy approach to responding to new arrivals.
- Interagency collaboration including:
 - Partnership with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS) to deliver targeted programs within new arrivals programs.
 - Partnership with agencies to deliver mentoring for students starting in NAP centres.
- ESL educational psychology service by Guidance Officers including:
 - Supporting students with special needs.
 - Providing state-wide training to support officers (eg Guidance, disabilities, speech) regarding needs of NAP students.
 - Providing psychological assessment service to new arrivals.
 - Developing protocols for appropriate cross cultural psychological assessment in collaboration with other states and National Psychological Assessment Board.