University of South Australia | David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research

CONNECTING CULTURES

REVIEW OF

Victoria's Indigenous Education Strategies: Supporting Indigenous Students through School

Professor Peter Buckskin PSM, FACE; Professor Paul Hughes AM, FACE; Professor Bob Teasdale; Mr John Gregory; Ms Colleen Clarke; Associate Professor Douglas L Morgan and Ms Jody St Clair

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REVIEW OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION STRATEGIES:

SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS STUDENTS THROUGH SCHOOL

Prepared for the

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria

Submitted by the
David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research
University of South Australia

Submission date

January 2008

Prepared by Professor Peter Buckskin PSM, FACE, Dean and Head of School, David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research (DUCIER), University of South Australia; Professor Paul Hughes AM, FACE, DUCIER; Professor Bob Teasdale of People Perspectives; Mr John Gregory, Ms Colleen Clarke, Associate Professor Douglas L. Morgan and Ms Jody St Clair of DUCIER.

University of
South Australia

Letter of Transmittal

Professor Peter Dawkins
Secretary
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

11 January 2008

Dear Mr Secretary

We have been privileged to conduct the Review of the Indigenous Education Strategies: Supporting Indigenous Students through School.

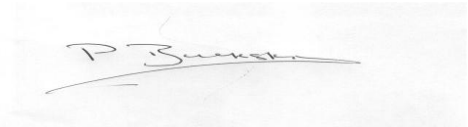
The Review focused on making a difference in improving learning outcomes for Victorian Koorie Students by positioning the Koorie student at the forefront of our discussions and research. We have been informed through our discussions with parents, caregivers, teachers, education administrators, the dedicated Koorie workforce and the broader community through the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI).

There is great diversity in Victoria's endeavour to make a difference. Devolution encourages diversity, but devolution was never meant to mean freedom ***from*** departmental policy. It was always meant to mean the freedom ***to*** implement government policy in ***the best possible way***, under a system of earned autonomy and accountability.

And there is the main part of the problem as we found it. So many different ways of doing things have been tried that few, if any, have been tried for long enough with enough people to see if they make a difference. Even if they did make a difference, we would not necessarily know it because the systems are not in place here, or anywhere else in Australia, to implement, monitor and evaluate long term programs.

We do not need to detail the data sets yet again to know that in spite of everything that has been tried, the outcomes remain essentially unchanged. Instead, we have tried to establish what it is that might work and suggest low risk strategies promising steady returns based on long term commitments to their implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The wish to make a difference is there. It is the direction that is needed.



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We acknowledge this review was carried out on traditional lands of the Koorie people and we respect their spiritual relationship with their country. We respect the traditional custodians of those lands and acknowledge that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still important to the living Koorie people today.

This project has been conducted under the leadership of Professor Peter Buckskin – Research Leader, assisted by: Professor Paul Hughes – Expert Advisor; Mr John Gregory – Project Coordinator; Ms Colleen Clarke – Researcher; Associate Professor Douglas L Morgan – Research Advisor; Professor Bob Teasdale – Literature Reviewer; and Ms Jody St Clair – Project Officer.

This project could not have been completed without the tremendous contributions made by a broad range of people who brought their experience, commitment and perceptiveness to this important issue. Accordingly, the researchers would like to acknowledge the following participants and organisations for their time and assistance in contributing to the Review of Indigenous Education Strategies – Supporting Indigenous Students through School. While we appreciate their efforts and the information provided, the researchers accept full responsibility for all errors and omissions.

Department of Education, Early Childhood Development, Victoria (DEECD)
Mr John Sullivan, General Manager, System Policy and Research
Ms Janet Thompson, Assistant General Manager, System Policy and Research
Mr James Atkinson, Acting Manager, Koorie Strategy Branch

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)
Ms Geraldine Atkinson, President VAEAI
Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager

A comprehensive list of all participants and organisations is contained in Attachment 3.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

AIM – Achievement Improvement Monitoring

AP – Assistant Principal

ASSPA – Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness

ATSI - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

CASES - Computerised Administrative System Environment in Schools

DEECD - Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

DEST – Department of Education Science and Training

DHS – Department of Human Services

ECE – Early Childhood Education

EFT – Equivalent Full Time

HSLO – Home School Liaison Officer

IEA – Indigenous Education Agreement

IESIP – Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme

IEDA – Indigenous Education Direct Assistance

ILP – used generically in the broadest sense of an Individual Learning Plan, except where specifically referenced against the ILP's developed as part of the formal, 38 page booklet intended for use with students covered under the Program for Students with Disabilities

ITAS – Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme

KE – Koorie Educator

KEDO – Koorie Education Development Officer

KECFO – Koorie Early Childhood Field Officer

LAECG – Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

MCEETYA – Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

Parent – includes caregiver, guardian.

PSPI – Parent School Partnership Initiative

RD – Regional Director

RKEC – Regional Koorie Education Committee

SAR – Students at Risk

SEO – Senior Education Officer

SLR – School Level Report

SSO – School Services Officer

TAFE – Technical and Further Education

TVET – TAFE delivered Vocational Education and Training

VAEAI – Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

VACCA - Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Association

VCAA – Victorian Curriculum Accreditation Authority

VCAL – Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

VELS - Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Youth Options Guarantee – See as an example, the statement from the Department's Grampians Region.

REPORT SUMMARY

Project Overview

This review used key quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess the DEECD workforce's overall efficiency and effectiveness in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. The objective of the review was to inform supportable and sustainable directions for improved future delivery, with particular regard to the terms of reference as follows:

- investigate national and international practice in relation to effective mechanisms to support Indigenous students to progress through school;
- investigate national and international practice in relation to the roles of the various components of the educational workforce in providing support for Indigenous students through school;
- review national and international practice in relation to the employment of a dedicated Indigenous Support Workforce in education;
- provide an assessment of the workforce's overall efficiency and effectiveness in improving outcomes for Indigenous students and, in particular:
  - advice on the inter-relationship between the dedicated and devolved Koorie Support Workforce and the broader education workforce, as a strategy for delivering improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students within school and in their communities;
  - assess the provision of supports to Indigenous students through the broader education workforce;
  - assess how the broader education workforce utilises the Koorie Support Workforce in achieving improved outcomes for Indigenous students;
  - assess the level of clarity of the roles, responsibilities and the day to day functions of the mainstream and the Koorie Support Workforce;
  - examine whether the current structure, configuration and inter-relationship of the Koorie Support Workforce with the broader education workforce has substantively contributed to improved outcomes for Indigenous students and provide advice on the reasons behind the level of contribution to date;
  - provide advice on the structural and operational capacity of both the mainstream and the Koorie Support Workforce to deliver high level educational outcomes for Indigenous students into the future;
  - provide advice on any systemic operational barriers to the Koorie Support Workforce operating at maximum effectiveness;
  - assess how the Koorie Support Workforce can work more effectively with support workers from other agencies and whether there are viable opportunities for more complementary work with workers from such agencies;
  - provide recommendations on alternative roles, responsibilities, structures or management arrangements for the Workforce that might improve its effectiveness in supporting better outcomes for Indigenous students;
- determine whether a revised approach to the operations and/or structure of the Koorie Support Workforce and the broader education workforce, might facilitate improved outcomes for Indigenous students;
- provide advice on how recommended options should be implemented.

The review identifies strategies for future success based on comparative analysis and understanding of existing strategies. The development and consideration of improved existing models and of positive and possible alternative models, was an important part of the consultative process and was developed from information gleaned from participants within the state and from national and international literature.
In conducting the research the following objectives were met:

- Development of a Review plan outlining the approach of the review with anticipated timelines.
- Review of existing workforce strategies in achieving key objectives of Koorie education and assessing the cost effectiveness of dedicated and mainstream contributions.
- Research of current trends and comparing these and other strategies as a point of reference/benchmark for discussion.
- Consideration of the viability of alternative strategies and models emerging from the literature and document review and data analysis, including discourse analysis.
- Consultation with stakeholders, in accordance with the Review plan, to canvass their issues, views, concerns and ideas for future sustainable delivery.
- Determining a revised approach to the operations and/or structure of the Koorie Support Workforce and the broader education workforce, to facilitate improved outcomes for Indigenous students.
- Provision of the final report summarising the findings of the review and recommendations on how supportable approaches can be implemented.

Findings, Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

The Victorian Government's *Best Start* program and its commitment to early childhood development are excellent examples of a determination to improve outcomes for Victoria's children. The evidence is that the education workforce is committed to improvement and best practice. There are many excellent examples of concerned endeavour, ranging from the development of on-site preschool playgroups and offsite programs organised through Local Learning Employment Networks. The diversity of devolution promises much, but lacks sufficient feedback on what works best. The search for improvement means that while alternative ways of doing things have been tried, they have not been implemented for long enough, or with enough Koorie children, to establish what works best. This is compounded by the lack of a systemic approach in Victoria, or anywhere else in Australia, to implement, monitor and evaluate long-term programs for Indigenous children.

Key Findings

This report sets out a long-term plan predicated on the implementation of programs which include provisions for careful evaluation against six key finding areas:

Key finding 1
Connecting cultures – Valuing Koorie cultures to support student success

a) Accommodating Victorian Koorie perspectives within early childhood development and education to ensure a more strategic focus on improving outcomes for Koorie children
b) Positioning DEECD to promote Koorie cultures and heritage as an integral part of education

Key finding 2
Engagement of Communities – Increasing parent participation and the participation of communities in Koorie education

a) Growing the capacity of Koorie community members to engage with the education system

Key finding 3
0-8 Early Childhood – Building foundations for the future

a) Support for integrated 0-8 approach - DHS, Local Councils & DEECD, including arrangements for case management
b) Importance of two years of preschool

Key finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom

a) Funding:
   i. Change & impact of Commonwealth funding arrangements e.g. ASSPA to PSPI
   ii. Slow release of fragmented, short-term funding
   iii. Multiplicity of minor funding sources
   iv. Repetitive accountability
b) Data – use of a unique identifier
c) Coordinated state-wide approach to literacy
d) Case Management approach – ILP's, MIP's

Key finding 5
Koorie Workforce and its positioning within the broader workforce

a) Building capacity of workforce to undertake roles
b) Building strategic partnerships with the education workforce
c) Requirements for:
   i. Clarification of roles, reporting relationships, industrial arrangements
   ii. Clear career pathways, linked to qualifications, updated duty statements and remuneration
   iii. Revised allocative mechanism

Key finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination - exemplifying best practice

a) 'Earned autonomy' - Impact of devolution resulting in reduced coordination
b) Implementation 'gaps':
   i. Literacy strategy
   ii. Students at Risk (SAR) assessment tool

iii. Unintended side effect that LLENS and related provisions also increase the risk of marginalisation

These elements, when addressed together, constitute a recipe for success.

Key Finding 1: Connecting cultures - Valuing Koorie cultures to support student success

The data sets provide clear evidence that, in spite of a concerted effort, the outcomes for Koorie students have remained essentially unchanged for some time. The impetus for change, therefore, needs to focus on what works best and why, low-risk strategies that promise steady improvement and a long term commitment to their implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

During the research it was reported that the dedicated workforce feels that it has been abandoned under devolution and this is also reflected by the general workforce. It was also reported that while these staff sought direction from central office, it was not forthcoming. In the absence of strategic direction, these staff are taking action with little support or sufficient resources to implement, monitor and evaluate their actions in improving educational outcomes for Koorie students. Resources that might once have been held in central offices have been reduced to a minimum in order to maximise local resources. Unfortunately, there are now too few resources in central office to allow it to support the workforce by providing the advice and direction that it looks for and needs. Koorie education effort is characterised by under-resourced short-term projects, put together "on the scrounge", as concerned workers try to make a difference. This is further compounded by a lack of appropriate data to assist in evaluating the worth of these projects.

From the child's perspective, they experience a system of continual change lacking educational continuity. The child changes grades, teachers and locations and locations change policies, programs, principals, teachers and resources in response to short-lived, short-funded state and commonwealth initiatives. This is further compounded by governmental and departmental change. For the student "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

In response to this continual change, teachers often go about their business as they always have, using the limited resources and programs to do the best they can for their students. The thing that works best certainly is the same and that is the quality of the teacher/student relationship. Teachers are actively engaged in the search for good pedagogy. The problem is that there are no certainties about what works best in key areas for Koorie students. Teaching literacy successfully is one of the major fundamentals to future success. There are at least ten generically different mixtures of strategy and resource in place, but none have been thoroughly evaluated for their impact on Victoria's Koorie population.

The literature demonstrates that students work best when they can see themselves in what they are doing. Unfortunately, many Koorie students cannot see themselves in what is offered at school and they do not see their culture as valued. There are schools that do it well which can act as models for others to examine. There is much to learn from these schools. A lot has been written about the importance of community engagement and the

incorporation of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum. Where Koorie students get a choice, the few who remain to continue with secondary study choose away from whole rafts of senior secondary subjects towards the handful in which they can see themselves. There is much to learn from these subjects.

Not all children come to school with the same readiness and the readiness to read. Preschooling is very important, but Victoria's Koorie preschool participation rates lag behind those of many other jurisdictions. Significantly, the Victorian government is committed to new funding of $136 million over four years to implement *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood* (March 2007). Its re-organised department brings together the elements of Childhood Development and Education which are essential to success.

The following recommendations address these key elements starting from the Koorie child's heritage of community and culture, building up from birth and working on and out to eventual constructive community engagement. A short discussion of implementation strategies expands on the implications of the recommendations.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 1.1
There be a system of initial cultural training, with refresher courses for existing employees working with Koorie parents and their children, or those who are working on programs that will impact Koorie children and their parents. Successful, Koorie specific childhood development and teaching strategies should be identified and regularly promoted to staff as part of the in-service program.

In addition, pre-service training courses in other jurisdictions include compulsory cultural studies units which should be introduced for Victorian teachers. Proposals need to be developed and advocated by a re-organised Koorie Education and Children's Development Strategy Unit and phased in through:

- The Victorian Institute of Teaching
- Employment pre-requisites
- Tertiary providers.

There is a need for the staff involved in enrolment procedures and parent community contact to attend short courses with a member of the leadership team. This should apply to all staff – central, regional and site based. It is as relevant to the front office staff as much as it is to the leadership. The best ways of establishing and valuing identity should be workshopped as part of these courses to:

- audit enrolments and improve enrolment procedures, reducing errors in the CASES data base;
- grow a commitment to community engagement and parental involvement; and
- provide sufficient information to support the in-school development of curriculum offerings and the acquisition of supporting materials to improve student retention and engagement, subject-by-subject if necessary, where indicated by a lack of Koorie enrolments.

This process is to establish the pre-conditions for Koorie student success. These pre-conditions include an analysis of why it is that some schools and some subjects attract and retain Koorie students while others do not. The strategies gained from analysis of those schools/subjects that retain Koorie students – that is, what the school or the subject needs to change; how change can be effected; what goals will be set; and how leaders and support staff can help the process - will inform their implementation. In this process there will be some lessons to learn from off-site programs about how they engage students, modify their practice in relation to mainstream schools and how they counter student disengagement. The VAEAI "*Youth Forums, 2002*" report is an important resource in that it reveals how young Koories perceive their school and its staff. Schools and staff need the opportunity to analyse feedback to implement planned changes. Implicit in this approach is the sharing of current good practices and improving upon these through adopting international best practice. There is much to learn from New Zealand practice which is worthy of study by a small leadership group. Similarly, options to extend existing leadership programs involving overseas study tours should be explored to include the work of Fraser Mustard and the Canadian early year's programs. Extension to other staff should be provided as resources permit.

Course structures should be developed by a re-organised Koorie Education and Children's Development Strategy Unit for delivery through existing mechanisms, such as the Leadership and Teacher Development Branch and programs like Learning to Lead Effective Schools Program, *Dare to Lead* and *What Works*.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 1.2
Aboriginal Studies courses should return to the previous, more comprehensive provisions which existed as part of the Curriculum Standards Framework before their revision as part of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. A complete, extended statement should be supported by subject specific provision within each area of study and within subjects offered at senior secondary. Like schools, subjects that cannot enrol a proportionate share of Koorie student sand subjects losing students, should receive priority support.

While the previous Aboriginal Studies course was well described and supported, it would benefit from the incorporation of contemporary Aboriginal perspectives examples which may include plant copyright, traditional knowledge and the development of new medicines, the physics of boomerangs and spear throwers, the mathematics of population projections, small business management and the use of contemporary art in design, garments and architecture. Subjects which do not attract Koorie students should be examined for their appropriateness with targets set and monitored to increase enrolments. A small *Dare to Lead* or *What Works* (Best) type program offered through professional subject associations, can underpin this process. Proposals for inclusion should be referred to the Koorie Education and Early Childhood Services Strategy Unit for collation and discussion with curriculum officers for implementation. Similarly, Indigenous readers and other book-based

resources should be identified and recommended for acquisition to support contemporary studies.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 1.3
That a set of protocols be developed for schools and offices to publicly acknowledge Victoria's Koorie heritage, including ways to mark important events with appropriate announcements.

Existing protocols need to be disseminated to all staff for observation. An example of where this is appropriate is Victoria's hosting of the World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education, 2008. This is the opportunity for Victoria's public buildings, including schools, preschools and education offices, to openly reflect and celebrate Koorie heritage and contemporary success. It is an appropriate occasion for the launch of detailed plans regarding new directions for Koorie education, including those aimed at the early years. The department should also actively support Koorie members of the workforce to attend this major event. Conference participation provides an economic way of gathering examples of best practice from around the world for education departmental staff.

Key Finding 2: Engagement of Communities – Increasing parent participation and the participation of communities in Koorie education

Yalca provides the framework for connectivity between the Victorian Koorie community and government services in early childhood care, development, education and further education. A report on *Koorie Student Attendance and Engagement in Government Schools* prepared for the Victorian Department of Education (2007) noted the need to operationalise the policy.

There is an evident mismatch between the regional structures that were designed to link with VAEAI and the regional structures that serve DEECD. There are equally evident mismatches between schools and LAECG's.

- DEECD has nine regions, VAEAI has eight.
- VAEAI has seven country regions, the department has five.
- The department has four metropolitan regions, VAEAI has one.
- VAEAI has 29[1] LAECG's based on Koorie communities.
- The department has an unknown number of school clusters and networks linked with Senior Education Officers.
- It is too early to know the detail of how early childhood development and education will be linked, but they should be, as reference is made to the importance of co-location, continuity and seamlessness in *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood (*March 2007).

In one way, the mismatches are unimportant because, historically, the LAECG's were built upon and designed to serve Koorie Education communities, not the department. However, that does not relieve the department of its responsibility to provide for regional Koorie

[1] VAEAI website, October 2007

participation in the development and monitoring of Koorie Early Childhood Development and Education. The department must exercise responsibility for consultation and its links with Koorie communities. However, education programs and program outcomes must be developed, implemented and monitored by the department without fear of veto or dictation by VAEAI or LAECG's.

The more detailed proposals below are put forward for consideration. Regional committees could be constituted as follows:

- The Regional Committee for Koorie Children's Development and Education should include a significant number of Indigenous members, paid and unpaid, including at least two Indigenous parents of children currently enrolled, upon the invitation of the regional director, after local consultation.
- Regional directors should nominate at least two Indigenous employees, one having a background in Koorie Childhood Development and one in Koorie education.
- Regional directors should nominate at least three other employees representing leadership in preschools and schools.
- The department should pay a modest sitting fee to allow otherwise unpaid participants to attend.
- The committee should meet at least once a term.
- The committee will have as its major tasks:
    - the construction and recommendation of a regional Koorie Childhood Development and Education Action Plan, and
    - monitoring for feedback and improvement, school and preschool based data sets using agreed indicators.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 2
Regional Directors should each establish and chair a Regional Advisory Committee for Koorie Children's Development and Education.

Key Finding 3: 0-8 Early Childhood – Building foundations for the future

The term *preschool childhood development program* is intended to encompass the full suite as set out in Victoria's *Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood* (2007) and as indicated by the literature, culminating with two years high quality preschool. The Victorian government has already committed to new funding of more than $136 million over the next four years, with a vigorous roll out of *Best Start* projects. Priority should be given to locations which are easily accessed by Koorie parents. The commonwealth is showing signs of a renewed interest in early years' provision and its assistance should be sought for a contribution towards the costs involved.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 3.1
That the DEECD work with the Commonwealth to fund the planned extension of preschool childhood development programs, with priority for those centres with high density Koorie populations.

The need for an interagency approach is clearly identified in the literature and the results of this study. The Koorie child can only benefit where they are at the centre of a number of agencies contributing to their interests and outcomes. The importance of preschool records, including information that may be gained from midwives and the health services involved in children's development is detailed in subsequent discussion. The use of unique identifiers which capture preschool as well as school records will assist with case management and the compilation and analysis of child development histories and their impact on life outcomes.

Many of the potential benefits of involvement in preschool programs have already been addressed in *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood* (2007). The issue for the implementation of this process is to design a system which will allow the effective evaluation of various strategies, tracking individual children and their participation in various programs, including preschool. Existing data sets are problematical when it comes to describing or evaluating the preschool participation rates of Victoria's Koorie children. Attendance and achievement data sets should be referenced against the Koorie population over time to measure progress and the impact of different programs.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 3.2
An interagency agreed system of unique identifiers be developed and used as early as possible to monitor children's development and education and to assist in the evaluation of programs for effect.

Throughout this research many Koorie parents spoke of their fear in approaching (what was to the parents) an unfriendly place. In a system where the Koorie child should be central, this should not be happening. There are many ways of redressing this which can be implemented without expense. Senior Education Officers might check for and recommend supportive practices. An approach is required that results in the seamless transmission of relevant parent and child related information which will assist in the provision of educational and other relevant services. Currently, attendance data is dumped from one year to the next when CASES is rolled over. CASES has an information transfer facility, but the transfer of attendance and achievement information between schools is complicated by the existence of other home grown systems which contribute to export/import difficulties.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 3.3
Transition programs be developed to effect the smooth transfer of the child and of parent and child related information, from preschool to school and from primary to secondary.

Key finding 4: Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom

The child is at the centre of a maelstrom of short-term funding, released in dribs and drabs. Classroom teachers often watch these things come and go, with little long-term impact other than to absorb a huge amount of time in submission and report writing. The objective is for an officer to develop a position paper working through the issues for consideration by senior officers with a view to inter-government negotiation.

Areas to consider:

- Early years care, development and education.
- Later years mainstreaming, monitoring and managing for reduction offsite provisions which have an over-representation of Koorie students due to the process of marginalisation.
- Effective literacy teaching.
- Improved case management including the use of Individual Learning Plans (ILP's) and the development of Koorie Individual Education Plans (KIEP's).
- Improved data collection and analysis.

Non-government organisations often come together in some common forum. Schools spend a lot of time sourcing these organisations. This officer could also develop an overview of funding sources and other assists for system reference by principals working on Koorie projects. These include:

- interagency operations, including joint operations with local and non-government contributors; and
- inter-government projects in Koorie early years development and education.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 4.1
Priority is given to the development of a strategy to pool resources, consolidating long-term (five year) funding (local, state and federal) targeting key areas.

The research has clearly identified the need for an officer to be appointed to a re-organised and relocated Koorie Education and Children's Development Strategy Unit, to drive developments in discussion with a select panel of Indigenous researchers. A lot of work already goes into data collection and analysis. Unfortunately, its usefulness has been impeded by the lack of a unique identifier, in what is at times, an overly complicated recording system, especially for student absence. Additional methodologies for data collection are required which will incorporate interdisciplinary longitudinal and individualised approaches. This includes the development of Indigenous specific data sets to act as reference points to assess individual and group outcomes over time. The literature indicates that any approach adopted will need to include 'Indigenous voice' in researching educational outcomes and involve Indigenous researchers.

There is value in the New Zealand practice of referencing Maori outcomes against the Maori population rather than the entire population because it reduces cultural bias and puts the student in context with peers. The progress of this population is measured by, as they put it, "shifting the bell curve". As such, it has become a clear indicator of achievement in an area which was previously bedevilled by small populations referenced against the instruments of a comparatively large, dominant culture. The officer involved will, of necessity, liaise with existing data management officers and those introducing the Ultranet. Early priorities should be to develop an improved system to track students on transfer from preschool and to offsite locations and to track student progression, especially between years 6 and 7. This data is important to help schools, regional management and LLEN's monitor and address the losses and informal streaming that already occurs.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 4.2
Priority be given to the development of improved data sets, their retention, transfer, monitoring and analysis, based on a system of unique student identifiers used to measure trends over time, for the child and for the system.

The research has clearly identified the need for the evaluation of Koorie literacy support programs. Evaluation programs should be established in at least two locations with high density Koorie populations to evaluate the effectiveness of current literacy programs. The programs suggested for evaluation are:

- Extending Reading Recovery up to and including Year 5, with some relaxation concerning absence as a disqualifier. This might be attempted with, or without, an on-site involvement in:
    - scaffolding/accelerated literacy and/or
    - a current best practice implementation of common programs, such as those using graded reading schemes like National Geographic linked with Ashton Scholastic's computer based assessment on demand.

There is sufficient detail in these recommendations to permit a minimal implementation and research program without great expense. The research issue is to compare the prospect of leapfrogging, or accelerated progression, with graded approaches which have been criticised for their requirement to move forward a step at a time. As described, the problem with moving forward a step at a time is that if a child starts from behind, that child stays behind, hence the attractiveness of Accelerated Literacy. At the same time, there are excellent graded reading schemes but they have not been thoroughly checked against the Indigenous population. There were several examples of these programs in use. In one case, it had been supported by the appointment of five extra School Services Officer's (SSO) for reading programs; and two extra SSO's for speech pathology. A check of reading results did not however produce anything significant, which may be due to the small samples. The intention is to provide for an intensive long-term (five years) study of the best prospects before committing to a wider implementation. The NT government is rolling out an Accelerated Literacy program and although there are important differences in the makeup of the Indigenous population, there is at least some opportunity to learn what might best be done and how to avoid mistakes.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 4.3
A system of evaluation be established to test the effectiveness of the most promising literacy programs, using the expert advice already in place for the Literacy project.

The research has identified a clearly defined need for an interagency approach to case management. The reasons for this are almost self explanatory, but difficult to manage given all the protocols and sensitivities involved. A start has been made by developing protocols for children in the care of the Minister, where the Minister is the parent for all purposes. South Australia is well advanced in the development of these protocols. An exchange of

information between officers could assist. Key data sets, such as those relating to attendance and achievement, should be rolled over and retained from one year to the next. They should transfer with the student. ILP's should be extended to include every Koorie child who has not been assessed, or who is one or more VELS levels behind the average for their Indigenous peers. ILP's also should be developed for interagency case management of students whose attendance falls to eighty per cent or less.

An interagency case management approach for attendance is required as there were instances where it simply was not safe, or appropriate, for school workers to get involved in family follow up. Sometimes, justice or other agencies will need to be involved. Each region should establish and promulgate to principals and to staff generally, once each semester, an interagency grievance procedure to allow for and resolve unsatisfactory case management referrals. Field work revealed several cases where education workers felt as though another agency had either acted inappropriately over a child, or a report, or had not acted at all. It is understood case workers face enormous loads, but some system must be put in place to sort these matters through without leaving them unresolved as a source of tension at local level. Police were praised for their approach in encouraging school attendance using knowledge and relationships established over time with vulnerable families.

It is important to avoid the dangers of an overly bureaucratic extension of ILP's and of resistance by association with those ILP's constructed for the program for students with disabilities. The use of the term "ILP" in these two recommendations refers exclusively to that process, under the Program for Students with Disabilities. Its extension should be reserved for use with students at risk. Students who cannot read or write well, or do not attend school, are at risk.

The VELS threshold for formal ILP's has been deliberately referenced against data sets for the Indigenous population, building on Bishop's research and successes in New Zealand. (Bishop, 2006, 2007). This reduces the numbers that might be involved but given that there are gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous achievement levels and, given that one VELS level is the equivalent of two year's study, this might be seen as setting the benchmark too low. Accordingly, the threshold level could be reviewed using better statistical data to guide estimates of the numbers likely to be involved. There are similar problems with attendance data – it is not possible to estimate the numbers that might be involved, perhaps up to twenty per cent of a cohort, or about 1400 students, although that is probably a high estimate and many may already be identified by the VELS recommendation and existing ILP's. Again, the benchmark might be adjusted through better use of data. However, the Koorie child who misses the equivalent of one day a week will not experience satisfactory progress, especially at secondary level where more than one teacher is involved in catch up. The "eighty per cent" should be reckoned against a term's attendance, but it could cut in for unexplained absences of a week or more (ten per cent).

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 4.4
Interagency agreements about case management, based on a system of unique identifiers, should start as early as possible and continue as long as indicated for care, development and education of a child.

The researchers identified that an element of future career/vocation/employment planning should be introduced to KIEP's from year 5 and onwards to orient students towards the purposes of further study. This is especially important for the transition years, 6/7. Managed Individual Plans (MIP's) should take over beyond Year 8. KIEP's have value as collaborative documents, agreed between teacher, student and parent. They complement the reporting process, helping to clarify learning goals and the method of achievement for all to understand and agree. These cautions are important. Some year 7 students cannot clearly link their high school studies with their futures, despite high school *familiarisation* programs. Most high school transition programs are familiarisation programs. They are designed to introduce the child and the family, to the high school, to show how it works, to meet some of the staff. The best are very good, but they are not intended to orient the new (to the school) student towards a career. Eyers dealt with this in more detail in his analysis of the middle years (Eyers et al, 1992). He discusses primary preparation and the re-orientation of secondary schools as necessary to effect better transitions. An aspect of this is for Year 6 teachers who know their students to provide an orientation connecting high school studies and futures by including a suitable reference in the KIEP for further use and development in the early secondary years.

MIPs are already in use for Year 9 students at risk. Year 9 is a major departure point – around thirteen per cent leave during that year. It was clear from the research that many principals did not know or use the Student at Risk Assessment tool, updated by advertisement in *Education Times*, 30 August 2007. Its use will reveal that more than thirteen per cent are at risk through non-attendance. An orientation to and explanation of the relevance of further study through the MIP's process may assist the retention of secondary students, especially in year 9 and beyond.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 4.5
That, in order to avoid confusion, the two page Hume Region Koorie ILP's be re-named as Koorie Individual Education Plans (KIEP's) and extended to all Koorie children.

Key Finding 5: Koorie Workforce and its positioning within the broader workforce
The researchers have identified the need to employ a larger Koorie education workforce with appropriate pre and in-service training. It is government policy to provide improved opportunity for Indigenous employees, but a literature review of the *Wur-cum burra* policy initiative shows that it has only been partially delivered (Purdie et al, 2006). Government set a two per cent target for the employment of Indigenous people in the public service (Media Release, Office of the Premier, 7 January, 2005). This sets an agency target near 1100 across the education service. Achievement, including a headcount of part-time

temporary employees, is unlikely to reach 100, or 10 per cent of that target. This equates to an overall 0.2 per cent, well under the 0.5 per cent in the general population.

Role modelling is important in supporting the Koorie workforce. There is a mentoring program to identify and develop school leadership, but this program appears not to have been applied to the Indigenous workforce. Indigenous indicators (tags) are not compulsory in employment returns and statistics. It may be possible to establish a more exact number by encouraging Koorie employees to register for leadership and supported professional development programs. No dedicated network exists for Indigenous officers or leadership development in Victoria.

The state receives a little over $600 from the Commonwealth for every Koorie student, paid under the Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) program. South Australia provides a per capita allowance of 0.7 of an hour per student for the employment of dedicated, school based staff. The amount paid via the SRA nearly equals that allocation, but it poses problems in South Australia. Plainly, it is not possible to employ someone for 0.7 of an hour in schools with one student, so the money is not used. However, if a comparable provision was made in Victoria, then in aggregate it would mean the employment of approximately 144 dedicated staff, compared to the 80 employed now.

There is a history to Victorian employment practices based around a threshold allocation of one KE for 20 students. If that commitment was renewed, then about 70 staff would be appointed to schools with 20 or more students. All sorts of arrangements can occur around the equivalences of 50 students by 0.7 hours equals 35 hours, including a lower threshold, fractional and shared appointments and multiple appointments. However this is allocated, it is obvious that many students will miss out because they are culturally isolated as small cohorts in schools with less than ten enrolments. Half of Victoria's Koorie students are vulnerable and dispersed in this way and need support. A revised allocative mechanism is suggested based upon a core of fulltime appointments in schools with large enrolments, whatever that threshold may eventually be, with the remaining fractions being shared for regional use. In doing so, the following needs to be considered:

- The issues outlined in the draft report, *Koorie Education Transition Project*, Victorian Department of Education July 2004.
- It must be phased in with a satisfactory grandparent clause to protect existing permanent staff.
- It must be economically and educationally viable.
- It should be based upon an allocative mechanism that supports changing enrolments, including:
    - a threshold for appointment and retention of full time staff set at a Koorie peak annual enrolment of 20 students, with a corridor of five, balanced either way across the system permitted for up to three years
    - the majority should be permanent, but subject to transfer on reducing enrolments, with a margin of temporary appointments to allow for the student population within the corridor, and
    - provision for regional staff to support dedicated staff appointed to high density locations, based on a notional allocation of 0.7 hours/enrolment to

the region for schools with less than 15 students, thereby also providing a regional resource to service directly the dispersed, culturally isolated population.

- Staff awards to be linked to an updated system connecting qualifications and pay rates. Pay scales and classifications to be contingent upon the acquisition of explicitly stated qualifications, including an initial qualification coupled with satisfactory performance to qualify for permanence.
- Provision for both a *Well-Being* and *Teaching and Learning* career streams, with the preponderance in favour of *Teaching and Learning* and with well-being to serve as a link with, rather than a direct provider of, interagency case management.
- The line management of dedicated staff appointed outside schools rests unambiguously with the Regional Director.
- School-based, dedicated staff will be line-managed, unambiguously, by principals.
- In both cases, line managers will provide for the release of dedicated staff once each semester for the purpose of attending central network briefings, organised by the Koorie Education and Early Childhood Development Strategy Unit in discussion with Regional Directors through the Office for Government School Education.
- Regional meetings of the region's dedicated workforce to be convened under the authority of the regional director, up to four times a year for a total of up to six days.
- Approved, award based training should be blocked and grouped to allow networking.
- All other work time meetings away from site and main duty should be minimised.

The nuances of these options need to be teased out by a team of experts with detailed local knowledge of budgets, professional workforce expectations and industrial systems, supplemented by matching expert advice drawn from other jurisdictions.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 5
That an expert team of three works through the detail of an implementation proposal to restructure the dedicated Koorie workforce for stakeholder (the dedicated workforce and the Department) consideration within six months.

Key Finding 6: Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination - exemplifying best practice

The research has revealed the need for a central unit to champion Koorie education within DEECD. The Office for Government School Education is the recommended location as it is within the same administrative branch as the Regional Directors with major responsibility for overseeing educational delivery to Koorie students. This Office is also responsible for the allied tasks of stakeholder briefings and for Programs for Students with Disabilities. Interaction with regional directors and through them, with regional staff, is critical in driving and monitoring the changes required. At present, the existing unit is isolated and understaffed, resulting in difficulties for schools and some regions in obtaining timely and appropriate advice.

These officers should contribute to informing and harnessing the mainstream effort by providing expert advice for action. It is not intended to have these officers take over the work of the mainstream or for them to be used by the mainstream as a dumping ground for anything Koorie. Rather, these officers will bring to the mainstream specialist Indigenous understandings and expectations for incorporation by mainstream officers. They will be a first port of call for expert advice to the system. Given the complexities and the magnitude of the tasks involved, it justifies the employment of five Indigenous staff. If it is not possible to recruit, then a certain amount of planned twinning, as between Indigenous and non-Indigenous officers should be provided to secure continuity, succession, mentoring and career pathways.

Non-indigenous staff appointed to Indigenous specific units and tasks, twinned for the purpose of Indigenous leadership development, should be appointed on a once only basis for a period not exceeding five years. That will avoid the accidental accumulation of dominant non-Indigenous staff that have built up in the Indigenous Support Units of other jurisdictions. It will ensure succession.

While there are many tasks for such a small team it needs to be small to encourage major service delivery via the mainstream, ensuring those who have responsibility for implementation do so.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 6.1
A Koorie Education and Children's Development Strategy Unit be formed within the Office for Government School Education.

The research has identified the need for Koorie policy advice. This is consistent with an already established *Wur-cum burra* policy to provide for Indigenous employment. Modelling is required at the highest level. This officer should be supported by an Indigenous Operations leadership team of up to four professional stream officers based around key stages of a child's development, linked to strategic portfolios by a process of mix and match and based around the following:

- Early Childhood Development
- Early Years Schooling
- Middle Years, and
- Senior Years.

There should be specialisations assigned between them to cover:

- Effective literacy teaching
- Improved case management, the extension of formal ILP's and the development of KIEP's
- Data Services/Ultranet, including improved data collection, retention, transfer, monitoring and analysis
- Interagency operations, including joint operations with local and non-government contributors

- Inter-government and non-government projects in Koorie early years development and education
- Programs for Students with Disabilities
- Workforce Training and Leadership Development
- Curriculum
- Later years mainstreaming, monitoring and managing for reduction offsite provisions which have an over-representation of Koorie students due to the process of marginalisation
- Leadership programs and mentoring and professional development for Koorie employees, including the dedicated workforce
- A system of initial training and refresher courses for employees working with Koorie students, or on programs that will impact Koorie children, and
- Briefings, MCEETYA correspondence and VAEAI.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 6.2
That an Indigenous officer be appointed to develop policy and lead the Unit, at least at the level of Regional Director, reporting directly to the same Deputy Secretary as regional directors in order to meet with and work closely together.

The need was identified through this research for the consolidation of Koorie strategies. Existing plans and priorities, including regional and sub sectional plans, should be sifted, together with this report, to assist in the development of a draft plan acknowledging government policy and its resolve to affect improved outcomes.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 6.3
That the Department produce and publish a Strategic Plan for Koorie Childhood Development and Education.

The researchers have identified a clear need for a Senior Education Officer to work with senior and regional staff to develop, promote and evaluate Koorie programs. These programs are to include:

- The implementation and effectiveness for Koorie students of literacy, attendance and mathematics programs
- The development and implementation of the extension of Koorie children's case management and of the ILP and KIEP programs as recommended
- The impact and management of formal and informal procedures and of oversights, which result in social streaming and marginalisation. Progression data should be collected at the level of the individual. It should be monitored for effective management at the school level. Particular attention must be paid to:
    - Local follow up of missing students, of students who exit without a constructive destination, or who otherwise miss out during key transitions, such as between years 6 and 7
    - The supports that schools and their leaders may need to improve engagement and retention, and

- Upgraded provisions for Aboriginal studies, across the curriculum, as recommended.

The current policy provides a system of central direction that, under a scheme of devolution, relies on regional offices and local sites for its proper implementation. This has not worked for Koorie students. Hume region recognised this as a problem and appointed an SEO to improve monitoring and implementation. Devolution was never intended to mean freedom from government policy. It was always meant to provide freedom to implement policies in the best possible way within an accountability framework under a system of earned autonomy. While one region already employs an officer at this level to work on Koorie education, all should do so. These officers are not there to become dumping grounds for anything Koorie. They are there to provide expert advice and analysis to the mainstream workforce so it can better discharge its responsibilities.

Therefore we recommend:

Recommendation 6.4
Regional structures are amended to include an officer appointed at the level of Senior Education officer, preferably Indigenous, to work with other senior staff and the regional committee to develop, promote, monitor and evaluate major programs.

We finally recommend:

Recommendation 7
An expert team be formed to develop an implementation proposal to operationalise all the review proposals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Education Outcomes for Indigenous Australian Students

1. 1 Indigenous education outcomes have been the subject of countless research studies and reports in Australia during the past 40 or more years. The conclusions have been almost entirely bleak: Indigenous Australian students are perceived to have significantly lower levels of educational achievement than their non-Indigenous peers at all levels of schooling. Not a single report has shown otherwise. Many of the reports have included recommendations on how to resolve this dilemma. On those occasions when recommendations have been implemented there is little evidence of positive impact, often because of limited follow-up. The aim of this review, however, is not to dwell on the negatives, but to search the literature, both from Australia and internationally, for potentially positive ways forward.

2. Effective provision of early childhood education

2. 1 Learning outcomes in the later years of school are profoundly influenced by health, growth and development during infancy. Deprivation, stress and neglect in the early years (including the antenatal period) can have significant impacts on the child's subsequent health and education outcomes (*Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, 2007). The most recent national statistics continue to paint a grim picture of the health status of Indigenous infants: those under four years of age are twice as likely as non-Indigenous infants to be hospitalised for potentially preventable diseases and injuries; low birth weights are twice as common; mortality rates are up to five times as high in some states and territories; the prevalence of hearing problems is three times as high (*Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, 2007).

2.2 There is increasing recognition that effective early childhood care and education is an important part of the solution. It should be a seamless process throughout the early years; i.e., from birth to eight. Many now advocate that it start from conception. The provision of culturally appropriate programs of education and support for Indigenous parents is an essential element, especially in the antenatal period and during the first years of life. Chapter five of *Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage* (2007) includes a series of short case studies of 'things that work' in Indigenous communities. It describes settings where community health educators provide home-based services for families. It also describes education programs for pregnant mothers and for parents of babies and infants, based in local health centres or preschools. It is these kinds of intensive educational interventions that have the potential to improve the health and well-being of young Indigenous children, with positive impacts in later years on their learning outcomes (*Effective learning issues*, 2001). As well as focusing on health and nutrition, these education programs also should guide parents in the effective use of play, toys and reading as stimuli for cognitive development.

2.3 Linked with the above is the provision of preschool education. A recent OECD report based on a comprehensive analysis of its data sets on school performance found that, in

more than half of the OECD countries, 15-year-old students who reported that they had attended preschool for more than one year, showed a statistically significant performance advantage over those without preschool attendance, even after data were corrected for the effect of socio-economic status (*Learning for tomorrow's world*, 2004). While many smaller research studies have provided similar results, the scale and sophistication of the OECD study is unprecedented. The report's conclusion of a 'substantial association between attending preschool and performing well at age fifteen' is, in its own words, 'striking' (*Learning for tomorrow's world*, 2004, 243). It certainly lends support to those who advocate preschool provisions for all Indigenous children.

2.4 Data from the USA, reported in *Effective learning issues* (2001), provide similar supporting evidence of the benefits of preschool education:

> *The USA Head Start program has shown positive short-term cost-benefit, with at least $US7,160 returned to society for every $US1,000 invested, based on the financial cost to society of crime, special education, income support and unemployment. It also included an estimation of return to society of taxes from the higher paid individuals who had attended preschool.*

2.5 Fraser Mustard, who with Margaret McCain co- chaired the Canadian Early Years Study (Mustard and McCain, 1999), are acknowledged experts on the importance of early years care, development and education as fundamental to achievement in the later years. They present convincing evidence-based arguments to show that these are the most cost effective years for educational investment. Mustard served as a Thinker in Residence in Adelaide in 2006 and 2007, presenting a variety of papers such as 'Investing in the early years'. His work heavily influenced a South Australian Inquiry into Early Childhood Services (*The Virtual Village*, 2005). Chapter 8 of that report focused on the delivery of services to Aboriginal children. Its recommendations have been adopted and implemented by the South Australian Government.

2.6 There is a relatively long tradition of preschool provisions for Indigenous Australian children going back to the late 1960s (Teasdale & Whitelaw, 1981). Many of the early programs, generally funded from non-government sources, emphasised parental and grandparental participation, inclusion of all babies and infants aged between 0 to 5and the training and employment of Indigenous people as classroom assistants. A Bernard van Leer Foundation funded project in NSW went even further, giving communities full ownership and control of family education centres and providing comprehensive training programs for parents and caregivers (Grey, 1976; Teasdale & Whitelaw, 1981). Some of these early programs are still more conceptually advanced than many present-day provisions.

2.7 The most recent data on Indigenous participation rates in preschool are disappointing. Nationally, 18.6 per cent of Indigenous three year olds and 46.2 per cent of four year olds attend preschool. Victorian data show lower percentages of Indigenous students attending preschool: 5.8 per cent of three-year-olds and 41.9 per cent of four-year olds (*Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage*, 2007, 347). Overall, 25.1 per cent of three to five year old

Indigenous children are enrolled in preschools nationally, compared with 28.8 per cent for non-Indigenous children. Assuming the validity of the OECD findings (above), it seems imperative that much greater efforts be made to provide preschooling for Indigenous children. It also is important to address articulation between early childhood services across the health, welfare and education sectors and to ensure that parent education and enrichment programs in the first years are effectively harmonised with preschool programs. A smooth and seamless transition from preschool to primary school also should be given high priority. A more holistic view of development and learning across the early life span should help policy makers to achieve this goal (*Effective learning issues*, 2001). A whole-of-government approach to the early years of life will facilitate the effective integration of services.

2.8 Data on participation in the early years of primary school (i.e., for children aged five to eight) are more encouraging, with no significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous enrolments (*Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage*, 2007). Data on actual attendance rates are harder to find. Bourke et al (2000, 14) provide a graph showing the rates for each of the first three grades of primary school. It indicates that Indigenous students attend less regularly, with attendance about ten percentage points lower. Over the first seven years of school Bourke et al (2000) reported that Indigenous students attend about 84 per cent of the time, non-Indigenous about 93 per cent.

3. Improving student attendance

3.1 Almost every report on Indigenous education outcomes identifies irregular school attendance as a key variable in low achievement. By way of example, an independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (*Learning lessons*, 1999) devotes a whole chapter to attendance and participation. An opening caveat to the chapter states clearly:

> *The review took the position that, complex as the task of education is, as a first requirement, children must attend school consistently to progress. In relation to Indigenous education, poor attendance is without doubt the primary cause of poor educational outcomes*
>
> *Learning lessons*, 1999, 141

3.2 A recent review of Aboriginal education in New South Wales provides data showing that the higher the attendance rate of Indigenous Year 7 students, the better their performance in English literacy and language tests. The report concludes that absenteeism sets up a vicious cycle whereby, 'Poorer results lead to lower student morale and self-esteem which results in even poorer attendance' (*Yanigurra muya*, 2004, 25-26).

3.3 In a comprehensive national analysis of Indigenous school attendance, Bourke et al (2000) found that students attended on average about 84 per cent of the time, compared with a non-Indigenous rate of 93 per cent. They reported that the gap widened at secondary level, with Indigenous school attendance falling to 75 per cent by Year 10, compared with

90 per cent for non-Indigenous students. Their analysis also showed notable differences in the distribution of individual attendance, with 'strikingly much higher proportions of Indigenous students attending at low or very low levels' (Bourke et al, 2000, 18). They also found that absences of Indigenous students are more likely to be recorded in schools as 'unexplained'.

3.4 In an attractive brochure notable for its clarity of presentation and balanced approach, McRae (n.d., 2) reviews Indigenous school attendance data, concluding that, without wishing to diminish the scale of the issue, it is important to recognise that the majority of Indigenous young people who are enrolled at school do attend regularly and consistently.

3.5 All analyses of Indigenous school attendance stress the multifaceted and diverse reasons for student absence. McRae (n.d.) lists over 20 relatively discrete factors. He concludes his analysis, however, by recommending that educators think of poor attendance as a visible symptom of a situation that needs tackling from a larger and more holistic perspective. Bourke et al (2000) likewise, stress the complexity of the situation. They are particularly critical of those researchers who invoke deficit explanations that attribute blame to individual, family or cultural factors, concluding that, '... there is a growing body of opinion represented in the literature that school-based factors are of primary importance in relation to non-attendance of Indigenous students' (Bourke et al, 2000, 7).

3.6 Most studies comment on the decline in attendance in the early years of secondary school. A key factor here appears to be alienation from the culturally oppressive and, at times, racist atmosphere of the school. Non-attendance is one of the strongest forms of resistance available to young Indigenous people. From a New Zealand perspective, Bishop & Berryman's (2006) accounts of interviews with Maori youth portray a deeply disturbing picture of the depth of alienation that they feel in the secondary school. In their South Australian study of boys in secondary schools, Slade & Trent (2000) paint a very similar picture of alienation and resistance amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In both studies the authors emphasise the failure of the schools and their teachers to create a culturally safe and affirming environment.

3.7 Just as the reasons for poor school attendance are multifaceted so too are any potential solutions. McRae (n.d.) advocates three interrelated approaches. The first is to ensure cultural recognition, acknowledgement and support of each Indigenous student. This includes a respect for their languages and patterns of discourse, as well as involvement of families and communities in all aspects of the schooling process. The second is to emphasise skill development using explicit and individualised approaches to teaching and learning, including recognition of the fact that Standard Australian English is not necessarily the first language or dialect of many students. The third is to provide a safe, secure school environment, characterised by good student-teacher relationships. The school should be welcoming to Indigenous students and free from racism. It should empower students by giving them real control over their own learning. McRae (n.d., 6) then adds a final plea for a: '... whole-school approach based on a commitment to providing successful learning experiences and outcomes for all students'.

3.8 Finally, it is important to consider suspension, exclusion and expulsion from school as factors in non-attendance. Bourke et al (2000) and Bale (n.d.) report that Indigenous students are massively over-represented in suspension data from all states and territories. The NSW review of Aboriginal education (*Yanigurra muya*, 2004), shows that suspension rates in that state are three to four times greater for Indigenous than for non-Indigenous students. It is worth quoting at some length the findings of the report. They provide a stark picture:

> *...communities argued that many students regarded suspension as a reward rather than a punishment...Families also felt that some high schools treated suspension as the easy way to get rid of a difficult or disruptive student rather than trying to understand why the student was behaving unacceptably and help them to improve. ... Communities pointed out the anomaly between expecting compulsory attendance and the use of suspension for unruly students as the young people most frequently suspended were the ones most in need of help. There was a sense that students were reinforced in the feeling that their school did not want or care about them.*
>
> *Yanigurra muya*, 2004, 126

3.9 In his very clearly and sensitively written brochure, Bale (n.d.) explores alternatives to suspension. He believes the most important element of success in avoiding suspension lies in the strength and effectiveness of relationships that principals have with staff, students, parents and the community and with the quality of relationships between each of these groups. He believes each group should have a sense of ownership and partnership in developing and implementing action plans. As with non-attendance, the solutions appear to lie in a whole-school approach that empowers students by giving them real control over their own lives and their own learning in a safe and secure environment.

4. Improving Indigenous performance in literacy and numeracy

4.1 Achievement in literacy and numeracy is a precondition for successful progression through the school system. Despite serious reservations about the validity and reliability of national MCEETYA standardised test data (refer to 7.2 to 7.9 below) and the need for extreme caution in interpreting them, the overall trends of the results are so clear that they can be accepted with at least some degree of confidence.

4.2 The most recent and comprehensive analysis of the MCEETYA test results is reported in *Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage* (2007). It is based on analyses of test results over a seven year period from 1999 to 2005 in Literacy and Numeracy for Years 3, 5 and 7. In summary:

4.2.1 while Indigenous performance fluctuated year by year there was no statistically significant trend in any subject at any year level; i.e., there was no evidence of improvement over time;

4.2.2 nationally, for all three subjects across all three year levels and in each of the seven years, there was a consistent pattern: substantially higher proportions of Indigenous students failed to meet national benchmarks compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts;

4.2.3 as Indigenous students progress through school, the proportion who achieve the national minimum benchmarks decreases; i.e., disparities in academic performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students increase from Year 3 to Year 7;

4.2.4 the pattern of lower performance of Indigenous students was consistent across all states and territories, with only one exception: Year 3 Indigenous students in Victoria recorded slightly higher gains than non-Indigenous students on the writing benchmark, while in Year 5 the Indigenous results were only very slightly lower.

4.3 There are no 'quick fixes' to this dismal situation. A sustained, multifaceted and culturally relevant approach is required. Teachers need to be deeply committed, appropriately trained and able to nurture the well-being and social inclusion of their Indigenous students. Policies therefore need to be in place to attract and retain high quality teachers: staff depth is an essential ingredient in successful outcomes. Schools and their principals need to ensure good relationships between staff, students and local communities and to ensure that the school is a safe and welcoming place for students:

> *If social inclusion strategies are working, students will want to attend, will feel valued and respected, will know to expect the level of support they need to stay at school , and will view school as a site of positive experience in their lives*
>
> *Literacy for succeeding at school*, n.d., 3

4.4 Most importantly, however, there is a need to establish best practice in the teaching of literacy, writing and numeracy to Indigenous students and to identify or prepare exemplary teaching resources. A careful review of the literature does suggest some promising new directions. First and foremost is the need to recognise Aboriginal English as a legitimate language or dialect in its own right and to design programs based on the best principles of teaching English as a second language or dialect. The *Effective learning issues* (2001) paper makes the point that there are many forms of Aboriginal English, with significant local and regional variations and that these languages generally are grammatically complex, often making distinctions unknown in Standard Australian English. Some use an extensive range of non-verbal forms of communication. The paper continues:

> *While they [i.e., the various forms of Aboriginal English] contain much English-based vocabulary, semantic variation has occurred over many generations to the point where meanings of the same words differ completely ... This language similarity or transparency may not be readily apparent to many adults and even less so to many children, and may therefore cause*

> *difficulties for students and educators, unless they are aware of the explicit differences between the languages*
>
> *Effective learning issues*, 2001, 33

4.5 The recent review of Aboriginal education in NSW (*Yanigurra muya*, 2004, 70) makes a similar point, noting that Aboriginal English is the home language of many children in that state and that parents and Aboriginal community members who were interviewed, '... believe that Aboriginal English is not well understood by teachers'. Teachers themselves reported only limited understanding of Aboriginal English. They confirmed that they had not had access to training and support for developing an awareness of Aboriginal English and its importance in the classroom, nor how to incorporate it into classroom practice. The report then goes on to describe a 'Bidialectal Pilot Project' being trialled in NSW schools. The aim is to develop teaching strategies that cultivate Aboriginal ways of making meaning as well as explicitly teaching Standard Australian English (*Yanigurra muya*, 2004, 71). In Western Australia the recent child health survey (Zubrick et al, 2006) also addresses the issue of Aboriginal English, recommending that Standard Australian English be explicitly taught as a second dialect throughout all years of the school.

4.6 The effective teaching of literacy and writing is a significant challenge. There is no evidence that any of the numerous programs and approaches of recent years has had a positive impact, at least as measured by MCEETYA test results. The attractively produced 'What works' brochure, *Literacy for succeeding at school* (n.d.), offers a range of suggestions, but suggests no clear way forward, except for the final section (pp 7-9) on accelerating literacy. Recent state and territory reviews (e.g., *Learning lessons*, 1999; *Yanigurra muya*, 2004; Zubrick et al, 2006) all recommend that something be done about Indigenous literacy and writing and that more resources be provided, but no specific programs or approaches are suggested.

4.7 The most promising way forward comes from the work of Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey at the University of Canberra, together with David Rose from the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney. The main features of their work, initially referred to as 'Scaffolding Literacy' and more recently as 'Accelerated Literacy', are comprehensively described in *Scaffolding literacy in the middle years* (2004). A shorter account focusing on the application of the program to Indigenous settings appears in *The University of Canberra scaffolding literacy program* (n.d.)and also in *Literacy for succeeding at school* (n.d.). The theoretical underpinnings of the program are described by Gray (2007).

4.8 The program is now being implemented in Indigenous schools in the NT through the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) based at Charles Darwin University and funded by the Australian and NT Governments. The aim is to successfully roll out the program in 100 NT Indigenous schools by the end of 2008, including the provision of training for 700 teachers and support for 10,000 students (*National Accelerated Literacy Program*, 2007). There is no indication if and when NALP might be extended to other states and territories.

4.9 While Gray, Cowey and Rose, in their various publications, provide extensive anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of the program, no longitudinal studies appear to have been completed, at least in Indigenous settings. A comprehensive evaluation of its use in Indigenous schools in WA, SA, Queensland and the NT was undertaken by a team from ACER in 2002 using a qualitative approach based on interviews and school observations (Cresswell et al, 2002). It concluded that the program is an effective means of improving literacy skills and that the Indigenous students involved achieve at a much higher level than if they had followed the normal curriculum. However the evaluation did not include any measurement of literacy skills.

4.10 The Scaffolding/Accelerated Literacy program has a number of distinctive features, as described in *The University of Canberra scaffolding literacy program* (n.d.):

4.10.1 It allows students who may be performing years below their grade level to work at, or very close to, reading levels appropriate to their age; i.e., students work intensively on texts with content and complexity equivalent to their more successful age peers. The texts are not modified in any way.

4.10.2 The primary method of delivery is the teacher working with the whole class, rather than using individualised approaches. The pedagogy is based on an approach to learning negotiation that the authors describe as 'scaffolding'. Teachers manage learning engagement via modelling and providing information. Interactions between students and teacher are highly dynamic. Teachers' expectations about the ways of learning and thinking necessary for school success are made clearly visible to students.

4.10.3 The core program is built around a systematic approach to the development of literacy:

> *[It] leads learners through intensive exploration of high level text comprehension which pays careful attention to understanding the complex grammar that is encountered in literate text as opposed to everyday speech. As students begin to engage successfully with reading following this support, the emphasis shifts to development of high level decoding, spelling and eventually to writing.*
>
> *Development across reading writing and spelling is highly integrated. Children learn to spell and decode words they can already identify following intensive comprehension work. Furthermore, they learn to use the literate choices they have studied in comprehension activities in their own writing*
>
> *The University of Canberra scaffolding literacy program*, n.d.

4.11 The program clearly requires high levels of teacher commitment and engagement, together with effective training and support for teachers before and during implementation. Training resources in the form of teaching notes, training videos and support booklets are

being prepared for teachers in NT schools by NALP, with the teaching notes available online.

4.12 There is no program or approach in the field of numeracy of comparable scale, although the pedagogical principles embedded in Scaffolding/Accelerated Literacy may be relevant to the development of mathematical ability on the grounds that language plays such a significant role in mathematics learning (*Numeracy*, n.d.). Frigo (1999) and Frigo & Simpson (2001), have comprehensively reviewed the literature on teaching strategies for the mathematics learning of Indigenous students. Their reports likewise stress the central role of language and the need for understanding of 'mathematical English'. The two reviews are particularly helpful in identifying key issues and providing a sound framework for culturally appropriate numeracy teaching in Indigenous settings. They both emphasise the need for consultation with local communities to ensure effective contextualisation of the mathematics curriculum.

4.13 The above reports were prepared for the NSW Board of Studies and contributed to the design of its Community Capacity Research Project, *Mathematics in Indigenous contexts* (Howard et al, 2006). The project sought to engage Indigenous parents and communities in developing and implementing culturally contextualised mathematics curriculum units by seeking to engender mutual appreciation amongst all participants of each others' values, languages and ways of learning: 'The Aboriginal people were involved in making curriculum-based decisions that enhanced their sense of belonging and brought a relevance to the students' mathematical learning' (Howard et al, 2006, 45). However the final report says nothing about the impact on student achievement in mathematics. Its entire focus is on community engagement and capacity building.

4.14 The 'What works' website (www.whatworks.edu.au) and its brochure (*Numeracy*, n.d.) contain accounts of several other, relatively small-scale, state-level initiatives to improve Indigenous numeracy. Again, many encouraging conclusions are drawn and much sound advice dispensed, but there is no objective evidence that any of these projects is having a direct impact on Indigenous students' achievement in mathematics. There is an urgent - indeed imperative - need for theoretically sound and innovative approaches to mathematics education for Indigenous students and for longitudinal studies of their impact. Until substantial insights and resources are brought to bear, the serious disparities in achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students are likely to remain.

5. Better transitions and pathways between primary, secondary, post-secondary and the world of work

5.1 During the extended transition from childhood to adulthood, several critical educational transitions occur: from primary to secondary, from compulsory to post-compulsory, from secondary to post-secondary (TVET and higher education)and from secondary and post-secondary to the world of work. For Indigenous students, far more than their non-Indigenous peers, these transitions are fraught with pitfalls as well as opportunities.

5.2 The transition from primary to secondary is marked by increasing rates of absence from school (see section 3 above) although enrolment rates remain high (>90 per cent). Key factors in low levels of school attendance and early school leaving are poor literacy, writing and numeracy skills, coupled with low motivation, poverty and poor quality teaching (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; *Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage*, 2007). By age 15, at the end of compulsory schooling, Indigenous participation drops markedly, with 21 per cent not enrolled compared with only 5 per cent for non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students are only half as likely to continue to Year 12, with 31.8 per cent still at school at age 17 compared with 64.7 per cent for non-Indigenous students (*Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage*, 2007).

5.3 Considerable effort has been made in most states and territories to improve pathways from school to TVET, including provision of TVET courses in schools. The proportion of Indigenous students participating in post-secondary education has more than doubled in recent years and pass rates of Indigenous students in both TVET and higher education have increased. Nationally, non-Indigenous people are 1.6 times more likely than Indigenous to attend university, whereas Indigenous people are more likely to attend TVET programs (*Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage*, 2007). However Indigenous students tend to study lower level and shorter TVET courses, generally at certificate level, rather than higher level diploma courses (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). The latest data (*Australian vocational education*, 2007) show the percentage of Indigenous enrolments at Certificate One level to be approximately three times greater than non-Indigenous and vice versa for enrolments in diploma courses and above. Most Certificate One courses are preparatory or 'catch-up' and do not lead directly to employment. Often they seem to be pathways to nowhere. For example, a recent and comprehensive study by Alford & James (2007) of TVET pathways in the Goulburn Valley region of Victoria concluded that many Indigenous students moved through TVET in an unproductive journey that does not lead to employment.

5.4 Nationally, the data on Indigenous employment indicates that transitions to the world of work have not been easy for many Indigenous people. Indigenous labour force participation in 2004-05 was only 58.5 per cent, compared with 78.1 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians. The actual rate of unemployment of Indigenous people was 12.9 per cent, over three times higher than for non-Indigenous (4.4 per cent) (*Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage*, 2007). Mellor & Corrigan (2004) discuss at some length the links between education and employment in Indigenous settings. They argue that these links are generally weak and therefore many Indigenous people do not see any personal benefit from investing in education: when the link between education and employment is not self-evident, achievement motivation is much diminished.

5.5 Again, there are no 'quick fix' solutions. A sustained and multifaceted approach is required. Amongst the plethora of reports and reviews prepared over the past decade are some based on extensive consultations with Indigenous people that suggest promising ways forward. Miller's (2005) synthesis provides a particularly useful framework for action. Mellor & Corrigan (2004) likewise offer a range of balanced suggestions. Herewith, a summary of the directions being advocated by Indigenous people.

5.5.1 Community-school relations. Relationships between schools and their communities need to be based on reciprocity and mutual trust (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). Teachers should learn about their communities, including language use, values and educational goals. Parents need the power to determine the form and content of school programs so that community needs and aspirations are met. Miller (2005, 24) believes there is unequivocal evidence that, '... the single most important factor in assisting in the achievement of the full range of positive outcomes ... for Indigenous students is Indigenous community ownership and involvement'. These are strong words. They do echo, however, the findings of many studies over many years that Indigenous autonomy and self-determination are the keys to successful delivery of education programs.

5.5.2 A learner-centred approach. The provision of a welcoming, secure, supportive and learner-centred environment is emphasised in almost every report. Alford & James (2007) go further. They recommend that reluctant students be supported emotionally, educationally and culturally via individual case and pathway management and by pastoral/mentoring support. Miller (2005) comments on the need for academic support, especially in literacy and numeracy, tailored to each student's individual background and needs. The use of individual or personalised learning plans is one way of achieving this. McRae (2007b) also recommends the use of collaborative learning, building on the more collectivist orientation of many Indigenous groups.

5.5.3 Quality staff. Mellor & Corrigan (2004) provide convincing evidence of the importance of good teachers and effective teaching in achieving quality learning outcomes. They cite research evidence that teacher effects account for much of the explained variance in student achievement, even more so than student level factors. The message from Miller (2005, 33) is equally strong: 'There is indisputable evidence that program effectiveness is linked directly to the commitment, expertise, understanding and sensitivity of people involved throughout the training system and process'. Careful selection of teachers, along with appropriate incentives for quality performance, should be mandatory. Effective pre- and in-service training programs also are highly important. An even greater need, however, is for heavy investment in the training and appointment of Indigenous educators and support staff (Alford & James, 2007; Miller, 2005).

5.5.4 Culture and identity. Culturally inclusive schooling is an essential feature of any approach (Hughes, 2004). Zubrick et al (2006) particularly stress the importance of avoiding the deficit models of Indigenous education of earlier years, arguing instead for policies and practices that create a more culturally secure learning environment. Mellor & Corrigan (2004), note that culturally appropriate pedagogy is integral to an inclusive approach. Hughes et al (2004) explore Indigenous ways of thinking, knowing and learning and suggest teaching principles based upon them. McRae (2007b) advocates a holistic approach based on cultural recognition, acknowledgment and support. Almost all of the reviews, in one way or another, recommend that curriculum content and process be built on a strong foundation of local Indigenous cultures, languages, epistemologies and wisdoms.

5.6 It is particularly important to distinguish between the culturally inclusive schooling described above and the current trend towards school programs that seek to counter

inequality and poverty based on the work of Payne (2005) and others. The latter trend is the antithesis of cultural inclusivity. It is based on the premise that children in poverty need explicit instruction on the hidden rules that govern the thought and behaviour of wealthier groups and then learn how best to conform to these rules (*aha! process*, 2007). This deficit and racist approach is based on changing the child, not the school and is anathema to the whole ethos of Indigenous education on which this report is based.

6. International perspectives

6.1 There are many parallels between the education of Indigenous groups in Australia and elsewhere. Approaches to improving Indigenous learning outcomes in various countries and cultures need to be shared, as took place at a recent DEST/OECD international seminar in Cairns, reported by McRae (2007a). Several important conclusions were drawn, based on the experiences of Indigenous participants from six Pacific-rim countries:

6.1.1 The value of investing in early learning programs for children aged 0 to 5 years: seminar participants stressed the need to engage more effectively with families and to provide quality learning experiences in childcare settings, in order to create learning foundations for achievement in later life.

6.1.2 The value of designing appropriate data models customised to Indigenous contexts: participants emphasised the need to use data as a driver to improve learning outcomes. They therefore supported evidence-based and data-informed policy development. However they also advocated a personalised approach to student learning, with progress mapped at an individual level.

6.1.3 The value of schools and communities working together towards shared objectives with high expectations of the outcomes: participants affirmed that experience worldwide has shown the central importance of productive school-community partnerships that recognise the purpose of education from Indigenous perspectives. They also urged governments to develop the capacity of the Indigenous educator workforce.

6.1.4 The value of revitalising and preserving Indigenous languages: participants pressed for stronger partnerships to ensure improved proficiency in local languages.

6.2 A review of education in those countries where Indigenous/First Nations people are a small minority, in the land that once was exclusively theirs, shows a similar pattern to Australia in terms of low achievement and attendance levels. Patterns of response also are broadly similar, with a strong emphasis on early childhood provisions, focused literacy and numeracy programs, more effective parent and community involvement and the strengthening of student identity through culturally inclusive and appropriate teaching. Success is most likely to be achieved in those settings where Indigenous peoples have a strong sense of local ownership and control and have direct involvement in their children's learning. Benally (2007), for example, describes how one Navajo group in the USA took control of its college, rebuilding curriculum content and processes on Navajo values, wisdoms and epistemologies, with positive educational and employment outcomes.

6.3 A particularly innovative and successful approach to Indigenous underachievement is that of Russell Bishop, Professor of Māori Education at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. Funded by the NZ Ministry of Education, Bishop has conducted a substantial, long-term, action study to improve the secondary school performance of Māori students in mainstream education (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al, 2007a, 2007b). The study began in 2001 with an extensive process of listening to the voices of Māori students, as well as the voices of teachers, principals and local Māori communities. The results are comprehensively reported in Bishop & Berryman (2006).

6.4 From the student interviews Bishop and his team concluded that those Māori students who have good relationships with their teachers are able to thrive at school. They therefore focused on the qualities of those teachers who were able to establish positive relationships, using their data to develop an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP). There are two fundamentals to the ETP. The first is teachers '...understanding the need to explicitly reject deficit theorising as a means of explaining Māori students' educational achievement levels ...' (Bishop et al, 2007a, 1). The second is teachers recognising their own individual responsibility to be agents of change in the classroom. Bishop et al (2007a, 1) continue:

> *These two central understandings are then manifested in these teachers' classrooms where the teachers demonstrate on a daily basis that: they care for the students as culturally located individuals; they have high expectations of the learning for students; they are able to manage their classrooms so as to promote learning; they are able to engage in a range of discursive learning interactions with students ...; they know a range of strategies that can facilitate learning interactions; they promote, monitor and reflect upon learning outcomes that in turn lead to improvements in Māori student achievement and they share this knowledge with the students.*

6.5 Following their initial research, the Bishop team then embarked on an extensive program of teacher in-service development that involved workshops, regular classroom observations and follow-up feedback, group co-construction meetings and targeted shadow coaching. The aim was to significantly expand the number of effective teachers in the twelve participating schools. At the same time a research program monitored the impact on student achievement using multiple indicators based on qualitative and quantitative measures. The results showed significant improvements in teacher effectiveness, as well as significant gains in students' literacy and numeracy, especially amongst the lower achieving students.

6.6 The work of Bishop and his colleagues is deserving of careful analysis. Internationally, it is one of the most sustained and impressive attempts to enhance the learning of Indigenous students. The focus on teachers is especially significant. The research evidence is that teacher effects account for much of the explained variance in student achievement. Bishop has clearly demonstrated that teacher quality can be improved and that improved teacher performance can have a real impact on student learning.

6.7 Bishop's second substantial contribution is theoretical. As an Indigenous educator and researcher he has grounded his work deeply in Māori culture, values and epistemology. Indigenous educators in Australia would do well to reflect on his 'Culturally Reflective Pedagogy of Relations' (note that the concept of 'spirals' in the following quote is based on his understanding of Māori holistic learning as an outwardly spiralling and expanding process of lifelong knowledge and wisdom acquisition):

> *From the theoretical position of Kaupapa Māori research and an examination of appropriate Māori cultural metaphors, we suggested that [the improved educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classrooms] will be accomplished when educators create learning contexts within their classroom: where power is shared between self-determining individuals within non-dominating relations of interdependence; where culture counts; where learning is interactive, dialogic and spirals; where participants are connected to one another through the establishment of a common vision for what constitutes excellence in educational outcomes*
>
> Bishop et al, 2007a,1

7. Toward the more effective measurement of educational achievement

7.1 There has been almost total reliance in all states and territories and nationally, on the use of group standardised testing to measure educational achievement, typically in the areas of literacy and numeracy. In March 1997 all State, Territory and Commonwealth education ministers agreed to develop national benchmarks and to assess student performance against them. During the subsequent decade the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) developed a comprehensive process for the measurement and reporting of student performance for each of years 3, 5 and 7 in the areas of reading, writing and numeracy. These data are reported as percentages of students achieving the benchmarks in each state and territory, as well as nationally and include comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (MCEETYA, 2005). The 2005 data show a consistent pattern of lower percentages for Indigenous students in all states and territories at all three year levels and in all three areas.

7.2 There is growing concern that the collection, analysis and reporting of national data of this kind is inappropriate in Indigenous Australian contexts, especially as it masks regional and local variations in outcomes. In a particularly clear and objective report, a team from the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) argued that the inclusion of data from remote communities may conceal improvements and successes in urban and regional communities (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). They reported analyses indicating that differences in performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students on tests of literacy and numeracy are smaller in urban locations than rural and remote, commenting that:

These results are consistent with anecdotal evidence that significant regional and local differences in learning outcomes exist. But these important local and regional distinctions

are not readily accessible to researchers or policy makers and the claims as to the cause of the variations cannot be fully analysed (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, 2).

7.3 Writing several years earlier, the then Director of ACER, Barry McGaw, spoke of his own analyses of sub-sets of data, making the point that state and national averages were hiding important information. 'In fact', he stated, 'there is a quite extraordinary variation in the performances of Indigenous students':

> *The Indigenous students who perform at high levels are performing quite well and grow substantially, as far as you can tell from a cross-sectional study, between year three and year five. Those students performing at a low level are by year five no better than they were at year three. ... Those who were behind fall further behind; those who were doing well grow rather like the rest of the population.*
>
> McGaw, 1998

7.4 The analysis and reporting of state and national data also masks the very significant cultural and linguistic differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and within the Indigenous population. Standardised tests, by their very nature, reflect the norms and values of the mainstream, not of minorities, thereby disadvantaging the latter (see, for example, Partington, Wyatt & Godfrey, 2001; Tripcony, 2005). Even the process of testing itself can be culturally alienating for Indigenous students, with its emphasis on individual, timed performance. The interdependent, collectivist orientation of many Indigenous groups and their differing attitudes to the passage of time, are totally disregarded in the administration of standardised tests. Likewise the instrumental 'right-wrong' nature of the tests is anathema to the more holistic, contextualised and interconnected ways of thinking of many Indigenous peoples (see, for example, Hughes, More & Williams, 2004).

7.5 In terms of content, the tests inevitably reflect the knowledge and learning that is currently most valued in the modern global world. The particular cognitive strengths that many Indigenous students bring to the classroom are neither recognised nor measured. In mathematics, for example, the tests emphasise precision in counting, measurement and calculation, not the more fluid spatial awareness and estimation skills characteristic of many Aboriginal students (Hughes, More & Williams, 2004; Teasdale & Teasdale, 1999). Likewise in the fields of writing and literacy, the emphasis is highly verbal, with little recognition of the significant visual discrimination and visual memory skills of many Indigenous students.

7.6 From a linguistic perspective, it is important to recognise that most Indigenous students use Standard Australian English either as a second language or second dialect. There are wide variations, even within most states and territories, in the languages that Indigenous students use in their homes and communities, whether these are Indigenous languages or one of the many forms of Aboriginal English. The latter is widely regarded by linguists as a valid, rule-governed language capable of expressing the full range of human experience and with its own distinctive syntax and lexicon (*Language & culture*, 1992).

7.7 A Report of the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Torres Strait Islander Affairs affirms that:

> *While some speakers are bilingual or bidialectal and can switch quickly between one dialect and another, young children with Aboriginal English coming to school for the first time, usually have it as their only language. The failure to recognise it as a separate dialect leads to several problems. It is often looked upon as bad English with both the language and the speaker being devalued. Speakers often undervalue their dialect as a result of years of disparagement.*
>
> Language & culture, 1992

7.8 Clearly, what may be correct usage in Aboriginal English may be quite incorrect in Standard Australian English and therefore incorrect if used in response to a test item. Paul Hughes (2004) stresses the need to disaggregate test data for students and communities where Standard Australian English is not the language of everyday use in order for valid comparisons to be made. Certainly the performance of many Indigenous students on standardised literacy and writing tests can only truly be understood from the perspective of their first language, especially if that language is Aboriginal English.

7.9 In summary, it is clear that cultural and linguistic factors can impact very significantly on the measurement of Indigenous education outcomes. Aggregated data derived from standardised testing of populations at state, territory and national levels may provide quite misleading and unreliable results. Standardised testing can mask local and regional variations in outcomes, as well as masking the particular cognitive strengths that many Indigenous students bring to the classroom. Its highly instrumental approach can be culturally alienating to Indigenous students and fail to provide a true picture of their underlying capacities. Standardised testing also can give misleading impressions of literacy and writing skills amongst children for whom Standard Australian English is a second language or dialect. Mellor & Corrigan (2004) comment on the reduced insight possible from such aggregated data, arguing strongly that additional data on a wider range of educational and non-educational factors need to be collected and presented in disaggregated form to create a complex picture of educational engagement. They continue:

> *This [i.e., aggregated] data and the failure to collect it in such a way as to demonstrate the significant variation across locations, highlights the pressing need for a new approach to both research and policy into Indigenous outcomes. ... Research must be more holistic, broader-based, forward-looking and proactive. ... The solutions are not to be found in these [aggregated] data - they simply demonstrate the urgent need for sound and innovative research on which to base policy initiatives that will contribute to a resolution.*
>
> Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, 45

7.10 Mellor & Corrigan (2004, 47) go on to suggest how a new national research agenda into Indigenous education outcomes might be developed. In terms of methodology they recommend the inclusion of qualitative and case study research that is able to provide, 'richer and more personalised data than other methodologies, thus leading to a more complex understanding of the many ways in which factors impact and interconnect in the real lives of Indigenous people'. They also suggest the funding of large-scale, broadly based, longitudinal studies, with an emphasis on successes as well as problems. A more interdisciplinary approach also is advocated, with consideration of key non-education factors such as health and poverty that impact on education outcomes. An excellent example of the latter is the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, which comprehensively explores the interactions between health and education in Volume Three of its report (Zubrick et al, 2006).

7.11 Finally, both Hughes (2004) and Mellor & Corrigan (2004) very strongly recommend the inclusion of Indigenous conversation and voice in all research on education outcomes. Hughes comments on the significant numbers of Indigenous Australians with postgraduate qualifications and with skills and experience as researchers: 'From here on', he says, 'there is every reason for our people to be involved in any new research agenda'. Mellor & Corrigan (2004, 49-50) make the point even more strongly:

There is a methodological and substantive urgency to the issues of how to hear and empower Indigenous voices. If ownership by the Indigenous population ... is not engendered, no funding or policy initiatives are likely to be successful in improving the learning outcomes of Indigenous children. If the anecdotal evidence that asserts the interest and concern of Indigenous adults in the learning outcomes of their young people is proven correct, then the issue becomes one of hearing the voices and incorporating their perspectives in both the policies and research.

METHODOLOGY

Details of Procedures

An initial meeting was held with the client to discuss the details of the Research and define the scope of the Review, the development of a Research Plan, identification of the key players and stakeholders and identification of relevant data and documentation and scoping of consultation with the client, with communities and with sites to address the following issues:

- analysis over time of existing outcomes for Koorie students and workforce contributions to meeting the objectives of Koorie education policies using quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the department, from public documents, from the literature reviews and from the Reviewer's proposed consultation process;
- the research of current and projected sustainability and outcomes, wherever possible comparing trends and benchmarking dedicated provision against such positive alternative strategies as may be identified during the consultation and by a literature review;
- the analysis of related reviews, locally, (noting activity carried out as part of phase 1, for example and assuming access) in other jurisdictions and internationally; the analysis of the views and input of key stakeholders; and
- the analysis of operational connectivity between goal setting, monitoring, resource allocation, staff deployment, program delivery, staff and student participation and outcomes. The detail of implementation strategies and system connectivity for Individualised Learning Plans was explored, as one example and Literacy/numeracy as another.

The selection of schools for onsite data collection was based upon the following considerations:

- enrolments by aggregated year levels, by school type and location;
- attendance – as a measure of engagement and participation - a necessary (but not of itself, sufficient) pre-requisite to achievement indicators such as literacy, numeracy and school completion;
- literacy, indicated by AIM testing, by VELS data and by teacher judgement; and
- numeracy, as measured by AIM and VELS data sets.

The researchers met with the officers responsible for Koorie education in all nine departmental regions and engaged with a broad range of operators, including: Regional Directors; Assistant Regional Directors; Senior Education Officers; and the leaders and members of Teaching and Learning and Student Wellbeing Teams. They also met with regional Koorie Education Development and Home School Liaison Officers and school-based Koorie Educators. Additional documentation including 2006 data for Victorian Government Schools, by region, was obtained identifying:

- total EFT enrolment
- total Koorie enrolment
- Koorie Average Attendance, and

- average AIM literacy and numeracy achievement levels for years 3, 5 and 7 by
  - Indigenous student – including number assessed; and
  - Non-Indigenous student.

Central and regional officers with roles in key areas were consulted including:

- officers of the Koorie Strategy Branch;
- persons engaged directly in data collection and management;
- literacy project officers; and
- several senior officers with direct functional responsibilities for, or experience in, the leadership of Koorie education.

Operational constraints precluded direct contact with services such as DHS, VACCA, Health and the Department of Justice, although the preschool section of DHS was contacted, without success.

Reference was made by several sites to important contributions from non-government agencies. For example, Notre Dame's McAuley Champagnat Programme is a well organised referral system for Shepparton youth. Similar programs in at least two other regions relied heavily on the contributions of other non-government agencies. Again, operational constraints precluded direct interaction.

Literature and Document Review

Appropriate national and international literature sources were identified and analysed by the reviewer using standard procedures, including a comprehensive search of the World Wide Web and the results summarised in the literature review. Reports, reviews data sets and other documents specific to Victoria were obtained from the client. These were analysed and the outcomes summarised in the body of the report. Details of all documents consulted are shown in the Reference List at the end of the report.

Data Collection

A stratified sample based on size of Koorie enrolment at schools within each of the nine regions was selected for onsite data collection. To obtain a representative cross section, 54 schools were chosen on the basis of school type, level, location and size of Koorie student enrolment. Forty-six sites were visited from the chosen sample, with another two providing data during the Principals' Forum. A further three sites were substituted to preserve the range and coverage of the survey data. Data from community forums (arranged through VAEAI) provided information from 80 LAECG representatives at one meeting and a further 100 community members at five other community forums. Additional data were obtained from two regional "What Works" conferences, each with approximately 50 participants and a centrally organised "Principals Forum" with a further 90 participants, all three of which provided examples of good practice. The Branch Secretary, Victorian Branch, Australian Education Union, was also consulted and invited to provide comment on the review. Due to timing and operational difficulties, the researchers were only able to visit 48 of the selected sites. The interview sample is sufficiently large to preserve the

integrity of the overall research findings. Professor Peter Buckskin, Professor Paul Hughes, Mr John Gregory and Ms Colleen Clarke conducted the school, departmental and community interviews.

Questionnaire Development

In consultation with the DEECD, a survey instrument was developed to survey key stakeholders. DEECD distributed the document and invited responses more generally by advertisement using in-house systems (see Attachment 1 – Survey Instrument). The instrument prompted for responses based around what's working, what's not working and what can be suggested to improve outcomes. The coversheet directed respondents' consideration to areas established through discussion with the Koorie Strategy Branch, including:

- Preschool provision and the contributions of other agencies;
- Attendance and participation;
- Literacy;
- Numeracy;
- Specialist support services;
- Learning Plans and Managed Individual Pathways;
- Progressions, completions, transitions and destinations data;
- Parent/caregiver participation;
- Mainstream teaching practices and their impact on Koorie students;
- Koorie specific Teaching strategies;
- Koorie Curriculum Support Materials – Aboriginal Studies;
- Whole School Curriculum Planning;
- Performance and Development culture;
- Pedagogical approaches to improving learning outcomes, including personalized teaching;
- Indigenous perspectives within the curricula; and
- Professional learning practices.

Respondents were invited to comment during meetings on the role and value of the dedicated workforce and elements of the general workforce in key areas.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed into key issues and prioritised according to frequency and importance accorded through the discourse analysis against the research objectives.

RESULTS – FIELD ANALYSIS

While DEECD collects a great deal of data by school and by region, establishing trends in best practice Indigenous education for Koories has proven to be difficult. The recent change to data collection (VELS) creates difficulties in examining five year trends which, otherwise, might have indicated those schools producing consistent improvements. The absence of unique student identifiers does not allow individual improvements in scholastic performance to be measured. However despite these difficulties DEECD data clearly shows that while the aggregate non-Indigenous students' scholastic outcomes are improving, in general there is no comparative improvement in Indigenous students' scholastic outcomes, apart from some minor improvements in student attendance.

Findings from the Data – Key Themes

These issues are grouped, starting with the child and building out to shape the key findings from the research. As such, they cover the terms of reference, but do not follow them *seriatim*.

Forty six schools were surveyed on the basis of school type, level, location and size of Koorie student enrolment; another two provided data during the Principals' Forum; and a further three sites were substituted, bringing the total to 51 schools. Further data was obtained from approximately 370 participants consisting of 80 LAECG representatives, 100 community members at five other community forums, 100 participants from two regional *"What Works"* conferences and 90 participants at the "*Principals Forum*". From the research a number of key issues were identified and ordered according to response frequency:

- Community engagement with the school (n=57);
- Funding (clarity, release of and lack of) (n=43);
- Staffing development and training (n=30);
- Accessing schooling (n=28);
- KE: pay; appointment and allocation (n=24);
- Regional action plans (senior commitment to) (n=23);
- Teaching curriculum (n=23);
- KE Roles (n=22);
- Tracking students (academic mobility within location) (n=21);
- Student movements (mobility between locations) (n=18);
- Attendance (n=16);
- Benchmarking (n=12);
- Data Collection (n=11); and
- ITAS (n=6).

These results have been grouped together in related areas to form the key findings which need to be addressed to improve Koorie student outcomes.

Key Findings

Key finding 1
Connecting cultures – Valuing Koorie cultures to support student success

a) Accommodating Victorian Koorie perspectives within early childhood development and education to ensure a more strategic focus improving outcomes for Koorie children.
b) Positioning DEECD to promote Koorie cultures and heritage as an integral part of education.

Key finding 2
Engagement of Communities – Increasing parent participation and the participation of communities in Koorie education

a) Growing the capacity of Koorie community members to engage with the education system.

Key finding 3
0-8 Early Childhood – Building foundations for the future

a) Support for integrated 0-8 approach - DHS, Local Councils & DEECD, including arrangements for case management.
b) Importance of two years of preschool.

Key finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom

a) Funding:
   i. change & impact of Commonwealth funding arrangements e.g. ASSPA to PSPI;
   ii. slow release of fragmented, short-term funding;
   iii. multiplicity of minor funding sources; and
   iv. repetitive accountability.
b) Data – use of a unique identifier.
c) Coordinated state-wide approach to literacy.
d) Case Management approach – ILP's, MIP's.

Key finding 5
Koorie Workforce and its positioning within the broader workforce

a) Building capacity of workforce to undertake roles.
b) Building strategic partnerships with the education workforce.
c) Requirements for:
   i. clarification of roles, reporting relationships, industrial arrangements;
   ii. clear career pathways, linked to qualifications, updated duty statements and remuneration; and
   iii. revised allocative mechanism

Key finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination - exemplifying best practice

a) 'Earned autonomy' - Impact of devolution resulting in reduced coordination
b) Implementation 'gaps':
   iv. literacy strategy;

i. Students at Risk (SAR) assessment tool; and
ii. unintended side effect that LLENS and related provisions also increase the risk of marginalisation.

Communities, Identities and Engagement

The Victorian Government's officially agreed written policy statement covering Koorie education, *Yalca*, puts the child at the centre of all that is done. The literature refers to, time and again, the importance to the child of culturally safe places and of engaging students and community. Students exiting early, or not attending in the first place, are an indication that a school needs to examine its practice and provision. Case managing an absent student might well be addressing the wrong end of the problem.

There is good practice where a certain dynamic synchronicity exists between teachers, students and parents; supported by an informed leadership, in touch with regional supports and the LAECG. Unfortunately, good practice is not necessarily captured by the data systems in place, for reasons discussed in detail below.

On occasion an aggressive "colour-blindness" was put forward by a school leadership which stated with defensive pride that they treated all students the same, regardless of race. Treating different people equally guarantees different outcomes. Equity of input does not equal equity in output. They went on – "*We did not know which students were Koorie." "Until you asked the question, in fact, we did not know that information could be extracted from the CASES database.*" Some still do not know.

Community members referred, time and again, to this as a problem, suggesting that staff with more than 10 years experience should take a course in cultural understandings, with local information from recognised representatives of the various communities. VAEAI documented similar concerns and its *'Having Our Say' youth forums report and video* (VAEAI 2002) would form an excellent resource to reinforce the requirement for sensitive personal understanding and informed valuing. These VAEAI forums were broadly based, involving 19 groups. Seventy two per cent of participating students reported racism as a concern in education and 55 per cent listed teachers and problems with teachers, as their next major problem.

The exemplary teacher in-service program developed by Russell Bishop in New Zealand also would be an invaluable resource (refer to Literature Review 6.5 and 6.6). There might be significant benefit in inviting Professor Bishop to Victoria with a view to adapting his program and trialling it in selected regions.

Identity

The Commonwealth definition of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person does not discuss colour of skin, appearance or degree of Aboriginality. This is because it was constructed by the very people whom it defines, those with insider knowledge around its meaning, not only personally and collectively, but also politically. It would do well for

educators to be adequately versed in the meaning behind this definition, and not only as it refers to 2.4 per cent of Australia's population, the original custodians of this land and the oldest living culture in the world (http://www.aph.gov.au, 2000).

The issues of lack of Koorie identity and knowledge of culture amongst Koorie students were raised at all sites including community and LAECG meetings. At the majority of school sites researchers were confronted with stereotypes of what Koorie children and teenagers should look like, a total lack of awareness of the presence of Koorie children in some schools and teachers and principals who were oblivious to their unconscious ethnocentrism. There is no question that many Koorie children have issues of cultural identity and are lacking cultural knowledge, but this needs to be seen in a constructive light rather than through a distorted lens that renders the child as lacking and flawed:
… (they are) visibly Indigenous people – so I don't have to explain anything.
Teacher & Assistant Principal, 2007

Some of the schools included in the review were not aware that they had Koorie students enrolled and were of the attitude that as there were no Koorie students there was no need for Indigenous studies or courses. Comments from a teacher and principal at separate schools stated that the Koorie children did not 'stand out' from other non-Koorie students, meaning that they were indistinguishable from other children in terms of appearance. Another school, with only 1 or 2 Koorie students was of the opinion that raising awareness of Koorie issues and culture was dependent on the attitudes of these Koorie students and whether or not they were 'strong in their identity' or 'knew their culture'. This was also seen as a judgement to determine their right to claim their Aboriginality. One educator expressed his belief that "having experiences of extended family, speaking language and having knowledge of traditional culture" defined the concept of 'strong knowledge of culture'.

The subliminal messages here are that:

- Koories need to justify their Aboriginality;
- Non-Koorie students do not need to know about Koorie issues, people, culture, history – it is Koorie stuff;
- Koorie cultural knowledge is / should be innate;
- Koorie children are expected to have Aboriginal knowledge beyond their age capacity;
- Koorie cultural knowledge is expected but is not recognised academically;
- Koorie children need to 'fit a stereotype' by being visibly Koorie – i.e. having dark coloured skin and specific features;
- Students' strength of Koorie identity and of cultural knowledge, determines their right to be Koorie; and
- Non-Koories have a right to position themselves on Koorie identity and cultural knowledge.

For a child at school, whatever their age, repeated invalidation of who they are is potentially dangerous to their mental and emotional health. The psychological fall-out of repeatedly hearing, sensing and seeing the reactions and negative attitudes of others,

particularly teachers and continuously having to justify themselves, affects their capacity to be present in the classroom, let alone to be successful at school. Koorie children are not safe in a system that does not value who and what they are. Koorie children in all schools have a basic human right to be culturally safe within an environment where they spend a great deal of their lives between the ages of 5 and 15. Cultural safety means, "an environment which is safe for people where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening" (Williams, 2002).

On several occasions leaders said that they were "colour blind". The leader at one site said that he did not know how to identify Koorie students from the CASES data. The leader at another claimed that it was not until asked that they were able to identify (from CASES) who was Koorie and who was not. Curiously, she went so far as to express surprise that a couple of Koorie students had red hair and one had blue eyes.

The failure to recognise and affirm the identity of Koorie students may be linked to the spread and influence of the US author and presenter, Ruby K Payne (2005), whose work has taken hold in schools in at least three regions of Victoria (also refer to the Literature Review, paragraph 5.6). Four principals asserted that they had found her work most useful. They in-serviced staff and established for themselves a common language to deal with poverty, Koories included, despite significant research to show that the impact of poverty on Indigenous Australians is more marked and qualitatively different to the impact of poverty on other groups (Hunter, 1999; Purdie et al, 2000).

However and treated in common on the assumed basis of a common poverty, Koorie students are being told to modify their language and their behaviour as though they are all alike with non Indigenous students. As one informant put it, they are told to leave their culture and language 'at the school gate'. This absolves the school of its responsibility to develop supportive understandings of Koorie Peoples and of the differences amongst Koorie children.

It also denies the child's identity. It requires the child to develop an understanding of English as a foreign language or dialect without the supports that go with it. It is easier to obtain funds for and to get training in the teaching of English as a Second Language than it is to get funds and training for the teaching of English as either a Foreign Language, or as a Second Dialect to Indigenous children (refer also to Literature Review paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5).

Payne's (2005) work has been critiqued, but these critiques do not appear to have been promoted by the Department for discussion amongst educators in Victoria (see, for example, Bohn, 2006; Gorski, 2006). More realistic understandings and more appropriate ways are needed to connect the Koorie cultures with the dominant culture.

The Department's entrance in St Andrews Place refers to Professor Elmore's second law, namely: the effect of professional development on practice and performance is inverse to

the square of its distance from the classroom. Unfortunately, there are few opportunities for teachers to participate in Departmental provided professional development focused on Koorie education and community. The principals' forum highlighted the difficulty involved in networking professional development for teachers and the dedicated workforce. A system is needed to link both teachers and the dedicated workforce to effect the development of detailed and appropriate cultural understandings.

This is best done within a positive public context of success and public celebration. VAEAI plans to extend its practice of celebrating Indigenous achievements to schools. Its work in TAFE is evidenced in the *Wurreka Newsletter*, Special Edition, December 2006.
The forthcoming *World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education 2008*, to be held in Melbourne (http://www.wipce2008.com/), also provides a perfect opportunity to celebrate Victoria's Koorie heritage by charting new ways forward. The alternative: One way to kill a culture is to make it invisible.

Key finding 1
Connecting Cultures – valuing Koorie cultures to support student success

The Formalities of Community Engagement

Changes which have occurred incrementally in a wide range of bureaucratic structures have been compounded by the loss of ATSIC, which provided a system of community leadership and by the demise of ASSPA funding, which provided a system for local contact. Casualties include the kinds of networked inter-connectivity – local, regional and central – that once thrived to form a system of LAECG's that, as a whole, made up VAEAI and the Koorie Education Communities. The problem of connecting cultures, community and school is significant for the difficulties it presents in the absence of an effective linking mechanism. VAEAI possesses expert knowledge of Koorie communities and Indigenous networks. It produces well researched papers on a range of issues but its connectivity with the workforce is extremely patchy, and not for want of effort by either party.

Arrangements were made to connect Government with VAEAI and through VAEAI, with the Koorie education community, by way of a formal agreement – Yalca. Unfortunately, the structures that were so carefully drawn up as part of Yalca never had a chance to mature. These too were caught up in the changes, not only to ATSIC and ASSPA, but also within government as departments, state and federal, changed and were re-organised. VAEAI was reviewed before these changes became obvious, as part of the Commonwealth overview carried out by Professor Mary Ann Bin-Sallik (Bin-Sallik and Smallacombe, 2003).

One of the principal mechanisms for connectivity with regional administrations, for example, is the Regional Koorie Education Committee (RKEC). LAECG's are meant to do the same locally. Two regional directors could not identify an operating RKEC and the publication of another region listed six LAECG's, with only three operational. Yalca was also used to justify attempts by LAECG's to dictate or veto regional initiatives, school programs and staffing decisions.

There is an evident mismatch between the regional structures that were designed to link with VAEAI and the regional structures that serve DEECD. There are equally evident mismatches between schools and LAECG's:

- DEECD has nine regions, VAEAI has eight;
- VAEAI has seven country regions, the Department has five;
- the Department has four metropolitan regions, VAEAI has one;
- VAEAI has 29[2] LAECG's based on Koorie communities;
- the Department has an unknown number of school clusters and networks linked with Senior Education Officers; and
- it is still too early to know the details of how early childhood development will be accommodated, although reference is made to the importance of co-location, continuity and seamlessness in Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood released in March 2007.

VAEAI's reliance on LAECG's as its building blocks remains essentially the same now as it was in the days when funds were available to support the ASSPA and ATSIC programs that helped pay for Koorie leadership and representation. Circumstances have changed and LAECG's complain of the difficulty in getting unpaid people to travel and attend meetings. Community participants sought a modest sitting fee for members who were otherwise unpaid.

As noted, DEECD has been through several re-organisations in recent times and now includes early childhood when once it included the VET sector. DEST operates new programs in the emerging context of Indigenous Coordination Centres and SRA's. Regional Koorie Education Committees, where they are operational, attempt with varying degrees of success to serve the Koorie community by responding to both VAEAI and DEECD in spite of the mismatches.

Key finding 1
Connecting cultures - Valuing Koorie cultures to support student success

a) Accommodating Victorian Koorie perspectives within early childhood development and education to ensure a more strategic focus, improving outcomes for Koorie children

b) Positioning DEECD to promote Koorie cultures and heritage as an integral part of education

Key finding 2
Engagement of Communities - Increasing parent participation and the participation of communities in Koorie education

a) Growing the capacity of Koorie community members to engage with the education system.

[2] Estimates vary – This is the October 2007 figure, VAEAI website.

The Importance of the Early Years

Victoria is in a good position to extend early years development for Indigenous children in a reorganised department as the Victorian Government has already committed to new funding of $136m over four years. Administrative arrangements are being put in place to operationalise the new department. The development of the *Best Start* program is encouraging, as is Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood, released in March 2007, but it requires proper funding, coordinated with that of the Commonwealth.

As noted in the Review of Literature (paragraph 2.7), Victoria has one of the lowest preschool participation rates in Australia. This may help explain why more Indigenous children require additional support when they enter school. Preschool head count enrolment data is not designed to reflect issues of quality and quantity. The field evidence is that some Koorie preschool enrolments last just six to 12 weeks due to cost and transport difficulties and that the length and content of sessions varies. MCEETYA's research points to a range of quality indicators, including early and continuing access over at least two years and to a range of cultural sensitivities as being important. These are summarised in the Victorian, SA and MCEETYA reports already referred to. It also means that official records mask the true extent of under-provision, qualitatively and quantitatively.

Some schools have tried to make up for this during Reception/Year 1. Two have provided play-based socialisation for up to six months on entry at age five, stretching the time spent in the first years of schooling. They also described a variety of good practices including an association with parenting and pre-parenting programs to establish early and positive connections with young parents. Some programs led to formal certification, but most aimed to assist young parents, sometimes accompanied by grandparents, in the development of pre-reading skills using take-home packs of educational toys, readers and "talking" books. The latter are a simple and effective way of avoiding the sorts of difficulties that might otherwise arise when the parent has trouble reading.

Unfortunately, the inter-departmental gaps that have existed organisationally between early years development and education means that the existence of seamless, connected and co-located provisions is the exception rather than the rule. Planning is underway to re-organise the Department to make best use of the connectivity between the early years and education. This connectivity should be mirrored, with a particular focus on what works best for Koorie children, in organisational arrangements for Regional Advisory Committees for Koorie Children's Development and Education and in a reorganised and relocated Koorie Strategy Branch.

Key finding 3
0-8 Early Childhood - Building foundations for the future

a) Support for integrated 0-8 approach - DHS, Local Councils & DEECD, including arrangements for case management.
b) Importance of two years of preschool

Funding and Engagement

While ASSPA had its faults and difficulties, at least it provided parents and principals with a forum for the realistic exchange of personal, cultural information, connecting cultures - local with school and parent with principal. The substitute PSPI initiative has been slow to gain ground in the vacuum created by the demise of ASSPA. About 100 Victorian government schools received an average allocation of approximately $20,000 each for these projects. There are over 1,000 schools with Koorie students. Some schools complained bitterly that they were trapped by a 'Catch 22'. They were required, for funding purposes, to have their request endorsed locally, by the equivalent of an ASSPA, when ASSPA had folded. ATSIC is dissolved and the local LAECG or Co-op didn't function as might have been expected. As such, the schools affected were at a loss as to how best to proceed. Several decided to go it alone. One school put its funding application forward without local endorsement and faced the equivalent of a ban on its implementation when it was successful. On another occasion, an application endorsed by one group was boycotted by another.

On several occasions, school leadership put its own inactivity down to the undoubted problems of making local contact, or of dealing with factions if they did, so they did nothing. They described the complexities of the funding process as being more trouble than it was worth. Some programs require a threshold minimum number of Koorie enrolments to qualify, others are available to individual students, but it is hard to work out what funds are available without research and a certain amount of luck in finding the right web site. Those who did receive funds frequently spoke of funding delays, with long lead times between the application and the receipt of minor funds and short lead times for onerous accountability statements and evaluations. The DEST website reports some funding allocations for homework centres lasting twelve weeks, starting in October and ending in December of the same year. Or as one community member put it, "*It took us twelve months to find out about it, and what did we get? Six months funding*."

ITAS funding came in for more criticism. It was evident that few principals thought it was worth the bother. The few that did normally had more than 20 Koorie enrolments. One principal, with less than 10 students, learned of its existence through *Dare to Lead* and made a successful application only to be turned down by the students involved because they rejected the tutor. Another expressed frustration at what he called *"a 150 page application"* buried on the web. There is an information pack which runs to 92 pages on the website, viewed in October 2007 at: *http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/programmes_funding/forms_guidelines/guidelines_and_application_forms.htm*, but the actual application forms are considerably shorter, depending on the program. It does take time to work out which program might offer support.

DEECD funding mechanisms came in for criticism too, from principals and community representatives alike. Principals complained that funding for some programs required a

threshold; while others contained an inadequate generic funding allowance that did not vary between locations. Koorie parents were caught between two poles on their attitudes to these arrangements. Some thought "bulked up funding" hid "*black*" dollars intended for Koorie children, meaning that schools used the money for other purposes and denied Koorie students the support that should have been theirs. These parents wanted the dollars identified clearly earmarked and accounted for.

Others were critical of a process where principals were seen to manage money according to *"black problem, needs black dollars"*, meaning that general purpose equity funds for example were being denied to Koorie children. Only inadequate earmarked funds were applied. The irony is that funding arrangements intended to support Koorie students and parent engagement are now so complicated that they are in themselves an obstacle to good communication. Principals find it hard to simply and satisfactorily explain the mechanisms to their communities. Community members and parents respond by thinking principals are hiding something.

The best way forward is clear: consolidate funds; simplify the guidelines; make long term funding commitments and have transparent and accountable decision making. Few principals bother to work through the current complexities with their communities. Mapping program supports to maintain currency and contacts is too time-consuming to justify what is, after all, fragmented funding released in dribs and drabs using a wide range of criteria. Principals made repeat requests for simplicity, consolidated funding and long term commitment.

Key finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom
a) Funding –
i. *Change & impact of Commonwealth funding arrangements e.g. ASSPA to PSPI*
ii. *Slow release of fragmented, short term funding*
iii. *Multiplicity of minor funding sources*
iv. *Repetitive accountability*

Data problems – from the general to the particular.

Many people work hard under pressure to supply data. In almost every case, the data problems that exist are well known. The Department is well served by its officers but not necessarily by its systems and problems persist. As with any system of data collection, each item has known limitations and issues. Combined and adapted to suit purposes that they were never intended to suit, some data sets have grown like topsy. CASES has 47 different absence codes, which makes it difficult to maintain. Inaccuracies accumulate and act to inhibit the production of new knowledge and invalidate trend data. Some of the most common problems are described below.

Not all Koorie students of compulsory age are enrolled
It is very hard to estimate the number of students who may not be enrolled, although there are some proxy measures to indicate the size of the problem. The Department's CASES

database may be more accurate as a measure of Koorie student numbers than the ABS, but it is still inaccurate. Alford and James (2007) made detailed studies in the Shepparton region, producing figures to show, for example, that the
"*…2001 census records 375 Indigenous people aged between 5 and 14 years in the region, compared with 438 recorded by the Department for Education and Training Victoria and 984 according to Rumbalara Medical Centre records."*

Along similar lines, one Shepparton source suggested significant departures occurred at transition from Year 6 to Year 7. This could not be verified, but it links with the studies to suggest that the under-estimates in primary and secondary compulsory enrolments are of some magnitude and require further detailed follow up, probably at regional level.

These under-estimates act to understate the numbers of Koorie students. These understated numbers:

- deny the Department access to Commonwealth funds based on per capita allocations;
- deny service delivery to unenrolled students;
- underestimate the numbers that require additional support; and
- inflate achievement indicators by discounting unenrolled children.

Not all Koorie students are enrolled as Koorie students.
Some students recorded as Koorie are not and some Koorie students do not claim to be Koorie. Currently, Koorie attendance and achievement indicators depend on, for their accuracy, the voluntary identification of Koorie students in the CASES database in the first place. In the early 2000s, identification for assessment purposes relied on teacher knowledge or students self identifying at test time. Trend data are not well based.

Closer questioning at five sites where CASES identification was offered as a problem revealed an error rate of up to 25 per cent (on a base of 27) assigned as follows:

- some students refuse to identify;
- the most common cause for a refusal to identify was parent choice, especially in those instances where a child had an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous parent; and
- occasional reference was made to the perception of a parent that identification brought with it unwelcome and unhelpful assignations and attention that they would prefer to avoid.

Five schools raised this as an issue. Parent members at community forums confirmed it and that which follows.

Some students identify as Indigenous when they are new arrivals, especially those who are first generation Tongan, Fijian, or Maori. These students and their parents rightly take pride in their Indigeneity as Islanders and interpret the reference to Islanders in the enrolment template (see below) as a reference to *their* Indigeneity and they select it. Koorie parents from three schools raised this as 'Gammon' (fake) enrolments. They resented this sort of misidentification that careful enrolment procedures would avoid.

The standard CASES enrolment form includes a tick the box option that asks the question as follows:
Is the student of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? (tick one)
a)No *b) Yes, Aboriginal.*
c)Yes, Torres Strait Islander. *d) Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.*

There is no reference to the preferred term for Indigenous Victorians, which is Koorie. In that sense, no option applies and the selection may be left blank. A blank selection defaults to *Unknown* in the CASES database, which makes the Koorie student invisible in data collection. A consultant presenter based in Victoria with experience in the use of CASES data produced a sample extract from a school where 12 of 114 entries were recorded as *Unknown*. She spoke of an in-school audit which accurately identified and increased, the number of Koorie students, producing a corresponding increase in equity funding and attention.

It must be possible for the form to be amended to make it clear that Koorie is included and for schools to develop improved systems to collect the data on enrolment in the first place and to check it as part of routine audit procedures. Local Co-ops and Health services usually possess detailed knowledge, but privacy protocols are an issue.

These distortions act to contaminate data, denying unidentified Koorie students and schools access to financial and other resources they might otherwise have.

Not all Koorie students enrolled are assessed and not all students assessed are in Government schools

Footnotes to MCEETYA tables and the department's own internal research, show that significant numbers of students are absent at the time of key assessments. Absent students are not assessed and as community members point out they are then not funded when it comes to special purpose support. There is no unique identifier. This means that some students leave one school and present at another to be re-assessed, anew, as though without an academic history. Frequently, CASES data do not follow the student. There are significant discontinuities, not only between schools at the same level, but between Years 6 and 7.

It is also common practice across Victoria for some secondary students to be placed using a wide range of alternatives such as the Alpine School or McAuley Champagnat, or in some form of community placement. Although technically "enrolled" at a government secondary site, these students are also offsite, working through TAFE, a non-government school or some other collective arrangement. As such their achievements are those of other locations and not of government schools.

These practices act to mask and overstate the true extent of Indigenous achievement in government schools.

Those that are recorded as Koorie may have their results recorded inaccurately

The Department's own internal research (2007, 54), includes the following amongst several qualifiers on the use of data: '*The analysis of the 2005 data showed that there were a number of schools that had their average number of absent days per student greater than the expected number of school days*'.

These practices act to reduce the reliability of analyses seeking to establish connections between attendance and achievement. Adjusting the data may not change its limited utility. Average data is not particularly useful in making an analysis of the connection between attendance and achievement (see below).

The rules for assessment have changed over time

To quote from the National Report on Schooling in Australia (2005, p6, Footnote [d]):

> *Victoria has advised that the increase in 2005 (and in 2004) in the percentage of students reaching the Writing benchmark in Victoria was due to changes in the marking instructions. From 2004, markers were instructed to start with a particular marking category deemed appropriate for a particular year level of students. This resulted in a somewhat narrower distribution of scores as compared to those in 2003. Consequently, the 2005 Victorian marking procedures do not spread students to the lower (and upper) ends of the ability distribution. This in turn results in fewer students in Victoria deemed as below the writing benchmark.*

And, to quote again from the Department's own internal research (2007, 34):

> *Teacher assessments of student learning are made at the end of each school year. Since the beginning of the 2006 (sic) assessments of student learning are made against the standards in the curriculum as described in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). Prior to this, teachers made their assessment using the standards described in the Victorian Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSFII) in English*[3] *and Mathematics*[4].
>
> *However in 2006, some schools adopted the VELS in assessing their student progress whilst others used the CSFII. As a result, analyses of the 2006 Teacher Judgement data at the region or state-wide level cannot be undertaken. For the purpose of this report, the 2002 to 2005 results are used.*

These changes also act to reduce the comparability of observations over time. On correction, common measures applied in standard ways will help map trends accurately over time.

Aggregate data do not help to understand individual students, schools or teaching strategies

[3] Assessment strands were reading, writing, and speaking and listening.

[4] Assessments were made in the Number and Measurement strands in primary schools and the Chance and Data and Algebra strands in secondary schools.

As discussed in the Review of Literature (paragraphs 7.1 to 7.11), the aggregation of data can provide quite misleading and unreliable results, often masking local and regional variations in outcomes, as well as the particular cognitive strengths that many Indigenous students bring to the classroom. For example, our own research revealed the following assessments for Indigenous students involved in a literacy and numeracy project, as supplied by one school with a large Koorie enrolment of more than 40. Five of the Indigenous students in this particular school are in Year 3. Here are their results:

TABLE 1

		2006	2006	2007	2007
Current Grade	Name	English	Mathematics	English	Mathematics
3	FemaleA	0.5	0.5	1.25	1.5
3	FemaleB	2	1.75	2.25	2
3	FemaleC	2	1.5	2.25	1.75
3	FemaleD	1.75	1.75	2.25	2.25
3	MaleA	1.5	1.75	2	2
Average		1.55	1.45	2	1.9

The state benchmark VELS achievement for reading is expected to be 2.1 or higher and within the range of 2.0 to 2.5. These results are about the average of 1.985 for schools with similar cohorts, but are still lower than the 2.5 achieved by non-Indigenous students in 2006 (page 20, department's internal research, 2007). The average improvement is 0.45, which is not far off the 0.5 that might be expected over a full year, but it means the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous is increasing.

Female A however has made some excellent progress, particularly in Mathematics, from a low base, but is still below both benchmark, and average, and catching up. Her progress has been accelerated. She has moved up an entire VELS level in just one year. Normally, it takes two. Females B and C, on the other hand, operating from a higher base, have not made as much progress as might have been expected, and Female C is now below both benchmark and average in Mathematics. They are slowing down and, where once in Grade 2 they may have been on a par with their non-Indigenous counterparts, they are now below. This tendency for high achievers to move towards Koorie peer norms was commented upon in field observations. Ways of celebrating and encouraging high achievement are needed to redress this sort of negative norming.

Female D and Male A have progressed pretty much according to the expectation of 0.5 for English, but they remain below their non-Indigenous counterparts because they start from a lower base and Male A has made little progress in Mathematics.

Similar results can be graphed in aggregate, across the state and across the nation, but they do not show what is happening with individual students. Individual results, maintained over

time, are highly informative and illustrate the importance of local data and local action. The challenge is to produce a system that will serve both purposes more reliably than is done at present.

The results tabulated here are quite typical for schools with a large Koorie enrolment. It shows that each student requires a different, individualised, teaching and management strategy and that average data are particularly useless in meeting that end. It may be tempting to dismiss or otherwise diminish the importance of these results because they come from just five students. The results however are highly typical for the variations they show and highlight the poverty of averages and the importance of individuals in the consideration of data. Unfortunately systems data sets rely on aggregated averages to lead discussion when the focus, as stated in Yalca, should place the student at the centre of all that is done. That requires individual data, held and tracked, using unique identifiers over time.

Key Finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom
b) Data – use of a unique identifier

An analysis of the 2006 data set supplied established that 281 schools assessed 487 Year 3 Koorie students in cohorts as follows.

TABLE 2

Number of Schools	Number of Yr 3's	Total
188	1	188
51	2	102
17	3	51
7	4	28
8	5	40
2	6	12
5	7	35
1	8	8
1	10	10
1	13	13
281		487

Seventy per cent of all enrolled Koorie Year 3 students are in groups of three or less. Their average achievement is highest when they are the only Koorie student in the school. Generally, achievement drops as numbers increase, but as may be observed from Table 1, this is a particularly useless observation because it disguises the individualised teaching strategies required and the progress, or lack of it, that is being made by individual students.

It will help schools if they can reference individual Indigenous achievement against Indigenous data sets, (see also literature review, par 7.9 and 7.10). Otherwise, it is all too easy to misunderstand the ones and twos that are enrolled in isolation as part and parcel of an overall distribution for the entire non-Indigenous population. Setting the ones and twos against the entire Indigenous population will put performance in a more appropriate context.

Occasionally, well meaning attempts are made to link averaged attendances with averaged achievement data. The rationale for this comes from the well established research linking attendance and achievement. But these links are only true at the level of the individual and then only in terms of linking the probability of higher achievement with higher attendance. Minor variations in average attendance and average attendances generally, cannot be linked reliably with corresponding increases in average achievement. This is particularly the case in Victoria, where more than 50 per cent of Koorie students are assessed in very small cohorts of three or less at Year 3and it is probably the same at other year levels and for similar reasons. The sample is just too small and at school level, the results vary enormously. This is not cause for disappointment, or resignation.

The literature shows that the best understandings come at the level of the individual student referenced against students with similar backgrounds (refer to Literature Review paragraphs 7.9 and 7.10). Unfortunately, at present, there are a number of systems issues that prevent that kind of analysis at anything other than the school level. The importance of data analysis based on individual student results highlights the critical role of school based personnel in knowing how to access and use it. A straw poll at the principals' conference suggested many do not know how to and do not use, the Student at Risk Assessment Tool linked to CASES. Field comments showed that others did not know how to identify Koorie students using CASES. This is a matter for attention using existing training programs and SEO's.

Key Finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination – exemplifying best practice

b) Implementation 'gaps':
ii. *Students at Risk (SAR) assessment tool*

The data requiring analysis are held by different authorities, with justifiably different access protocols. Some are held by the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority but for different purposes, either for final year certification and tertiary entrance, or for Victorian Essential Learning Standards, and some are held by the Department. The way in which the data are held makes holistic longitudinal assessment of individual students impossible. The data are collected, but they cannot be linked without appropriate linking mechanisms, retention or access protocols. Proposals for a Victorian Academic Number may assist, provided they link with other essential records, such as preschool and longitudinal attendance data.

The simplest way of achieving the added extra benefit is to establish lifelong unique identifiers and caregiver agreements when students are first enrolled, to use them across the data gathering systems involved and to maintain them on transfer between schools or upon re-entry. It is not sufficient to say that schools can save or analyse data that will otherwise be dumped on roll over because students are mobile. The Ultranet can only provide a central data banking service if its design parameters include a capacity to capture and retain data in the first place.

Key Finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom
b. Data – use of a unique identifier

Attendance, average attendance and achievement
Average attendance data do not help to understand individuals and are highly susceptible to variations in individual attendances, student mobility and deliberate administrative decisions. The interaction between attendance and achievement, over time, is well documented for the negative impact of absence on achievement. Systemically, the department has already noted in its own internal research the significant effort that is required to validate the error ridden data. Little wonder: there are 47 CASES codes for student absence. Long term individual attendance data remove the guess work from achievement and case management. Unfortunately, and in spite of the work involved in managing 47 codes, individual CASES attendance data are not rolled over from one year to the next. Long term individual data are not available. With minor adjustments, such information could be available and it could be linked to achievement indicators and case management. The extra work involved would be more than offset by simplifying and grouping entry codes.

As already noted in the Literature Review (section 3), most reports indicate that the majority of students attend most of the time. School based data typically show about 80 per cent of students attending 80 per cent plus of the time. The literature (and this was backed up by examples in the field) shows that it is usually one, or two, or three, (nameable and known) chronic non-attenders who pull average attendances down, masking the good work and attendance of most students. These non-attenders are usually hard to manage through no fault of their own. They are often victims of some traumatic circumstance. Sometimes, they just drift off, apparently disengaged and for no obvious reason. At other times they slip away unnoticed in the general busy-ness of a school. They may be shifting between locations with separated parents, one or both of whom may be impacted by violence, substance misuse, engagement with the justice system, or chronic ill health. These issues impact directly and negatively on the child and that impact increases when the child has to move to live with another family member, or with another family altogether.

Whatever the circumstance, these children require intensive support and case management. These ones, twos or threes occurred at more than half the sites sampled. There are over 1,000 sites with Koorie enrolments. Therefore, this may impact on up to 1000 students, although without access to individualised attendance data it is not possible to say precisely how many are affected.

Schools with multiple enrolments readily identified a small number of students whose absences exceeded 20 per cent, or one day a week on average. Low attendance is not necessarily cause for pessimism. It is cause for case management and action. One of the lowest ranked attendees was put at 10 per cent, but improving, as a result of strong interagency intervention and special placement.

Key finding 4d
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom
d. Case Management approach – ILP's, MIP's

More than half of the 54 sites sampled were, when asked, able to identify one or two students as basically lost to the school and system for periods of a week or more. School aggregate attendance data – high or low - made no difference in reasons given:

- Moved interstate.
- Moved intrastate, but a long way. One side of the state to the other.
- Refusing to come as a protest, usually the result of some known disagreement, either with the school, or with another family.
- Left, basically refusing to attend. Drifted off. Wandering the streets.
- Unmanageable at school – severe violence and/or mental health issues that cannot be managed or resolved due to a paucity of local juvenile justice or mental health services.
- Excluded – in one case to nowhere until the following year.
- Placed in a protective setting by an agency. Unsafe to reveal current location.

There is a very big danger in this sort of exceptional circumstance, understandable though it might be. One of the unfortunate side effects of the stolen generation and its deliberate practice of scattering families, clans and language groups, has been to scatter normal family supports that might otherwise remain in close proximity. The dispersed availability of emergency and subsidised accommodation acts also to scatter family. The ones and twos who move for these reasons are easily lost to the system and this is a system where more than 1000 schools have Koorie students. More than 600 schools have between 1 and 5 students. The continuing absence of one student is cause for concern, but when that concern is assuaged by well meant considerations such as those assigned to culture and circumstance, then it is easy to lose sight of a great many students and the evidence is that this has happened.

Unfortunately, this is less than half the story. Koorie students gave voice to the alienation of schooling. The *Having Our Say* 2002 Youth Forums (VAEAI, 2002) made the point with an accompanying video that 72 per cent experienced racism at school and more than half had problems with teachers. Similar sentiments were conveyed by parents and community members during community forums. Thus, there are two sides to the story of attendance. Schools must look at what it is they need to change to welcome and retain students in the first place. Students are lost in other ways as well, especially during the secondary years, streamed off by a process of marginalisation which is discussed in more detail under *Senior Secondary – the end product of a process of marginalisation* below

Average attendance and individual school achievement

Unfortunately, a practice has emerged in some localities where, for one reason or another, one site amongst several becomes the preferred site for Koorie enrolments, especially for enrolments that might be difficult to manage. This is an informal mechanism and it works in a variety of ways, as described below. Its existence was confirmed by an analysis of district enrolment data by the VCOKE Review (Sarra & Wilkinson, 2007) and by a range of informed observers, including an Assistant Regional Director, several principals and Koorie parents of Koorie students.

- *Sometimes*, parents identify one school as more sympathetic to their needs than another. This is unsurprising. Devolution was justified in part to provide some opportunity for the development of specialities amongst schools and to provide parents with some choice. So it is that some schools get a name for computing, or Tertiary Entrance scores, or Koorie students. Koorie groups within a community sometimes align with one school rather than another for a range of reasons. Deliberate user choices are made in favour of some schools.

- *Sometimes*, school requirements act informally to discourage some students. Those that advertise high cost or difficult electives and language choices, can discourage students looking for studies with a practical, hands-on approach.

- Sometimes, schools will counsel students, particularly difficult students or non-attendees and their parents, that "they might be better off at such and such a place. You might find it more interesting. New start. It has a more suitable range of subjects, or skills, or ethos, or uniform policy. You can make friends there."

- *Sometimes*, schools see themselves as being targeted by other schools to accept Koorie enrolments. This trend emerged during the review of the VCOKE schools (Sarra & Wilkinson, 2007), but on the evidence presented, it is not limited to these schools.

- *Sometimes* secondary schools will counsel students, especially those with a record of low attendance, poor achievement, or poor behaviour, to enrol in a TVET course offsite or at some other off-campus location organised through a Local Learning Employment Network or community based engagement network. This practice may be masked because the school "retains" the enrolment for funding purposes, although the student is offsite.

The combined impact of these informal mechanisms – the additive effect of all these "*sometimes*" – is to concentrate some types of students in a few targeted locations. These sites develop a reputation as being the best for certain types of student and, if that means they receive more than their fair share of the more difficult, non-attending Koorie students, they accept it, albeit reluctantly on occasion. Leaders of the recipient sites openly acknowledged their role and experienced administrators observed it. Donor schools were

less forthcoming, but some were quite open about it as being in the best interests of the students. And it might be, as much as it might not be and for the following reasons.

This trend to social stratification has positives as well as negatives. The positive is that the recipient site develops special skills and networks that act to retain and engage non-attenders, at cost to their average attendance data, but with marked benefits for students and society more generally. At least one senior officer confirmed and endorsed it as an economic way of providing specialised services.

The positive for the donor school is that it places a difficult student in what it considers to be a more useful environment and its overall attendance and achievement figures improve. This is another reason why the link between average attendance and average achievement is suspect for its utility. High average attendance may be a sign of social stratification, rather than of successful teaching. Schools that have less than their fair share of Koorie students, or more than their fair share of exits, might be examined more closely by regional officers with a view to providing extra support for improved engagement and retention. The negative for the system is that high concentrations of more difficult students can act to normalise lower expectations, making it more difficult to staff, more difficult to attract general enrolments and more difficult to maintain high achievement levels and expectations.

Zubrick et al (2006) showed that students in low density schools performed better than students in high density schools. The understood mechanism is one of immersion, meaning the student is constantly and necessarily exposed to Standard Australian English and higher expectations. Departmental data pick up the same achievement trends. It serves as a warning that the unchecked development of high density locations will have a negative impact. Several high density schools reported staffing difficulties and they expected these to get worse, not better, with the current demographic.

The haphazard concentration of non-attenders in a few locations will not improve attendance. There are two major sets of influences, each of them critical to success. The first is to make certain that each school is a culturally safe and welcoming place, with high expectations, sensitive understandings and informed practices. The second is to case manage the few non-attenders at their many locations; to case manage each student individually, using a wide range of strategies, with those strategies which apply best, arrived at in group discussion, amongst informed staff, with the student and/or caregiver and with other agencies as the case may require.

A more systemic provision is required for the majority of students in need, widely dispersed across the more than 1,000 sites that have Koorie enrolments. The best places to start will be in revitalising programs to serve both of the major sets of influences and to support schools with a disproportionately low enrolment, low retention and high absence. Chronic non-attenders will need case management using Individual Learning Plans.

Most of the sites with large Koorie enrolments and a low average attendance, showed remarkable persistence and celebrated their successes, including the site where the one

student had an attendance rate of 10 per cent which had been addressed by successful case management. It was equally obvious that some of the sites with high average attendances had small, selective enrolments, including a few students that they did not know were Koorie and did nothing about. Attendance management practices and enrolment policies for schools that are selective by deliberate decision, or in default, should be reviewed to reflect, at least, community values and a proportionate share of enrolments.

In summary, aggregated attendance data act to mask all kinds of achievement indicators and successful management strategies, including the achievements of schools with low average attendances that are dealing successfully with the most difficult cases. Too often, schools with high attendances are offloading their difficult cases, failing to change themselves, or to recognise and extend regular attenders.

Key finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom.
d. Case Management approach – ILP's, MIP's
Key finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination - exemplifying best practice.
b. 'Earned autonomy' - Impact of devolution resulting in reduced coordination
Implementation 'gaps':
iii. *Unintended side effect that LLENS and related provisions also increase the risk of marginalisation*

Tracking Koorie Student Progress
There is a rough and ready solution to the problem of cultural bias in test instruments and that is to reference Koorie achievement data for individual Koories against achievement data for the Koorie student population as a whole and not against the non-Indigenous population. That approach is taken in New Zealand. It better serves to inform case management strategies at the local level because it reduces the problem of cultural bias. It relies, however, on the accurate identification of Koorie students in the first place and on the development and use of a unique identifier across the system.

Mellor and Corrigan (2004) point out that more work needs to be done on program validation for Indigenous students. The data sets accessed did not permit accurate longitudinal analysis of student attendance or achievement profiles. This makes it impossible to reliably measure the impact of any program or policy over time.

ABS data on population mobility suggests that about ten per cent of the entire Victorian population changes residence in any one year (*Population mobility - Victoria*, 1999). These problems are magnified at the local level. Today's Year 5 students will not be the same group, with the same teacher, that was assessed in Year 3 two years ago. Indigenous students have higher mobility and they exist as a smaller cohort, so the mismatch is even more pronounced. When checked for change at a local level, mobility indicators ranged up from a low 10 per cent a year, amounting to a 50 per cent turnover between Reception and Year 6. Data tabled from another school with a large Koorie enrolment, chosen by the

region as a Literacy pilot, showed that only three of nine students had been assessed in both semester one and semester two. Five were new to the school and one was absent. This highlights the need for a central database to track mobile students and their achievements. How can that region reliably report on the success or otherwise of its literacy strategy at that school and others like it?

Practically all Australian achievement data sets, including those held in Victoria, rely on school based cohorts at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It might be possible to draw some overall comparisons at jurisdictional level, but even at that level footnotes to tables frequently show changing contexts and changed measures. Locally, mobility means that aggregate long term data are extremely suspect (Refer to Literature Review section 7). Even well maintained local data sets are extremely unreliable indicators of Indigenous achievement trends over time because the same students are not compared.

The best way forward requires the development of a system based on unique student identifiers to permit the tracking of individual students over time. Victorian Government schools enrol over 40,000 new students annually. ABS data indicate that there were 802 Indigenous births in Victoria in 2005 (*Births, Australia*, 2005). It is possible to manage that small number more carefully using the Ultranet by paying careful attention to enrolment procedures to establish identity and assign or use a unique identifier. The Ultranet can act as a data warehouse to track individual students, transfer their data when they transfer and to reference their achievements against the rest of the Koorie population and against their participation in projects designed to improve, for example, literacy or numeracy.

Key Finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom
b. Data – use of a unique identifier

Literacy teaching
A great deal of work goes into collecting, maintaining and analysing data sets and in returning the analysis to schools by way of the School Level Report (SLR) and to jurisdictions via the National Report on Schooling. (MCEETYA, 2005).

Most teachers know how their students are going well before testing time or system feedback. What is there to support good teachers in the best ways of teaching literacy to Indigenous students? Where can good teachers go for advice, and how reliable is it?

It is very difficult to establish whether or not any particular reading program is more effective than any other because the means to evaluation over time are not available. (Refer to Literature Review section 4). Indigenous students were not identified in Victoria as part of the planned evaluation of the Literacy Improvement Teams Project currently underway with 45 specialists at a cost of $11.7m over two years. The Koorie Strategy Branch paid for an extra two advisers in one region and extracted from that region a commitment to examine the impact on Koorie children. It is not clear how this might be done in less than two years without individual identifiers. Preliminary analysis, based on a list of 160 schools chosen for the overall project, suggests that as many as 2,093 Koorie students might be

enrolled in the 160 schools. However, the number in each cohort that might be directly impacted is very much lower – as the following reasoning shows – maybe as low as 60.

Based on the 2006 data set there were only:

- 146 Year 3s
- 182 Year 5s
- 177 Year 7s

in the 160 schools chosen for the pilot (all numbers are for numbers of Koorie students). Only a fraction of these students are likely to be directly impacted by the Project in that school and then for less than two years before an evaluation is made. Several schools denied the Project was underway when asked to describe the way it was unfolding in their school. They had seen little except a small allocation of Casual Relief Teacher days. This was probably due to the slow roll out, exacerbated by staff shortages. Some schools will have less than a year between the time they start to implement the program and evaluation. That is too short a timeframe to witness anything durable.

Closer checks with several sites uncovered problems which can only make it harder to get a reliable result in the time allowed. One school shared one salary across four schools, using two part time teachers: one 0.4 and the other 0.6. Other suitable staff simply were not available. The plan was for the part timer to work with two teachers, chosen for their proven skill and willingness to work in the way required. Unfortunately, one of the part timers had to withdraw. The program was in abeyance. In another, the key teacher had moved on, promoted. Staff changes act against the program due to normal teacher absence and mobility and this was a problem in several schools.

The project pattern of one specialist working with two more than ordinarily competent teachers was fairly typical in the schools that recognised their own involvement. Unfortunately, this acts to dilute and delay whole school impact, a point made with some heat by three principals. It limits supportive intervention to a small part of the school and then, for a short time, because the specialist has to work with a different pair of teachers each year, maybe even the next term.

One region provided a detailed project plan. It intends to involve 48 teachers over two years, staged as six each term, over eight terms, with the last six to be engaged in the last term of 2008. Two teachers must come from each school involved. That means this project is limited to, at best, 24 of the 75 schools with a primary Koorie enrolment. Many will miss out. Twelve schools will not participate as planned until the second half of 2008, which makes problematic their inclusion in the evaluation of a two year project. Schools have more than two teachers, so the dilution factor increases. Staff cannot work with other teachers without release. The limited number of Casual Relief Teacher days, coupled with a decreasing number of high quality relievers, acts against the availability of the chosen teacher and against the class when that teacher is absent on the project. This sort of delivery dilution means that perhaps 60 Year 3 Indigenous students will be involved across the state. It might be more, it may even be less. The Literacy Improvement Team Project, as with many of its kind, state and federal, has only short term funding – two years. It takes time to roll it out, compressing timelines between actual implementation and evaluation to less than

a year. Parents see this, as well as teachers and each alike develops a well deserved cynicism about government commitment which was reflected during discussion. It simply is not possible to reliably measure sustainable change in such a small population within such a short time frame.

The *area* working best in Victoria is Year R-2 inclusive, where the focus is on the development of decoding skills. This is attributed to three main factors:

- Good practice, developed during an early years Literacy Improvement Project, since discontinued, but supported generally through the bulked-up funding arrangements that apply to years R-2. One school denied that the funds had been included, but others accepted that they had been, but were inadequate. That aside, the results have been enduring.
- The availability of Reading Recovery programs. Again, the source of funding and its adequacy was disputed, but a reliable and responsible central source suggested that about 18.5 per cent of Koorie students participated in this program. Eighteen per cent left it too, leaving just 0.5 per cent to benefit from anything other than the base allocation.
- Culturally neutral assessment, based as it is, on the mechanics of decoding.

The generally well regarded and highly effective, Reading Recovery Program came in for its share of criticism, from teachers and parents alike, for its practice in some locations of excluding students who missed sessions. Students such as these may require immediate referral through the Department's formal assessment program for Students with Disabilities. Instead it seems they are left out altogether, punished some more as nuisances for their absence, which is why parents at some community meetings and concerned grandparents doing their best to get the child to school, were resentful.

Another area of general concern is for Years 3 to 7, particularly Years 3 and 5, when achievement gaps open up between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Some parents at community meetings argued in favour of extending the Reading Recovery Program because they had seen its success and wanted it to continue.

Sites use a great many different strategies to establish strong literacy programs, but it is impossible to work out with any accuracy which ones might be the most effective, or even just plain effective. The variety in use is evidence in itself of the energy being applied in a desperate attempt to lift literacy levels. The diversity of resources and strategies in use is indicated by the following list:

- Scaffolding (the same as Accelerated Literacy with a different set of proponents);
- Explicit Teaching, coaching;
- YACHAD, a philanthropic Israeli scheme under trial in four schools;
- Rainbow Readers;
- Ashton Scholastic, computer based testing, linked with:
- National Geographic graded readers;
- THRASS (see for example, *Education Times*, May 25, 2006);
- First Steps;

- Indij Readers; and
- Ruby K Payne's linguistic register.

There are links and overlaps between many of these. Most schools use a hybrid strategy, dictated by the resources available and teacher backgrounds.

Currently, the market is heavily influenced by what is available at a cost that schools and teachers, can afford. All up, common course costs, usually split three ways, amount to about $1000 per participant. This is apportioned as follows: about $300 from the teacher; $300 from the school; and another $300, usually from the school or sometimes from a special program, for materials.

Mention was made of three main providers, outside an explicit teaching project the Department already has underway, which was discussed above. Commercial considerations prevent public comment on the effectiveness of private providers. The Department commissioned an internal literature review which covered some, but there are no extensive evaluations or knowledge bases established over time against the Victorian Indigenous population. Two schemes have been assessed against overseas student populations, one in the US, the other against a small number of ESL students in Australia. Tripcony (2005) and others have argued that Aboriginal English, or Koorie English as it is known in Victoria, demands acknowledgement in the development of literacy teaching strategies. It is not good enough to validate a program against speakers of overseas languages and expect it to work with Koorie students.

The application of more informed strategies might be assisted if there were some local investigations of language patterns and dialects used by students, especially if these were assessed using longitudinal data sets based on a system of unique identifiers (See, for example, Literature Review paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5). The single word, 'country', for example, has many more connotations in Koorie English than the Standard Australian English understanding. This is not a matter of word substitution, where the word *murra* for example, might be substituted for 'hand'. Many other words: 'share', 'deadly', 'only', 'shame', 'charged up' and even the word 'Koorie', to select just a few, mean much more in Koorie English than they do in Standard Australian English. Conversely, many words in Standard Australian English mean a lot more to non-Indigenous Australians than they do to Indigenous Australians. This is the type of problem that bedevils the development of culturally neutral assessment instruments. Koorie students may not have the linguistic background required to comprehend what they are being asked to answer in Years 3, 5 and 7 literacy assessments or in mathematics. There was much discussion about the educational application of Ruby Payne's linguistic register (Payne, 2005) and of the need for explicit teaching to boost inferential learning and comprehension of Standard Australian English for Koorie students. The sort of boost that has been given via Reading Recovery to assist 18.5 per cent of students in the development of decoding skills is not there beyond Grade 1and it should be.

If, as Yalca suggests, the student is placed at the centre of all that is done then, chances are, the student is at the centre of this maelstrom of activity

In summary, it appears that many Indigenous students are being cycled through a range of literacy and writing schemes as they change grades, teachers and locations; and as locations change policies, programs, principals, teachers and resources in response to short-lived, short-funded initiatives at state and commonwealth level. A more considered approach to standardisation seems appropriate. A start might be made by pooling all the different sources of government funding, state and commonwealth, to develop enduring, long term programs for evaluation with funding certainty. Long term programs, with long term data sets using unique identifiers, will be very important aspects of program validation.

Key finding 4
Supporting students and teachers in the classroom
c. Coordinated state wide approach to literacy
Key finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination – exemplifying best practice
b. Implementation 'gaps'
i. Literacy strategy

Individual Learning Plans, Managed Individual Pathways and Personalised teaching
Individual Learning Plans were mandated in two regions, Loddon Mallee in 2006 and Hume region as an official pilot in 2007. The Hume region implementation will be formally evaluated by the Department to inform decisions about the prospect of a system wide extension. Several considerations emerged during consultations in the course of this review and they are set out below.

There are over 8000 Koorie students and there may be more if enrolment and identity procedures are improved. For some schools with large numbers – more than 20 Koorie enrolments - significant extra work is involved. One school employed a specialist teacher to write the plans for all students, defeating the purpose of having a collaboratively developed plan in the first place. In another school the principal declared, "*that was last year's priority*" implying it was not happening again this year – or being checked for either, apparently. He reported that he was not going to complete funding accountability returns, nor learning plans, consigning these and many other external interventions to the same basket. There are limits. Schools cannot declare themselves exempt from building regulations, or federal law. They can earn a certain amount of autonomy, provided they observe basic government policies, a point that needs to be reinforced by line managers. Fragmented funding, released in dribs and drabs with onerous and overlapping accountabilities built up the sort of frustration evident in this principal who extended it to apply to all Koorie programs.

Two principals, accompanied by the Assistant Principal whose delegated task it was to manage Individual Learning Plans, said they had not seen a template. Still, other schools simply developed their own. A web search of SofWEB produces many variants. This highlights the problem of ensuring that all people are properly informed because the template that existed as part of a carefully prepared print package provided to all schools in the region was indeed one among many. These issues highlight the gap between policy and

practice, a gap that can only be reduced by effective planning and professional development.

Valuable advice came from an experienced Student Welfare Coordinator in a school outside the mandated regions. The comments are repeated in full for their relevance:
Cautions against a "formulaic" response which would be meaningless. That's the risk. Must be authentic documents, overseen by experienced practitioners (cites own training, special education background, NSW Individual Teaching Plans). Must be individualised.

Has the advantage of accountability (all round – student, staff and family). Records preferred learning styles, objectives and provides strategies to match these. A vision for each student, that moves with the student (mobile students) and grows with the student. Must take into more account the living arrangements for each student, especially those placed in out-of-home care (foster or ward placement via VACCA).

Requires a clear protocol, especially where there are several agencies involved, e.g. DHS, Justice, and Health, otherwise student can get "lost" in the process. Must be clear about who notifies who when changes in circumstance occur – such as alternative placement, home conflict. That may not be a Department of Education (or school) role. Might be police or DHS. Role of DHS must be clear in relation to how it works with and informs the school. Must include a grievance procedure for staff who may hold reservations about actions not taken, taken, or planned to be taken, which, in the teacher's professional judgement would be against the student's best interests.

Protocols exist, don't know if they are always followed (suggesting it is not and that it has a negative impact when they are not).

Talks in favour of Individual Transition Plans – aimed at transition points:
- *School entry*
- *Year2 to year 3*
- *Year 6 to year 7*
- *Year 10 to Year 11/12.*
- *Year 12 and exit.*

*Suggests a planning process modelled on the Victorian department's formal provision for students with disabilities, but not necessarily identical. Focused more on the **process** of teaming key teachers with the student and caregiver than on copying the exact format.*

Suggests review once a term – Assistant Principal, classroom teachers, family/carer, child, with (as relevant) VACCA, Pathways, Agency person and any specialist teacher.

Involve carer by phone if cannot get to school.

There are clear and significant resource implications if this type of thoroughness is to be followed for all Koorie students. Two alternatives are either a quick tick and flick, which is meaningless, or the development of strict and agreed criteria to apply individual learning

plans, where indicated by a set of clearly laid out circumstances, such as attendance below 80 per cent. It will be a significant task, however it is done. There are over 1,000schools with Koorie students. Teaching staff change every year. As such, it requires a system-wide response, targeting KE's, Principals, Assistant Principals and Student Welfare Coordinators.

The usual practice of personalising teaching and support to suit each student is commendable. Some schools elect to produce the equivalent of an individual learning plan as a matter of course. Students will be sensitive about the implementation process. Koorie students, in common with all other students, have mixed views about anything that sets them apart. Some are proud to be Koorie, some are quietly satisfied as long are they are not embarrassed and some regard anything different that draws attention to them as an embarrassment. Some students are all of these things at the same time. Just over 600 Koorie students are spread across more than 500 schools in cohorts of one to three. At school, these students are culturally isolated and particularly vulnerable to anything that sets them apart. There are not enough of them to form a critical mass for personal support. About two per cent already have an Individual Learning Plan as part of the program for Students with Disabilities. Extending a program using the same name might be rejected as an attempt to associate every Koorie student with that program, adding extra, outdated, deficit, pejorative connotations of disability to the issue of Koorie identity. Alternative names were suggested during field discussions. Of these, there are two that may be useful – Personal Learning Plans or Koorie Individual Education Plans.

Senior students have Managed Individual Pathways, but these are not the same as individual learning plans and issues of connectivity between the two will have to be resolved. MIP's are also meant to be used with Year 9 Koorie students identified as being at risk. Year 9 is a major departure point. Koorie parents criticised some schools for delaying the use of these plans until year 10. It may be that an alternative is to use elements of the MIP's planning process to orient students from Year 6 and on. *Having Our Say* (VAEAI, 2002) highlights the importance of an early orientation linking further study and vocation.

It is suggested that a small dedicated workforce be formed as part of a central office commitment to progress good practice gradually across the system.

Key finding4
Supporting students and teachers in the classroom
b. Data – use of unique identifier.
Key finding 5
Koorie workforce and its positioning within the broader workforce
c. Requirements for:
iii. Revise allocated mechanism

Key finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination – exemplifying best practice
a. 'Earned autonomy' – impact of devolution resulting in reduced coordination

Senior Secondary – the end product of a process of marginalisation

National and international research points to the importance of early intervention. High quality pre- and early- years care, development and education provide the best return. The literature shows that interventions affected in later years, even in years 3 to 5, are increasingly ineffective and costly. See for example Penman, 2006; and *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood*, Victorian Government, March 2007

It is the exception rather than the rule for the later years of secondary school to provide anything in the way of basic literacy instruction, benchmark assessment, or diagnostic assessment because it is assumed those things will have been attended to in the earlier years. The few programs in place are high cost remedial programs, some of them at adult level. Clearly, it would be better for the student and more cost effective, to effect improvements in the early years.

During years 8 and 9 a process of marginalisation leading to eventual unemployment intensifies as student attendance and achievement tail off. Year 9 is proportionately the major departure point in Victoria, but significant numbers are lost between years 6 and 7and during the remaining years of secondary schooling. It is hard to judge without systematic individual attendance data over time, but the indications are that those who make it through year 10 have a good chance of staying on to complete year 12. However, very few make it through –just 107 VCE completions in 2006. Some just leave.

Other low attending, low achieving students end up being placed in some other external program through well organised Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLEN's). To some extent at least, it is the very effectiveness of LLEN's that is causing so few to make it through to year 12, but that is not to say that LLEN's are not needed. They are needed in order to address the deficiencies of earlier years by substituting something more engaging than an unaltered mainstream in the later years. LLEN's represent a lot of work by many people. It is interesting to speculate what might happen if similar effort was put into developing networks and programs to reduce alienation in the first place.

Alienated youth might undertake work experience, community placement, or some sort of specialised hands on activity – e.g., fabricating electronic kits to make MP3 speakers or even adventure training. More frequently, the disengaged take TVET modules or Community VCAL and participate in programs for basic literacy and numeracy. Cost estimates vary about a figure of $6,000 per student. Despite the high cost, the positives are that these programs retain some engagement for students who might otherwise be lost to the system. Occasionally and only two could be named, the student returns more motivated to the mainstream and makes a success of it.

There are many negatives that, together, result in high levels of unemployment for participants in these schemes. Koorie students are said to be over-represented. However significant masking of school results is likely as outplaced students remain on secondary school rolls of convenience where one school amongst many accepts the administrative

enrolment requirements for a group of schools. Warnings too have been made by Roger Holdsworth (2004) in *Real Learning, Real Futures A Brief Evaluation and Reflection*,

> *Over many years, various criticisms have been made of such models: they focus on behavioural characteristics of individuals - particularly in a deficit mode; they focus on 'fixing' students; the situations and approaches within schools remain un-touched (in the worst of cases, students are returned to an unchanged situation that has contributed to the 'problem'); they disconnect students from the broad range of on-going options – they are 'dead-end' courses; they concentrate students with 'problems' in isolation from other students; and on a broader canvas, they marginalize structural solutions as 'alternative' to an unchanging 'mainstream.*

This was reported in several locations, with serious negatives:

- A site's reputation can act to attract more of the difficult enrolments, with negative consequences of low expectations: it was described as 'dumping' by several sources;
- It is very hard to find and retain the specially skilled staff required for success. One or two people can make the program and it can collapse if they leave;
- The site can become a magnet for visitors, turning it and the students into some kind of fishbowl. It takes a lot of time to deal with all the visitors, looking for 'good practice', when the good practice they ought to be seeking is back in the mainstream or the early years to start with;
- Sites frequently depend on short-term, left over, philanthropic funds or a few volunteers, public and private; and
- Successful sites tend to be an exception and, as good as they are, they cater for a minority. The Youth Options Guarantee is taken seriously, with estimates that around 500 young people, including an unknown number of Koories, required access in the three regions where figures were used. Much less than that number participate in these schemes. The rest are lost.

As evidence, one offering involving less than 20 students relied, primarily, on two experienced retirees. This was in the same region where another principal estimated the number requiring support under the Youth Options Guarantee would be in the order of 400-500. In another case, the entire program had been outsourced to a private provider at a cost of $6000 per participant student, while yet another required a levy based on enrolment. The resource intensive nature of these programs meant that additional funds had to be found from a wide range of other sources and a lot of work was put into this endeavour. Principals recognised the need for these programs to continue, but expressed concern about the costs involved and the sustainability of staffing.

For these students, program placement might be a lifeline, a second chance, an option to re-engage with the mainstream after a period of respite and rehabilitation. And it might not be. Principals, when asked, were able to name several students they had referred to these programs. Only two could name students that had returned to an unaltered mainstream. It might also be a life sentence – easing the way to eventual disengagement, loss and

unemployment. Further and better research is needed. The movement from mainstream to the margins requires careful monitoring, careful management and specially selected and supported staffing if it is to remain the lifeline that it is meant to be. It also requires an equally dedicated effort to identify and address the reasons for such mutual separation in the first place. See also the discussion in the literature review at pars 5.3 and 5.4 which links this practice with increased unemployment.

There are some excellent offsite programs, but little was said about what was being done to address mainstream school deficiencies in the first place. The successes of offsite programs can be used to improve practice within the mainstream. The best return on investment occurs in the early years, but even so, more students will be lost before programs there can take effect. Even with the will and the resources, it will take time for the mainstream to change itself. There will be a continuing requirement for special purpose secondary programs.

As such, a more systematic provision is required than the effort that most schools must undertake to source leftover funds from a wide range of local, state and federal government programs and agencies, as well as philanthropic bodies. This not a planned or systematic provision and it may be viewed as chaotic neglect, a side effect of devolution that has escaped monitoring in central office. The negatives of this kind of specialised placement require careful monitoring and management at regional level, with deliberate collegiate strategies put in place across sites to spread enrolments and to change and improve mainstream effort evenly in the interests of achievement.

The minority of students that stay on show a distinct preference in their choice of subjects. An analysis of enrolment patterns confirms that VCAL is popular and lot of effort has been put into developing one of the most popular, Community VCAL, which is delivered offsite. Unfortunately these courses limit options for post-school study and tertiary entrance and other outcomes as discussed in pars 5.3 and 5.4 of the literature review. This matter was touched on by community representatives concerned about the low numbers of university graduates and the number taking general studies rather than, for example, medicine. These observations raise difficult questions in principle about student engagement, subject by subject, at secondary level. It is possible to identify subjects with low engagement rates and to introduce programs designed to lift those rates by incorporating Koorie perspectives, by setting enrolment targets and by subject specific support programs for students and teachers. Professional subject associations could be supported to provide a lead.

In summary, the situation in the senior school years is that only a small proportion of Koorie students complete a school-based Year 12 and even fewer choose the academic VCE option and university pathways. Schools must be better supported both to build basic skills in the earlier years and subjects modified to provide a range of options in the middle and senior years that will retain the interest of a greater number of these students onsite. Currently there remains a need for alternative programs, most conducted out of schools, to engage young people who are disenchanted with the school offerings. Although some excellent programs exist, as a whole these alternatives also have a number of limitations,

including the tendency to further separate participants from the mainstream. Evidence based assessment and planning and monitoring of outcomes is urgently required.

Key finding 4
Supporting students and teachers in the classroom
a. Funding
iii. Multiplicity of minor funding sources

Key finding 5
Koorie workforce positioning within the broader workforce
a. Building capacity of workforce to undertake roles

Key finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination – exemplifying best practice
b. Implementation 'gaps'
iii. Unintended side-effects that LLENS and related provisions also increase the risk of marginalisation

Workforce Issues – The Dedicated Workforce
Outlined above are reservations about data collection and analysis as applied to commonly used outcome indicators. Even so, macro analysis of 2006 achievement data for schools with KE's and for schools without, indicates that, in aggregate, students do better in schools without KE's. The WAACHS report produced a similar finding using a more rigorous analysis (Zubrick et al, 2005). This is not a disturbing finding because its most common implication is based on a false assumption to start with, that is, that the reduction is somehow the fault of the dedicated workforce. Fifty-four KE's cannot be held responsible for whatever it is that a very much larger mainstream workforce cannot achieve in the first place. Aggregate data hides outstanding achievements in difficult circumstances.

The Department's own analysis sheds some light on the mechanisms at work and the complexities involved. This report shows that, in aggregate, achievement reduces in:

- schools with large numbers of Koorie students; and
- in disadvantaged schools, as indicated by
  - measures of parental occupation and
  - the Department's Student Family Occupation Index.

Both Zubrick (2005) and Purdie (2000) produce detailed information to highlight the importance of Koorie educators in the development and delivery of programs for Koorie students. Their findings were reflected in the field by both community and co-workers alike who spoke highly of the role and value of Koorie Educators.

Approximately 180 community members - 80 at a meeting of LAECG's convened by VAEAI and more than 100 at five meetings convened around Victoria - spoke strongly in support of the dedicated workforce as an essential link between community and teacher/student interaction. Members of the review team met with many Koorie Educators as individuals and with several in groups, including a group of 15 at Mildura. The evidence is that Koorie Educators have a detailed knowledge of individual students, their interests

and circumstances. Their capacity to connect school, teacher, parent/caregiver and student was relied upon by school leaders as an essential support. They act as a conduit and linking mechanism with other agencies in the interests of a child's education and welfare.

Koorie Educators are commonly used in one of two major roles, sometimes as a blend of both:

- they work broadly as well being officers, managing home-school liaison, interagency connections and community contact;
- they assist the teaching and learning program, sometimes by supporting children withdrawn from the classroom or more generally, by encouraging student engagement with their learning program, by tutoring, brokering and advising teachers, parents, caregivers and students on how best to work together; and
- occasionally, Koorie Educators are expected to deliver cultural training to staff generally and provide specific cultural advice. At other times, they arrange for the delivery of cultural advice and information, using their network of community contacts to arrange for elders or other people regarded as appropriate by the community to make the presentations.

Generally, they are highly valued for their knowledge of and networking with the local community, Koorie children and their parents or caregivers. These observations are made regardless of gender, but with the added observation that male Koorie Educators are very useful role models for male Koorie students.

It was rare to find an instance where a Koorie Educator worked directly to provide classroom support as a teacher aide, supporting a child and the teacher, in the classroom, although it did happen occasionally. Most are kept more than fully occupied in a wide range of general learning and wellbeing tasks, all oriented about students as individuals and their circumstances.

Principals spoke of the importance of maintaining and developing interagency networks to remedy the de facto involvement of KE's and KEDO's as untrained, substitute case workers. Interagency arrangements did not always work out well for a few of the more difficult cases involving long term absence, abuse and mental health. This was raised as an issue by principals on several occasions. They disagreed with the directions taken by other agencies, most commonly DHS, in the way that they managed a child's placement or re-location. They also argued that a lack of child adolescent mental health services left them with no alternative but to suspend some of the most violent young people without effective referral for support. They suggested that long term absences were as much an issue for DHS and the justice system in their work with families, as they were for schools and KE's, especially when families responded abusively to legitimate inquiries about a student's absence.

More commonly, interagency operators were praised for their constructive participation in matters of student welfare. Police particularly came up for positive comment in their work with youth and families. Although on balance there were many more positive comments than negatives, something must be done about the negatives. The Grampians region had clearly defined and established procedures linking interagency operations at the most senior

level. The heads of each agency came together regularly to work through forward strategies and issues of concern. Principals could refer issues to a more senior departmental officer for resolution using these networks. Network meetings did not have to be long or frequent to establish durable relationships to assist efficient interaction and grievance resolution.

The evidence is that KE appointments across more than one site usually resulted in an unfair burden on all involved. It made life difficult for the worker trying to manage the competing demands and complexities of two or more sites. It made it difficult for school leadership trying to manage the one worker who also carried unknown commitments from the other site. Very occasionally, the complexities become well nigh unmanageable, detracting from overall effectiveness. No travel assistance was provided. No full time worker should be made to work across more than two proximate sites. Part timers should only be appointed to a single site for similar reasons.

The report drafted to help manage workforce devolution in 2004, *Koorie education transition project*, contained 20 recommendations that have not been acted upon (Department of Education, Victoria, 2004). KE's have been appointed on a series of twelve month extensions ever since, subject to review. This in itself generated high levels of cynicism and staff turnover. The report suggested that their role statements and their work value required re-assessment. Three sites have already adopted work-arounds, paying over and above the award rate to retain valued officers. They are amongst the lowest paid workers in the whole of the Victorian Department for Education and Early Childhood Development workforce, yet they are expected to provide realistic advice and leadership to solve the most difficult and challenging student management issues.

The arrangements recommended in the report (Department of Education, Victoria, 2004) have not been put in place. Recommendations two and nine in particular, updated as need be, should be attended to. On page ten it shows that about 80 per cent relied on Commonwealth funding, the continuation of which was in doubt. Apparently, this matter was resolved and the State took over funding, but we could not get advice about the exact budgetary arrangements now in force. State funded positions should be converted to permanence.

Commonwealth money is provided in part on a per capita basis. As such, there is a prima facie case for a proportional increase in the workforce to match increased enrolments. Tenure should be provided, subject to satisfactory performance, agreement about re-location in case of enrolment change and appropriate participation in training opportunities. Much can be learned from the modelling in other jurisdictions. The expertise that these workers possess commands a much higher salary in other sectors, such as health, mental health, sport and the juvenile justice services. The result is that workers are forced to choose between their loyalty to a school and its students and their income stream and tenure.

The allocative mechanism is well and truly out of date. Some appointments appear on the numbers to be an historical inheritance from a different day. Schools with equal or greater numbers have missed out. More detail on deployment is recorded in the previously

mentioned report (Department of Education, Victoria, 2004). There is no point repeating the detail of what is reported there, other than to emphasise the current inequities in allocation and deployment which result in part from a failure to implement that report's recommendations. It appears as though deployment strategies are based on an historical allocation of 54 school based salaries for a (then) Koorie student enrolment of something less than 4,000. The number of Koorie students has since increased to nearly double that, without any commensurate increase in the total allocation. It might be expected to grow beyond demographic projections as more students feel safe to identify.

A check against 2006 data showed that 58 sites shared 54 salaries, but not all those salaries were in use (some were appointed across more than one site). Of these, ten sites had less than the historical 20 Koorie enrolments that was said to have been used to organise initial deployment, while there were 20 sites with more than 20 Koorie students and no Koorie Educator. This included one site with more than 70 students where the position has remained vacant. It was reported that the salary saved had been used in the past to fund occasional one-off projects.

The regional distribution of KEDO's and KHSLO's is inequitable. There is very little balance in their distribution. One region has five KEDO's for approximately 1,300 students over 161 schools; another two regions share one KEDO for a similar number of students spread across 500 schools.

Clearly, there is a need for some mechanism to adjust both head count and deployment to take changing enrolments into account. Some mechanism for adjustment is required to distribute available staff more equitably, perhaps one based on numbers over a rolling three year triennium, with extra capacity built in to make allowance for the additional complexities imposed by the aggregations that have occurred in some locations, whereby some sites end up with many of the more difficult cases.

The researchers could not find an accurate, up to date, system duty statement. Several templates existed at regional and at school level, with different operational dates, different (and inaccurate) salaries and different content. Up to date information about prospective career paths was generally non-existent. Koorie Educators had mixed views and in some cases, no knowledge at all, of the one course that was specifically designed some years ago for their certification. A community member said that this course relied on ANTA accreditation in NSW and NSW is not certain that it will submit it for re-accreditation.

It appears professional training and development practices require an extensive overhaul to ensure appropriate in-service certification, linked with progressive salary payments, re-classification, promotion and career path planning, all subject, as a matter of course, to satisfactory performance.

The centrally maintained networks that existed before devolution were dismantled and have not been replaced. Historically, there were concerns about the way some members of the dedicated workforce were seen to have been preoccupied with external commitments, "lost" between a multitude of meetings. That has to be addressed. But, there is still a need

for structured accountable central communication and networking perhaps for two days each semester. The first meeting early in the year to be a briefing by central officers about major projects, and to set directions; and the last meeting to reflect, to share good practice and to celebrate achievement.

Koorie Education Development and Home School Liaison Officers expressed concern about having to work across many sites without clearly understood role statements. There are many dangers:

- The worker faces an impossible task covering too many sites, with too many role expectations. In the worst case, one worker was expected to operate across two regions, serving around five hundred schools. Recommendation 4 of the draft report addressed this and it should be acted on – appoint at least one KEDO to each region (Department of Education, Victoria, 2004). Even so, the work required may be too much for one officer. One way to make the task more manageable is to narrow the work focus, working with a project team as a project officer in a priority area, e.g., Literacy. At least one region has adopted this practice and employed the worker on a more appropriate award as well, as a project officer, by topping up the salary from its own funds. Two schools had a similar practice for Koorie Educators.
- In some cases, clients and supervisors lost track of the worker's whereabouts and tasks. It is easy for this to happen with a complex role across many sites and committees. Occasionally, it was stated that workers resisted elementary line management practices such as whereabouts sheets and vehicle logs. Basic accountability requirements must be met to satisfy matters relating to worker safety, to locate people in an emergency and for accountability purposes. The issue was clouded un-necessarily by an outdated assertion that somehow these workers were supposed to relate to VAEAI for accountability purposes. True, they must have proper regard for and maintain good relations with local groups, LAECG's and VAEAI, but Regional Managers are line managers for the purpose of accountability, not VAEAI or the LAECG.
- Schools and at least some regional officers, expected officers to attend crisis meetings, especially those involving suspension or difficult parents. KEDO's have many useful skills, but so do many other officers in a region. Community members put their view about this sort of stereotyping, commenting, *"Just because its black does not mean it's our problem, or it's only our workers that have to solve it."* They are not human fire fighters and there are not enough of them to be used in this way across the large numbers of sites, agencies and circumstances that exist within a region. A far more precise role description is required. It should be negotiated and vigorously promoted so that all parties – central office, regions, schools, VAEAI, other agencies and other workers – have a very clear understanding of what is involved and what might fairly be expected.
- Occasionally, it appears that the officer is torn between a perceived allegiance or alliance with an LAECG, or other prominent body, such as a Co-op and the community and their role as a worker in the region. It is important to maintain good community connections and personal involvement helps but as with other workers, personal community involvement must be managed without taking time away from work without explicit approval from a line manager.

There were many positives about these officers:

- Principals saw KEDO's as an expert source of general advice about Koorie networks, parents and community, demanding increased availability;
- Koorie Educators frequently saw KEDO's as experienced advisers they could rely on in confidence;
- Regional officers used KEDO's and KHSLO's as project staff to drive regional priorities;
- Koorie communities saw KEDO's and KHSLO's as leaders, with valued expertise in education; and
- Students saw KEDO's and KHSLO's as mentors, role models and sources of support.

Appropriately, priorities varied across regions, with many excellent match ups between specified regional priorities and the skills and interests of individual workers. These tasks ranged from the further development of preschool initiatives to the delivery of special services for alienated youth. For these reasons, the resource should be retained, but their role, their accountability and their training and reporting arrangements should be clarified and vigorously promoted. Good models are available in other jurisdictions.

Key finding 5
Koorie Workforce and its positioning within the broader workforce

a. *Building capacity of workforce to undertake roles*
b. *Building strategic partnerships with the education workforce*
c. *Requirements for:*
  i. *Clarification of roles, reporting relationships, industrial arrangements*
  ii. *Clear career pathways, linked to qualifications, updated duty statements and remuneration*
  iii. *Revised Allocative mechanism*

Key finding 6
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination - exemplifying best practice.

a. *'Earned autonomy' - Impact of devolution resulting in reduced coordination*

The General Workforce. Devolution.

Central and Regional Planning and Review: Generally, principals and teachers want to know "what works" and they spend a lot of their own time and money on that endeavour. Questions were asked to identify the major sources of advice. *Dare to Lead* and '*What Works* were cited with the greatest frequency by principals but, on closer examination, the advice taken ranged from peripheral engagement with one or other of these programs, chiefly by conference attendance, through to a much more substantial leadership role within a network or reference group.

What appeared to be missing was leadership from the centre, which came in for all sorts of criticism and from all levels, for collecting information and not providing feedback or

systematic distillation or direction. There is a great deal of cynicism about the likelihood of any action resulting from this review. One principal captured this sentiment with the words, "*Yet another review, I'll file it in my reviews folder.*" This cynicism has been well earned. For at least three years in a row, schools with Koorie Educators and Koorie Educators themselves have been advised of limited term appointment processes (twelve month measures) "subject to review."

It is easy to understand how these views regarding reviews develop in the field. Seven out of 10 of the major reports listed as references from the Department are unpublished internal drafts that many people have either contributed to or are aware of. The Commonwealth, through DEST, carries out its own reviews for its own purposes. Reference to the DEST program reveals that nine evaluations have been carried out since 2001. Reference to the ACER forward research program reveals as many more in progress. The Victorian Department conducts other reviews, many of which relate to Indigenous education although that may not be their main aim. All this activity means that some way must be found to distil all these reviews, honouring their purpose and the commitment of participants by informing them of the outcomes, linking them to action and resources. That requires strong central direction and staffing. Leadership is also missing from the region, despite the hard work of regional staff. Well-worded written advice is invariably lost in the detailed notices that serve as regional bulletins. Some regional plans have been developed through consultation with stakeholders and some without, prompting further criticism. One was admirably well written and constructed.

As noted above, the most common sources of advice were *Dare to Lead* and *What Works*. This is as much a credit to those programs as it is a condemnation of the dissolution of direction under devolution. *Dare to Lead* was itself criticised for not coordinating all these and other efforts in Indigenous education, as though it was the central agency whose task it was to deliver central coordination. Closer questioning revealed stakeholder concerns that *Dare to Lead* and *What Works* operated too much on their own, with too few links to regional representatives. Criticism was levelled at the lack of clear central support. These criticisms came from all levels of the general workforce. They were not directed at any individual and they most certainly are not the fault of the few remaining highly dedicated central office staff whose numbers have been decimated to the point where VAEAI, as a community organisation, has more dedicated staff than the Department's central office. The Department's few officers work across several, unrelated portfolios, adding to the complexity. There are just too few to do the work involved in what is acknowledged to be one of the most difficult and challenging areas within any jurisdiction.

Key finding 5
Koorie Workforce and its positioning within the broader workforce

a. *Building capacity of workforce to undertake roles*
b. *Building strategic partnerships with the education workforce*
c. *Requirements for:*
  i. *Clarification of roles, reporting relationships, industrial arrangements*
  ii. *Clear career pathways, linked to qualifications, updated duty statements and remuneration*

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The terms of reference have not been separated out and addressed *ad seriatum* but rather inform the key findings and recommendations of this report, starting with the child at the centre, building out from there.

The following recommendations address the key findings from the research:

Key finding 1

Connecting Cultures – Valuing Koorie culture to support children's success

a. Accommodating Victorian Koorie perspectives within education and early childhood development, ensuring a strategic focus in supporting improved outcomes for Koorie children.

b. Positioning DEECD to promote Koorie culture and heritage as an integral part of early childhood development and education.

Parent participation and student engagement both depend on the perception that it is culturally safe to access programs. Cultural safety is the most fundamental of all the pre-requisites to success.

Culturally safe places exhibit the following characteristics. They:

- celebrate Koorie cultures, heritage and learning with displays in public places and access points;
- fly the Koorie flag and acknowledge country – by a plaque in the foyer, at meetings and on public occasions;
- provide welcoming points of contact in publications and public places, by identifying staff members selected for their skills and understandings, to greet Koorie parents and their children, linking both to the workforce and the governing body;
- invite local Koorie leaders to share in public celebrations, to give advice and acknowledge both their presence and their status;
- work with Koorie parents, to establish and publish a clear set of goals for Koorie children, with high expectations known to all staff;
- reflect cultural understandings at all levels. In schools, those understandings are demonstrated publicly and across the curriculum. These are refreshed by and maintained annually, with local knowledge; and
- have carefully structured Koorie specific work programs, supported by contemporary resources which are acceptable, engaging and available to Koorie parents and their children.

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 1.1

There be a system of initial cultural training, with refresher courses for existing employees working with Koorie parents and their children, or who are working on programs that will impact Koorie children and their parents. Successful, Koorie specific childhood development and teaching strategies should be identified and regularly promoted to staff as part of the in-service program.

Recommendation 1.2
Aboriginal Studies courses should return to the previous, more comprehensive provisions which existed as part of the Curriculum Standards Framework before their revision as part of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. A complete, extended statement should be supported by subject specific provision within each area of study and within subjects offered at senior secondary. Like schools, subjects that cannot enrol a proportionate share of Koorie students and subjects losing students, should receive priority support.

Recommendation 1.3
That a set of protocols be developed for schools and offices to publicly acknowledge Victoria's Koorie heritage, including ways to mark important events with appropriate announcements.

Key finding 2
Engaging Communities –Increasing parent participation and the participation of communities in Koorie education

a) Growing the capacity of Koorie community members to engage with the education system

The core relationship is that of parent, teacher and child. All other arrangements are there to support this relationship. As noted in Finding (1) above, schools and preschools work best when they make Koorie students and their parents welcome by developing culturally safe places. Departmental offices can take a lead.

The department has been re-organised several times, but VAEAI is not "at the table" for system-client-stakeholder forums which include almost every other major stakeholder, such as the Victorian Council of State School Organisations and the AEU. This is partly due to the special place that VAEAI holds. Without derogating from that, it will assist the development of stakeholder understandings if there is at least one common forum.

Yalca provides an official framework for connectivity in early childhood development and education and for further education, but it needs further operationalisation. Important contexts, such as ASSPA and ATSIC, that were once an aid to community participation and its infrastructure – RKECS and LAECG's – have disappeared. There are mismatches between RKEC's and the department's current regional structures.

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 2
Regional Directors should each establish and chair a Regional Advisory Committee for Koorie Children's Development and Education.

Key finding 3
0-8 Early Childhood – Building foundations for the future

a) *Support for integrated 0-8 approach - DHS, Local Councils & DEECD, including arrangements for case management*
b) *Importance of two years of preschool*

The literature points unequivocally to the importance of two years high quality preschool as a pre-requisite for successful schooling. The broad view is taken, consistent with the Victorian Government's funded response to COAG that these programs should best start, as the report put it, "pre-parenting" and build from there. (Victorian Government, March 2007).

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 3.1
That the DEECD work with the Commonwealth to fund the planned extension of preschool childhood development programs, with priority for those centres with high density Koorie populations.

Recommendation 3.2
An interagency agreed system of unique identifiers be developed and used as early as possible to monitor children's development and education and to assist the evaluation of programs for effect.

Recommendation 3.3
Transition programs be developed to effect the smooth transfer of the child and of parent and child related information, from preschool to school and from primary to secondary.

Key finding 4
Supporting Students and Teachers in the Classroom

a) Funding –
   i. Change & impact of Commonwealth funding arrangements e.g. ASSPA to PSPI
   ii. Slow release of fragmented, short term funding
   iii. multiplicity of minor funding sources
   iv. Repetitive accountability
b) Data – use of a unique identifier
c) Coordinated state-wide approach to literacy
d) Case Management approach – ILP's, MIP's

Funding

The child is at the centre of a maelstrom of short term funding, released in dribs and drabs. Classroom teachers often watch these things come and go, with little long term impact other than to absorb a huge amount of time in submission and report writing.

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 4.1
Priority is given to the development of a strategy to pool resources, consolidating long-term (five year) funding, local, state and federal, targeting key areas.

Data

Additional methodologies for data collection are required which will incorporate interdisciplinary longitudinal and individualised approaches. The literature indicates that any approach adopted will need to include 'Indigenous voice' in researching educational outcomes and involve Indigenous researchers. A lot of work already goes into data collection and analysis. Unfortunately its usefulness has been impeded by the lack of a unique identifier in what is at times an overly complicated recording system. It discards information on attendance each year. The transfer of information is haphazard.

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 4.2
Priority be given to the development of improved data sets, their retention, transfer, monitoring and analysis, based on a system of unique student identifiers used to measure trends over time, for the child and for the system.

The Teaching of Literacy

Literacy is the next big key to success at school, building as it does on preschool, within a culturally safe environment. There is too much churning for anything sensible to happen or be recognised. Three programs show particular promise. They should be considered for implementation and evaluation over time – at least five years – using a system of unique identifiers to track individual student progress.

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 4.3
A system of evaluation be established to test the effectiveness of the most promising literacy programs, using the expert advice already in place for the Literacy project.

Case Management – ILP's, KIEP's and MIP's

The importance of supporting classroom teachers who work with the most vulnerable children is self evident. Some of the most important information is gathered well before school entry. Children do not choose their parents. Midwives are known to hold the earliest and most useful systems information about a child's future prospects. Systems must be put in place early or, as *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood (2007)* puts it, preferably pre-parenting. Agreements about interagency case management need to start at this level and build from there so that a child receives the best possible support before going to school and continues to receive it once there.

The use of the term 'ILP' in these recommendations refers exclusively to the booklet used as part of the Program for Students with Disabilities, available at www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/disabil/index. It outlines a purpose and a process over 40 pages (2008 edition), which is properly reserved for the most needy - currently estimated at about two per cent of the Koorie population. Its extension should be reserved for use with students at risk. They are at risk if they are not attending, or if their performances at reading and writing lag well behind those of their Indigenous peers, which means, by a year or more.

Accordingly it is recommended that:

Recommendation 4.4
Interagency agreements about case management, based on a system of unique identifiers, should start as early as possible and continue as long as indicated for care, development and education of a child.

One more recommendation is made for consideration as part of the evaluation of Koorie ILP's as implemented in the Hume pilot.

Recommendation 4.5
That, in order to avoid confusion, the two page Hume Region Koorie ILP's be re-named as Koorie Individual Education Plans (KIEP's) and extended to all Koorie children.

Key Finding 5
Koorie Workforce and its positioning within the broader workforce

a) Building capacity of workforce to undertake roles
b) Building strategic partnerships with the education workforce
c) Requirements for:
   i. Clarification of roles, reporting relationships, industrial arrangements
   ii. Clear career pathways, linked to qualifications, updated duty statements and remuneration
   iii. Revised Allocative mechanism

The background for this recommendation can be found in the Results section Workforce Issues – The Dedicated Workforce.

Recommendation 5
That an expert team of three works through the detail of an implementation proposal to restructure the dedicated Koorie workforce for stakeholder (the dedicated workforce and the Department) consideration within six months.

Key finding 6:
Providing strong leadership, direction and coordination, exemplifying best practice

a) 'Earned autonomy' - Impact of devolution resulting in reduced coordination
b) Implementation 'gaps':
   i. Literacy strategy
   ii. Students at Risk (SAR) assessment tool
   iii. Unintended side effect that LLENS and related provisions also increase the risk of marginalisation

Supportive and sympathetic senior officers require expert advice to drive clearly articulated central initiatives, monitored constantly and evaluated for their effectiveness. In at least some other jurisdictions, that leader is an Indigenous peer and, in one, that officer is at a level equivalent to Deputy Secretary. Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 6.1
A Koorie Education and Children's Development Strategy Unit be formed within the

Office for Government School Education.

Recommendation 6.2
That an Indigenous officer be appointed to develop policy and lead the Unit, at least at the level of Regional Director, reporting directly to the same Deputy Secretary as regional directors in order to meet with and work closely together.

Planning and direction

Mention was made of field cynicism about the planning process in the results section. There have been so many reviews and major reports, and there are so many regional and sub-sectional plans that they require some sort of synthesis to bring stability and certainty.

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 6.3
That the Department produce and publish a Strategic Plan for Koorie Childhood Development and Education.

Regional Offices

Government policy provides for a system of central direction that, under a scheme of devolution, relies on regional offices and local sites for its proper implementation.

Devolution was never intended to mean freedom from government policy. It always meant the freedom to implement policies in the best ways possible and within an accountability framework under a system of earned autonomy.

Accordingly, it is recommended that:

Recommendation 6.4
Regional structures are amended to include an officer appointed at the level of Senior Education officer, preferably Indigenous, to work with other senior staff and the regional committee to develop, promote, monitor and evaluate major programs.

The review team is encouraged that the workforce has both the commitment and the resolve to address Koorie education issues. They have no doubt that effective outcomes will result from the implementation of these recommendations.

Recommendation 7
An expert team be formed to develop an implementation proposal to operationalise all the review proposals.

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Attachment 1

Survey Instrument

REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Supporting Indigenous Students through School Review

The Review will be conducted by the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research, University of South Australia
Consultants: Professor Peter Buckskin PSM FACE – Review Leader
Professor Paul Hughes AM FACE
Senior Consultant – John Gregory
Researcher – Colleen Clarke

Review of Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students

The Victorian Department of Education in conjunction with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Incorporated (VAEAI) in undertaking a Review of Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students as outlined in the attached Terms of Reference. These Terms of Reference have been agreed to by the Ministers of the Ministerial Taskforce for Aboriginal Affairs and the members of the VAEAI Committee of Management.

As this is one element of the provider Review to be undertaken, we have been engaged to consider the following Terms of Reference in the context of the provision of Supporting Indigenous Students through School:

- An assessment of the educational progress of Indigenous students against an agreed set of indicators and an analysis of the reasons for any differential between the outcomes of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students.
- Consideration of the adequacy of existing educational support programs, including general and dedicated programs for Indigenous students and their value in achieving good educational outcomes.
- An analysis of the roles and capacities of the various parts of the educational workforce to improve the educational performance of students.
- An examination of contemporary examples of best practice in Indigenous education in other jurisdictions both within Australia and internationally.

As part of this review process we will be undertaking the following:

- Review existing workforce strategies in achieving key objectives of Koorie education and assess the cost effectiveness of dedicated and mainstream contributions
- Research current trends comparing these and other strategies as a point of reference/benchmark for discussion
- Extensive consultation with stakeholders to canvass any issues, views, concerns and ideas for future sustainable delivery
- Determine whether a revised approach to the operations and/or structure of the Koorie Support Workforce and broader education workforce might facilitate improved outcomes for Indigenous students.

Consultation Process
All consultancies will be coordinated through the Department of Education and VAEAI.

To ensure confidentiality, all discussions will be undertaken in the strictest confidence and in doing so will not identify the input by any individual in this Review.

Alternatively if you wish to submit your input through a written response, please respond to the following questions and return to:

Professor Peter Buckskin
GPO Box 4637
MELBOURNE VIC 3001

We thank you for your participation towards improving the educational outcomes for the Koorie students in Victoria.

More detailed background information for Regional Directors & Principals

1. Introductory Questions

There are two sets of key questions to get discussion going. We anticipate that responses to these questions will vary according to local circumstances. At least two, sometimes more, of the review team will be in the field at any one time to meet with students, parents and members of the workforce and allied agencies.

1.1 What works well in mainstream education which helps Koorie students?

1.2 What can be done to improve it?

What problems might be encountered improving it?

How might those problems be solved?

1.5 Are there important supports, policies, or other sources of advice, information and data that you use to make decisions about what is working and what isn't? If so, what are they and how do you use them?

1.6 What is the one thing that you could suggest that would have a major impact on improving Koorie student outcomes?

****

The team is especially interested in positive examples of good practice leading to improved outcomes for Koorie students and in constructive suggestions for better practice. It expects to listen attentively to all contributions, however made, including the negative.

We are especially interested in finding out more about what helps improve the quality of student/teacher interaction, leading to improved outcomes. Important mainstream contributions are made by leaders, teachers and specialist support workers, as well as Koorie Educators.

2. Your relevant experience

2.1 What are the most important things that you do to make a difference when it comes to mainstream education which also lifts the outcomes for Koorie students?

How does your role help improve the quality of student/teacher interaction?

2.3 Is there anything that can be done differently to make the outcomes for Koorie students even better?

If so, what is it and what problems might be encountered?

How might those problems be resolved?

Does your role involve direct contact with teachers? If so, how does what you do help improve the quality of student/teacher interaction?

2.7 Does your role include direct contact with Koorie Educators? If so, how do you interact with them and how does that help improve outcomes for Koorie students?

Are you, or have you been, involved in any professional development associated with Koorie education? If so, what is it, or what would you like to see?

What is the one thing that you could suggest that would have a major impact on improving Koorie student outcomes?

Local information is of significant interest. Persons interested in responding to the terms of reference are invited to do so in writing and/or by making arrangements attend one of the several meetings that will be arranged through regional and central offices.

For further information, please contact your Regional Director or
Ms Janet Thompson,
System Policy and Research Division
Victorian Department of Education
Tel: (03) 9637 2002
Email: Thompson.janet.l@edumail.vic.gov.au

Attachment 2

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1.1
There be a system of initial cultural training, with refresher courses for existing employees working with Koorie parents and their children, or those who are working on programs that will impact Koorie children and their parents. Successful, Koorie specific childhood development and teaching strategies should be identified and regularly promoted to staff as part of the in-service program.

Recommendation 1.2
Aboriginal Studies courses should return to the previous, more comprehensive provisions which existed as part of the Curriculum Standards Framework before their revision as part of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. A complete, extended statement should be supported by subject specific provision within each area of study and within subjects offered at senior secondary. Like schools, subjects that cannot enrol a proportionate share of Koorie students and subjects losing students, should receive priority support.

Recommendation 1.3
That a set of protocols be developed for schools and offices to publicly acknowledge Victoria's Koorie heritage, including ways to mark important events with appropriate announcements.

Recommendation 2
Regional Directors should each establish and chair a Regional Advisory Committee for Koorie Children's Development and Education.

Recommendation 3.1
That the DEECD work with the Commonwealth to fund the planned extension of preschool childhood development programs, with priority for those centres with high density Koorie populations.

Recommendation 3.2
An interagency agreed system of unique identifiers be developed and used as early as possible to monitor children's development and education and to assist the evaluation of programs for effect.

Recommendation 3.3
Transition programs be developed to effect the smooth transfer of the child and of parent and child related information, from preschool to school and from primary to secondary.

Recommendation 4.1
Priority is given to the development of a strategy to pool resources, consolidating long-term (five year) funding (local, state and federal) targeting key areas.

Recommendation 4.2
Priority be given to the development of improved data sets, their retention, transfer, monitoring and analysis, based on a system of unique student identifiers used to measure trends over time, for the child and for the system.

Recommendation 4.3
A system of evaluation be established to test the effectiveness of the most promising literacy programs, using the expert advice already in place for the Literacy project.

Recommendation 4.4
Interagency agreements about case management, based on a system of unique identifiers, should start as early as possible and continue as long as indicated for care, development and education of a child.

Recommendation 4.5
That, in order to avoid confusion, the two page Hume Region Koorie ILP's be re-named as Koorie Individual Education Plans (KIEP's) and extended to all Koorie children.

Recommendation 5
That an expert team of three works through the detail of an implementation proposal to restructure the dedicated Koorie workforce for stakeholder (the dedicated workforce and the Department) consideration within six months.

Recommendation 6.1
A Koorie Education and Children's Development Strategy Unit be formed within the Office for Government School Education.

Recommendation 6.2
That an Indigenous officer be appointed to develop policy and lead the Unit, at least at the level of Regional Director, reporting directly to the same Deputy Secretary as Regional Directors in order to meet with and work closely together.

Recommendation 6.3
That the Department produce and publish a Strategic Plan for Koorie Childhood Development and Education.

Recommendation 6.4
Regional structures are amended to include an officer appointed at the level of Senior Education Officer, preferably Indigenous, to work with other senior staff and the regional committee to develop, promote, monitor and evaluate major programs.

Recommendation 7
An expert team be formed to develop an implementation proposal to operationalise all the review proposals.

Attachment 3

List of Participants

Participant Name	Organisation Name	Title
Brett New Judith Thorne	DEECD - Western Metropolitan Region	Regional Director Koorie Education Development Officer
Chris Bonacci David Cummins	DEECD – Hume Region (Benalla)	Project Officer Senior Education Officer
Ron Lake Julie Baker Susan Saunders Robert Saunders Stephanie Armstrong	DEECD – Loddon Mallee Region	Regional Director Deputy Regional Director Koorie Education Development Officer Koorie Education Development Officer Regional Coordinator, Koorie Programs, Loddon Mallee
Peter Henry Jim Bond Marjorie Pickford Sue Renn	DEECD – Grampians Region	Assistant Regional Director Manager Student Learning Programs Koorie Education Development Officer Student Wellbeing Coordinator
Richard Fry Ros Pevitt Wayne Harradine Glenda Strong	DEECD – Barwon South Western Region	Koorie Education Development Officer Koorie Education Development Officer Home School Liaison Officer Regional Director
Wayne Craig	DEECD – Northern Metropolitan Region	Regional Director
Peter Greenwell	DEECD – Southern Metropolitan Region	Regional Director
Jim Watterston	DEECD – Eastern Metropolitan Region	Regional Director
Melva Johnson	LAECG	Chair
Vera Harold; Jenny Soloman; Kate T; Zak H; Linda Mullett; Steven Walsh; Wayne Thorpe; Michael Graham; Jackie Morriss; Kaylene; Pete Haratty; Terry Burgess; Dooka; Alice-Anne; Anne Maree Hughes; Cheryl Drayton; Neil Daly; Liz Jones	West Gippsland / Tralgalong / regional LAECG and Community at Nindedana Quarenook, Morwell	
Carol Smith Roland Atkinson Joanne Norling Miranda Borlini Jamie Atkinson Anne Atkinson David Atkinson Bill Boyer Janet Green Tina Maloni Janet Atkinson Phillip Guthrie	Community Meeting held at Shepparton	GOTAFE Koorie Unit GOTAFE GOTAFE Notre Dame Catholic College, MCD Wanganui Park SC DEET CUGTIVEC Smith Family The Smith Family Centrelink KECFO DHS Academy of Sport, Health, Education (ASHE)
Wayne Harradine	LAECG and community meeting held at Portland. Dharrung Wharrung	Home School Liaison Officer
Marjorie Pickford; Gwenda Freeman; Darlene Rumler; Angela Singh; Wayne Muir; Sheree Lowe; Nicki Foy; Carmen Merson; Abbie Lovett; Jenni Beer	LAECG Meeting. Ballarat University	
Jazmyn Fuller Shelley Chapman Michael Graham Cecily Atkinson	Meeting at Aboriginal Advancement League, Thornbury with LAECG members & community (32 participants)	not stated AHW / Parent VAEAI / WOSI Parent & Grandmother/ Community

Participant Name	Organisation Name	Title
Daria Atkinson Phillip Murray Narissa Warden Alison Fuller Ralph Bamblett April Pender Tanya Weston Lance Briggs Dorothy Bamblett Bradley Spriggs Lisa Smith		Child Care Vic. Chairperson, LAECG, Northern Region DEECD / KE not stated Parent / Grandmother VAEAI / Parent KEDO / Parent Parent / Vacsal VAEAI / Wurreker Broker not stated SSO2 K.Ed. (Vic College of Koorie Ed.)
Kathy Potter (KE) Norsiyah Mokak (KEDO) Josh Wanganeen (KE) Gary Saunders (VAEAI) Kellyann Edwards (KHSLO) Robert Saunders (KEDO) Susan Saunders (KEDO) Maureen Hodge (KE) Shelley Atkinson (KE) Stephanie Armstrong (Koori Manager, Bendigo)	Group meeting at Mildura	
Dianne Peck Dahle Suggett Katherine Henderson Tony Cook John Sullivan Janet Thompson John Allman Gillian Essex, Gail Innes	DEECD	Acting General Manager, Student Learning Programs Deputy Secretary, Office for Education, Policy & Innovation Deputy Secretary, Office for Policy, Planning & Evaluation General Manager, Education, Policy and Research General Manager, System Policy and Research Assistant General Manager, System Policy and Research General Manager, Student Wellbeing & Support Literacy Improvement Team
Geraldine Atkinson Lionel Bamblett Lowanna Moore Jacqueline Morris Gary Saunders Michael Graham Ralph Bamblett	VAEAI	President General Manager Programs Manager Trainee Policy Manager Schools Coordinator WoSI Project Officer VET/VCAL Project Officer
Chris King	Corio Bay Senior College	Student Wellbeing Coordinator
Claire Quirk	Bendigo Senior Secondary College	Koori Coordinator
Janet Beck	Richmond West Primary School	Assistant Principal
David Rose		Koorie Support Worker
McGuire College St Georges Road Primary School Flinders Peak Secondary College Brauer Secondary College Warrnambool Primary School Corio West Primary school Warrnambool East Primary School Hawksdale P12 College		

Participant Name	Organisation Name	Title
Western Port Secondary College Cranbourne West Primary School Horsham College Horsham North Primary School Bendigo Senior Secondary College Swan Hill North Primary School Chaffey Secondary College Ranfurly Primary School Swan Hill College Swan Hill Primary School Echuca South Primary School Mildura Primary School Robinvale Secondary College Healesville High School Healesville Primary School Thornbury Primary School Penders Grove Primary School St Peters Catholic School, Bendigo Lakes Entrance Primary School Lowanna College Bairnsdale West Primary School Kurnai College Lakes Entrance Secondary College Mooroopna Primary School		
Brian Henderson	Australian Education Union, Victorian branch	Branch Secretary