



# PRAPA PATHWAYS

## OUR VISION FOR YUMI

A submission to the Queensland Productivity Commission's 2017 inquiry into service delivery in Queensland's remote and discrete Indigenous Communities.

# **PRAIPA PATHWAYS OUR VISION FOR YUMI**

May 2017

A submission to the Queensland Productivity Commission's inquiry into service delivery in Queensland's remote and discrete Indigenous Communities from the Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council (TSIREC) - the Torres Strait Nation's peak advocacy body on issues of education and training.

**The vision of the Torres Strait Nation is of a Prapa Pathway for all of our young people.**

That is, the opportunity for all children living within the region to engage in, and seamlessly transition between early education, formal schooling, training and employment services in order to achieve quality personal, social, and economic well-being in the society of their choice.

Achieving this significant vision, however, requires productive partnerships at all levels, national, state, regional and community, between families, communities, schools, governments and community organisations.

This submission provides details of three key services that are considered vital by the Torres Strait for ensuring that their children can successfully access, participate in and complete school with a genuine chance to achieve their aspiration.

1. Transition support services for secondary school-aged students from the Torres Strait
2. Early childhood education and family support services in the Torres Strait
3. Student residential boarding facilities in the Torres Strait

Each proposal has been developed by TSIREC – as the Torres Strait Nation’s peak advocacy body on issues of education and training - through years of consultation with families, community leaders, Government representatives, schools and service providers. All have been officially endorsed by Local Government Leaders, community groups, schools, private and government education, and training providers as well as other service providers.

### ***Message from the TSIREC Chairperson: Lui David***

*The history of western education in the Torres Strait region dates back to the late 1800s and can be pinpointed to the arrival of Christian missionaries and teachers in 1871*

*In the 135 years since this event the Torres Strait Nation have sought to improve their life through better educational opportunities and to strengthen their identity as the first peoples of the islands and waters of their homeland.*

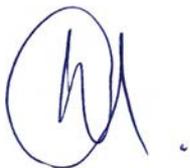
*The establishment of the Torres Strait Islanders Regional Education Council (TSIREC) to represent communities in 1983 signifies a pivotal development in the journey of the region. Since its' inception, TSIREC as the peak advocacy body for the region on education and training, has secured a range of initiatives and infrastructure that has assisted with raising the standard of education provision.*

*Most notably;*

- *The transfer of responsibility in 1985 from the Department of Native Affairs to Department of Education in Queensland for education delivery and supervision of all outer island schools in the Torres Strait.*
- *The presence of the federal agency, ComEd on Thursday Island to support parents and students.*
- *The new secondary campus on Thursday Island with inclusion of senior years 11 and 12.*
- *Remote Area Teachers Education Program for indigenous teaching staff in the outer islands.*
- *Most recently the establishment of Tagai State College*

*However great these outcomes are they have not been matched by further measures required to ensure the demands of present day context are met.*

*The submission sets out a way forward based on experienced and current research findings, it provides a solution to meet the demands of the unique Torres Strait region.*



*Lui David*

*Chairperson*

*Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council (TSIREC)*

# **TRANSITION SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL- AGED STUDENTS**

Integrated transition support structures are vital to ensuring that young people in the Torres Strait can successfully access, participate in and complete secondary school with a genuine chance to achieve their aspiration.

## Secondary School Completion: A National Priority

### National Completions Rates

COAG's "Closing the Gap" agenda and the Indigenous Advancement Strategy has set the ambitious target of halving the gap in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2020.

Addressing this gap requires sustained intervention that is targeted, community-led and founded on evidence-based approaches.

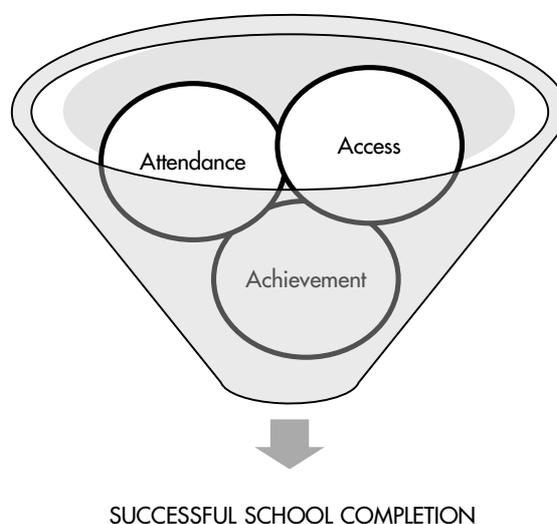
National data shows that secondary school completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are well below the rates for non-Indigenous students. Despite a decline in the gap over the past 15 years, the completion rates for indigenous young people are still almost 30% below that of non-indigenous students – 41% compared with 72% for males and 49.5% compared with 82.7% for females. In fact, a 2009 report showed that school completion rates for Indigenous students are the lowest of every other demographic group in Australia.

This national data does not illustrate the significant influence of relative remoteness on school completion rates. ABS data has consistently shown that school completion rates are significantly lower for students in very remote locations – such as communities of the Torres Strait. Rates in these communities are up to 50 percentage points below those of non-indigenous students.

### Causes of Lower Completion Rates

The literature identifies three main factors that influence school completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: access, attendance and achievement.

1. Access: Indigenous students in remote areas do not have the same access to secondary schools as young people in other parts of the country. For these students, barriers to secondary schooling are:
  - Physical – geographic isolation forcing relocation from home communities to continue with secondary school,
  - Economic – lower employment opportunities in home communities results in fewer incentives for persisting with education and lower household incomes to cover tuition, transport and living-away expenses
  - Informational – lower levels of literacy in home communities and fewer adults who have completed secondary education, higher education or training.



Despite improved access to secondary school being facilitated by Government policies, such as ABSTUDY, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in remote communities fail to arrive to school on-time and often return home during the year for extended periods. This is clearly evidenced by the significantly higher rates of absenteeism for indigenous students from remote communities.

2. Attendance: A national study by Purdie and Bucklet showed a clear attendance gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across Australia, with a difference of up to 10 percentage points in the proportion of days attended in the past year across government schools in all states and territories. The study also showed that the gap widens greatly in the early secondary years, especially for indigenous students from remote communities.

Research shows that school attendance has a significant impact on a child's achievement in education, and that the effect is more pronounced for disadvantaged children. A child's education is considered at risk if they frequently miss more than half a day of school a week (less than 90% attendance). If it falls below 80%, it is significantly diminished.

Not only does school attendance have an impact on positive life outcomes, limited school participation is associated with a greater chance of dropping out of school and may lead to a cycle of disruptive behaviour. These outcomes have later implications for employment, a range of health risk behaviours (drug and alcohol abuse), homelessness, poverty, welfare dependence, and involvement in the justice system.

A recent West Australian study has found that as much as one-third of the gap in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children could be attributed to poorer rates of school attendance for Indigenous children.

3. Achievement: Research has consistently shown a significant causal link between non-attendance and reduce learning outcomes. It is also be used as strong predictor of non-completion. Low academic achievement makes it more difficult for students to successfully complete school. Academic achievement, as measured by academic progress and the NAPLAN results, is one of the strongest influences on Year 12 completion. According to NAPLAN, a high proportion of Indigenous students fail to meet national minimum benchmarks in academic achievement in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. This means that many Indigenous students from very remote locations enter secondary schools without the core literacy and numeracy skills required to actively engage with the curriculum.

### The role of secondary schools in non-attendance and non-completion

In the last decade, there has been greater recognition that school-based factors are of primary importance in relation to the non-attendance, low achievement and non-completion of Indigenous students.

*“While mobility within the Indigenous community and student transience are widely recognised in the literature as significant ‘out of school’ factors influencing absenteeism, the most frequently identified ‘school-based’ factors relate to:*

- *The inadequacies in and inappropriateness of, the schooling process itself;*
  - *Inadequate pre and in-service training of teachers and their unpreparedness for teaching in a crosscultural, bilingual situation;*
  - *Poor teacher/student relationships;*
  - *Teacher attitudes, expectations and a tendency to rely on deficit explanations of low levels of academic achievement, and*
  - *A significant lack of Indigenous parental/community involvement in the schooling process”*
- (Burke et al. 2000:3)

## The Torres Strait Context

### Growth in Cohort size

Based on historical primary school enrolments and ABS data, there are approximately 720 students of secondary school age living in the Torres Strait. Of these, at least 500 live in remote island communities and must relocate to attend secondary school on Thursday Island or mainland Australia.

In January 2015, the number of secondary school aged students in the region is set to rise to over 850 – as a result of the Queensland State Government’s Flying Start initiative. Further increases are predicted, with primary school enrolments and ABS data indicating a 30% increase in the cohort size by 2017.

*Table Predicated size of the TSI secondary school-age cohort 2013 - 2017*

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
TSI Secondary School-age Cohort	723	706	856	856	947

### Completion rates

There currently exists no official school completion date for young people in the Torres Strait. Neither the State Government nor the Commonwealth publicly reports regional figures. Despite this, school enrolment figures, ABS data, QCAA results and state-wide reports together indicate that completion rates for the region are significantly lower than the state and national averages for both Indigenous and non-indigenous students.

Across every measure of retention to Year 12 – that is Year 8 to Year 10, Year 8 to Year 12, and Year 10 to Year 12 – the rates for students from the Torres Strait may be between 10 and 30 percentage points lower than the state’s rates for non-indigenous students. While almost 80% of Queensland students complete Year 12, it is estimated that only 56% of students from Torres Strait achieve the same outcome. Moreover, a recent community-funded survey reported that across the region 13% of compulsory school aged students (between 13 and 16 years of age) were disengaged from schooling (that is, not attending and/or enrolled in a secondary school).

1. Access: Barriers to accessing secondary schools have a negative impact on students in the Torres Strait. The lowest completion rates in the region can most often be associated with one or both of the following factors:
  - The student lives on outer island communities (those with no direct access to Horn Island airport or Thursday Island)
  - The student is enrolled in secondary schools on the mainland (completion rates at Tagai State College Thursday Island are equal to State averages)

This data poses great concern as at least 65% of students live on outer island communities and approximately 50% of the total secondary school aged cohort enroll in mainland schools,

2. Attendance; Primary attendance is a hidden issue in the Torres Strait. While average primary attendance rates appear on-track with Far North Queensland rates, they mask the fact that the majority of students have the equivalent of 1 day off per week every year - the point in which research shows that education is significantly diminished. Moreover, many of these absences are taken in “chunks of time” - extended periods during which students miss out on whole stages in foundational skill development. For the secondary schooling years, It has been estimated that significant number of students of the Torres Strait do not start school on-time after school holidays – it is reported that at least 1 in 5 miss between 1 and 4 weeks of school each year after returning late from home visits. This data, in particular, is hard to quantify without specialized tracking as students are enrolled across state and private schools, boarding colleges and family homes.

Another factor that significantly impacts on attendance of young people in the Torres Strait is the high enrolment mobility rate. It is estimated that there are approximately 234 changes in enrolment (movement between secondary schools) each year. Each one of these changes represents a crisis point; an opportunity in which a student potentially misses an extended period of schooling or becomes disengaged completely.

3. Achievement; Secondary schools who enroll students from the Torres Strait often report that the young people do not have the foundational literacy and numeracy skills then need to successfully engage with the school’s curriculum.

Despite movements in the right direction, NAPLAN results consistently show that almost 1 in 4 Year 7 students in the Torres Strait below the National Minimum Standard – that is, they have not achieved the learning outcomes expected for their year level and are at risk of being unable to progress satisfactorily at school without targeted intervention. This is close to 10 times higher than the national average.

In addition, nearly 1 in 2 students are rated as performing at the National Minimum Standard, a level that may also require additional assistance to enable them to achieve their potential. This is over 3.5 times higher than the national average.

Despite an obvious and persistent need, no government-funded services has been provided to support secondary school-aged students from the Torres Strait, their families or destination schools to ensure the successful transition to and completion of secondary school. By contrast, the Commonwealth currently provides recurrent funding via the State for the Transition Support Services for Cape York communities (estimated at over \$1.5 million per annum).

## The Prapa Pathway Service Model

TSIREC proposes a specialised support service for the Torres Strait.

The Prapa Pathway. Prapa Future. model is designed to set in place the support structures that will ensure that young people of the Torres Strait can successfully access, participate in and complete secondary school. It aims to nurture and educate children and their families to achieve improved pathways to engagement, achievement, prosperity and wellbeing.

### Objectives

The Torres Strait Nation is united by its aspiration to increase school attendance and the educational outcomes for their young people. This model supports this aspiration by establishing productive partnerships at both the regional and community-level to ensure students can successfully access, participate in and complete secondary school.

The Prapa Pathway. Prapa Future. model is focused on building the capacity of families, communities, schools and service providers to meet the needs of young people on their journey through secondary schooling.

In doing so, the targeted objectives of the model are to:

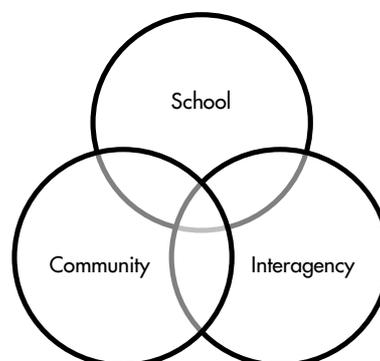
- Improve attendance rates of secondary schools students – including an increase in on-time arrivals after school holidays
- Decrease enrolment mobility rates
- Improved academic achievement, such as in national testing (National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN));
- Improved attainment of QCE
- Engage community in service governance and delivery
- Establish a reliable system of data collection of secondary student's attendance and retention to Year 12
- Improve secondary-school readiness of young people
- Improve information sharing between primary and secondary schools
- Improve information sharing between families/communities and secondary schools

- Improve support for secondary schools to embed cross cultural perspectives, deliver targeted support services and establish a positive, school-wide learning environment for students living in the Torres Strait.

## Overview

Based on research from Australian and overseas, the Prapa Pathway. Prapa Future. model incorporates strategies that have been shown to be effective for increasing access, engagement, achievement and completion among indigenous students.

In particular, the model is designed around three core components: school, community and interagency.



### School-focused components

The model will see the establishment of a Secondary Schooling Accord between TSIREC (as a representative body of the Torres Strait communities) and the 10 most popular Secondary Schools for Torres Strait Islander students.

Through this agreement, secondary schools will commit to a range of service guarantees – aligned to the AITSL’s Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and Principals - in return for support from the Prapa Pathway service, feeder primary schools and communities. For example, schools will commit to:

- Developing and implementing a positive school-wide support plan for Torres Strait students, that sponsors the “cultural safety” of students’ Torres Strait identity
- Providing quarterly data on student enrolment, attendance and achievement
- Nominating at least one school liaison officer for families and the Prapa Pathway service
- Providing teaching staff with a minimum number of hours professional development per year in teaching students with ESL and on embedding cross cultural perspectives in the curriculum
- Establishing a internal indigenous senior student mentor program – in which senior school students mentor middle years learners during their transition to secondary school
- Establish regular and direct contact with students’ families
- Offering additional literacy and numeracy support for students with additional learning needs.
- In return, schools will be supported with:
  - The equivalent of 6 days TRS per annum for service planning and engagement with other service providers
  - Individualised Student Profiles for new Year 7 students upon enrolment, including results from literacy and numeracy testing (on agreed measurement tools) and information on behavioural responses, social/emotional needs, medical and educational assessments, interests/strengths and family circumstances.
- Professional development through TSIREC’s Mura Gubal Gedira cross cultural training package

- Access to a range of specialised support material and professional development activities for teachers on embedding cross cultural perspectives and working with students with ESL
- Access to Prapa Pathway service providers – including Case Managers and Community Engagement Officers
- An annual forum to discuss challenges and share best practices.

These schools will be provided with access to a range of specialised support material and professional development activities for teachers on embedding cross-cultural perspectives and working with students with ESL.

#### Community-focused components

The model will develop the capacity of remote communities to better prepare their young people to transition to secondary school and complete Year 12.

Community Support Officer positions will be established in each of the 16 communities and based in Tagai Strait College's primary campuses. In a part capacity time, these officers will be responsible for:

- Promoting school attendance for primary school aged students
- Developing individualised Transition Plans for every Year 6 student
- Supporting primary school teachers to prepare individual Student Profiles for every Year 6 student
- Facilitating lines of communication between Accord secondary schools and families in the community
- Support parents in their application for ABSTUDY – including preparing for on-time departures after school holidays
- Community-based officers support to secondary school-aged students and their during periods of transition or crisis – including referrals to other agencies
- Supporting the seamless movement of enrolment between secondary schools, as required
- Tracking student disengagement in the community
- Providing the community perspective at the annual forum

#### Interagency-focused components

The model will establish a web-based database to facilitate the tracking of secondary student mobility, attendance and retention. Based on data from primary school enrolments, information collected from Accord Secondary Schools and communities will be used to monitor student enrolments, engagement and achievement. With appropriate data protocols in place, information from this database will be shared with communities, service providers and governments to support future, evidenced-based decision making.

The model will facilitate an annual forum between Accord Secondary Schools, Prapa Pathway Case Managers, Community Engagement Officers, parent/community representatives and other key service providers to discuss challenges and share best practices.

The model will sponsor the development of specialised support material and professional development activities for teachers on embedding cross-cultural perspectives and working with students with ESL. These materials will be specifically aligned to the new Australian Professional Standards for Teacher. They will provide templates and illustrate examples of best practice through a range of mediums and platforms (e.g. online videos and print resources). Materials will cover topics such as:

- Knowing your students, their backgrounds and their learning needs
- Embedding cross-cultural perspectives into your content area,
- Creating supportive and culturally safe learning environments
- Assessment, feedback and reporting
- Engaging with families and communities

The model will also provide case-management for schools, students and families – facilitating access to cross-agency services. These full time positions, based in both Cairns and on Thursday Island, will be responsible for:

- Scheduled visits to Accord Secondary Schools - offering support to individual students, assisting staff with communicating with individual families or cross-cultural training
- Recording student enrolment, attendance and achievement data
- Supporting students, families and schools during periods of transition or crisis (such as, disciplinary absences, homesickness or emergent family issues)
- Providing referrals to government agencies and community bodies
- Coordinating the annual forum
- Sharing school-specific data on student enrolment, attendance and achievement together with stories of best-practice/success

### Measuring Success

*Note: Given the limited data available in the region, it is impossible to establish accurate baseline measures. It is therefore proposed that the first collection year's data collection is used as the baseline, with success measures being that of State averages.*

The success of the Prapa Pathway. Prapa Future. model in achieving the outcomes of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy will be ascertained through a number of measures, including:

Strategic Objective	Measure
Increased Attendance	School-based attendance data
	On-time school arrivals
	Apparent retention rates to Year 12
Improved Learning Outcomes	Year 9 NAPLAN – % above national minimum standard
	QCE attainment

The success of the Prapa Pathway. Prapa Future. model in achieving the specific model objectives and outcomes will be ascertained through a number of measures, including

Objective	Measure
Engage community in service governance and delivery	Number of Community Support Officer positions (16)
Establish a reliable system of data collection of secondary student's attendance and retention to Year 12	Number of students being tracked compared to historical primary school enrolments and ABS data (100%)
Improve secondary-school readiness of young people	Percentage of Year 6 students with a Transition Plan by Term 4 (100%)
Improve information sharing between primary and secondary schools	Percentage of Year 6 students with a Student Profile by Term 4 (100%)
Improve information sharing between families and secondary schools	The number of Accord Secondary Schools that provide student enrolment, attendance and achievement (100%)
	The annual publication of school-specific data to communities
	The number of facilitated contacts between school and parents by Case Managers or Community Engagement Officers
Improve support structures for secondary schools in embedding cross cultural perspectives, deliver targeted support services and establish a positive, school-wide learning environment	Numbers of schools signing the Secondary School Accord
	Percentage of Accord Secondary Schools with a positive school-wide support plan for Torres Strait students
	Percentage of Accord Secondary Schools providing Mura Gubal Gedira cross cultural training
	Percentage of Accord Secondary Schools that provide teaching staff with a minimum number of hours professional development in teaching students with ESL and on embedding cross cultural perspectives in the curriculum
	Percentage of Accord Secondary Schools offering additional literacy and numeracy support structures in place for students with additional learning needs.
Improve attendance rates of secondary schools students – including an increase in on-time arrivals after school holidays	School-based attendance data
	On-time school arrivals
Decrease enrolment mobility rates	Numbers of new enrolments and exits

Objective	Measure
Improved academic achievement, such as in national testing	Year 9 NAPLAN – % above national minimum standard
Improved attainment of QCE	QCE attainment

## Rationale

The consensus of both national and international research is clear that non-attendance and non-completion of school causes significant harm. While the most harm is to the young people themselves, non-completion has adverse effects on teachers who become demoralised, other students who receive less attention, support jurisdiction personnel who face the increased costs and time to provide alternative education services and families and communities who are stigmatised when their children do not attend school.

It is therefore an imperative for schools, governments and community to implement policy and practices that will work to minimize these harms.

### What we know doesn't work?

Research has shown that the following strategies are not effective in increasing the engagement, academic achievement or school completion rates for Indigenous students in Australia:

- A 'one size fits all' approach that either treats Indigenous students the same as non-Indigenous students or assumes that all Indigenous young people are the same
- Short-term, piecemeal interventions that are not funded adequately or implemented for long enough to make a significant impact
- Interventions that are adopted without considering local needs and collaborating with Indigenous communities
- Attempting to solve the problem of leaving school early without dealing with its underlying causes and providing sustained institutional support.

### What we know works?

While there is no one approach that has been found to increase rates school compliance for Indigenous students in remote communities, consensus does exist that the reasons for non-attendance and non-completion of school are complex and contextual; that there is no simple answer; and that real change occurs over time.

National and international literature supports strategies that target the underlying causes or antecedents of non-completion – that is, the barriers to access, attendance and achievement – in overcoming non-completion. In particular, research and practice promote a focus on the key components that can increase engagement in learning and therefore school retention over the longer term. These components include strategies that are school focused, community focused, and interagency focused.

- School-focused components attempt to make learning environments more responsive to the needs of young people

- Community-focused components involve local community, including families and primary school staff, programs that promote and recognize the importance of attendance and retention.
- Interagency approaches improve cross agency linkages and providing wrap-around support to students and their families at times of transition and crisis.

### **The critical need for positive school environments**

In the last decade, there has been greater recognition of the school-based factors that directly impact on the attendance, achievement and completion of Indigenous students in secondary schools.

A positive school environment plays a significant part in determining the extent to which students participate and engage in schooling. Researchers have emphasised the link between students' perceptions of school and their motivation, achievement, and behaviour. Students who feel connected with school are more motivated to attend and engage. This enables learning and academic accomplishment to occur.

A particular school-based issue of importance, and one highlighted by Australian research, is teacher quality. Good teacher/student relationships are fundamental to a positive learning experience and teachers must be aware of and respect the cultural heritage of their Indigenous students. Curriculum must also reflect a valuing of Indigenous history and the communicative styles that are a part of Indigenous cultures. Nevertheless, the best curriculum taught by the most capable and dedicated teachers will have no effect on students who are not regularly in classrooms to participate.

"Failure to establish meaning in the curriculum or to build satisfactory teaching relationships reduces the possibility of successful learning, which is the most important intrinsic motive for staying on at school" (Lamb et al. 2004:9.)

In particular, the national research clearly provides an evidence base for the effectiveness of the following school-based strategies in supporting indigenous students:

- Provide professional development training for staff, raising their awareness of and sensitivity to the history, culture, contemporary lifestyle and enduring characteristics of their Indigenous students.
- Recognise the need to value the students' cultural background and the skills and knowledge that they bring with them into the classroom.
- Use a whole-school approach based on a commitment to providing successful learning experiences and outcomes for all students.
- Involve Indigenous teaching personnel, parents and community members in all aspects of the schooling process from initial planning, to implementation and delivery of programs, to develop Indigenous ownership of educational programs.
- Provide a safe, secure school environment, characterised by good teacher/student relationships, which is free from racism and welcoming to Indigenous students, and to parents and community members.

- Take a whole-school approach that involves all students, all teachers, parents, and ancillary staff, and enlists the support of local business and community services.
- Implement appropriate early intervention schemes.
- Implement straightforward, plain language, behaviour management policies that are applied consistently to address bullying, harassment and peer pressures.

### Torres Strait Experience

The Prapa Pathway. Prapa Future. model is clearly modeled on setting in places the structures required to address the underlying causes or antecedents of student absenteeism and non-completion in the Torres Strait.

Not only is TSIREC's approach supported by the literature, it have been proven as successful through a trial, conducted in 2012/2013. Over an 18 month period, TSIREC responded to community demands for services by self-funding an informal transition support service for secondary school-age students from the Torres Strait. Despite being restricted to students enrolled in the Greater Cairns Region, this trial illustrated:

- The need for specialized support for students and families living in the Torres Strait
- The importance of services in communities and regional centres to support schools, students and families
- A lack of information shaing between schools and communities/parents
- The gap in systemic data about the attendance, achievement and completion of students in the Torres Strait
- The importance of community ownership, not just consultation, in the design, delivery and evaluation of services
- The value of family relationships and cultural connections with the Torres Strait for service delivery
- Consistency of service delivery staff

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES**

Families in the Torres Strait understand that children are born to learn and that learning takes place across the entire span of life. The quality of children's learning experiences can optimise their individual potential and, equally, contribute to building the future of a nation.

The quality of their learning throughout life can be enhanced by strong and consistent support for their development in the earliest years of life.

## The Importance of the Early Years

### Outcomes for Children

International neurological and child development research unequivocally demonstrates that human development is powerfully influenced by contextual surroundings and experiences. Experiences in the early years (0-6) affect the structural and functional development of a child's brain, with long term consequences – both positive and negative – for the child, family and society.

### Early Childhood Development

Community data profiles of the Australian Early Developmental Index (AEDI) – collected in 2009 and 2012 – illustrate a consistent gap between the development of young children in the Torres Strait and other Australian children.

The AEDI profile for the region showed that across all the developmental domains, young children in the Torres Strait were up to twice as likely to be identified as developmentally vulnerable or at risk compared with national norms. The data also showed that our children recorded:

- Lower levels of language and cognitive skills
- Acquired fewer early-literacy and numeracy skills
- Lower levels of independence
- Fewer social and skills
- Lower levels of emotional maturity

### School Achievement, Participation and Retention

National school testing illustrates that the gap in academic skill development (reading, writing and numeracy) between children in the Torres Strait and national norms that exists in the early years continues throughout all phases of schooling. Students who perform poorly in Year 3 continue to perform poorly in Year 5 and 7.

In 2013, at least 25% of Year 3s across the Torres Strait were judged by NAPLAN as not yet demonstrating fundamental literacy and numeracy skills required, compared to 3% nationally.

Other school-based data also indicates that indigenous students of the Torres Strait are more likely to:

- Have higher rates of enrolment mobility (with approximately 1 in 3 students changing school at least once each year)
- Leave school before completing Year 12
- Be disengaged from paid work, training or higher education two years after leaving school.

## Engagement of Parents

### Parenting in Early Childhood

In comparison with their non-indigenous peers, data indicates that families of young children in the Torres Strait are significantly less likely to engage with early childhood education and preventative health services. Without access to high quality learning opportunities and early intervention programs during the early years of their development, young children in the Torres Strait too often start at a significant disadvantage in life and learning.

Using data collected from the Torres Strait, the first four waves of the Footprints in Time: Longitudinal Study also illustrated:

- Less than half the mothers had breastfed their baby for at least 6 months, with less than 1 in 4 mothers breastfeeding for 12 months (as recommended by NHMRC)
- Over 50% of mums smoked during pregnancy and 22% consumed alcohol
- 97% of parents considered their child in good to excellent health, despite COAG data indicating significantly higher rates of overweight/obesity, preventable diseases and injuries
- Less than 1 in 5 parents sought advice about their child from a recognised professional

### Teenage Parenting

Teenage parenting is a significant issue across the Torres Strait. In many of our communities the rate of teenage pregnancy (mothers under 19 years of age) is close to 40%, compared with just 3-4% of all 19 year olds in major cities.

Observations clearly show that not only does a teenage pregnancy negatively impact on an already-stressed family unit; it can put young mothers at risk of long-term disadvantage. Research by Joen, Kalb and Vu found that young mothers are less likely to complete their schooling, resulting in weak employment prospects, an increased risk of ongoing welfare reliance and significantly less earnings over their lifetime.

In the Torres Strait, not only is there a great unmet need for community-based support services for teenage parents, but also school- and training-based services that promote reconnection with education, and support young parents to make long-term plans for further study and employment.

## Service Availability

There is a significant gap in coordinated service delivery to parents, families and young children across the Torres Strait, despite the clear evidence of need. While there are a number of specific crisis intervention services and programs currently in operation in the region, many run in isolation and target only certain communities or parent groups.

The following provides an overview of the early childhood education, health and crisis support services currently available in the Torres Strait:

### Early Childhood Education Services

- Strait Start – a birth to 3-year-old early childhood education program – operates in 8 communities across the Torres Strait. These services operate through a joint arrangement between TSIREC and Tagai State School.
- Long day care centres operate on Thursday Island, Horn Island, Badu and Yam Island – enrolment numbers into these services are very limited due to space restrictions (e.g. Yam and Horn Island currently service only 14 children each).
- There are no early childhood education services available in Saibai, Dauan, Mabuyag, St Pauls, Warraber and Ugar.

### Parent Education and Support Services

- State Government Child Protection services operate in the Torres Strait, offer crisis intervention and re-engagement services. These services are based on Thursday Island with emergency outreach to other communities.
- Queensland health runs outreach maternal health and child wellbeing services to all communities. These services are based on Thursday Island.

Of the approximate 1,125 children under 4 years of age in the region, it is estimated that at least 1 in 4 have no access to early childhood education services before starting school, and 1 in 2 have no access to scheduled specialist health screening (e.g. hearing and vision).

As most services are focused on crisis care and primary health, there are no proactive services across the region to provide support for teenage parents or parenting education.

#### **About Strait Start**

Strait Start is an early childhood education developed in the Torres Strait for young children. Established through Commonwealth funding in 2010, it provides high quality learning environments for children from birth to PrePrep across the region's remote communities. Staffed by trained community members, the program supports the development of children's motor development, language and literacy development, cognitive development, general knowledge, social and emotional development, independence and self efficacy.

Services currently operate in 8 communities for 2 hours 5 days per week. Through a Memorandum of Understanding, Tagai State College funds all wages and operates, while TSIREC funds training and supervision.

## The Meriba Model

Meriba means: “*all of Ours*” in Meriam Mer – the traditional language of the eastern islands of the Torres Strait. The name was adopted to reflect the Torres Strait region’s desire for a holistic model of early education and care that encapsulates all families in the region and of the region.

The Meriba model is designed to address the clearly observable and evidenced need for integrated early childhood education and parenting services across the 16 communities of the Torres Strait. The model aligns with the Indigenous Advancement Strategy’s Children and Schooling programme area. It aims to nurture and educate children and their families to achieve improved pathways to engagement, achievement, prosperity and wellbeing.

### Objectives

The Torres Strait Nation is united by a vision to increase school attendance and the educational outcomes for their young people. This model supports this vision by ensuring that every child is given the optimum learning environment for physical wellbeing and motor development, language and literacy development, cognitive development, general knowledge, social and emotional development, and executive functions.

The Meriba model builds on the region’s existing early childhood education, health and crisis support programs to establish an integrated network of proactive family learning services. This network will work from within communities to strengthen the capacity of parents, families and communities to optimise the development of their youngest children.

The targeted objectives recommended for this model are:

- Universal access to high quality, culturally reflective early childhood education programs and parenting services
- Community-led governance and delivery of local services
- Improved school readiness of young children, including foundational literacy and numeracy skills
- Improved rates of early childhood development across all domains
- Increased engagement between parents/families and schools
- Increased knowledge and skill-base of parents in effective parenting behaviours

### Overview

The Meriba model will establish a network of Family Learning Centres across the Torres Strait, ensuring every family has access to high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education and parenting services.

The model will create community-based learning centres in 16 communities of the Torres Strait. Branded as “Meriba” (meaning “belongs to us” in traditional Meriam Mir), these learning centres will provide:

- Strait Start services to young children (aged from birth to 4 years)
- Targeted parent training in early childhood development, positive parenting strategies and early literacy and numeracy development
- Home visits or community based programs
- Individualised support services for teenage parents, from pre-birth until the child is 3 years of age – focusing on early parenting skills and reconnection with education and training
- The community with access to culturally appropriate and relevant parenting resources
- Referrals to other early childhood education, early intervention, child and maternal health and family crisis services

A hub, or central learning centre, will be established on Thursday Island. Staffed by a specialist in early childhood education and parenting, this hub will:

- Supervise community-based learning centre staff
- Develop, collate and distribute culturally appropriate and relevant parenting resources
- Develop specialised parenting training packages, targeting different groups within the community (e.g. grandparents, younger parents, fathers, aunts, siblings)
- Deliver pre-conception/preparation for parenting education to targeted audiences (e.g. all Secondary school students in the Torres Strait)
- Lead collaborate service planning with other early childhood education, early intervention, child and maternal health and family crisis services
- Identify needs and advocate for additional parenting and family support services on behalf of the region to Government

### Measuring Success

The success of the Meriba model in achieving the outcomes of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy will be ascertained through a number of measures, including

Strategic Objective	Measure	Baseline	Expected Result
Increased Attendance	School student attendance data (PrePrep, Prep & Year 1)	Data from 2013 & 2014	Improved student attendance data in Preprep from 2016, Prep 2017 and Year 1 2017
	School student enrolment – mobility of enrolment	Changes of enrolment from 2013 & 2014	Less changes in enrolment for children in Preprep, Prep and Year 1 from 2016
Improved Learning Outcomes	Bracken School Readiness Assessment (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition) - conducted from 2015 with every child in PrePrep	Results collected in 2012 with every child in PrePrep	Improvement in school readiness from 2015

	NAPLAN – Year 3	Results from 2013 & 2014	Improvement in reading, writing and numeracy from 2020
	AEDI	Results from 2009 & 2012	Improvement across 5 domains in Torres Strait community profile from 2016

The success of the Meriba model in achieving the specific model objectives and outcomes will be ascertained through a number of measures, including:

Objective	Measure	Baseline	Expected Result
Universal access to parenting services	Number of family learning centres	0	16 (with 1 hub)
Universal access to early childhood education programs	Number of Strait Start programs	8	12 (with 4 small services on Yam Island, Horn Island, Dauan and Ugar)
Community-led governance and service delivery	Number of local advisory committees	0	16 (with 1 overarching strategic advisory committee)
Improved school readiness of young children,	Bracken School Readiness Assessment (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition)	Results collected in 2012 with every child in PrePrep	Improvement in school readiness from 2015
Improved rates of early childhood development across all domains	AEDI	Results from 2009 & 2012	Improvement across 5 domains in Torres Strait community profile from 2016
Increased engagement between parents/families and schools	Numbers of parents attending scheduled parent/teacher conferences	Results from 2014	Increased parent attendance from 2016
Increased knowledge and skill-base of parents	Self-reporting of on pre & post training assessments	Pre-training self assessments	At least 50% of participants reporting an increase in knowledge and skills

Outcome	Measure	Baseline	Expected Result
The establishment of 16 Meriba Family Learning Centres and a Hub	Number of family learning centres	0	16 (with 1 hub)
The provision of early childhood education services	Number of Strait Start programs	8	12 (with 4 small services on Yam Island, Horn Island, Dauan and Ugar)

The delivery of targeted training to parents and community members in early childhood development.	Training delivered	0	At least 256 (at least 4 courses per community per year)
	Attendance	0	At least 1280
The delivery of preparation for parenting education	Training delivered	0	At least 1 course each year
	Attendance	0	At least 400
The distribution of parenting resources	Numbers of resources distributed	0	1200
Coordination between service providers	Number of interagency/service meetings	0	At least 4 per year

### Rational

International and Torres Strait-specific research clearly demonstrates the benefits of community-based early childhood education and parenting programs in at-risk populations.

#### International Research

International neurological and child development research unequivocally demonstrates that human development is powerfully influenced by contextual surroundings and experiences. Experiences in the early years (0-6) affect the structural and functional development of a child's brain, with long term consequences – both positive and negative – for the child, family and society.

Research of high quality early intervention programs, such as early childhood education and care programs and parenting education services, for socially at-risk children has shown significant and sustained effects over both short and long term periods.

Short Term:

- Parents are more knowledgeable about child development
- Parents display more skilled child-rearing practices
- Parents are more knowledgeable about childhood health and safety issues
- Parents engage more in language- and literacy-promoting behaviours
- Children have developmental delays identified earlier
- Children are more likely to be in good general health ( are fully vaccinated, within a health weight range and accessing good nutrition)
- Parents become more knowledgeable about discipline (show more positive involvement with children and organise their home environment more appropriately)
- Families have fewer documented cases of neglect

Long term:

- Children achieve greater school success,
- Children achieve higher post-school engagement,
- Children are less likely to require juvenile detention,
- Children are less likely to need for remedial education services, and
- Children are less likely to become pregnant during adolescence

The research also concludes that children who have contact with high quality early intervention programs also demonstrate better numeracy and literacy skills, better cognition and social skills, better interpersonal relationships and better behavioural self-regulation than children accessing lower-quality services. Indeed, experiences with the latter have been shown to have a deleterious effect on language and social skill development.

#### The Torres Strait Experience

Data from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) - the national census on the development of 4 year olds conducted every 3 years - has clearly demonstrated that the Strait Start program has had a dramatic affect on the development of children in Torres Strait communities.

The 2012 Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) data revealed the number of developmentally vulnerable children in the Torres Strait had reduced from almost 60% in 2009 to 35.8%.

School staff, local community leaders, parents as well as Commonwealth and State Governments have attributed much of this movement on the success of the Strait Start program.

The Strait Start program illustrates the effectiveness of community capacity building – investing in locally developed programs that are delivered in communities by trained community members. In addition to enhancing the outcomes for children, Strait Start has also proven to be a way of strengthening community support structures and building families' confidence in their role as parents.

# **STUDENT RESIDENTIAL BOARDING FACILITIES**

Student residential facilities in the Torres Strait are vital to ensuring that young people in the region can successfully access, participate in and complete secondary school with a genuine chance to achieve their aspiration.

## Boarding in the Torres Strait

### Background

The Torres Strait Islanders' Regional Education Council (TSIREC) has sought government support to establish additional residential accommodation on Thursday Island (TI) to improve access to local educational services.

There are currently two hostels on TI catering for the needs of secondary school and training students in the Torres Strait; Canon Boggo Pilot Hostel and Kaziw Meta College with a maximum capacity of 35 and 65 students respectively.

These facilities are at capacity and TSIREC claim that many parents are unable to access secondary education and training for their children within the Torres Strait due to insufficient student accommodation provisions. They have little choice other than send their children to private boarding schools elsewhere in the state.

It is estimated that approximately 50% of secondary students in the Torres Strait leave home each year to attend high school in other parts of the state.

TSIREC recommends a state owned and operated residential facility to be established on TI which means that more students will have the opportunity to complete their secondary education and training locally while remaining relatively close to home and their families.

The Indigenous Education Division and the Far North Queensland Region have responded to the issues by meeting with stakeholders and carrying out preliminary enquiry to identify potential site options for a student residential provision.

The provision of residential facilities will provide full boarding services throughout the school year on a weekly or full-term basis. Students will be able to reside in a safe and caring environment whilst completing their secondary education and training on TI.

### Current Enrolment Trends

There are total of 17 state schools in the Tagai State College group that are currently made up of 16 (Pre-Prep to Year 7) campuses and the secondary campus (Year 8-12) located on Thursday Island.

Primary school enrolments and ABS data suggests that historically, on average, 150 students' have transitioned each year from the 16 primary schools into secondary education. This trend is predicted to increase by 30% over the next 3 years – due in part to the Flying Start initiative, and part to greater enrolment numbers in the middle primary.

Over the last 6 years, fifty percent of students have left the Torres Straits each year to complete their secondary education elsewhere in the state; usually at private boarding schools in the Greater Cairns Region.

In part, this trend may be attributed to established connections between the private boarding school sector and island communities. It may also be linked to the deficiency in suitable student residential provisions on Thursday Island.

The other fifty percent (70 – 80 students) enroll at the secondary campus on TI. Of these, 50 – 60 come from the outer islands and require long-term residential options on Thursday Island for the duration of their secondary education and training programs.

These options are limited to either placement at one of the existing hostels or boarding privately with relatives who live on TI.

All other students attending the secondary campus generally live locally with their parents or relatives on Thursday Island or some of the other close-by island communities that have daily water taxi/ferry services to and from TI.

### **Flying Start**

The implementation of the Flying Start initiative in 2015 saw 90 Year 7 students enrolling at the Tagai Secondary Campus on TI – representing a 30% increase in secondary school enrolments compared to 2014. When combined with the Year 8 enrolment figures, it should be noted that Tagai State College attracted 60% of the transition student enrollments for 2015 – up almost 10% from previous years.

This growth had a direct impact on the demand for additional student residential accommodation to be established on TI. Current provisions at Canon Boggo Pilot and Kaziw Meta hostels are insufficient to meet this growing need.

### **Future Trends**

Across the extent of Years 7 – 12 it is probable that by 2017 up to 350 students (or approximately 75% of the enrolment) attending the secondary campus will require long term accommodation of some kind (over a 6 year period) whilst undertaking their secondary education and training programs.

From 2016, enrolments in the secondary campus are predicted to continue rising, in-line with higher middle primary enrolments. This will put even more pressure on current boarding facilities and force more families into sending their children to mainland schools.

The community preference is for a state owned and operated student residential facility to be developed on land at the secondary school site on TI.

### **Staffing Trends**

Increased student numbers at the secondary campus will also result in additional teaching staff being appointed to the secondary campus.

This situation will subsequently impact on the availability of existing DETE housing on TI. Currently there is insufficient housing to meet the staffing models being implemented by Tagai State College.

The quantity and quality of existing housing on TI is also an issue that will need to be reviewed separately by the region prior to the implementation of Flying Start.

### **Attendance, Retention and Achievement**

Attendance, retention and achievement are key areas of concern as students who leave their home to attend secondary fall out of the education cycle.

The long distances between home and school and the lack of regular family connection are important factors that contribute to this situation.

Although accurate figures cannot be identified, it is estimated that at least 1 in 10 compulsorily school-aged students are disengaged with little hope of completing their secondary education.

Tagai State College's apparent retention and Year 12 attainment rates are amongst the highest in the Far North Queensland region, and certainly the highest of schools with a comparable proportion of indigenous enrolments.

### **Student Capacity**

The overall student capacity for the Tagai State College Secondary Campus is approximately 590 students.

With future enrolment trends suggesting 455 students by 2014, it is believed the school contains sufficient classroom space to initially cater for increased enrolments realised through Flying Start.

However, future demand for additional specialist teaching areas or the transformation of existing classroom space to meet future curriculum needs as a result of Flying Start is a matter that will need to be separately reviewed and addressed by the region.

## Recommended Site Options

The following alternatives have been identified as possible site options for the establishment of student residential facilities in the Torres Strait:

1. Develop a student residential village at the Tagai Secondary Campus on Thursday Island;
2. Develop a student residential village at the TAFE Campus adjacent the Tagai Secondary Campus to cater for high school and training students;
3. Develop a student residential village at the Horn Island Campus of Tagai State College. Students will need to be ferried by boat each school day between TI and Horn Island.

### Option 1: Secondary Campus

This option contains a range of operational benefits for the school and the proposed residential provision allowing students to live on the site with access to all sporting, recreational, cultural and educational facilities on offer; before and after school and on weekends. It also eliminates daily transportation of students to and from school, as would be the case with an off-school site solution.

This option also supports opportunities to forge strong operational links with the other established hostels, especially the Kawiz Meta College which borders the school boundary at the back of the sports oval.

Initial site inspections reveal sufficient land is available at the back of the school to develop a substantial student residential complex. The school sits at the base of a steep hill and excavation works will be required to create suitable building platforms to site future buildings.

A property search reveals the school site is freehold and contains 6.038 hectares of land, which is sufficient to develop the required facilities

### Option 2: TAFE Campus

This option considers the expansion of the existing TAFE site which is located directly adjacent the secondary campus. This option contains all of the benefits contained in Option 1 in that students can make full use of school and TAFE facilities. They can live, play and study without leaving the general school/TAFE precinct.

This option also provides future scope to transform, revitalize and improve the overall use and functionality of the existing TAFE complex. Some of the existing facilities could have a dual function and double as learning/services areas in the event that a future residential facility is established on this site.

Under the Trade Training initiative, the school is injecting almost \$1 million to upgrade the existing student refectory into a training kitchen and dining facility to Certificate 3 level. These resources could have dual function in the future, in that students engaged in hospitality training programs will gain hands-on industry experience through the delivery of services to students boarding at the residential facility.

Is this paragraph necessary Such initiatives potentially negate the need to reproduce similar facilities elsewhere on site generating savings in overall establishment costs for a future residential provision. Administration offices and student services areas are also located within the same complex, all of which are integral to the needs of a future student residential facility.

Additionally, the opportunity exists to amalgamate the two campuses into the one multi-disciplinary education precinct catering to the needs of the community in the areas of secondary education, training and tertiary level study. Other TAFE buildings could be refurbished to cater for senior secondary, VET and other tertiary level programs.

The TAFE site contains 3.66 hectares of land that is also listed as being freehold.

### **Option 3: Horn Island**

This option explores the opportunity to expand the Horn Island State School to develop a student residential precinct.

The land is more conducive to construction in that the school site is relatively flat and should not present any unforeseen complications. It is also likely to be the most cost efficient option in terms of projected building costs. The land is also listed as being freehold and contains 11.75ha that is sufficient to allow the future development of a student residential precinct to accommodate up to 100 students.

Horn Island is also a major connection hub for the Torres Straits with daily flights to and from Cairns and it is a distribution point for delivery of goods and services to the outer islands.

Operationally, this site does present substantial restrictions for school functionality with students having to be ferried by boat to and from the Thursday Island secondary campus each day. Logistically, this may not be a practical solution.

In addition to school infrastructure, there are also three staff houses and planning is in place to add a further two duplex style accommodation units on the site. There is scope to acquire additional land on Horn Island for additional staff housing, should the need arise.

## Facilities Infrastructure

It is well known that building costs in the remote areas of Far North Queensland are atypically high. This is mainly due to remoteness issues including the logistics of transporting materials, travel and accommodation costs for construction workers.

By way of comparison, a proposed residential complex located at the Tagai State College Secondary Campus on TI is not likely to require facilities infrastructure as expansive as the Weipa project as administration areas and car parking facilities are already established at the school campus.

Exploring contemporary building methods including the adaptability of transportable and “flat-pack” building systems may also deliver high quality, value for money outcomes in this particular scenario.

It is plausible that construction costs for a residential facility to accommodate up to 100 students on Thursday Island will be lower than Weipa; potentially up to 20% less.

It is envisaged that some of the key design elements will include:

- Student residential units where male and female students can be accommodated in separate and secure facilities that consist of multi share, air conditioned rooms (consisting of 2 and 4 beds) that are fully furnished with study desks, wardrobe and locker space and all the necessary basics for each student.
- Each student block will also provide access to shared bathroom and toilet facilities which provide students with appropriate levels of privacy.
- Access to a general common area complete with lounge style furniture, TVs and entertainment space complete with pool tables, video games and the like. The provision of quiet study areas with access to on-line computers will also be a feature within the general student areas.
- General dining and kitchen facilities where meals can be prepared and served to students each day.
- Staff quarters including the provision of individual bedrooms and amenities for supervising staff/house parents.
- Outdoor environment includes shaded courtyards/decks and access to school facilities.

The preparation of a Project Definition Plan (PDP) will consider all of the necessary design elements associated with a facility of this nature and communicate a clear understanding to the Committee and draw attention to crucial factors that include: Project objectives; Site investigation and analysis; Functional design requirements including sketch designs; Risk assessment; Implementation plan; and Cost planning.

## Management & Operating Models

The following alternatives have been identified as possible models of management and operation for the student residential facilities in the Torres Strait:

### **Option 1: DETE Management**

DETE manages the residential provision including all of the associated operational services.

Spinafex College at Mount Isa has a similar model in that a Deputy Principal/Campus Head is employed directly by DETE to manage the residential campus. All support staff including administrative and operational are also DETE employees.

TSIREC have recommended a preference for a state owned and operated residential facility.

This option is likely to present the lowest level of risk as all staff working at the facility are directly employed by DET. Also, the appointment of a Campus Head ensures that there is a distinct reporting and accountability structure in place.

### **Option 2: DETE Management with Outsourcing Ancillary Services**

This model reflects similar operating assumptions as detailed above in so far as DETE manages and operates the residential provision. However, it would be advisable that consideration is given to outsourcing associated ancillary services such as daily catering services, cleaning and laundry services and grounds care. These services could be sourced from local service providers on Thursday Island.

This strategy is beneficial to the local economic community through increased demand for service delivery and enhances future employment opportunities. Service Level Agreements that reflect the scope and quality of services to be delivered would need to be developed by DET.

### **Option 3: Private Management**

This option considers the outsourcing of the overall management and operations of the residential facility to appropriately qualified organisations.

This option may contain the highest risks for DETE in that it may be perceived by the community as being representative of a student hostel rather than a state owned and operated boarding facility and sub-campus of the Tagai Secondary Campus.

Other risks may also be attributed to the ability of external service providers to source and retain suitably qualified staff on Thursday Island. Continual staff turnover may be detrimental to student achievement and/or corporate outcomes as the overall success and future operations of the residential provision will be dependent upon the success of the facility in its first years of operation.