



15.0 Education and training

This chapter provides an overview of education and training in communities, and examines key service delivery issues influencing students' opportunities to learn. The Commission has not undertaken a full review of education and training; rather, the findings reflect a focus on significant issues impacting the communities.

Key points

Challenges and opportunities for education in communities include:

- High levels of developmental vulnerability among young children, uncoordinated early childhood and family support services and gaps that make access difficult.
- NAPLAN results and Year 12 attainment are lower for Indigenous students in remote areas.
- Higher levels of special needs and psychosocial distress among children in the communities make learning difficult and are precursors for a wide range of adverse outcomes.
- Strengths of Indigenous children include a close connection to their identity, land, language and culture; listening, recounting and memorization skills; experience in learning and using more than one language and/or dialect; independence and a strong sense of caring for younger ones; and resilience, with hope and dreams for the future.
- School-based issues relate to inadequate and inappropriate schooling processes, unpreparedness for teaching a cross-cultural, bilingual situation; a reliance on deficit explanations of low academic achievement; and a lack of Indigenous parental/community involvement in the schooling process.
- Broader issues such as poor housing and health care, inter-generational unemployment, and parents with low literacy affect families' capacity to support their children's schooling.
- Many students must relocate to attend secondary school—they face cultural barriers, homesickness, and a lack of access to Indigenous teachers and support people. Education that works for all students is needed, including alternative models for re-engaging remote-living secondary students.
- Indigenous young people are less likely to have the skills to participate in the workforce. Barriers to access, attendance and achievement need to be addressed to overcome non-completion of secondary school and/or not transitioning through to higher education, training or employment.
- The employment rate of Indigenous people increases with their level of education. Those completing tertiary education have employment outcomes on par with non-Indigenous people.

What is working:

- Indigenous approaches to early childhood, school and training services.
- Training that is industry-led, addresses impediments to training, and delivers culturally appropriate, jobs-focused training that aligns with employer objectives.

The reforms proposed by this inquiry can provide an enabling environment for stakeholders to develop collaborative and flexible solutions to education and training challenges.

15.1 Introduction

Education is a crucial pathway to improved health, social and economic outcomes for individuals, their families and communities, and society more broadly (DPMC 2017c). Improved educational outcomes are a key lever for addressing the disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians.

There is a strong link between education and employment—employment outcomes for Indigenous students that graduated from higher-level education (2016) are on par with non-Indigenous (Shaw et al. 2017). Research has shown that the greatest scope for improvement in educational outcomes for Indigenous students after school comes from improved educational performance during the early and middle levels of school (Mahuteau et al. 2015).

This chapter discusses how well the current education and training system is supporting the educational performance of remote and discrete living students, and proposes a strengths-based approach to improving outcomes. The chapter has two sections.

The first section discusses education, which includes early childhood education and care, and school education. It considers factors influencing students' ability to learn including early childhood development, accessibility and attendance at school, and support for special needs and for the important transitions to boarding school, training and further education.

The second section—training—considers vocational education and training services. Remote living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are significantly less likely to have the skills or training to participate in the workforce. This section looks at current initiatives and outcomes, and identifies some strategies that have been shown to work well. A more collaborative approach between government, industry and communities is recommended to improve training and employment opportunities in communities.

15.2 Education

Getting a good education, and doing well at school in a broader social sense, is widely acknowledged to underpin a healthy and prosperous future. Benefits to the individual and the wider community flow on to other areas including health and wellbeing, employment and justice (Boughton & Beetson 2017; Silburn et al. 2014).

Literacy and numeracy skills are an essential precursor to success in school, university and employment (Mahuteau et al., 2015). Improving outcomes and beyond-school prospects for students living in remote and discrete communities are influenced by multiple challenges and opportunities (Halsey 2017, p. 10). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland are:

more likely to be disadvantaged, removed from their families, absent from school, experiencing violence, racism and trauma, substance addiction, and to have a disability or mental illness, among other contribution factors. (Amnesty International sub. 13, p. 1)

Indigeneity does not play a role in exacerbating educational disadvantage in the final years of secondary schooling—Indigenous and non-Indigenous children with the same level of academic achievement at the age of 15 go on to complete Year 12 and higher education at the same rates (Mahuteau et al. 2015). Moreover, Indigenous students are recognised to bring unique strengths to their learning experience, such as:

- knowledge and close connection to their identity, land, language and culture
- listening, recounting and memorisation skills developed through engaging in oral traditions
- social, interpersonal and respectful relationship capabilities, developed through a strong understanding of kinship, family connections and other social contacts
- communication experiences in learning and using more than one language and/or dialect, including code switching skills between home language and Standard Australian English

- high levels of independence at a young age and a strong sense of caring for younger ones
- high levels of resilience, with hopes and dreams for their own future and that of their peers, community and children (DET 2016a, p. 5).

A strength-based approach that re-thinks ways to build on the capabilities of Indigenous students is likely to be more productive than simply concentrating on ‘the problems’ (DET 2016a; Halsey 2017, p. 9).

The following discussion draws on data and literature, stakeholder views and experiences of other jurisdictions. It presents a high-level view of student outcomes, and considers how well the current system addresses factors that influence students’ ability to learn and their options and opportunities when they leave school:

- early childhood development
- attendance at school
- teacher training, quality and retention
- language, culture and the curriculum
- health, wellbeing and special needs
- transitions.

High-level outcomes

In Queensland in 2016, 93 per cent of Indigenous children were enrolled in a preschool program of 15 hours or more (recommended minimum), though actual attendance was significantly less (Shaw et al. 2017). Remote and very remote preschools cater for 18 per cent of Queensland’s Indigenous pre-schoolers—attendance at these preschools is generally lower than for Indigenous children overall, ranging between 75 and 95 per cent in 2015 (AEDC 2015).

As discussed in Chapter 3, NAPLAN results are lower for Indigenous students, and the difference increases with remoteness. For example, the proportion of Year 3 Indigenous students in remote Queensland in 2016 who achieved above the national minimum standards, compared to non-Indigenous students, were:

- reading: 73 per cent (96 per cent non-Indigenous)
- writing: 80 per cent (98 per cent non-Indigenous)
- numeracy: 76 per cent (97 per cent non-Indigenous).

Results are similar for Years 5 and 9.

The gap in apparent retention rates⁵¹ of 16.6 percentage points in 2016 (between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students across Queensland) has improved from 21.4 percentage points in 2012 (QAO 2017, p. 5). Almost all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who graduated from Year 12 in a state school achieved a Year 12 certificate (QAO 2017, p. 3).

⁵¹ Retention rates are ‘apparent’ as they are based on aggregate enrolment data and do not record the progression of individual students. Factors not taken into account by this measure include: students repeating year levels; interstate and overseas migration; transfer of students between education sectors or schools; students who have left school previously, returning to continue their school education (ACARA 2013).

Early childhood development

Experiences in the early years (age 0–6) affect the structural and functional development of a child’s brain, with long-term consequences (TSIREC sub. 8, p. 17). Community data profiles of the Australian Early Developmental Index (AEDI)—collected in 2009, 2012 and 2015—illustrate a consistent gap between the development of young children in some of the remote and discrete communities and other Australian children. For example, the AEDI profile for the Torres region showed that across all domains young children were up to twice as likely to be identified as developmentally vulnerable or at risk compared with national norms (TSIREC sub. 8, p. 17). AEDI profiles for seven of the remote and discrete communities are shown in Table 35.

Table 35 Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in 2015
Percentage of children developmentally vulnerable in 2015

	Physical health and wellbeing*	Social competence	Emotional maturity	Language and cognitive skills	Communication skills and general knowledge	Vulnerable on one or more domains	Vulnerable on two or more domains
Australia	9.7	9.9	8.4	6.5	8.5	22.0	11.2
Queensland	12.4	12.4	10.1	8.0	10.5	26.1	14.0
Yarrabah	13.7	5.9	7.8	3.9	11.8	23.5	13.7
Torres	14.5	25.8	19.5	18.8	11.7	42.6	25.4
Palm Island	13.2	18.4	10.5	18.4	47.4	63.2	23.7
Mossman Gorge	15.8	13.2	13.2	23.7	31.6	39.5	26.3
Hope Vale	60.0	46.7	N/A	33.3	73.3	N/A	66.7
Doomadgee	86.4	22.7	40.9	50.0	22.7	≥90	59.1
Mornington Island	17.6	23.5	11.8	17.6	5.9	35.3	29.4

* Results for children with chronic special needs are not included in the results. If there are a certain number of questions not answered by teachers, these children do not contribute to the domain analysis.

AEDC data collection is greater than or equal to 60 per cent and less than 80 per cent of the ABS five-year-old population; interpret with caution. Profiles are not available for all communities due to too few teachers or children to display.

Source: AEDC 2015.

Early childhood services

Quality early childhood programs improve cognitive, language and social skills development, helping to close gaps in knowledge and ability before they become more difficult and costly to address.

Investing in early childhood education for disadvantaged children is an important component of a strategy for developing skills that help people thrive and society prosper (Heckman, in DET 2016, p. 10).

The benefits of quality early childhood education in achieving improved life outcomes—and savings in welfare and justice costs over the long term—were demonstrated in the Perry Preschool Project (Box 15.1).

Box 15.1 Perry Preschool Project

The program

- Preschool was provided each weekday morning in sessions that lasted for 2.5 hours.
- Children were taught by certified public school teachers with at least a bachelor's degree.
- Average child–teacher ratio was 6:1.
- The curriculum emphasized active learning. The children were engaged in decision-making and problem-solving, and planned, carried out and reviewed activities with support from adults.
- Teachers provided a weekly 1.5-hour home visit to each mother and child, designed to involve the mother in the educational process and help implement the preschool curriculum at home.
- Program cost was approximately \$11,300 per child over the school year (2007 dollars).

Evidence of effectiveness

The program was evaluated in one randomised controlled trial of 128 children—64 in the intervention group that received the preschool program, and 64 in the control group that did not.

- At age 27, the preschool group had completed on average one year more of schooling, spent 1.3 fewer years in special education services, and achieved a 44 per cent higher high school graduation rate. There were 50 per cent fewer teen pregnancies on average.
- At age 40, the preschool group were 46 per cent less likely to have served time in jail or prison, and had a 33 per cent lower arrest rate for violent crimes. They averaged a 42 per cent higher median monthly income, and were 26 per cent less likely to have received welfare in the past 10 years.

Source: CEBP 2015.

Various early childhood education and family support services, funded by the Queensland and Australian governments, are delivered to communities (Box 15.2).

Box 15.2 Services delivered to remote and discrete communities

Children and Family Centres (CFCs) (funded by Queensland Government)

- CFCs provide integrated early childhood, parenting and family support, and child and maternal health services for children aged up to eight years of age and their families.
- Nine remote and discrete locations include Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Mount Isa, Palm Island.
- Integrated services are operated by eight non-government organisations and one Indigenous Council.

Ready Together: Remote Early Years Transition project (funded by Australian Government)

- The project supports children's transition from home to early years services and then on to school.
- Taking a community-focused approach, the program is run in Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Mount Isa and Palm Island.

Pre-prep programs

- Early childhood education and care available to children 3 ½ to 4 ½ years of age for 15 hours per week.
- Four are operated by Indigenous councils in Hopevale, Napranum, Woorabinda and Wujal Wujal.
- State schools deliver pre-prep across 30 other remote and discrete communities.
- Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy delivers pre-prep at the Coen and Hope Vale campuses.
- 'Strait Start' is delivered through Tagai State College.

Long day care centres

- The Queensland Government funds nine discrete Indigenous communities for delivery of early childhood education through a long day care centre.
- Indigenous councils operate five services: Aurukun, Badu Island, Doomadgee, Hopevale, Napranum.

Remote Kindy Pilot (commenced in Term 2, 2016)

- The kindergarten program is provided in a composite class with other school children, to 38 remote state schools.
- Options for the future of the pilot scheme will be informed by an impact assessment and feedback.

Sources: Queensland Government sub. 27, pp. 7–8; DET 2017.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in planning, developing and delivering early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is central to addressing cultural competence and creating a feeling of belonging (DET 2016a, p. 9). The degree of Indigenous involvement in remote and discrete ECEC services varies from programs delivered by non-Indigenous, non-government organisations, through to those delivered by state schools, Indigenous councils, and Indigenous organisations. The Strait Start program is an example of an early childhood education program developed and delivered by community members (Box 15.3).

Box 15.3 Case study—Strait Start

The program

- An early childhood education program for children from birth to pre-prep, supporting children’s motor skills development, language and literacy, cognitive development, general knowledge, social and emotional development, independence and self-efficacy.
- Developed in the Torres Strait and is staffed by trained community members.
- 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 operations, while TSIREC funds training and supervision.

Outcomes

- The number of developmentally vulnerable children in the Torres Strait has fallen from almost 60 per cent in 2009 to 35.8 per cent in 2012 (Australian Early Development Index data).
- The TSIREC reports that school staff, local community leaders, parents and governments have attributed much of this improvement to the Strait Start program.
- The outcomes demonstrate the effectiveness of community capacity building—investing in locally developed programs that are delivered in communities by trained community members.
- Strait Start has also been credited for strengthening community support structures and building families’ confidence in their role as parents.

Source: TSIREC sub. 8, pp. 19–24.

Current Queensland Government strategies to build the capacity and capabilities of the ECEC workforce in remote communities include:

- providing relevant professional development, mentoring and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators
- supporting educators in communities to gain early childhood qualifications through the Indigenous remote support coordination project (DET 2016a, p. 10).

Issues

In comparison with their non-Indigenous peers, data indicate that families of young children in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are less likely to engage with early childhood education and care services (AEDC 2015). The Torres Strait Islanders’ Regional Education Council’s (TSIREC) submission highlighted gaps and uncoordinated service delivery to parents, families and young children across the Torres Strait. Several crisis intervention services and programs are operating in isolation and target only certain communities or parent groups. Box 15.4 provides an overview of early childhood services in the Torres Strait.

Box 15.4 Early childhood services in the Torres Strait

Early childhood education services

- Strait Start: the 'birth to 3 years' early childhood education program operates in 8 communities.
- Long day care centres are available on Thursday Island, Horn Island, Badu and Yam Island—enrolment numbers are very limited due to space restrictions.
- No early childhood education services are 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, and offer crisis intervention and re-engagement services; they are based on Thursday Island and offer 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.

Gaps (TSIREC estimates)

- An estimated 25 per cent of children under 4 years have no access to ECE services prior to school.
- Half of the children have no access to scheduled specialist health screening (for example, hearing and vision).
- No proactive services are available to support teenage parents or to provide parenting education.

Source: TSIREC sub. 8, pp. 18–19.

All stakeholders should work to improve early childhood education and family support services through better alignment to priorities identified by the communities—thereby delivering a greater focus on prevention, improved outcomes and better value for money.

Attendance at school

In Queensland in 2016, the school attendance rates⁵² for Indigenous children in year 1 was 86.5 per cent, a gap of 7.1 percentage points below non-Indigenous children (93.6 per cent). Attendance rates of Indigenous children decline in secondary school—by year 10, the attendance rate for Indigenous students was 80.3 per cent compared to 90.5 per cent for non-Indigenous students. Remoteness also impacts on attendance—only 71.7 per cent of Indigenous students in remote areas were attending school by year 10 (67.8 per cent in very remote areas), compared to 82.6 per cent in major cities (ACARA 2016).

Many factors create the preconditions for low school attendance, including family, school and teacher attributes, and underlying community issues such as inadequate housing and health care and inter-generational unemployment (Bourke et al. 2000; Silburn 2014).

School and community factors that influence attendance rates are outlined in Box 15.5.

⁵² The school attendance rate is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-time students in Years 1 to 10 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended over the period (ACARA 2013).

Box 15.5 School and community factors influencing attendance rates

School-based factors are significant contributors to the non-attendance, low achievement and non-completion of Indigenous students:

- inadequacies in and inappropriateness of the schooling process itself
- inadequate pre- and in-service training of teachers and their unpreparedness for teaching in a cross-cultural and/or bilingual situation
- poor teacher/student relationships
- teacher attitudes, expectations and a tendency to rely on deficit explanations that link underachievement with the individual rather than the individual's environment (Silverman, 2011)
- low level of Indigenous parental/community involvement in the schooling process.

There are several **community factors** to be considered when tackling attendance rates:

- high ratios of children to adults; younger parents and parents with low levels of school education
- the small percentage of adults in the community who speak English
- geographic remoteness, and overcrowded housing.

Sources: TSIREC sub. 8; Bourke et al. 2000, p. 3; Silburn 2014; Silburn et al. 2014.

Importance of adult literacy

Families are children's first educators, and continue to influence their learning and development during the school years and beyond (DET 2016a, p. 19). Parents with low literacy levels may struggle to support their children at school, including through reading to children; being able to understand and respond to school notes; taking part in parent-teacher meetings; and advocating for their children when they are having trouble at school. Research shows that children who are least likely to attend school regularly and do well are those who grow up in a household where few adults, if any, have had a good education (Boughton & Beetson 2017). The 'Yes, I Can!' Aboriginal adult literacy campaigns have brought positive change to communities in western New South Wales (Box 15.6).

The success of 'Yes, I Can' demonstrates the benefits of greater community involvement in delivering local initiatives.

Box 15.6 'Yes, I Can!' Aboriginal adult literacy campaigns

- 'Yes, I Can!' Aboriginal adult literacy campaigns are based on the premise that the most effective way to get more kids reading and writing is to give their parents those same skills.
- Developed in Cuba and since used in 30 countries, 'Yes, I Can!' campaigns have been running in western New South Wales since 2012, in partnership with the University of New England.
- Completion rates are over 65 per cent—five times higher than Indigenous students' completion rates for formal, accredited Foundations Skills courses run through the national VET system.
- A local school principal said:

More parents are talking to me about school and asking for their kids to be given homework. Our pre-schoolers are using the library more, too. It's been a great thing for the community: it's given the adults who did miss out on their schooling a chance to catch up and have a way to relate to their children.

- 'Yes, I Can!' is taught in the community, by community members, with a non-formal community education approach.
- A longitudinal study of the impact of 'Yes, I Can!' is underway.

Source: Boughton & Beetson 2017.

Teacher quality and retention

Quality teachers benefit those students who depend the most on school for positive life outcomes; however, attracting and retaining the best teachers for remote schools is a challenge (Halsey 2017, p. 24; Rice et al. 2017). Teachers working with Indigenous students in remote/very remote schools are likely to be less experienced, more likely to have spent less than five years in their current schools, and report low levels of specialised training in Indigenous education, with less than a third reporting pre-training or in-service training (Luke et al. 2013, p. 6).

Poor cultural competency and an understanding of how communities function were factors raised by stakeholders, who said they:

desire strong consideration to ensure cultural competency; improve staff broad knowledge around aboriginal community functionality; need to improve working relationship with all tiers of education to support relevant educational structures that provide intense support to local community teachers and staff ... prepare staff about expectations, values, local trends and or essential needs including the effect of the environmental disparity that has strong association with a systemic cycle of mental health problems associated with the Doomadgee Aboriginal community. (NWQICSS sub. 23, p. 6)

Higher staff turnover impacts negatively on learning outcomes (Halsey 2017, p. 26). The average length of service (teaching) in the remote and discrete communities is 11.6 years, compared to around 15 years in cities and inner regional areas of Australia. Teacher turnover rates are high at 21.6 per cent on average across the communities (2016), compared to 6.5–8.3 per cent in cities and inner regional areas of Australia (DET 2017).

Strategies to attract and retain better prepared teachers are outlined in Box 15.7.

Box 15.7 Attracting and retaining better prepared teachers

What works

- increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, which fosters student engagement and improves educational outcomes
- pre-service teacher experience, such as a practice placement in a remote Indigenous school
- university curricula that explicitly focuses on preparing and supporting teachers for living and working in remote communities, and teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- tailored courses to prepare teachers—for example, the National Exceptional Teaching in Disadvantaged Schools program selects high-quality teacher trainees, and provides them with targeted coursework and practice placements in disadvantaged schools. Of these trainees, 90 per cent go on to accept a teaching job in a disadvantaged school
- recruiting quality principals—effective teachers value good school leadership and seek to move away from schools where this is lacking. Effective principals are also better at identifying quality staff and assisting teachers’ professional development.

What does not work

- Prescriptive curricula— ‘teacher-proof’ curricula are likely to drive out those teachers most able to improve student learning.

Source: Halsey 2017, p. 25; Rice et al. 2017.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and staff members are recognised as supporting a culturally inclusive curriculum. Indigenous teachers’ understanding of culture and preferred learning styles can enrich the school experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and support them to achieve success at school (Buckskin 2016; Crawford and Biddle 2017).

Strategies to attract and retain more Indigenous teachers and support their completion of initial teacher education call for effective engagement and retention strategies by faculties and schools of education (Buckskin 2016). A successful NSW Department of Education campaign is outlined in Box 15.8.

Box 15.8 Join our Mob

Join our Mob is a NSW Government campaign to attract more Indigenous teachers. It includes:

- a scholarship program supporting 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to train as teachers
- a guarantee of an appointment in a preferred location on graduation
- targeted career attraction campaigns with a highly visible message, found to be most effective
- university career attraction campaigns, social media and other online channels, used to promote teaching as a career of choice.

Source: Johnson et al. 2016.

In Queensland, the remote area teacher education program supports greater access to higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as increasing the number of Indigenous teachers in Queensland schools (Queensland Government sub. 27, p. 26). There are currently 612 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Queensland state schools, comprising 1.4 per cent of all teachers (DET 2016a, p. 22). Schools in the remote and discrete communities have on average 15.3 per cent Indigenous teachers and 31.6 per cent Indigenous educators in non-teaching positions. While this is positive, the data does not reflect the Indigenous populations of the regions in which teachers are based, and the total number of Indigenous teachers currently employed within Queensland schools is proportionately well below parity with the broader population.

Education employer approaches to attracting and retaining qualified Indigenous peoples into teaching and leadership positions is a key factor contributing to the numbers of Indigenous teachers in schools. A review of Indigenous teacher numbers in Australian schools found that, while many government policies have committed to increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, progress remains slow. Greatly increased levels of implementation, monitoring and reporting, and accountability are needed to stimulate change at any appreciable rate (Buckskin, 2016).

Language, culture and the curriculum

Research suggests that the absence of awareness and respect of culture and language are factors behind the gap and inequality in outcomes (Luke et al. 2013; Shaw et al. 2017). Education that is not inclusive of one's social, cultural and economic values is disempowering, and the disconnect raises questions in students' minds as to the purpose and value of education— 'am I learning so I can leave my community, am I learning so I can stay locally, or am I learning so I have a real choice about what I do?' (Halsey 2017, p. 21).

There are links between recognition and use of first language and cultural knowledge, and student identity, wellbeing and education outcomes (Disbray 2017). Research shows that many concepts are best learned in the language that the learner understands. Mastery in first language supports second language learning, literacy and academic achievement.

Schools teaching and instructing in English alone ... develops a failure syndrome for many children as they return home at the end of the school day often unable to remember what was taught that day – which causes them to become depressed. (Wild & Anderson 2007, p. 147)

Testing regimes delivered in the English language create a barrier to some students. Where teachers are not permitted or are unable to translate questions into the child's first language, their true knowledge of a subject like maths cannot be properly assessed (Salleh 2017).

Approaches that promote a culturally responsive school environment are outlined in Box 15.9.

Box 15.9 Cultural responsiveness

A culturally responsive approach has the following characteristics:

- a dual language approach supported with trained English language teachers and structured English as an Additional Language or Dialect programs
- flexibility for schools to interpret and implement the curriculum in a way that better meets the needs and interests of students, supported by the necessary authority and resources
- learning content that is engaging, accessible and culturally responsive, with a school culture that supports this and builds on high expectations for all students
- efforts to empower, support and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to enhance their own learning capacity, while also building and sustaining teacher capacity
- coherent and localised approaches to evidence-based literacy and numeracy teaching
- a profound understanding of the importance of school-community partnerships.

Sources: Fogarty 2012; Halsey 2017, p. 22.

Enabling a culturally responsive school environment

School can be an alienating experience for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders when there are no senior family members around and no teachers speaking familiar languages. Including the presence, languages and authority of parents and elders in schooling can improve attendance rates and the commitment of parents to working collaborative together (Christie 2014).

A more culturally responsive school environment can be enabled by involving Indigenous students, their families and communities in all aspects of developing and driving schooling solutions, particularly at the local community level. An independent review into regional, rural and remote education observed that:

When a community and its school work together, especially in what seem to be difficult social and demographic context, education happens in many new ways ...

... creating opportunities to build school, family and community relationships are very important to improving the core business of a school—teaching and learning. (Halsey 2017, pp. 28, 29)

The Torres Strait Island Regional Council (sub. 12, p. 34) highlighted the consistent and valued education services provided in their communities:

[All] have staff and facilities on the ground in each community. All are integrated well into their communities and play a positive role in facilitating other services into communities. All are staffed by people living in the communities.

Cultural recognition in schools

The Australian Curriculum sets expectations about what all Australian students should be taught, regardless of where they live or the background from which they come. The Queensland Government is free to deliver the Australian Curriculum in ways that are best suited to the students in local schools, including curriculum development and implementation, course accreditation, student assessment and certification (Halsey 2017, pp. 11, 19).

The Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) provides guidance on approaches to cultural recognition in schools, and recognises the importance of empowering communities in the Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training action plan. However, the take-up and effectiveness of community involvement and cultural recognition in schools is not measured, reducing the ability to monitor progress for the Closing the Gap targets (QAO 2017, pp. 4, 7).

There is scope for communities to drive change in their schools to make programs more accessible. For example, the remote Burketown State School is transitioning the Language Other Than English (LOTE) subject from Japanese to Gangalidda. Burketown State School is 97 per cent Indigenous, with most of the students being Gangalidda people. It is expected the Gangalidda LOTE subject will be a more appropriate component in students' lives—it will be usable and the students who already talk it will get stronger.

[So introducing Gangalidda] makes me feel that I should be proud of my language because I am a Gangalidda person, and it makes me happy just to be doing it. (Tatham 2017)

The change to the Gangalidda LOTE subject was driven by students and the community, and will employ local teachers.

Independent schools

The Independent Public Schools (IPS) initiative provides schools with greater autonomy in decision-making and increased capacity to work in new ways to maximise learning outcomes. Independent schools have greater flexibility to tailor the curriculum to directly suit the needs of their students. Taigai State College in the Torres Strait is an IPS seeing improved student outcomes. The Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (the Academy) is led by an independent board in a formal agreement with DET (Box 15.10).

Box 15.10 Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schools

Taigai State College

- The college delivers 'YUMI' Education⁵³ across 17 discrete communities for clients from birth to adulthood.
- YUMI prioritises the whole child—their academic, social, emotional, cultural and physical needs—by embedding the inherent value of languages, culture and history into teaching and learning.
- In 2015, Tagai State College achieved 100 per cent Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) and vocational education and training (VET) completion rates, maintained an improved attendance rate of 88 per cent, and improved achievement in reading and numeracy across Years 1 to 9.

The college works in partnership with the TSIREC to:

- promote 8 campuses that provide Strait Start, a Montessori program for early learners aimed at children 0–3 years old
- deliver a traditional language in all pre-school through third grade (P–3) classrooms
- partner with FNQ TAFE to enable students to access university via the VET pathway.

Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (the Academy)—Coen and Hope Vale primary schools

- The Academy incorporates five domains⁵⁴ focused on closing the early childhood development gap; Direction Instruction⁵⁵ of English literacy and numeracy; extracurricular programs; culture and traditional language instruction; case-managed school readiness, attendance, parental involvement and health.
- Overall student attendance rate is 81 per cent (2016).
- The number of students at grade level in Reading and Numeracy has improved steadily since 2013. Years 3 and 5 results are close to or above statistically similar schools in 7 out of 10 domains (2016).

Sources: CYAAA 2016; ACARA 2017b; TSC 2015.

More individual and community input is needed to develop strategies that address family, school and community preconditions for low school attendance, and underlying barriers to retention and achievement. The structural reforms and agreement-making proposed by this inquiry would support stakeholders to work together to improve schooling services.

⁵³ YUMI Education is a distinct style of education and training that recognises the role of community in determining the strategic direction of service delivery in the Torres Strait Nation (YUMI Education Inc. 2015).

⁵⁴ Educational learning objectives are classified into overarching domains of learning, for example: cognitive (thinking), affective (emotion/feeling), and psychomotor (physical/kinesthetic) domains. The domains of learning are a useful framework for educators as they try to construct optimal learning experiences (Wilson 2017).

⁵⁵ Direct instruction is the use of straightforward, explicit teaching techniques, usually to teach a specific skill. Teachers follow a step-by-step, lesson-by-lesson approach to instruction that follows a pre-determined skill acquisition sequence administered to students placed in ability/achievement groups (Luke 2013).

Health, wellbeing and special needs

Health factors, particularly disability and high levels of psychological distress, have a direct impact on Indigenous students (Nelson et al. 2016; Shaw et al. 2017). Indigenous Australians are 1.7 times more likely to have a disability, of which preventable hearing loss is a major problem. An estimated 79 per cent of Indigenous students tested across urban and remote centres had an educationally significant hearing disability, which affects language development and eventually school attendance. To compare, the World Health Organisation defines a rate higher than 4 per cent of otitis media—the main cause of hearing loss in children—as unacceptable (Shaw et al. 2017).

Socio-economic disadvantage and poor health outcomes in communities are known risk factors for students' learning, development and wellbeing (PC 2016a). These factors play out in a higher concentration of special needs. For example, a 2014–15 assessment of students' cognitive, social and emotional status in three Cape York communities found raised levels of intellectual impairment (Nelson et al. 2016, p. 20). Roughly one quarter of students reportedly met the criteria for diagnosis of intellectual impairment and subsequent Education Queensland verification, in two of the three locations. A further 42 per cent were within the borderline intelligence category⁵⁶ (Nelson et al. 2016, p. 20). The results highlight an urgent need for strategies to optimise education and development outcomes for these students.

High levels of trauma, self-harm and suicide in the Cape York and Torres Strait communities place a burden of mental health problems and stress on Indigenous children (TKI 2012). For example, a study of remote Indigenous Cape York students relocating to boarding schools found that 77.5 per cent knew someone who had suicided in the last year. Responses indicated 60 per cent had levels of psychological distress in the high to very high categories (Nelson et al. 2016). These findings indicate the need for trauma-informed education practices to enable students to achieve an education and contribute fully in society (CQUniversity sub. 9, p. 1).

Unmet special needs make learning difficult. A Cape York teacher observed that:

Some of these kids are too stressed to learn. Heaps of the kids just have total meltdowns, or they might act like zombies sometimes. It's like they are cognitively overloaded just dealing with what's going on at home and in the community. Yet the system doesn't want to know about that. We are just meant to focus on literacy and numeracy, and if you're lucky you might get support for Intellectual Impairment, but we don't even try and grapple with things like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ... the system doesn't want to hear about it'. (Nelson et al. 2016, p. 16)

Studies have shown that early conduct problems have far-reaching implications for later development. Conduct problems frequently co-occur with increased risks of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, early onset alcohol and substance abuse, school suspension and dropout, teen pregnancy and mental disorders. Childhood conduct problems are precursors of a range of adverse outcomes including crime, imprisonment, mental health problems, suicidal behaviours and physical health problems (Advisory Group 2009, pp. 5–6). Prevention, treatment and management of conduct problems improve outcomes for the child and society more broadly.

⁵⁶ Borderline intellectual functioning is a categorisation of intelligence wherein a person has below average cognitive ability (generally an IQ of 70–85), but the deficit is not as severe as intellectual impairment (below 70).

Queensland Government responses to special needs

Queensland Government current and proposed disability supports are outlined in Box 15.11.

Box 15.11 Special needs support arrangements

Deadly Ears program: The Queensland Government provides a multi-sector response to address middle ear disease and associated hearing loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through the Deadly Ears program.

Current disability support: DET has conducted extensive assessment and verification work with students in Cape York in recent years. In 2016, the Department engaged LifeStyle Therapies and Training Solutions allied health services to provide comprehensive psychology, occupational therapy, and speech therapy support, tailored to meet the complex needs of these isolated communities.

Proposed: A cross-agency working group to identify additional interventions and facilitate coordinated service delivery to support children with complex social and emotional behaviours is proposed in the draft action plan *Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training*.

Sources: DET 2016a, p. 20; Queensland Government sub. 27, p. 12.

Issues

Submissions raised concerns about gaps in identification, assessment and support for children with special needs (Box 15.12).

There is an opportunity to better respond to special needs by establishing and using a person-centred outcomes framework as the basis for needs assessment and service planning (PC 2017a). The service delivery reforms proposed by this inquiry would help to focus information collection, performance evaluation and contract management on a person-centred outcomes framework, providing a greater understanding of user needs and what works.

Box 15.12 Gaps in identification and response to special needs

Identification:

One teacher indicated she was working with a girl who turned 17 recently, whose family had described her as 'simple', and who had attended a state school in the community over a period of seven years, as well as attending a boarding school. Her attendance and achievement history were poor. As it turns out, the student is profoundly deaf but until now was undiagnosed.

The same teacher commented:

Identification and verification is quite random, in remote communities it is done using fly-in, fly-out expertise, and if a student is not at school that day or has chronic attendance issues, they don't get seen. (Nelson et al. 2016, p. 15)

Assessment and support:

In Queensland there is no systematic response within Queensland Education to identify and respond to social and emotional disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Conduct Disorder, even in our remote and discrete communities where the indicators make plain that we are well and truly 'on-notice' that these will be high-risk, high-prevalence populations. (CYI sub. 26, p. 8)

A Cape York teacher observed:

There are big gaps even if you get an assessment through. The system can't deal with co-morbid⁵⁷ conditions. You are forced to choose which one you get support for. It's not like you get 10 hours of support for this issue and 12 for that, you have to choose which. (Nelson et al. 2016 p. 16)

Sources: CYI sub. 26, p. 8; Nelson et al. 2016, pp. 15–16.

Transitions

Transition to secondary and boarding school

Many students from remote communities throughout Queensland must relocate to attend secondary school, due to limited or no options in their community. Of these, around 500 leave their families and communities each year to attend boarding schools.

Being away from family and community presents challenges for Indigenous boarding students. Conflicting feelings between wanting a good future and wanting to maintain their identity are often the reason for Indigenous students dropping out of boarding school. Students experience homesickness, and feel disconnected from family, culture and identity when they return home (Rogers 2017; Rogers & Biddle 2017).

The Queensland Government provides Transition Support Services (TSS) to students and families from some Cape York communities to transition to boarding school. TSS also provides in-school support to these students and a number from communities in the Northern Peninsula Area at boarding schools and residential facilities throughout Queensland. TSS supports student adjustment, orientation, and ongoing stay at boarding schools (CQ University sub. 9, p. 4; NWQICSS sub. 23, p. 18).

⁵⁷ Comorbidity is the presence of one or more additional disorders co-occurring with a primary disorder.

In the Torres Strait, at least 500 secondary-school-age students living in remote island communities must relocate to attend secondary school, including boarding schools, on Thursday Island or mainland Australia. TSIREC raised concerns that:

[d]espite 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. (TSIREC sub. 8, p. 9)

Research⁵⁸ has found that attending boarding school works well for some students, but is challenging for others. A high proportion of students who had been disengaged from boarding school had very high levels of psychosocial distress and were particularly vulnerable. The research identified opportunities for improving educational outcomes for remote Indigenous students without suitable secondary school options in their community (Box 15.13).

Box 15.13 Findings from the Resilience Study

The research conducted by TSS and the CQ University Resilience Study team provided evidence of remote Indigenous student experiences, and recommended the following actions:

- targeted preparation for primary students who are likely to be transitioning to boarding school, from the end of Year 4 / beginning of Year 5, as part of the Education Queensland curriculum
- linking boarding schools and communities to foster better engagement and understanding
- exploring alternative models of education for re-engaging remote Indigenous secondary students, and delivery of models of education that work for all students.

Source: CQ University sub. 9, p. 8.

Transition to further education, training and employment

The gap in apparent retention rates⁵⁹ of 16.6 percentage points in 2016 (across Queensland) has reduced from 21.4 percentage points in 2012, but the number of students leaving school before the end of Year 12 remains high. Queensland Government initiatives to lift attainment rates⁶⁰ and facilitate the transition to further education, training and employment are described in Box 15.14.

⁵⁸ The 5-year Resilience Study was developed by the Centre for Indigenous Health Equity Research, Central Queensland University, in partnership with TSS in response to identified self-harm and suicide risk for transitioning students.

⁵⁹ Apparent retention rates estimate the progression of students through school over several years through several grades/year levels (ACARA 2016).

⁶⁰ 'Attainment rate' refers to the percentage of Australian 20 to 24-year-olds who have achieved Year 12 or equivalent or an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate II or above (ACARA 2013).

Box 15.14 Supporting students in the senior school years

Three programs available to support senior students are:

- The Senior Education and Training (SET) plans are a DET initiative for Year 10 students that map out a plan of action for the student's education and training to support them to complete Year 12, achieve their Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) and help the student to enrol in the subjects they need to achieve their career goals.
- The Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) attainment project is a DET initiative that provides individual case management to support students to attain the QCE. This has proven effective in helping those who complete the senior phase of schooling to attain Year 12 certification.
- The Youth Employment Program is a DATSIP initiative that is available in term 3 of Year 12 and supports Indigenous students to successfully move from schools into training or employment pathways. It has found job placements for 2,661 post-Year 12 persons since starting in 2015.

Sources: Clontarf Foundation 2017; DET 2016a, p. 11; QAO 2017, pp. 6–7; QAO 2017, pp. 3–6; QAO 2017, p. 8.

Issues

A recent Queensland Audit Office (QAO) review of the Queensland Government initiatives found that while attainment rates of those who complete senior years had been lifted, more could be done to support students' engagement and achievement. Key issues were:

- State schools are not regularly reviewing whether all senior students have a SET plan, and in 2016, an estimated one third of Year 12 students did not (QAO 2017, pp. 6–7).
- Information on regional job opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is not being provided to schools, parents and students, to assist with the completion of students' SET plans.
- The number of Community Education Counsellors has not kept pace with the increase in Indigenous students in Year 11 and 12, and staff have concerns about the time available to undertake intensive case management (QAO 2017, pp. 3–6).
- Coverage of the Youth Employment Program is limited because it is restricted to engagement with Year 12 students in term 3 only.

The Barambah Local Justice Group raised concerns about gaps in support for high risk teens:

The students at the Rodeo School are high risk, most vulnerable and most disconnected in the community. They are the ones that are regularly before the courts and in and out of detention due to poor support at home and a dysfunctional upbringing. Although the school is classified as "Private", they are not like regular private schools where rich parents are paying high fees for their child's education. The students do not pay any fees and they often miss out on programs like the Clontarf Program which can only be delivered to public school kids and the kids from the Rodeo School and Silver Lining miss out. There is nothing fair about the way funding is allocated. (Barambah Local Justice Group sub. 2, p. 9)

There is an opportunity to improve outcomes by targeting support to the key transition phases. Informed by community needs assessment, appropriate responses could better prepare, support and involve students and their families in the transition to boarding school. Delivery models of education that work for all students are needed, including alternative models for re-engaging remote living secondary students.

Supporting a broader student base

Mentoring and engagement initiatives, such as those delivered by the Clontarf Foundation and the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) (Box 15.15), are critical to engage students with their education in a meaningful way. They can greatly improve Year 12 completion outcomes and support the transition to further education, training and work (DPMC 2017c). The success of these programs suggests there would be merit in extending their reach in remote and discrete communities.

Box 15.15 Mentoring and engagement initiatives

Clontarf Foundation

The Clontarf Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that supports Indigenous male students to improve their discipline, life skills and self-esteem, and remain engaged in school, through participation in sport. The Clontarf approach is premised on the belief that failure to experience achievement when young, coupled with a position of under-privilege can lead to alienation, anger and more serious consequences.

The program is delivered through a network of football academies established in partnership with local schools. Students are supported with mentoring and counselling on a range of behavioural and lifestyle issues by a locally based Clontarf staff member, while the school caters for their educational needs.

The Clontarf Foundation is funded by the Australian and state governments and the private sector.

Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)

The AIME program aims to address the high proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander high school students not completing secondary school and/or not transitioning through to university, further study or employment at the same rate as their non-Indigenous peers.

AIME delivers support services related to education and mentoring, school retention and transition into university, further education or employment. More than 50 per cent of AIME staff are Indigenous. Indigenous facilitators deliver the program to the Indigenous high school students from Years 7 to 12.

A case study of AIME in Central Queensland provided evidence it is a valuable, effective program. At the individual level, many AIME participants experienced improved educational outcomes and career prospects. Benefits extended to students' families and communities, and have the potential to support long-term change in outcomes for Indigenous young people (Fredericks et al. 2017).

An external evaluation of the AIME program found that AIME students performed better than Indigenous students around the country, and reached levels of school performance close to their non-Indigenous peers. The program had a positive impact on resilience, employment and earnings, and generated \$7 in benefits for every \$1 of cost.

AIME started in 2005 and is delivered by an Indigenous Corporation, in urban and regional areas. It is funded from various revenue streams including in-kind; university partners; corporate partnerships; family donations and philanthropic partners; government grants; and individual donations. Partner universities in Queensland include Central Queensland University, University of the Sunshine Coast, Griffith University, Bond University, and Southern Cross University (AIFS 2017).

More individual and community input should be secured through the community planning process to develop effective supports for transitioning and dis-engaged students in the remote and discrete communities.

15.3 Training

The relatively low rate of employment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders contributes to poorer economic and social outcomes (QAO 2017, p. 2). There is a direct relationship between employment and level of education—research has shown that the percentage of the Indigenous population aged 15–64 years in employment increases with increasing levels of education. The difference was reasonably consistent across gender, degree of remoteness and time (Crawford & Biddle 2017).

High-level outcomes

The Queensland Government submission to this inquiry noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in communities are significantly less likely to have the skills or training to participate in the workforce, with only one in two in the 20–24 years age group having attained a Year 12 (or equivalent) education. This compares to nearly two-thirds of all Indigenous Queenslanders and more than 4 out of every 5 non-Indigenous Queenslanders in the age cohort attaining Year 12 or equivalent (Queensland Government sub. 27, p. 5).

More Indigenous Australians participate in some form of government-funded Vocational Education and Training (VET). While their qualification levels are lower, there is a broad upward trend—the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–64 years who had a Certificate III or higher-level qualification increased substantially from 15 per cent in 2002 to 34 per cent in 2014–15 (Crawford & Biddle 2017).

Indigenous employment after training was lower, partly due to fewer opportunities in rural and remote areas, where many Indigenous students live (Rothman et al. 2013; Shaw et al. 2017).

Participation of Indigenous students at university almost doubled from 2006 to 2015, though less than half completed their studies. Employment outcomes for Indigenous students that graduated from higher-level education (2016) are on par with non-Indigenous (Shaw et al. 2017).

Current Queensland Government initiatives

In 2015–16, approximately \$10.4 million was invested by the Queensland Government to support people in discrete communities to access VET and complete formal qualifications, including:

- 1,910 students to gain qualifications through the Certificate 3 Guarantee and Higher Level Skills programs
- 278 apprentices and trainees to complete qualifications while learning skills at work
- training places and pathways to employment for 750 participants in 17 Indigenous councils plus five councils with high Indigenous populations under the Indigenous VET Partnership⁶¹ initiative for the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ).

The Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW) program provides training, skills development and paid traineeship opportunities. Since 2015, 10 projects worth \$962,200 have been approved across the discrete communities, involving 199 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous councils have been awarded \$625,000 under the SQW First Start program to employ 50 young people or disadvantaged jobseekers in a 12-month traineeship (Queensland Government sub. 27, p. 14).

What is working well

Employment rates in remote areas increase with the level of qualification, and are improving over time (Table 36).

⁶¹ Indigenous VET Partnerships is a Queensland Government initiative supporting participation in accredited training and assessment services that will improve training and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders across the state (DET 2016c).

Table 36 Employment rate, Indigenous people aged 15–64, Queensland remote areas

Qualification level	2002 (%)	2014–15 (%)
Diploma or higher	67	81
Certificate III or IV	57	60
Certificate I or II	35	41
No post-school qualification	15	24

Source: Crawford & Biddle 2017.

A VET partnership with the LGAQ (Box 15.16) exemplifies a collaborative approach between trainers and employers (Indigenous councils). The industry-led⁶² process has trained 1,200 people and raised VET completion rates to over 95 per cent (from 15 per cent in 2012, before LGAQ administration of the program). The training is tied to employment outcomes, which allows locals to take over job functions previously undertaken by external contractors.

In NSW, the 'Yes, I Can' Aboriginal adult literacy campaigns (Box 15.6) demonstrate what can be achieved with a non-formal community education approach to training.

Issues and opportunities

The Cape York and Torres Strait regions have relatively larger percentages of the Indigenous population with a Certificate I or II as their highest educational qualification (15–64 years, in 2011), compared to the eastern seaboard and cities. The percentage with Certificate III or IV level qualifications is largest in major cities and tends to decline with increasing remoteness (Crawford & Biddle 2017).

Remoteness can lead to difficulties in accessing training and gaining a trade:

Despite the region's unquestioning enthusiasm for Montessori early years programs, their establishment has not come without challenges. The remoteness of the communities, for example, is a barrier to staff accessing training ... (Montessori Children's Foundation n.d.)

Tradespeople visit for short projects and employment of local persons is not feasible for them. Likewise the weekly TAFE requirements do not suit the situation. (Hannan sub. 24, p. 3)

To build workforce capacity, initiatives need to build long term local employment and support local workers to gain the necessary skills and higher qualifications. For example, TSIRC supported:

Shifting to a 'local first' model of grant funding so that organisations based elsewhere (Thursday Island Cairns, Brisbane) do not automatically receive funding to deliver services in our region

Working in partnership with TSIRC and local partner organisations to build the skill and knowledge base of local workforce

Identifying barriers (legislative, required skills/knowledge/qualifications) to local employment and developing medium-to-long term strategies with TSIRC and local partner organisations to address such barriers. (TSIRC sub. 12, p. 8)

⁶² Indigenous VET partnerships with industry need to show value for money and clear pathways to employment (DET 2016c).

Box 15.16 Indigenous VET Partnership with LGAQ

The Indigenous VET partnership program was developed to build the workforce capacity and capability of Queensland Indigenous councils. The program is managed by LGAQ and provides supported training places and pathways for Indigenous people to participate in and complete vocational qualifications that lead to employment outcomes.

The aim of the project is to:

- establish an industry driven, fully contestable training procurement process responsive to the needs of each council
- identify council workforce capacity and capability issues/needs—current and future
- facilitate a collaborative cross government agency approach to addressing workforce requirements
- ensure closer alignment between workforce development initiatives and council objectives
- identify and address any impediments to training
- manage and deliver culturally appropriate, jobs-focused training.

Councils chose training to ensure that their employees:

- had requisite skills (Environmental Health Workers, Animal Management Workers)
- held current licences / tickets requirements (Plant Operators, Traffic Controllers)
- were formally trained in the technical aspects of their work
- met relevant national certification requirements (water operators)
- had skill levels in line with any legislative requirements (Early Child Care and Aged Care Workers).

As at May 2017, this program was achieving a 99 per cent completion rate. It has lifted qualification levels in communities and improved the workforce capacity of Indigenous councils.

Source: LGAQ sub. 14, pp. 13–14.

Closing the gap outcomes can be greatly enhanced with improved educational and employment opportunities in communities. Collaboration of all stakeholders is needed to develop effective responses including:

- a flexible approach to funding and delivery to enable more effective, place-based approaches to vocational and foundation skills training
- TAFE attendance requirements tailored to better suit remote living students
- VET delivery that is aligned with industry need and tied to employment outcomes
- paying attention to cultural appropriateness
- providing practical and mentoring supports to trainees and apprentices.

15.4 Conclusion

Outcomes and beyond-school prospects for remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are influenced by multiple challenges and possibilities. While some progress is being made, the needs of communities, families and students could be better met.

There is an opportunity to improve the accessibility and integration of early childhood education and family support services, to support better development outcomes for young children in the communities.

Strategies that focus on school, community and interagency factors influencing attendance rates can increase engagement in learning and therefore school retention over the longer term. Improving levels of adult literacy in communities would enable families to better support school education, with flow-on benefits to health, employment and justice.

Greater engagement of families and communities including elders and past students, to develop and drive schooling solutions, would assist schools to create a supportive atmosphere for Indigenous students. Learning and developmental outcomes of children with special needs and experiencing psychosocial distress would be better supported with trauma-informed education practices and appropriate supports.

More attention needs to be paid to target underlying barriers to access, attendance and achievement in overcoming non-completion of secondary school and/or not transitioning through to higher education, training or employment. Closing the gap of life outcomes can be enhanced with a more collaborative approach between government, industry and communities to improve training and employment opportunities in communities.

The reforms proposed by this inquiry can provide an enabling environment for stakeholders to develop collaborative and flexible solutions to these challenges.

Recommendation 18

All stakeholders should address opportunities to improve education and training services through:

- a greater focus on prevention, including through early childhood development and family supports, and identifying and responding to special needs
 - individual and community input to priorities, design and delivery of services, addressing:
 - family, school and community preconditions for low school attendance
 - underlying barriers to retention and achievement
 - difficulties with transition and re-engagement of secondary students living remotely
 - reform of vocational education and training (VET) funding and delivery to directly align with student and industry needs, and employment opportunities.
-