



ASSOCIATED CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Associated Christian Schools

Indigenous Education Action Plan
Response

February 2010

Introduction and Background on Associated Christian Schools

Associated Christian Schools comprises 27 member schools, with approximately 18,589 students enrolled.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed options for nationally consistent curriculum for the senior years of schooling. The improvement of regulation requirements to a more consistent and efficient regulatory system, quality of care and curriculum framework is a significant shared concern and our recommendations are a reflection of Christian school teachers' commitment, in Queensland, to these ends.

Associated Christian Schools member schools are also members of Independent Schools Queensland. Associated Christian Schools notes that ISQ have also submitted a response to this document, and supports the positions presented by ISQ.

1. What was your first impression of the draft IEAP when you read it?

Associated Christian Schools acknowledges and affirms the IEAP, as it attempts to address a comprehensive range of issues regarding the life outcomes of Indigenous Australians. Further, Associated Christian Schools endorses the IEAP, and the targets identified:

- Closing the life expectancy gap within a generation
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade
- Ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
- At least halve the gap for Indigenous Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

2.What questions, issues or concerns did the draft IEAP raise for you?

3.Are there important issues that you feel have not been addressed in the draft IEAP?

Responses to Questions 2 and 3.

1) Overview of the Indigenous Education Action Plan

Associated Christian Schools supports the proposed Action Plan which seeks to address the issues and concerns expressed by government, local and community organisation regarding the Indigenous students throughout Australia. In particular, we affirm the six priority areas targets identified by COAG, outline in the Introduction:

- Readiness for school
- Engagement and connections with school
- Attendance at school
- Literacy and numeracy
- Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development.
- Pathways to real post school options

Comment:

Clarification is sought regarding the involvement and commitment required from non-government schools as providers and, in particular, any additional workload that may be required from staff working in the administration departments of schools, with respect to data collection, especially with the Attendance at school target and post school options target.

The document states that there have been a commitment by governments, through COAG and the National Indigenous Reform agreement to ensure better connections across the six identified 'building blocks'. Clarification is sought as to the manner in which these connections will be achieved, especially with respect to access issues in isolated regional communities. Clarification is also sought as to funding access and service resources that will be available.

In the Conceptual overview of the Indigenous Education action Plan, there is no mention of health and community involvement in neither the overview, nor any outline of the process that will be utilised to engage support and involvement of parents of Indigenous students.

With respect to Pathways to real post school options: there is a need to outline funding and access issues with respect to isolated communities and how students desiring to pursue post schools options outside their immediate locality will gain access to courses and accommodation if they need to relocate.

2) Readiness for school.

This section requires further elaboration and outline regarding the following:

- How parents and the community will be engaged in this process.
- How teachers will be professionally developed and resourced to implement the programmes outlined on page 7.
- How students will be assessed in relation to their readiness for school in relation to the engagement with their relevant community literacy and skill development.
- How respective organisation will engage collectively to engage in this process; education, health, community and government agencies. In particular, the programmes that will be implemented to address eye diseases that can affect school readiness for Indigenous children.

3) Engagement and Readiness.

Comment: This section required further elaboration, socially in the involvement in Indigenous Australians and how the cultural identity of Indigenous students will be promoted and enhanced, especially in schools where teachers have little or no knowledge or understanding of the community cultural heritage.

In addition, elaboration is required as to the level of commitment and required action from schools, with respect to programmes, resources and professional development for teachers. Further elaboration is needed, with respect to Point 11 on page 9 in the National Collaborative action with respect to Engagement and connections, as to the commitment required from schools regarding funding and infrastructure for students in remote areas to gain access to high quality secondary schooling.

Further elaboration is needed with respect to Point 17, page 10: what level of commitment, in terms of finances, infrastructure and staffing will be required by schools to meet the accountability and reporting to families?

4) Attendance

Comment:

Further elaboration and details are needed in this section regarding the important linkage between school, health and other communities required for necessary improvement in student attendance targets. In particular, the proactive measures and actions required by schools and local communities, in developing relationships with Indigenous leaders to assist in achieving these targets.

In Point 20, page 11, the IEAP notes the Australian Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory Governments, and the proposed collaborative approach regarding highly mobile students from remote communities. This action could also include the isolated and remote areas of Queensland, such as Torres Strait Islands and the Gulf of Carpentaria communities.

Literacy and Numeracy

Comment: The importance of Literacy and Numeracy cannot be underestimated for all students. Of particular importance is the need to continue to identify and develop programmes that are specifically tailored to meet the literacy and numeracy skill development of Indigenous students.

Further elaboration is needed regarding Point 26 with respect to funding and access for schools to participate in appropriate professional development. Fast tracking the rollout of the National Broadband Plan may assist the access issue for isolated schools.

5) Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development

Comment:

Enhancement of the development of leadership and quality teaching can be enhanced by expanding Leadership programmes such as have been developed by “Dare to Lead”.

Targeted approaches are needed to assist tertiary training institutions to develop programmes for teaching training of Indigenous students. As a short term approach, consideration may be given to encouraging tertiary institutions to include short term courses in teaching Indigenous student, which includes an understanding of Indigenous culture and heritage.

Priority needs to be given to programmes and processes to attract Indigenous students into teacher training and then encouraging them to return to their communities to teach in their local schools.

Priority is also needed to research, as a matter of urgency, the New Zealand model, highlighted in Point 33, page 16.

Further elaboration is needed regarding Point 33, page 16, as to how the leadership programs for principals in focus schools will be accessed, both from distance and funding perspectives.

6) Pathways to real post-school options

Comment: This section notes some key actions required. However, as a matter of priority, consideration and consultation with stakeholders is needed as to programmes that will be developed to encourage indigenous post-school leavers to return to their communities, once qualified to support the continued development of programmes.

4.What do you like about the draft IEAP?

The Draft IEAP is a proactive and positive plan which seeks to address the issues and concerns relevant to the improvement and progress of Indigenous students throughout Australia.

It also outlines a process whereby consultation with relevant stakeholders in a variety of government and community organisations will be sought.

ACS endorses and encourages the continuation and further progress of the process that this plan initiates.

5. Have you any further advice that you feel might strengthen the Plan?

We encourage the government to ensure that future amendments to current systems and practices in Queensland will not be adversely affected, but will only improve the quality of delivery and outcomes for our schools.

We also encourage the government to ensure that there is a commitment to proactive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders who will be affected by this plan.

Lynne Doneley

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