



Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

Indigenous Education Action Plan Draft - Response

1. Introduction

Overview of the Indigenous Education Action Plan (IEAP)

The conceptual overview of the IEAP provides a clear map of the main foci of the six aspects of education to be addressed. The recognition of readiness for school, engagement and connections, literacy and numeracy, leadership and teacher quality and post school pathways as important aspects of achieving positive educational outcomes for Indigenous students provides a sound basis for the development of further action.

However, the division of responsibilities outlined in the concentric circles needs further clarification. In particular the reference to 'non-government' at the jurisdictional level needs to be defined as to whether it refers to non-government education providers or other agencies. There also needs to be clarification about the provision of post school options, establishing the role of post tertiary education providers such as TAFE, university and apprenticeship providers.

Policy environment

The statistical profile of Indigenous enrolments provides a general overview of the distribution of Indigenous students in schools. The targets set by COAG refer to 'closing the gap'; however, there is no reference in the IEAP which identifies the significance of the gap in different Indigenous communities. That is, there is no differentiation of the need in urban, rural and remote Indigenous communities. If targets are to be met there needs to be a clear definition of the need and the target in each set of circumstances.

Focus schools

The draft strategy for the identification of focus schools by targeting those with the greatest number of Indigenous students is an efficient way to reach the greatest number of students. However, this may limit the transferability of strategies used to improve Indigenous student outcomes to other schools, with lower numbers of Indigenous enrolments, which are likely to have significantly different demographic profiles, and, therefore, different student and community needs.

2. National Collaboration

Readiness for school

Points 4 – 6 indicate that it will be the responsibility of schools to address early childhood outcomes. This poses significant concerns for schools and systems which provide little or no pre-school facilities. Point 5 is particularly problematic in its requirement that focus schools provide 'universal access to early childhood education' by 2013.

Engagement and connections

Points 10 and 11 targeting Indigenous Languages and access to secondary education while maintaining community links are commendable actions. The community links and forums for focus schools in points 13 and 14 are also commendable; however, they would require significant support and staff development and liaison with appropriate personnel.

The requirement in point 15 for schools to have personalised learning plans for all indigenous students must be supported with teacher training and consideration of the diverse needs of Indigenous students.

The term 'education providers' needs to be defined in terms of the roles and responsibilities of state/territory providers, diocesan offices and independent school associations.

Attendance

It is concerning that the data included here is limited to government schools with no reference to non-government schools or whether the students are enrolled in urban, rural or remote schools. This contrasts with point 20 which refers specifically to initiatives in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. It is acknowledged that specific needs exist in these regions, but it would be clearer for all stakeholders if the data presented described the need in all areas.

Point 21 refers to an attendance strategy for implementation by June 2010. This timeframe is of concern given that the IEAP is still in draft form.

Literacy and numeracy

It is concerning that while the targets set aim to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students, the strategies identified are those already in place through the National Partnerships and Literacy and Numeracy. These partnerships aim to improve the outcomes of all students and may not 'close the gap'. It is essential that specific strategies are developed to target the literacy and numeracy needs of Indigenous students.

Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development

Again the data presented here is limited, referring only to government schools and not considering regionality.

While it is important that teachers have an awareness of the culture and background of all students in their care, it is concerning that points 31 and 32 are linking understanding of Indigenous education and practice to teacher registration. There needs to be consideration of the number of Indigenous enrolments in the school and the teacher's contact with Indigenous students. The IEAP refers to the variation in the number of Indigenous enrolments in schools but does not consider the implications here in terms of ongoing training and the opportunity for teachers to use that training.

The reference to the New Zealand model in point 33 also raises questions given the singular nature of Maori culture and language as compared to the diverse cultures and languages of Australia's Indigenous cultures. Further information is required regarding how the coalition of universities will work with the multiple Indigenous cultures and languages.

The flexibility and sharing for disadvantaged schools encouraged in point 38 is commendable.

Pathways and real post-school options

While the options presented here are appropriate for those living in metropolitan centres there are concerns about the feasibility in rural settings. These concerns are greater in remote locations.

3. Jurisdictional priorities

It is concerning that the priorities for NSW and the ACT have been sent by government education providers for government schools. There appears to be little or no consultation with non-government education providers.

4. Tracking progress and building on what works

As described in the IEAP efforts to minimise the reporting requirements of schools while maintaining accountability is appropriate. The clearinghouse on what works will also support schools implementing best practice. However, there does need to be consideration of the best method for collecting strategies that is useful and transferrable to schools in a variety of demographic settings.