

Facing the Facts about Aboriginal education



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Facing the Facts calls for positive change, including strengthening Aboriginal education as well as central and regional services and support provided to public schools in a system of connected autonomy.

The review's commentary, findings and all 46 recommendations go to matters that impact all children and young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable due to disadvantage and complex needs – amongst whom Aboriginal children and young people are grossly over-represented:

- Support services that are accessible and more responsive to local needs – focused on schools but also on reinvigorated regional education services.
- Joined-up services for children, young people and families across government – schools just can't continue to be left to do it on their own.
- Face-to-face and culturally responsive professional learning – especially for the most inexperienced teachers and the folks most professionally isolated.
- Good quality school facilities and maintenance no matter where you are in the state – and equivalent support for distance education infrastructure.
- Adequate and equitable school funding that truly takes into account remoteness, the needs of small communities and compounding disadvantage.
- Access to quality early learning opportunities for every child whoever and wherever they are.

In Section Five, Student Achievement and Satisfaction, *Facing the Facts* goes directly to improving outcomes for Aboriginal students with these additional findings and recommendations:

Recommendation 41: A dedicated Aboriginal Unit should be established as a matter of urgency. It should be well funded with the clear goal of supporting schools to implement the Aboriginal Standards Framework with appropriate resources and face-to-face support at the local level.

Recommendation 42: An elite Aboriginal Education Team comprised of experienced and highly trained educators should be developed to staff schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students.

Recommendation 43: Teachers competitively appointed to this team should have extensive cultural and educational training to understand and support local needs prior to taking up their roles.

Recommendation 44: Teachers in this team should be highly paid while in situ and guaranteed placements in preferred locations after three years' good service or, if they prefer, a return to their previous positions. They should also be provided with well-maintained accommodation and guaranteed regular flights to their usual hometowns or cities.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO)

Consistent with the Department of Education's *Aboriginal Cultural Standard Framework* and the report's findings in relation to the lack of investment in its implementation, perhaps it is time to explore the viability of ACCOs being engaged to provide face-to-face place-based cultural responsiveness training to school staff across the state – and possibly other government human services staff.

Perhaps this could not only improve cultural competence but also build relationships, shared understandings and concerted action.

Nearly 10 years on, it is also arguable not only that the *Framework's* implementation should be evaluated and barriers to its implementation addressed, but that the *Framework* itself might be worthy of review, especially given the shift in the system's approach to school improvement and accountability.

Other unfinished business

The Kimberley Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing Strategy in response to Message Stick and the *13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley* reports has been over two years in the making, yet still has to be agreed upon and commenced. And what about the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people right across the state?

The Kimberley Schools Project is expected to expand to other regions – yet we still have not seen an evaluation of the program and the outcome of 10s of millions of dollars of investment.

In particular, has there truly been family and community engagement as well as place-based co-design? Are we really impacting connection, attendance, aspiration and achievement?

How could Target 120 (despite its awful name) be improved and expanded?

Why is the Young People with Exceptionally Complex Needs program limited to a handful of young people when so many kids have extremely complex needs and are at dire risk?

What progress is being made to provide better support for Aboriginal children and young people in care – especially residential care – and/or in contact with the justice system?

Where is the dedicated support for schools to best serve these kids and for others to step up and play their part?

And finally, but certainly not least of all, where is the investment in teaching, learning and resources to implement the excellent work the School Curriculum and Standards Authority has done to include Aboriginal history, culture, language, arts and knowledge in the curriculum?

We need everyone to face the fact that these practical and positive measures to close the gap are within our grasp if kids, families, communities, teachers and school leaders are properly supported to take them forward together in a public school system of real connection and real autonomy.



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