

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**WRITTEN QUESTION**

Mr Maley

to Minister for Employment, Education and Training

School Truancy

1. What has the Northern Territory done to address the level of school truancy in Darwin and major towns?
2. What has been done to address the low levels of reading and writing skills in the Northern Territory schools?

ANSWER

One of the nine Strategic Outputs from the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 2002-03 'Plan on a Page' is 'Students who stay in school and attend regularly'. This output reflects the strong commitment by Government to positively influence student enrolment, attendance and retention in the Northern Territory school system.

A comprehensive enrolment, attendance and retention strategy has been developed by DEET and will be implemented over the next 12 months. The strategy addresses three main target areas:

- irregular attenders and those students not enrolled
- early school leavers
- students exhibiting challenging behaviours, particularly of an extreme nature.

Key elements of the strategy are the deployment of School Attendance Officers and the establishment of alternative education provision to target youth presently not attending school.

Funding was allocated in the 2001-02 Mini Budget for the employment of eight School Attendance Officers. Two officers will be employed in 2002-03 with a further three being employed in 2003-04 and another three in 2004-05.

It is expected that the School Attendance Officers will be deployed for discrete periods of time to assist identified schools to achieve agreed attendance targets. Local solutions to achieve effective change will be developed and implemented. These local solutions will involve consultation with schools, school communities, the wider community and other relevant agencies and organisations.

The School Attendance Officers will be expected to develop good working relationships with other personnel likely to be attending to the same target group, such as the Youth Night Patrol workers and Child Protection Officers.

An interdepartmental committee is already working with the Palmerston Crime Forum to develop a pilot project in the community to be trialled under the DEET enrolment, attendance and retention strategy. Under this model it is expected that one of the first two School Attendance Officers could contribute to the development and implementation of this pilot project.

Funding of \$0.5M was also allocated in the Mini Budget for the introduction of 'diversionary programs to help get wayward students back into the classroom'. To avoid confusion with the Police Juvenile Diversionary program, the DEET strategy refers to 'alternative education provision'.

The intention in the first instance is to target 'wayward' students in the 10-15 years age group, who are most likely to be truanting and/or engaged in anti-social activities. The programs provided at these future alternative education provision sites will be specifically aimed at enabling students to re-engage with regular schooling.

Initially it is proposed to establish two alternative education provision sites - one in Darwin's northern suburbs and one in either Katherine, Tennant Creek or Nhulunbuy, catering for approximately 30 students per site at any one time, depending on local circumstances. Alice Springs already has a number of alternative education programs in place that during 2002 engaged over 150 young people who would otherwise not have been enrolled in educational programs.

The School Attendance Officers may assist in the identification of students and in encouraging them to attend each day. Other agencies and providers will also be consulted with a view to pooling resources and providing a coordinated service for the alternative education provision sites.

2. A major DEET initiative to address the low levels of reading and writing skills in NT schools is the NT English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The Strategy was developed in 2001/02 and implementation commenced in 2002. It provides a sound basis for system and school-based accountability with the clearly identified objective that "*All students achieve or exceed National English Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks.*" All Territory schools must
 - ensure the School Literacy and Numeracy Plan is documented with an agreed consistent approach and ongoing commitment by all staff to improving students' English oracy, literacy and numeracy skills.
 - ensure that explicit teaching and learning of English oracy, literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum occurs for at least two hours a day.
 - set targets for literacy and numeracy achievement.
 - make optimal use of available resources to support students' and teachers' needs, particularly indigenous and ESL learners.
 - rigorously and regularly assess, track and report student achievement against standards as identified in the NT Curriculum Framework.

- ensure school commitment to the Multi-level Assessment Program (MAP) process and linking the process and results at school and system levels with curriculum and assessment.
- focus attention on the early years of school, including identifying students at risk of not meeting the Benchmarks and providing appropriate intervention programs.

The 2002 preliminary provisional NT English Literacy and Numeracy Benchmark results show an increase in numbers of students achieving Benchmark: 6.83% increase in Year 3 students reaching the National Reading Benchmark and 7% increase in Year 5 students reaching the National Reading Benchmark.

Another DEET initiative is the Training for Remote Youth Program (TRY). This project focuses on the introduction of Vocational Educational Training (VET) programs for 14 to 19 year olds in remote localities, particularly targeting those who have such poor attendance they are not considered to be at school. TRY emphasises programs being developed in partnership with the community, targeting the particular employment skills required by the community. Schools implementing TRY Programs are to articulate the literacy and numeracy support that will be provided in the TRY Program within their School Literacy and Numeracy Plan documentation. If there is no identified literacy and numeracy approach in the application, this will result in non funding of the project.