



**strong schools • strong communities**

A decorative graphic consisting of two wavy lines. The top line is blue with a white diagonal hatching pattern. The bottom line is a solid red shape that fills the lower right portion of the page.

## **Inquiry into Rural, Regional & Remote Education**

**Northern Territory Council of  
Government School Organisations  
SUBMISSION**

**September 2017**

## Curriculum

NTCOGSO surveyed NT regional, remote and very remote school communities, receiving a total of 104 responses.

Is the Australian Curriculum meeting the learning needs and interest of regional, rural and remote students?

60% NO

20% YES

10% Occasionally

10% Unsure or Other

*"To be inclusive the Australian Curriculum could be filtered in additional ways. The focus of what is important to access growth of a student needs to not only focus on content, also on capabilities. For students in remote schools their growth is not always apparent in academic curriculum. It would be useful to identify areas such as SEL and Employment Pathways as components of the curriculum so that value is placed in these curriculum areas."*

*"A lot of content is not relevant to Indigenous perspectives."*

*"Remote Indigenous students find the language content hard."*

*"Change needs to occur to capture the progress of students in very remote regions, indigenous and EAL/D who do not demonstrate progress or achieve standards; their growth is often in capabilities and SEL."*

NTCOGSO asks the review to seriously consider the challenges and barriers of high levels of hearing loss and that impact on the learning outcomes of our students.

"In remote communities it is common for as many as 90 % of the children to have abnormal middle ears; that is, they have current middle ear infection or perforation or scarring of the eardrum related to past infections (Couzos et al., 2001).

The significant gap is a systemic failure to understand that in education, resources need to be provided in our schools to ensure hearing loss students are equipped with the communication tools they need to learn.

Imagine sitting at school, a student with hearing loss, English as your second language, lost in your own world because the classroom acoustics simply don't enable you to hear your teacher.

Sadly, this is the case for almost half of our Aboriginal students at any given time. Yet as a society we wonder why these children aren't learning. As a government, you wonder why the gap isn't closing. We would ask; how do you learn when you can't hear?

## Teachers

Teachers' recruited to remote schools rarely stay beyond the minimum period, partly because of the poor standard of housing.

Principal turnover is equally high and it is not uncommon for two or three principals to occupy a position within one school year. Many of our survey respondents cited staff housing as a critical issue. Many teachers have no option but to reside in a house with other staff as housing options are limited.

In addition, a total of 37% of school communities considered professional development in cultural awareness, local language and engaging with Aboriginal families a high priority.

For our Aboriginal students with high educational support needs arising from conductive hearing loss as a result of otitis media, there is further impact on their learning with successive and often short term teachers with varying levels of skills and experience.

The findings of many reviews on Indigenous students with conductive hearing loss identify a range of factors that have implications for the delivery of educational support and subsequent student outcomes, including:

- o teacher professional development in cross-cultural pedagogy, English as a second (or additional) language (ESL/EAL) pedagogy, and special education principles;
- o teacher training and professional development to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to support students with hearing loss

Hearing loss effects not only educational performance, but also social and emotional wellbeing and social interaction, and can lead to behavioural problems (such as irritability, disobedience, distractibility, and overactivity), which, in turn, can lead to social isolation

Almost a quarter of our NT survey respondents also considered that professional development in trauma informed practice, disabilities, ESL/D, well-being, suicide awareness, substance abuse and sexual health is required.

*"Set up learning campuses where experienced remote educators are located or visit and assist teachers to develop programmes and improve their classroom delivery in an academically recognised pathway, greater time to discuss and learn about issues that impact on learning and strategies to use e.g. trauma related practice. Masters of Educations could be awarded from an in school model. Lecturers would not always be academics but experienced teachers."*

## Leadership

Almost half of Northern Territory schools cater for fewer than 100 students led by a principal who has a substantial teaching commitment. Remote schools warrant close attention from policy makers and federal funding streams.

The role of the principal is now more challenging. Principals are required to manage annual and monthly budgetary planning/monitoring, create a high performing learning environment for students and teachers, provide mentoring and professional development, embrace and manage change, ensure parental engagement through a school representative body, perform increasing administrative tasks and, in our smaller schools, maintenance tasks.

*“Remote schools with more than two teachers need their principal to be taken off teaching duties, cleaning duties, maintenance work and yard duties in order to devote their time to improving student outcomes and achievements.”*

In order for principals to devote most of their time and attention to student achievement;

*“Funding, workload addressed, administration is separated from Principal job description. If the core business of principals is around students this needs to be highly valued, recruitment systems need to be highly effective and recruit quality teachers, positions need to be in every school to address the administration load, teaching principals needs to be valued and paid accordingly, recognition of the cost of being remote and the impact this has on the budget; professional development involves flights, accommodation, staff allowances, relief teacher salary, flights, allowance. ICT needs to be efficient and budgeted for.”*

A total 79% of survey respondents listed;

- Adequate number of classroom teachers (removing principal from teaching load),
- Leadership and administration support,
- Specialist support with students with additional needs and behaviour management.

Leadership has a direct effect on the school ethos, staff morale and retention. We should be considering emotional intelligence of leaders. Learning to deal with the emotions of parents, students, staff and learning to recognise and manage their own emotions are challenging tasks.

Principals, who understand and motivate others, manage both positive and negative emotions and create environments where everyone can be their best.

*“Career progression, mentoring and support of younger teachers so they may become leaders invested in their schools and communities.*

## School and Community

Under the Northern Territory Education Act: Parent and community engagement in government schools (School Representative Bodies) is;

- to recognise the importance of parents and communities in the governance of Government schools; and
- for that purpose, to provide for the establishment and operation of school representative bodies and require principals of Government schools to take reasonable steps to establish them;
- to provide for the establishment of a parent consultative group at a Government school at which there is not a school representative body and at which it is not reasonably practicable for one to be established.

NTCOGSO is funded by Territory government and NT Department of Education to provide governance training to Rural, Regional and Remote School Representative Bodies. Our ability to reach schools and local families is dependent on the motivation of school leaders. Many welcome the opportunity to learn governance with their community. Leaders from other jurisdictions often see School Representative Bodies as a 'fundraising' arm only.

NTCOGSO assists remote school communities to build local, community engagement and partnerships with schools. This is achieved by empowering communities to establish or maintain a School Representative Body. Their legitimacy is within the Northern Territory Education Act & Regulations which requires a fifty percent, or higher, membership of parents and details their Functions and Powers.

We sit with school communities across the Northern Territory, in the desert, under palm trees and in their schools to let them know they have a voice in their schools. We spend time training community on governance which provides them a voice in their school communities.

No matter the revolving door of non-local educators, the School Representative Body will provide stability and collaborative decision making.

NT School Representative Bodies;

Promote meaningful family and community partnerships

Engage with school community on student learning

Lead conversations about key issues and challenges

Evaluate and communicate with their school community about its activities

Focus on improved learning outcomes for students

Review progress on student learning outcomes

Under NT Education Regulations, School representative Bodies are to be genuinely consulted and part of the process for the School Strategic Plan; Annual School Improvement Plan; Global School Budget and sign each when finalised.

*“Empowerment of School Councils to have an effective voice in their school is a powerful means to improve connection as it builds ownership.”*

*“To improve connection between schools and the broader community we need School Councils & Boards, community decision making and governance training.”*

*“Dynamic School Councils can strengthen the interaction and engagement with schools and the broader community.”*

In addition, respondents also considered Bilingual education integral.

### Information and communication technology

Overwhelmingly, 68% of respondents advised of unacceptable and unreliable internet with poor bandwidth.

Respondents urged for infrastructure upgrades and ongoing funding for IT learning devices and equipment to be done to ensure ICT supports education in communities as it does in the ‘best of the best’ city schools.

*“High speed internet (Alice Springs) Very remote schools, much cheaper satellite internet.”*

*“We don't have a technology centre that is enticing for children to be in - infrastructure that matches what you are trying to achieve - e.g. technology hubs in schools, coding clubs, schools should have funds to set them up and be adequately staffed.”*

*“Dedicated staff in charge of maintaining and growing the school ICT knowledge and infrastructure.”*

*“Equipment for every child, not 6 per classroom.”*

*“Provide more funding to allow aging equipment to be upgraded, more on the ground ICT support instead of the twice a term contractors who do not have time to support schools properly.”*

*“Newer lap tops. We currently use ones which are 7 years old and are past their use by date.”*

*“Government leased or subsidised equipment for every child.”*

Responses to how ICT could be used to improve educational outcomes once again asked the Inquiry to recommend equity of access to the internet in rural, regional and remote settings.

*"Upgrade infrastructure, how can we compete when we have bandwidth of 1.25mb...that's a little faster than dial up modem speeds...yet we are expected to run multiple machines for NAPLAN?"*

They also considered ICT could be used to improve educational outcomes in the following ways;

*"It would allow for access to information - reach out to other global students - innovative industries would be made available to students. Communities have limited employment - access to the web and they may take on enterprises from their kitchen or local community centre. The world then becomes endless and opportunities are then real."*

*"Encourage cooperation and competition between schools."*

*"Start with enough computers and sufficient bandwidth. Then you can use individually targeted instructional software and on-line courses to meet individual needs."*

## Entrepreneurship and schools

Our respondents found the three questions regarding an 'entrepreneurial education' difficult to respond to. Our school communities struggle from; a lack of resources in ICT; local and non-local staffing and funding for local community members to be employed to sign for students in the classroom. Too often we are coping with limited resources and this 'survival mode' means limited capacity to do anything other than 'tread water'.

Respondents did consider investment and support is required.

*"Seed funding. Professional Development for staff on how it would work, training in how to manage entrepreneurial settings e.g. dealing with money, banking, and related laws, sharing innovative ideas with other schools across Australia or beyond."*

*"Major reliable long term human resources power and access to grants and funds without having to complete dozens of pages of funding applications and later on similar amounts of paperwork evaluating and assessing results. Keep to one page documents."*

*"Relevant support for entrepreneurial projects.. budget.. leaders in the field visiting schools."*

*"Seed funding for experienced mentors to initiate projects."*

Would you like to add any other comments or expand on any previous answers (up to 500 words)?

NTCOGSO recommends the 2012 study; *TERRAnova: renewing Teacher Education for Rural and Regional Australia*, longitudinal study which collected and collated data across five states in Australia on the experiences of teachers and pre-service teachers in remote schools. The researchers established successful schools have good models of leadership, ongoing teacher learning and mentoring, and strong support structures, as well as operating in communities where innovative practices are valued (White et al, 2008).

NTCOGSO supports findings in the *Grattan Institute report; Engaging students: Creating classrooms that improve learning*. The Australian government has a role in providing additional resourcing to support teachers to be able to call on extra support from central services in the school.

NTCOGSO continues to advocate for the original Gonski recommended Schooling Resource Standard to provide staffing and specialist support required. Transitioning funding down from 24% to 20% over the next decade will result in dire consequences for NT student outcomes.

NTCOGSO continues to advocate for our critical, high levels of hearing loss in students.

Evidence-based research shows that to improve our children's ability to learn, for those with hearing loss, we need:

- classrooms with improved acoustics, requiring federal funding for acoustic upgrades
- sound field amplification systems in classrooms with predominantly Indigenous students
- community members employed in the classroom fluent in the local language and cognisant of local sign languages

Aboriginal teachers in a bilingual school often use sign language in parallel with verbal communication.

If the Australian Government is to truly support students there would be recognition of our unique circumstances in regard to the high level of remoteness and disadvantage we face compared to other jurisdictions.

Any policy recommendations from this review will require genuine consultation and conversations with our communities. Applying equal funding and equal binding obligations does not provide for equity for majority of students in the Northern Territory.

Reviews in education require time to ensure all stakeholders have an opportunity to respond.

NTCOGSO registers our concern regarding equal participation and consultation. The ability for communities who are remote, where English is another language, with access to internet limited, thirty-two discussion questions requiring strong literacy levels, does not allow for the voices of remote Aboriginal people to be heard.



Through our work in schools and the feedback we receive from local communities, we support on their behalf, the Key Messages contained in the learning from *Remote Education Systems project; Red Dirt Education: C6*

- ....education is not primarily about preparing young people for work; rather it is to ensure their language, culture and identity remains strong...
- ...educational success is primarily about parent and community involvement in education.

Our NT system does give power to parents and communities enabling them to be more involved in decisions that affect their schools. Without the required federal investment in Territory students, involved families in our schools are left to despair at the lack of resources, local classroom support staff and specialists for their children.

The provision of education in remote areas is costly. Access to a quality education is the right of every child.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tabby Fudge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tabby Fudge  
President

Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (NTCOGSO)

