

Indigenous Education

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION EDUCATION

Our education system is still profoundly failing Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians are a young population – 39% are under 15, compared with 20% of non-Indigenous Australians. Improving educational outcomes is therefore crucial to improving the life opportunities for Indigenous people. While this paper focuses on schooling and higher education, other poverty factors such as health, housing, family violence and employment opportunities are intrinsically linked to education outcomes and must all be addressed together.

“Our education system is still profoundly failing Indigenous Australians”

**Senator Andrew Bartlett
Spokesperson on
Indigenous Affairs**

A 2004 Commonwealth report found that for Indigenous students:

- Less than half the literacy and numeracy targets had been met;
- The retention rate in Year 12 was 39.8%;
- Attendance at primary school drops to as low as 85% and as low as 64.3% at secondary level;
- In some remote areas only one in eight children could pass Year 3 literacy and numeracy tests;
- Only 69% of Indigenous vocational education and training graduates had jobs;
- Only 1,191 Indigenous students completed university degree courses; and,
- Little progress has been made in employing Indigenous staff in schools.
- In 2004, there was a decrease in total Indigenous university student numbers. This was the first decrease since 2001 (down by 1% over 2003). Total domestic student numbers also decreased in 2004 (down by 0.4% over 2003).

Between 30-80% of Indigenous children have permanent hearing loss caused by middle ear infections, preventing the development of fundamental literacy and numeracy skills.

Social exclusion – not just remote problem

The Democrats believe local secondary education should be available to all young people, regardless of how remote the community and how poor the attendance rate. But access to education is not only about physical distance. The problem lies primarily in social remoteness and exclusion – not geographical remoteness.

Education must be relevant and engaging for Indigenous young people. Successful programs respect and include Indigenous culture and world views in the education system.



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Strengthen ASSPAs

Parental participation in children's schooling has a huge effect on educational outcomes. Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) groups were designed to involve parents by providing per capita funding for initiatives and activities. The Howard Government has restructured ASSPA funding, requiring separate applications for each activity, eg a barbeque. This will deter parents, some of whom cannot write English.

The Democrats support strengthening ASSPAs and returning to per capita funding.

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Whilst Indigenous participation in VET programs has increased, it is predominantly at Certificate I and II level. There has been no increase in the number of Indigenous students studying Certificate III or higher since 1997.

Teaching indigenous students

Two thirds of teachers will at some time have at least one Indigenous student in their class however only 3.7% have had any training in teaching Indigenous studies. 4.5% of students are Indigenous but only 0.8 percent of all public school teachers are Indigenous. There is no funding or pathway to further training for Indigenous support staff to progress to teacher training courses.

Democrats' Action Agenda

- Reform of the schooling system to make it more culturally and educationally appealing to Indigenous students, including: offering Indigenous languages in schools, with the aim of having them offered to all Australian school children; inclusion of Indigenous history and culture in curriculum;
- Indigenous involvement at local levels in decision-making in institutions, curriculum development, and teaching and learning systems;
- Indigenous Language Centres established to assist in preserving, recording and teaching languages, including preparing teaching materials;
- Cross cultural communication and teaching practices, pedagogies and ESL training in all undergraduate teaching courses;
- HECS free university teaching places to guarantee proportionate numbers of Indigenous teachers by 2010;
- Scholarships, proper wage allowances, and university places for Indigenous teaching support staff to attain teaching qualifications;
- Develop and implement strategies to increase indigenous staff recruitment in universities;
- Provide 50 APA scholarships per year for Indigenous postgraduate students;



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- Improved access to bridging courses to university and TAFE courses with adequate support programs;
- Establish predominantly Indigenous further education and training institutions along the lines of Bachelor College;
- Increased financial and other support for Indigenous students studying away from home at secondary colleges, doing apprenticeship and traineeships and studying at TAFE and at university;
- Better funded VET in schools programs as a tool in improving retention rates and encouraging further training;
- More flexible delivery of VET courses in prisons and rural and remote areas;
- 'One-stop shop' training and employment agencies; expanded New Apprenticeship opportunities; and expanded VET opportunities for people participating in CDEP; and,
- Explore ways to overcome the Community Development & Employment Program (CDEP) 'incentive' that results in many 15 year-olds leaving school to access the CDEP payment.



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