



Issue: Discontinuation of funding to the Western Australian Aboriginal Independent Community Schools' Support Unit.

Purpose: To provide information regarding the anticipated outcomes of the closure of the Western Australian Aboriginal Independent Community Schools' (AICS) Support Unit.

Current Situation

There are currently fourteen Aboriginal Independent Community (AIC) Schools registered in Western Australia. Legislative changes affecting Indigenous education funding has resulted in uncertain funding for the Western Australian Aboriginal Independent Community Schools' Support Unit which provides a range of services and support to these schools. Over the last two educational quadrennia (2001-2004 & 2005-2008) the AICS Support Unit was funded through the Indigenous (Targeted Assistance) Act, 2000. The Support Unit was funded as an Indigenous Support Unit.

Interim funding to the 31 December 2010 has been sourced through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) State Office. At this stage there is no indication of ongoing funding beyond this year. **DEEWR officials acknowledge the essential role the Support Unit plays** in the operation of the AIC Schools and in February 2009 **described this situation as an unintended consequence of the legislative changes.** This view is supported by the fact that interim funding has been sourced by DEEWR for 2009 and 2010. Only recently have **the discourse of DEEWR officials changed to the schools should fund the Support Unit themselves** as, according to these same officials the AIC Schools are in receipt of increased funding.

Under the current funding regime some AIC Schools have gone backwards financially, some are effectively the same, a few have received increases on a per capita basis. There is no logic or pattern to the Commonwealth's allocation of funds to the AIC Schools. **The view that AIC Schools are in receipt of substantial increases of Commonwealth funds is a myth.**

DEEWR officials espouse the notion that the way forward for Indigenous education is for initiatives to be evidenced based. **The recent evaluation shows that there is strong evidence that the Support Unit works.**

Currently, the Support Unit is responsible for the management of approximately \$8.6m in grants, including: teacher housing (\$5m), literacy (\$1.8m) and numeracy (\$1.8m). Without the Support Unit it is most unlikely that the literacy and numeracy initiatives will

continue beyond the term of the contracts. **Furthermore, the teacher housing grant specifically states that the WA AICS Support Unit is to manage this project.** Obviously this is impossible without the Support Unit receiving further funds to continue operation.

It is anticipated that with the cessation of the Support Unit the following will occur:

- **Principals' roles will be required to shift from educational leadership to managers preoccupied with meeting compliance requirements.** This will result in less effective education;
- The Support Unit has played a **pivotal role in the preparing the schools for state re-registration.** Without this support and advice it is likely, over time, that some of the schools will struggle to meet the required standards of education and may be forced to close. As AIC Schools are the sole education providers in 10 remote communities the WA Government would be required to provide education services to these communities;
- **The quality of education would decline over time.** Without the continuity of effort provided by the Support Unit, which mitigates against the effects of high staff turnover, the quality of education outcomes will decline;
- Increase in **industrial and governance conflict.** Over the last two decades the Support Unit has played an essential, but little acknowledged, role in the resolution of conflict which emerges in all organisations from time to time;
- **Decline in the effectiveness of professional networks** essential for the effective development of quality education and teaching. The Support Unit's work has been essential in the facilitation and maintenance of professional educational networks, a vital element of sound education change strategies;
- **Reduced capacity of schools to recruit staff effectively.** The Support Unit has played an important role in the recruitment of staff in the AIC Schools; and
- **Decrease in the capacity of communities to manage the schools.** The Support Unit has maintained effort over the past two decades to improve the capacity of communities to manage their schools effectively. This has included the development of formal school/community education agreements.

Without these services many of the schools will not be in a position to thrive, and educational outcomes will decline. Over time some are likely to close. As sole providers in many communities, this will mean that the Western Australian government will be required to meet the educational needs of these communities.

Essential role of the Support Unit to the AIC Schools

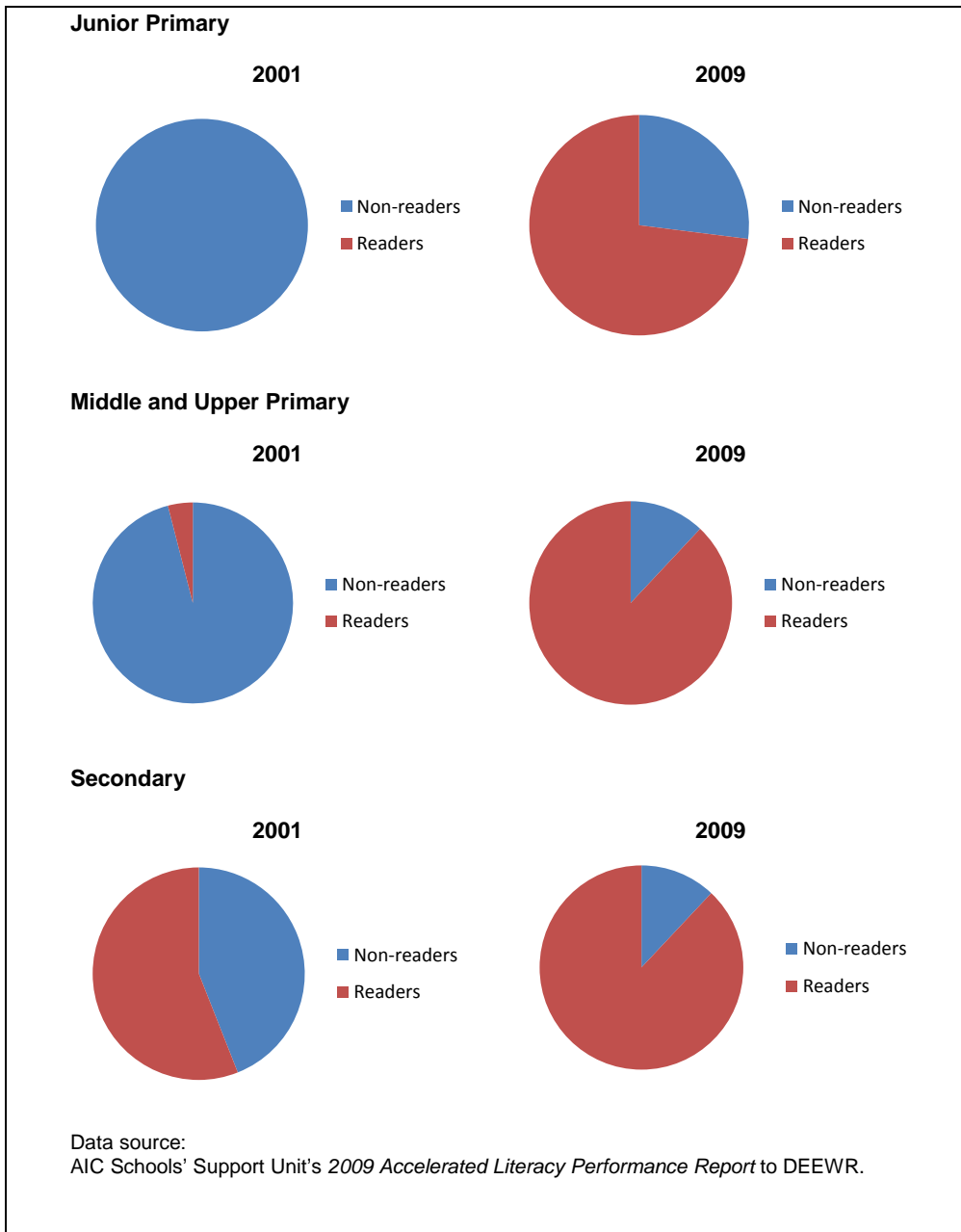
Since its establishment in 1990 the AICS Support Unit has made positive and substantial contributions to the development of the AIC Schools and, more widely, to strategic national projects and policy development.

This contribution can be measured by:

- **The significant improvement in literacy attainment levels of AIC Schools' students** through the National Accelerated Literacy Programs (NALP) – an initiative administered by the AICS Support Unit;

This is demonstrated by the measurable longitudinal improvement in literacy attainment levels across all AIC Schools and phases of schooling.

This is illustrated by the following graphs:



- The establishment of a **Kimberley numeracy teaching professional practice network**. This is a 2009 initiative which has attracted funding which will allow it to roll out across the state over 2010 and 2011;
- **The development of community capacity** to engage effectively in the management of their schools through the development of formal school/community education agreements;
- **Increasing the retention of quality teachers** through improvement of schools' infrastructure, particularly teacher housing;
- **Continued development of AIC Schools physical infrastructure** to ensure that school environments are conducive to high educational outcomes
- Providing the AIC Schools with **enhanced broadband access** as partners in the *Bush Schools Network* with Catholic Education;
- **Continuity of strategic effort within the community of AIC Schools**. The relative high turnover of teachers and principals in AIC Schools (an issue for all providers of education to remote Indigenous communities) has meant that the Support Unit has played an essential role in ensuring that the schools have maintained effort and high standards in education programs, particularly literacy, and the development of community capacity to manage their schools; and
- **Essential link between DEEWR, national Indigenous education policy and the AIC Schools**. Over the last two decades the Support Unit has developed a very productive relationship with the Commonwealth and enabled national policy and programs to be administered effectively within the AIC Schools.

Continued funding of the Support Unit is necessary to enable this essential work to be maintained. The Western Australian Aboriginal Independent Community Schools require the Support Unit's assistance, expertise and advice to advance the capacity of communities to manage and develop their schools and provide students with access to high standards of educational resources.

Background

The AICS Support Unit was established in 1990 as a direct result of a collective decision taken by the then, ten AIC Schools. The Support Unit was established to reduce professional isolation for teaching staff, maintain academic standards, and provide quality control of staff, financial management and other issues related to school development. The schools' governing bodies also recognised the advantages of having a 'service' organisation directly answerable to themselves when it came to keeping schools informed of developments in government policy and/or administrative processes.

The Support Unit operates under the auspice of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia but is under the collective control of the AIC Schools' governing bodies. The Support Unit is housed in two locations - Perth and Broome.

There are currently fourteen AIC Schools registered in Western Australia. The schools supported by the Support Unit are:

Kimberley:

Kulkarriya Community School
Yakanarra Community School
Yiyili Aboriginal Community School
Wulungarra Community School
Nyikina Mangala Community School
Purnululu Aboriginal Independent Community School

Pilbara and Great Sandy Desert:

Strelley Community School (consisting of two campuses)
Rawa Community School (consisting of two campuses)
Parnngurr Community School

Murchison:

Karalundi Aboriginal Education Community

Goldfields:

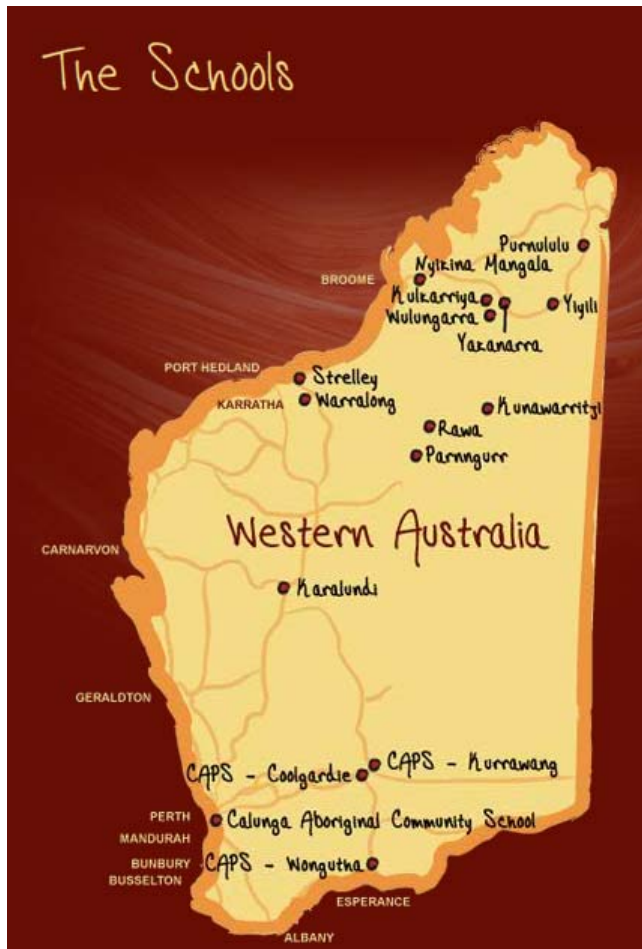
Christian Aboriginal Parent-Directed School (CAPS) Coolgardie
CAPS Kurrawang

Outer Metropolitan Area:

Culunga Community School, West Swan

Great Southern:

CAPS Wongutha, Esperance



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