



EDUCATION IN THE KIMBERLEY, YRS K – 12

AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

The briefing was researched and developed by the Kimberley Development Commission. It examines the characteristics and dynamics of educational and delivery in the Kimberley across the mainstream school system. It pre-dates Department of Education input and constitutes an independent but largely consistent analysis - September 2014

**DRAFT FOR PUBLIC
COMMENT**



CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----------|
| 1. Executive Summary | 3 |
| 1.1 Service Delivery Based on Population Density and Physical Presence | 3 |
| 1.2 Numeracy and Literacy | 4 |
| 1.3 Attendance | 4 |
| 2. The Current State | 5 |
| 2.1 Current Educational Infrastructure | 5 |
| 2.2 Broome | 5 |
| 2.3 Rest of Region | 7 |
| 2.4 Isolated Students | 7 |
| 2.5 Remote Schools | 7 |
| 3. Recommendations | 8 |

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education access and performance is a critical 'core competency' for the Kimberley as it is for any region. Education was one of the most commonly raised topics across the engagement process of the Kimberley Blueprint and ranks alongside housing, health and indigenous engagement as the perennial topics of conversation. Most residents of the region with school aged children would recognize it as a critical juncture in their planning and decision making when it comes to moving to or from the region. ABS data would suggest that non-indigenous families perceive education outcomes in the region to be a disincentive to residency and variously move out, do not move in or send children away to boarding schools outside the region. This dynamic not only increases the challenge to the regional education system which loses many of its most focused students but also represents an enormous cost to the regional workforce and skills base as qualified and educated parents leave the region.

Education in the Kimberley faces a number of challenges over and above or at greater levels of intensity than most regions. Whilst they are intimately linked, an effort has been made to examine them separately.

1.1 SERVICE DELIVERY BASED ON POPULATION DENSITY AND PHYSICAL PRESENCE

Education delivery in the Australia is heavily structured around the physical classroom with resources including staff and curriculum offering based on the aggregated need of a critical population mass. This standard service delivery model is embedded in the statistical measuring of school and system performance from sources such as NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy) and traces its origins back to the ABS concepts of ARIA (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) and service delivery that are further reflected in the MCEECTYA (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) geolocation codes¹. Although these models are designed as a simple method of measuring the concept of remoteness they do reflect a structural challenge for WA and the Kimberley that is not likely to be overcome by the standard delivery models or unamended programs. In simple terms the models measure the distance by road a particular location is from service centre points, (assumed to be collocated at population centres). The highest category of service centre (Category A) is equivalent to a centre with more than 250,000 people. No town outside of Perth in WA rates as a category B and no centre in the Kimberley rates higher than D (5-18,000). In combination with the extreme distances from

¹ The Measurement of Socioeconomic Status for the Reporting of Nationally Comparable Outcomes of Schooling, National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce, Marks, McMillan, Jones & Ainley, Australian Council for Educational Research & Sociology Program Research School of Social Sciences Australian National University, March, 2000

Perth (or Darwin) the outcome is that all population centres in the Kimberley are likely to be considered remote or very remote for many years to come. Broome is on the cusp of being a “provincial” centre in part because of its larger population but also because of its proximity to Perth and the other population centres in the south of the State.

Education delivery for remote students and WACE students across a wide range of subjects is delivered by the School of Isolated and Distance Education in Leonora and the associated School of the Air located in Derby (K-7). Delivery is via internet services (enabled via satellite in the case of the SOTA) but relies heavily on support from either parents, tutors or the students themselves with direct time with trained teachers being very limited from as little as 40 minutes a week to 60 minutes each day).

Between these factors, the lack of suitable teachers (particularly in mathematics and the sciences) and non-viable class sizes many schools in the region do not effectively offer a full curriculum.

1.2 NUMERACY AND LITERACY

The NAPLAN program was introduced in 2008 by the Commonwealth Government to measure attainment in years 3,5,7,9 in a range of core learning areas in literacy and numeracy. Whilst often criticized as a somewhat blunt tool it allows progression and differences across each of these year groups to be measured by sex, education status of parents, employment status of parents, aboriginality, LOTE status and state. It is a rigorous statistical exercise and is adopted and reported on widely in all states and regions.

Whilst many consumers of NAPLAN data will usually find themselves trying to differentiate between what may seem minute ranges of achievement some cohorts in the Kimberley exhibit the starkest variations found outside the Northern Territory. For example the proportion of Year 7 students reading at a level at or above the national minimum standard generally rates in the 90-95% order. But for WA students in the ‘remote’ to ‘very remote’ centres this falls to 87.2% and 63.8 % respectively whilst for indigenous students it is 62.7% and 45.4%.² The general order of results is similar across all cohorts and age groups and test areas. These low levels of attainment in the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy constitute barriers to skills development, employment and economic participation.

1.3 ATTENDANCE

Schools across the Kimberley are of widely varying sizes, year groups and ethnicity mixes (indigenous and non-indigenous) so comparisons of attendance data across them are problematic (see figure 1.0- school names have been replaced with non-specific codes). Attendance figures are collected and disclosed on the MySchool website but only across the entire student body so changes across year groups or more granular patterns of non-attendance are difficult to determine. Anecdotal sources across many schools in the

² Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2013, *NAPLAN Achievement in Reading, Persuasive Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report for 2013*,

Kimberley indicate that attendance rates vary throughout the year, usually fall as a cohort progresses through the school and often follow a range of other patterns. However the ensuing problem is children who miss more than 20% of scheduled class time. These students progressively fall further behind classmates who progress steadily off the back of regular attendance. There are multiple factors that sit behind low and erratic attendance but education delivery is hamstrung without continuous and consistent attendance.

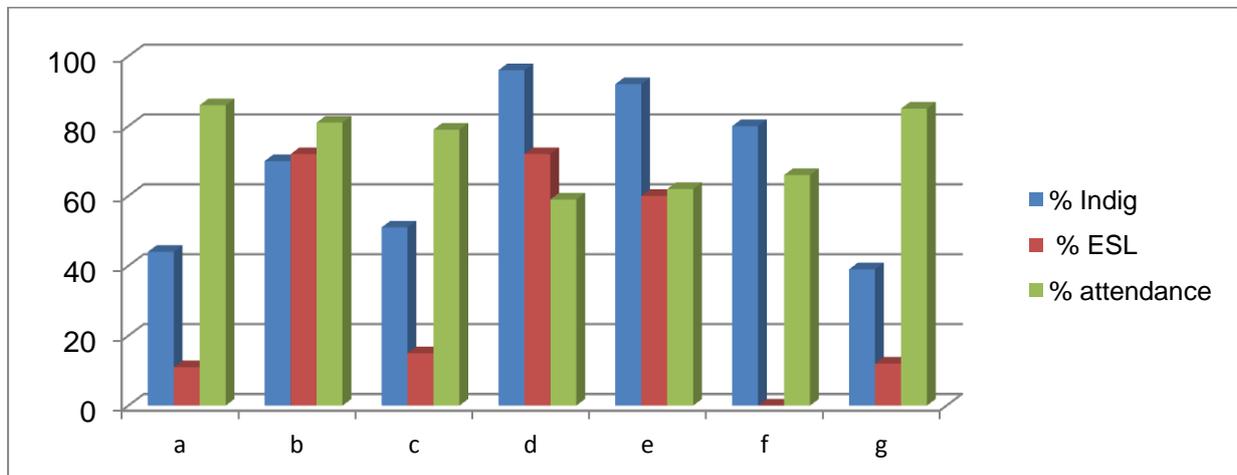


Fig 1.0 Break Ups across masked Kimberley schools – demonstrative of gains required in indigenous attendance

2. THE CURRENT STATE

2.1 Current Educational Infrastructure

The region has District High Schools in the major population centres of Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham and a full senior High school in Broome. Although district high schools nominally offer the capacity to finish schooling to a year 12 WACE level this not achieved in practice and the shortfall is formally recognised in funding assistance for sending students to residential colleges.

In Derby, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Kununurra and Wyndham the District High School is also the feeder school although Derby, Wyndham and Kununurra also have a catholic k-7 school. There are approximately 19 remote community schools scattered across the region operated either by independent schools (6 schools) or the DoE (13). Catholic Education Office runs 13 schools across the region including those already mentioned.

Numbers of private schools also offer scholarship programs that allow indigenous students from the Kimberley to study in capital cities. In recent years Wesley College and the Bunuba have established a cooperative school (termed studio school) at the Leopold Downs Cattle Station outside Fitzroy Crossing which operates for about 9 months of the years with local and Wesley students sharing the Leopold downs campus. Students now spend up to three months of the year in China, three months in Melbourne and three months of the year on the station. Wesley believes offer an option to complete year 12 to local students that is not otherwise available without leaving the region. In 2013 the school had its first cohorts of student's complete year 12. The studio school has required considerable capital input from Wesley and Bunuba and Wesley continues to underwrite the operating expenses.

2.2 Broome

Broome and Kununurra have residential student colleges with the Broome Campus fully occupied, catering for about 8-90 students and undergoing expansion works this year. It is shared by Broome Senior High School and St Marys High School. The Kununurra campus caters for about 45 students although it runs at about 25-50% occupancy.

Broome Senior High School is the only full high school in the region, is the only Independent Public School (IPS) in the region and was named the State School of the Year in 2012. Without diminishing this very considerable achievement and recognition BSHS's results place it in the mid-range of State High Schools. It caters for about 540 students and last year placed nearly 85% of its graduating students into employment, training or tertiary education. It has more VET enrolments than all other schools in the Kimberley combined. There are a number of contributing factors to Broome's achievements and it is beyond the scope of this document to attribute full credit to any one factor or series of factors. But amongst those indicators and attributes are:-

- Broome SHS runs a range of programs aimed at engaging and encouraging indigenous student to attend and achieve at high levels. These include the Clontarf academy, Girls Academy, Stronger Smarter and Follow the Dream. All have a primary or sole focus of lifting the achievement of aboriginal students and all have been run over multiple years.
- Broome has a critical mass of students that is conducive to traditional educational delivery and reduces the dependence on SIDE.
- Broome is highly flexible and responsive as an IPS and able to focus resources where the school believes they are most needed.
- BSHS has the support of a residential college and home work centres usually shared with St Marys).
- The retention rate (the rate at which students appear to transition from the feeder schools to the high school) at Broome has increased dramatically from about 45% to 90% over the last 10 years.
- The most marked difference in the Broome student body from other regional schools is in the levels of achievement of its indigenous students. Attendance has risen yoy from 69% in 2010 to 76% in 2012, is well above the State and Regional means for aboriginal students and is slowly closing on the attendance rates for non-aboriginal children of 90%.
- Indigenous achievement has included growing numbers achieving at the year 12 and WACE level with steady and growing volume.

The critical importance of Broome's success is that it suggests that educational and academic results on par with the metro can be consistently delivered by schools in the region. The vulnerability is that the success requires long term application to multiple factors across multiple years and at the moment still appears to be strongly linked if not driven by critical mass in population. The current population of Broome is not likely to be reached by other centers in the Kimberley for 10-15 years even based on aspirational growth for 2.2-5%. Therefore it is important that other methods of replicating the success of Broome be considered and assessed.

2.3 Rest of Region

It remains difficult to accurately ascertain how many students leave or do not arrive in the region where the perceived access to educational services is the primary reason for the family decision. The anecdotal evidence from regions across Australia is strong and declining class sizes as cohorts progress is in all centres except Broome provides strong empirical evidence that the characteristic is real. ABS data from the 2011 census shows the marked reduction in the presence of non-indigenous students in the region which is indicative of those students or their families no longer present in the region. Data (outside of the anecdotal) that would allow determination of how many families chose to leave the region vs. choosing to accommodate the cost of boarding (which along with tuition averages \$30-50,000 p.a) has not been located.

The Broome Senior High School experience does seem supportive of an assertion that a consistent effort over an extended period of time can improve educational delivery in the regions, increase the confidence levels of parents and communities and deliver much stronger results for the entire prospective student body. A crucial aspect in this achievement would appear to be lifting the attendance, literacy and numeracy results of the indigenous cohorts so that not only do those students benefit directly but the full student body benefits from an increase in the number of students studying at higher and more homogeneous levels. Early enquiries of school Principals indicate that teaching in such an environment is far more supportive of higher outcomes for students.

2.4 Isolated Students

Because of the low volume of students, the absence of many teaching resources and the absence of tertiary institutions many regional students are in effect isolated i.e. they have no daily direct face-to-face engagement with teaching professionals.

The physical realities of the region mean that a mastery of the remote teaching environment is and will remain a desirable attribute for many years to come. The Health and Justice portfolios and well as many government agencies continue to make progress in the virtual environment even if only through simple video – conferencing tools. The Education technical platform is severely limited by bandwidth and low function platforms (Centra and Moodle) that do not offer high levels of interactivity. The Moodle platform is used by many tertiary institutions but students at that level have an entirely different set of skills and needs. In most cases in those environments Moodle is used as a support platform over and above live lectures and tutorials which is a different delivery model to that used by most remote students in the Kimberley.

2.5 Remote Schools

There are about 19 remote community schools in the Kimberley run by independent organisations, the Catholic Education Office and the Department of Education. Most cater for

k-7 and have 1-5 staff. Children going onto high school can do so in a small range of these schools by generally they will have to attend school in one of the larger centres often facilitated by the Residential Colleges in Broome or Kununurra. The remote schools are challenging but often rewarding environments for teachers and students. Community engagement and commitment to the school are considered the enabling hallmarks to proper function within a school and many communities struggle to maintain these positive attributes year on year.

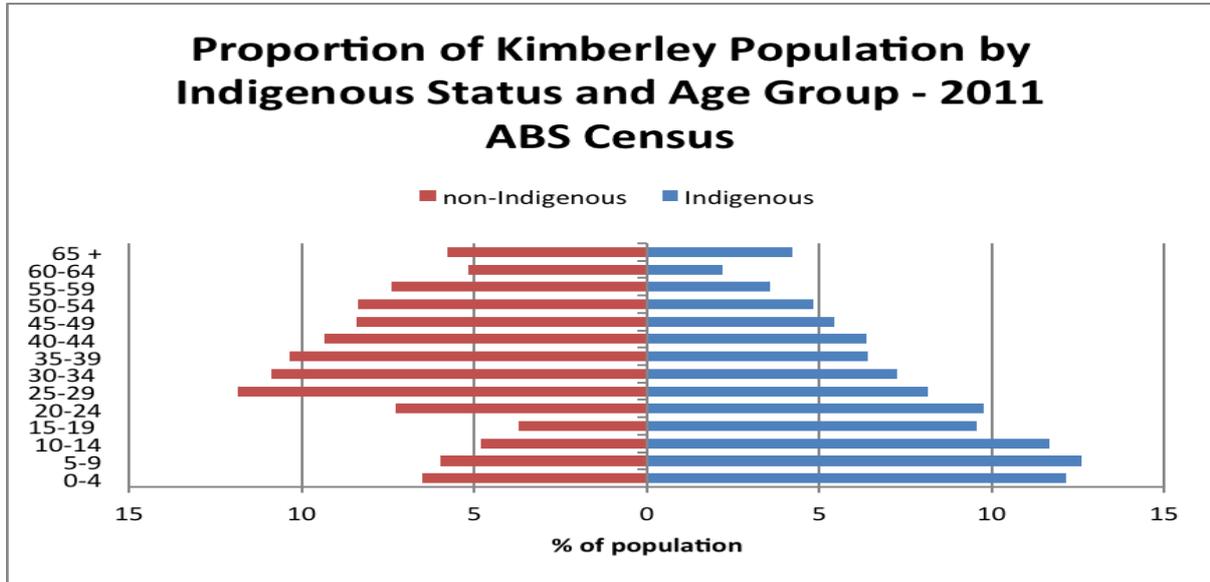


Fig 2. Population distribution by age and indigenous status in the Kimberley

Assuming for the moment as seems apparent that indigenous and non-indigenous students are being lost to the Kimberley education system through active withdrawal and discontinued engagement and that these students could be retained in future cohorts (as is suggested by the Broome experience) there is evidence that suggest that retention of these students could have immediate benefits akin to dramatic population growth i.e. driving ‘participation’ rates in a low participation environment has the same effect as strong population growth.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Community engagement is critical to education sector performance and should be approached and supported as an exercise with long term goals, aims and objectives to build the confidence of all potential ‘customers’, an ethic that seems absent.

Areas of focus should include:-

- 1 Success whilst sporadic and unevenly evident, is being achieved. Regional stakeholders are committed and engaged but a culture of blame borne out of frustration and low levels of responsibility is apparent between the Department and disengaged community factions. There needs to be a full open and honest assessment of what works what does not and what has not yet been adequately addressed. Factors to be assessed include :-
 - ❖ The wide variety of programs available or being used,
 - ❖ the ability of the region to influence and adopt appropriate strategies whilst remaining consistent with departmental goals,

- ❖ linking education and welfare reform
 - ❖ the wealth of skills and experience available in regional schools including Broome, Yiramalay and other schools in similar regions across the country
 - ❖ better models of distance education that utilize and stretch modern technology
 - ❖ Revised and enhanced residential programs to enhance attendance and senior completion.
- 2 A number of programs and most notably t programs such as Stronger Smarter focus on finding different pathways that observe the same end goals for aboriginal children. Many stakeholders have told us they regard constant effort to achieve engagement and re-engagement of aboriginal children in the education system as critical. Many more have told us these programs should be extended to any children serious about secondary completion. Attendance and achievement remain the central areas where outcomes must be improved.
- 3 In a practical sense distance education has not advanced much beyond the days of radio with out-moded technology, poor platform functionality and low effective access. In many parts of the Kimberley Distance Education has a much wider role to play than just Schools of the Air as it facilitates (or could) the delivery of elements of the curriculum not otherwise available. This is especially true of senior years. There is a growing risk that current services will fall behind and that replacement services and infrastructure (such as the NBN) may not fill the gap nor facilitate growth and improvement in service delivery. Improving the bandwidth, functionality, delivery capability and teaching skill sets should have multiple areas of return for service delivery including Education.