



## **NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council - NSW Department of Education Aboriginal Education and Training Policy**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments about the NSW Department of Education Aboriginal education and training policy (policy).

The Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council (AJAC) is an independent government body responsible for providing advice directly to the NSW Government on law and justice issues effecting Indigenous people in this state.

The AJAC applauds the policy. We recognise that education is pivotal in helping children and young people strive for current and future professional and personal success. Educational institutions, such as schools, play a vital role in fulfilling this, as they prepare children and young people to be active and responsible members of society.

The AJAC is committed to ensuring this success is achieved. In 2007, we initiated a variety of important child protection and awareness projects that were specifically designed for Aboriginal children and young people, although it is fair to say the principles espoused are applicable to all irrespective of race.

These projects include the *Our Kids: Stay Safe, Stay Strong* 2007 calendar (a competition we ran with the NSW AECG encouraging Indigenous primary students to submit creative works about their understanding of family and domestic violence); *Our Kids: Stay Safe, Stay Strong Children's Activity book* (an interactive resource tool aimed at building the awareness, skills and safety networks of Indigenous children to protect them from family, domestic and community violence), *Seido Aboriginal Karate program* (an ongoing program designed to encourage active participation in sport and prevent early contact with the criminal justice system) and *Our Kids: Stay Safe, Stay Strong - Know the Score, Check Out the Law* (competition to help educate Indigenous primary students about the justice system).

Further, the AJAC's Aboriginal Justice Plan (AJP) aims to increase education rates amongst Indigenous children and young people<sup>1</sup>. The AJP is the only community developed, endorsed, negotiated and consulted plan in NSW. Specifically, Strategic Directions 1 and 2 focus on Indigenous children and young people. Both aim to increase school attendance rates by reforming the education system to meet the needs of Indigenous children and support programs to maximise education and employment opportunities. This is consistent with statement 1.4 of the policy. Likewise, the *NSW State Plan* endeavours to increase Aboriginal health and education rates<sup>2</sup>.

*Prima facie*, the policy statement is broad. Whilst this provides fluidity, we pose whether all schools are capable of achieving the desired outcomes without further guidance.

Moreover, we believe it is imperative that the NSW AECG play an active role in all aspects of this policy to ensure its cultural appropriateness and that it mirrors the needs of Indigenous students. The involvement of the NSW AECG can assist in developing the necessary guidelines.

We note that the Working Group comprises of a number of bodies. We are unsure if Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs) are represented. If not, we believe this should be further considered. We also welcome the opportunity for an AJAC representative to participate in the Working Group.

We submit that the policy should apply across all levels of the department to ensure a successful outcome. Whilst the policy is predicated on improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students, it is important that all staff, including senior management develop programs and policies which strive to achieve these goals, as well as providing necessary resources.

It is imperative that all staff participate in mandatory cultural educational training as *per* key direction 1:1.5<sup>3</sup>. We note the reasons against mandatory cultural education training. We consider the training to be beneficial for the department on the basis that it will assist in identifying persons who may be hostile.

For example, if school X has a reputation in community Y as being racist or not meeting the needs of Aboriginal students, it is unlikely for community members including Elders to be involved in the Plan. Therefore this reduces the likelihood of successfully meeting the desired outcomes.

We agree with the views expressed that an explicit emphasis on early childhood and preschool be mentioned. Education is an integral part of social conditioning that commences in our cognitive development stages.

We submit that copies of the policy (and other relevant documents) should be distributed to Indigenous students, or that they are at least made aware. This is particularly important where a student wants to make a complaint. The development

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<sup>1</sup> *NSW Aboriginal Justice Plan*, Beyond Justice 2004 - 2014

<sup>2</sup> *NSW State Plan – A new direction for NSW*, F1

<sup>3</sup> *NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy* 2006 – 2008

of a complaints mechanism, such as a web page, would be beneficial. This would assist the department in tracking the policies success. We recognise that vexatious complaints could possibly be made, but note this is unavoidable, and by addressing complaints will improvement management of the service.

Furthermore, the AJAC queries what special measures will be developed to monitor the achievements? We note the *Two Ways Together* and the *NSW State Plan* targets. However set goals by the department would be preferable for schools, and given the individual nature of communities, this would allow the plan to be tailored towards individual community needs. The State Literacy<sup>4</sup> and Numeracy<sup>5</sup> Plans set targets which could be replicated.

Also, all related documents, including books, should be provided to all educational institutions, such as Working With Aboriginal Communities, Office of the Board of Studies. This will guarantee all departmental staff are equipped with the appropriate resources to achieve the desired goals.

We wish to thank you again for the opportunity to make comment. If you wish to discuss this matter further please call me on 02 8688 8108.

Yours sincerely

**Samantha Joseph**  
A/Senior Policy Officer

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<sup>4</sup> NSW Department of Education and Training *State Literacy Plan* 2006 - 2008

<sup>5</sup> NSW Department of Education and Training *Numeracy Plan* 2006 - 2008