

EARLY EDUCATION FOR A STRONG FUTURE

Background

Access to a quality education is the right of every child in Australia.

The Northern Territory's educational outcomes lag substantially behind the rest of Australia.

The Country Liberals are committed to improving the educational performance of Territory students by creating a first class education system.

To determine how best to achieve improvements in the Territory's education standards the Leader of the Opposition conducted extensive consultations within the school community as to how to improve outcomes.

A quality education is the foundation-stone upon which a child can move into adolescence and adulthood and forge a life that's happy, successful and fulfilling.

At present too many Northern Territory children slip through the net and are falling behind their counterparts interstate.

With a change of focus in the way our education system is resourced, the Country Liberals believe we can substantially increase the number of children reaching their maximum potential.

While training and recruiting quality teachers will always be the number one priority of a Country Liberals Government, we also recognise that our hard-working educators need additional support to improve education standards.

Early Education for a Strong Future focuses on providing the necessary resources to support teachers to achieve improved education outcomes.

Early Education for a Strong Future represents a major policy overhaul that will see significant additional resources directed to the early years of education.

Key Points:

- Establishment of a Literacy and Numeracy Expert Panel;
- Year 1 literacy and numeracy assessments;
- Additional class-room based teaching resources;
- Intensive after school literacy and numeracy programs;
- Psychologists heading up multi-disciplinary behavioural management teams;
- Valuing our Volunteers Professional Development for School Councils
- Resourcing COGSO to help school's maximize grants assistance from Government and non-Government sources.

We can no longer afford to fail so many of our children.

Labor's failure

A significant increase in the Territory's education budget has not translated into improved results for Territory students. Territory Labor has misused the financial windfall the GST has provided to State and Territory Governments.

Before the advent of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) the Northern Territory's own primary school testing programs actually showed results going backwards in many areas.

Two years of NAPLAN results have confirmed the dire state of education in the Territory. After nine years of Labor, the 2009 NAPLAN tests showed that 30% of Year 3 students were below the national minimum standard in reading; 36% of Year 3 students were below the national minimum standard in spelling; 35% of Year 3 students were below the national minimum standard in grammar and punctuation and more than 28% of Year 3 students were below the national minimum standard in numeracy. (See tables over).

Outcomes are similar for other NAPLAN age-groups.



Table 1a: Achievement of Year 3 Students in Reading, by State and Territory, 2009.

| State/ Territory | Average age/ Years of schooling | Participa- tion rate (%) | Below national minimum standard (%) | | At national minimum standard (%) | Above national minimum standard (%) | | | | At or above national minimum standard (%) |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------|---|--|--------|--------|---------------------|---|
| | | | Exempt | Band 1 | Band 2 | Band 3 | Band 4 | Band 5 | Band 6 and above | |
| NSW | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 97.1 | 1.3 | 3.1 | 9.3 | 16.7 | 22.4 | 21.3 | 26.0 | 95.6 |
| Vic | 8yrs 9mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.0 | 3.0 | 1.8 | 7.1 | 15.7 | 22.8 | 22.3 | 27.4 | 95.2 |
| Qld | 8yrs 1mth 2yrs 4mths | 97.1 | 1.8 | 6.1 | 16.4 | 22.4 | 23.3 | 17.2 | 12.9 | 92.0 |
| WA | 8yrs 5mths 3yrs 4mths | 96.3 | 1.3 | 7.5 | 14.1 | 19.0 | 21.6 | 18.4 | 18.1 | 91.2 |
| SA | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 94.8 | 1.7 | 4.7 | 12.9 | 20.5 | 24.1 | 19.7 | 16.6 | 93.6 |
| Tas | 8yrs 11mths 3yrs 4mths | 97.6 | 1.4 | 5.4 | 12.3 | 18.6 | 22.4 | 19.8 | 20.2 | 93.3 |
| ACT | 8yrs 8mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.4 | 2.9 | 2.4 | 7.2 | 13.8 | 21.6 | 22.3 | 29.8 | 94.7 |
| NT | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 4mths | 93.6 | 1.7 | 29.7 | 17.4 | 17.0 | 15.2 | 10.7 | 8.3 | 68.6 |
| Aust | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 1mth | 96.3 | 1.9 | 4.4 | 11.1 | 18.1 | 22.6 | 20.1 | 21.8 | 93.8 |

Table 1c: Achievement of Year 3 Students in Spelling, by State and Territory, 2009.

| State/ Territory | Average age/ Years of schooling | Participa- tion rate (%) | Below national minimum standard (%) | | At national minimum standard (%) | Above national minimum standard (%) | | | | At or above national minimum standard (%) |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------|---|--|--------|--------|---------------------|---|
| | | | Exempt | Band 1 | Band 2 | Band 3 | Band 4 | Band 5 | Band 6 and above | |
| NSW | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 97.3 | 1.3 | 3.8 | 7.2 | 15.6 | 24.1 | 22.5 | 25.4 | 94.9 |
| Vic | 8yrs 9mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.0 | 3.0 | 2.6 | 7.2 | 17.3 | 25.7 | 22.3 | 21.9 | 94.5 |
| Qld | 8yrs 1mth 2yrs 4mths | 97.2 | 1.8 | 9.4 | 14.0 | 23.8 | 26.1 | 16.3 | 8.7 | 88.8 |
| WA | 8yrs 5mths 3yrs 4mths | 96.5 | 1.3 | 8.2 | 11.0 | 20.7 | 26.6 | 18.8 | 13.3 | 90.5 |
| SA | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.1 | 1.7 | 7.8 | 11.1 | 19.8 | 24.2 | 19.1 | 16.3 | 90.5 |
| Tas | 8yrs 11mths 3yrs 4mths | 98.0 | 1.3 | 8.2 | 10.7 | 20.2 | 25.3 | 18.7 | 15.7 | 90.5 |
| ACT | 8yrs 8mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.6 | 3.0 | 4.2 | 8.0 | 19.0 | 25.6 | 19.7 | 20.3 | 92.7 |
| NT | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 4mths | 94.8 | 1.7 | 36.3 | 13.1 | 17.2 | 15.7 | 9.5 | 6.5 | 62.0 |
| Aust | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 1mth | 96.5 | 1.9 | 5.9 | 9.4 | 18.7 | 25.1 | 20.2 | 18.7 | 92.2 |



Table 1d: Achievement of Year 3 Students in Grammar and Punctuation, by State and Territory, 2009.

| State/ Territory | Average age/ Years of schooling | Participa- tion rate (%) | Below national minimum standard (%) | | At national minimum standard (%) | Above national minimum standard (%) | | | | At or above national minimum standard (%) |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------|---|--|--------|--------|---------------------|---|
| | | | Exempt | Band 1 | Band 2 | Band 3 | Band 4 | Band 5 | Band 6 and above | |
| NSW | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 97.3 | 1.3 | 3.8 | 7.6 | 12.9 | 20.9 | 23.8 | 29.7 | 94.9 |
| Vic | 8yrs 9mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.0 | 3.0 | 2.0 | 5.7 | 12.3 | 21.1 | 25.0 | 30.9 | 95.0 |
| Qld | 8yrs 1mth 2yrs 4mths | 97.2 | 1.8 | 8.7 | 13.4 | 17.1 | 22.3 | 20.0 | 16.6 | 89.4 |
| WA | 8yrs 5mths 3yrs 4mths | 96.5 | 1.3 | 10.2 | 10.8 | 14.5 | 20.3 | 20.7 | 22.3 | 88.5 |
| SA | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.1 | 1.7 | 6.1 | 10.4 | 15.6 | 23.6 | 22.6 | 20.1 | 92.2 |
| Tas | 8yrs 11mths 3yrs 4mths | 98.0 | 1.3 | 7.4 | 9.7 | 14.6 | 22.0 | 21.8 | 23.1 | 91.3 |
| ACT | 8yrs 8mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.6 | 3.0 | 2.7 | 5.7 | 11.1 | 20.6 | 25.1 | 31.7 | 94.3 |
| NT | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 4mths | 94.8 | 1.7 | 35.3 | 13.4 | 12.1 | 14.2 | 12.1 | 11.2 | 63.0 |
| Aust | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 1mth | 96.5 | 1.9 | 5.7 | 9.0 | 14.0 | 21.3 | 22.7 | 25.5 | 92.5 |

Table 1e: Achievement of Year 3 Students in Numeracy, by State and Territory, 2009.

| State/ Territory | Average age/ Years of schooling | Participa- tion rate (%) | Below national minimum standard (%) | | At national minimum standard (%) | Above national minimum standard (%) | | | | At or above national minimum standard (%) |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------|---|--|--------|--------|---------------------|---|
| | | | Exempt | Band 1 | Band 2 | Band 3 | Band 4 | Band 5 | Band 6 and above | |
| NSW | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 96.8 | 1.3 | 3.2 | 9.9 | 20.3 | 26.8 | 22.4 | 16.2 | 95.6 |
| Vic | 8yrs 9mths 3yrs 4mths | 94.4 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 8.0 | 19.8 | 28.1 | 23.6 | 16.1 | 95.6 |
| Qld | 8yrs 1mth 2yrs 4mths | 96.6 | 1.7 | 6.0 | 16.7 | 27.8 | 26.7 | 15.4 | 5.7 | 92.3 |
| WA | 8yrs 5mths 3yrs 4mths | 96.0 | 1.2 | 6.4 | 14.5 | 25.3 | 26.5 | 17.5 | 8.5 | 92.4 |
| SA | 8yrs 7mths 3yrs 4mths | 94.7 | 1.6 | 5.7 | 14.7 | 25.9 | 27.3 | 17.1 | 7.6 | 92.6 |
| Tas | 8yrs 11mths 3yrs 4mths | 97.1 | 1.3 | 5.0 | 13.2 | 22.9 | 26.1 | 19.4 | 12.1 | 93.7 |
| ACT | 8yrs 8mths 3yrs 4mths | 95.0 | 2.9 | 2.4 | 8.1 | 19.7 | 28.0 | 24.1 | 14.9 | 94.7 |
| NT | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 4mths | 92.2 | 1.6 | 27.8 | 17.2 | 21.1 | 18.9 | 9.4 | 3.9 | 70.6 |
| Aust | 8yrs 6mths 3yrs 1mth | 95.9 | 1.8 | 4.2 | 11.8 | 22.7 | 27.0 | 20.1 | 12.3 | 94.0 |



An Admission of Failure

The 2009 Territory Budget provided a profound insight into the thinking of Territory Labor regarding education standards. Despite already having targets well below the national standard for numeracy and literacy the Henderson Government further lowered the bar by reducing the performance measures for students. (See Year 3 table below).

This admission of failure indicates there is no hope of significant improvement under the Henderson Government. The Country Liberals believe that instead of doctoring figures to hide the extent of the failure, it's the role of Government to work harder to support schools to raise standards.

Primary Education Performance Measures Under Labor

| Achieving Minimum Standards | NT Govt. 2008-09 Budget Estimate | NT Govt. 2009-10 Budget Estimate |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Reading - Non Indigenous Year 3 | 90% | 83% |
| Reading - Indigenous Year 3 | 48% | 29% |
| Writing - Non Indigenous Year 3 | 87% | 85% |
| Writing - Indigenous Year 3 | 38% | 35% |
| Numeracy - Non Indigenous Year 3 | 97% | 88% |
| Numeracy - Indigenous Year 3 | 61% | 42% |

The Way Forward – Early Education for a Strong Future

Establishment of a Literacy and Numeracy Expert Panel

The recent release of the MySchools website and the 2009 NAPLAN results has shown that Territory children are falling behind their interstate peers in literacy and numeracy.

There is no reason why our children need not be performing as well as, if not better than, their peers.

Labor believes that the poor results in literacy and

numeracy lies with poor attendance and truancy of Indigenous school children. While there are issues with the number of Indigenous children attending school and completing their schooling, Labor's approach is to ignore other systemic issues within the Territory's Education system that are affecting all Territory school children.

The Country Liberals will simply not accept that our children can not achieve national literacy and numeracy standards. We will not settle for anything other than a first class education system, tailored to the particular circumstances of the Territory.

To assist us meet our targets, within the first month of a Country Liberals Government we will establish an Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy made up of experts in literacy, numeracy and ESL teaching. The Panel will undertake a comprehensive review of literacy and numeracy education in the Northern Territory and be required to provide recommendations, including on levels of resourcing, on how to meet our literacy and numeracy targets.

The Panel's scope will be broad and include:

- Examination of the barriers to student achievement in literacy and numeracy;
- Investigate the effectiveness or otherwise of current literacy and numeracy programs from Transition to Year 6 in the Northern Territory;
- Examine the teaching of literacy and numeracy from Transition to Year 6, including library based and web based learning tools;
- Consideration of the level of Departmental support to schools and teachers for literacy and numeracy programs;
- Examination of access to professional development in literacy and numeracy and the teaching of English as a second language; and
- Examination of any recent national report into literacy to identify issues of relevance in the Northern Territory.

This is to be an inclusive process and schools, teachers, School Councils, and their representative organisations and the community at large will be consulted as part of this process. A final report will be made public in the interests of open and transparent Government.

The Panel will be established for the life of the Government and asked to review the Territory's performance in literacy and numeracy on an annual basis.



First Year Foundations - Identify Early and Act Early

In addition to existing NAPLAN testing and teacher assessments, the Country Liberals will support schools to introduce a rigorous system of literacy and numeracy diagnostic assessments of individual students during Year 1.

The NAPLAN results indicate many Territory students are already falling well behind the national standard by Year 3. The testing of Year 1 students is designed to begin correcting that trend at the earliest possible moment.

Students who do not meet appropriate numeracy and literacy levels at an early age are less likely to achieve satisfactory educational standards in the future.

Under the plan, Year 1 students' reading, writing and numeracy capacity are assessed, in conjunction with the teacher's own assessments, to determine which children will require additional support.

A Country Liberals Government will work closely with teachers, principals and school councils to re-shape the early education system to correct the identified deficiencies that are currently impeding the progress of many Territory students. Parents will be kept fully informed of the changes being implemented.

Additional class-room based teaching resources - School Tutors

From Year 2, additional tutors will be employed to provide greater support for teachers to facilitate a general improvement in literacy and numeracy standards in Territory Primary Schools.

A lack of achievement in literacy and numeracy can also contribute to significant behavioural issues.

Under a Country Liberals Government schools, through their school council, will be provided with funding to recruit literacy and numeracy tutors in primary schools with more than 50 students.

Approximately 600 classrooms covering about 17,000 students across the Northern Territory will benefit from the initiative.

The policy is to provide schools with additional funding so as every classroom teacher from Year 2 to Year 6 will have a teacher assistant offering three-hours a day of literacy and numeracy support.

The tutor will support the teacher to work with identified

students to provide additional assistance that will focus on re-enforcing the key learning fundamentals.

Having classroom based tutors will ensure that there is assistance available to struggling students on a one-on-one basis to help enable them to meet numeracy and literacy benchmarks. This one-on-one work will also help guide parents with activities they can do with their kids outside of the classroom.

The introduction of classroom tutors does not replace ISA's.

Tutors will be provided with training and support before entering the classroom.

It's anticipated the tutors will be drawn from the wider community and include family members, trainee teachers, undergraduates and former teachers.

There is a further incentive to raising literacy and numeracy standards of Territory students.

Under COAG arrangements, the Federal Government has provided \$350 million to reward improvements in student outcomes. Some of this funding is conditional on the attainment of benchmarks by Indigenous students.

Costs: \$10.5 million (recurrent)

Intensive After School Literacy and Numeracy Program

The 2009 NAPLAN results showed that on average 30% of Year 3 and Year 5 students fell below the national minimum standards on literacy and numeracy.

That is 30% of students who are failing to match the level of numeracy and literacy of their peers.

We believe that these students need increased specialist attention and support.

Therefore in addition to the tutoring package to be provided in school, the Country Liberals are announcing an Intensive After School Literacy and Numeracy Program.

Each School Council will have access to additional funding of up to \$250,000 to provide after school literacy and numeracy programs for students in Years 2 to 6 who are identified as falling into the lowest literacy and numeracy band for their year level.

Year 2 students will be identified by teachers. In



Years 3 to 6 students who fall into the lowest band for their Year level in the NAPLAN results will be eligible for the program. In order for students to maximise the benefit of the program, students will need to demonstrate consistent attendance at school.

The funding could be used by school councils to offer home based tutoring, homework centres, and after school and holiday programs.

There is a substantial body of research that demonstrates that parents can be effective tutors and help their children make substantial gains in various academic and non-academic areas.

(Reference: "Reading intervention: The benefits of trained tutors", Woolley G and Hay I, Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, Vol. 30, No. 1 2007).

Further studies show that once parents begin to interact with their children around reading activities, children respond positively.

The funding will also assist School Councils to provide support and instruction by professional educators to parents and carers who wish to improve their understanding of how kids learn and how they can better assist their children to do better at school.

We believe this investment will deliver significant improvements in those children who are currently falling behind.

This commitment is in addition to any contribution made by the Commonwealth Government to improving literacy and numeracy in the Northern Territory. COGSO should be involved in this \$12 million annual programme and in doing so it would assist in strengthening the role of both COGSO and school councils.

Costs: \$12 million (Recurrent)
On-costs: \$600,000

Psychologists heading up Multi-disciplinary Behavioural Management Team

According to a recent Western Australian child health survey, one in six children aged between 4 and 16 years experience a mental health problem. That figure is even higher among Indigenous children.

The Western Australian Association of Child Psychologists identifies a growing body of work both nationally and internationally that indicates poor peer relations and emotional and behavioral disorders in children and adolescents can lead to language and communication disorders and delayed motor development.

Additionally, the Association says that poor language development, concentration or attention problems, hyperactivity and impulsive self-control difficulties constitute risk factors for the development of criminal behavior, delinquency, violence and anti-social behavior.

Health economists estimate that for every dollar spent on early prevention, between \$7 and \$18 is saved. Early childhood intervention represents an effective long-term investment for individuals and the wider community. Indeed all students in Territory schools will benefit from the improved class room behaviour in Territory schools.

Drawing on this understanding the Country Liberals policy is to recruit a multi-disciplinary team of 20 appropriately qualified child mental health workers, headed up by child psychologists, and including behavioural therapists to work with at risk students, their families and teachers to ensure the best outcomes for the children.

Under our scheme, the team will be shared between primary schools in similar regions on a ratio of 1:1000 students which is above the national average of 1:1500 in recognition of the depth of behavioural problems within our system.

Schools in remote parts of the Northern Territory will be serviced by a traveling member of the team.

Costs: A team of 20 multi-disciplinary child mental health specialists will cost \$2.5m (recurrent)
On-costs: \$500,000 (recurrent)

Valuing our Volunteers Professional Development for School Councils

The Country Liberals value the contributions of parents volunteering to serve on school councils. This contribution is an essential element of a strong education system and can be value added through an investment in these volunteers by the provision of appropriate professional development.

The Country Liberals take the view that it is not appropriate to assume that people who give their time freely to assist in the management of the schools should not be supported with access to appropriate training support.

For some time now, the Council of Government Schools Organisation [COGSO] has been seeking funding support to run training courses for school council members.



COGSO is right to be seeking this funding as part of our continued support for the role of parents in education. This support will extend to both the Government and non-Government sectors. Funding will be made available to the peak parent organisations of both sectors.

A Country Liberals Government would provide up to \$500,000 to both sectors for annual training and development programmes for current and prospective school council members.

As part of this training programme, we would work with Charles Darwin University to see that any such training programmes could be recognised as part of other accredited training.

As a community, we have high expectations of our teachers and our schools. With such high expectations, Government cannot continue to ignore the value in this training.

Cost: \$1,500,000 over 3 years.

Resourcing COGSO to help schools maximise grant assistance from Government and non-Government sources

The Country Liberals will provide grants to the Council of Government Schools Organisation to employ two additional staff responsible for liaising between school councils, principals and Governments and non-Government organisations to maximize grant opportunities for schools.

Too often, schools miss out on available grant opportunities simply because hard-working school councils and principals are not aware of the availability of programs or funding that would assist teachers and benefit students.

The additional staff will be based in COGSO's northern and southern regions and be in regular contact with schools and Government departments. These positions will assist in the grinding task of completing paperwork, take a lead role in organizing tenders and engage with the wider community to ensure schools have access to the funding and programs they are entitled.

The appointments would effectively double COGSO's human resource base.

*Costs: A04 positions - \$120,000 (salaries)
+ \$30,000 (on-costs)*

Summary Timetable for Action for a Country Liberals Government:

First Month

- establish literacy and numeracy expert panel;
- Cabinet allocates necessary resources;
- release funds to COGSO;
- schools to immediately begin engaging classroom based tutors; and
- department to assist schools in training programs for these students

First Year

- all tutors in place;
- all schools operating outside-of-hours literacy and numeracy programs;
- first year assessment of outcomes and further resources is undertaken; and
- 5% improvement in education fundamentals i.e. writing, numeracy and reading.

First Term of Government

- evidence of significant literacy, numeracy and writing improvements with at least a 15% improvement in education fundamentals i.e. writing, numeracy and reading; and
- comprehensive review of outcomes of this program looking for further changes as necessary.

