

School Autonomy: A Key Reform for Improving Indigenous Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No. 72 • 21 June 2006

- The marked educational under-achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote area communities has become an issue of great public concern.
- The government school model is failing Indigenous students in remote centres by imposing failed post-modern curricula in schools, through a lack of emphasis on teaching English at an early age, and through poor quality teaching practices.
- Funding by the Commonwealth and state governments is being wasted on inappropriate content, a questionable philosophy of education, and poor teaching practices, thus reinforcing Indigenous educational disadvantage.
- To promote meaningful structural reform in government schools within Indigenous communities would require the transformation of individual schools into autonomous ('non-systemic') government schools.
- These schools would be freed from the restrictive rules and regulations that apply to standard government schools; a growing body of evidence suggests that autonomous schools are succeeding in helping students.
- A system of autonomous schools would redress the current situation where highly-skilled and committed principals and teachers are unable to embark on change to improve education for their Indigenous students.
- Combined with other reforms, school autonomy has the potential to transform failed government schools in remote Indigenous communities into successful schools that lift long-term Indigenous educational outcomes.
- The political opposition to government school autonomy must be overcome if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote communities are to receive a decent education.
- We must ensure that another generation of Indigenous students is not lost.

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Introduction

Education is a central factor in economic and social achievement. The marked educational under-achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote communities has become an issue of great public concern because it is a blot on the public conscience. Educational standards attained by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are not only a central issue for Indigenous Australia, but for all Australians.

Commonwealth, state and territory governments are at last responding to the lagging performance of Indigenous students. Governments are proposing new measures that typically involve increases in public spending. However, despite the investment of millions of dollars, these measures are proving mostly ineffective. Spending is largely directed towards a government school system that relies on uniformity of service provision regardless of a student's background and needs; a system that is failing Indigenous children. The educational roles of Indigenous parents in remote communities have been destroyed by welfare dependence and by state and territory education departments that view themselves as having sole control and responsibility for the education of government school pupils. Major structural reform that provides more autonomy to government funded schools is necessary to give Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in those schools decent educational opportunities.

This paper canvasses the option of school autonomy in remote area communities. Either existing government schools might choose to take on greater autonomy, based on an opt-in model, or new autonomous schools might be established. The autonomous schools considered in this paper would still be public schools, but would be non-systemic, with a different decision-making and accountability structure from standard government schools. They would have individual decision-making powers over educational, administrative and operational matters devolved to them by educational authorities, but would be accountable to the educational authorities for their decisions. The first section provides a statistical profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes, and outlines the role of government schooling in contributing to Indigenous educational under-achievement. This is followed by a discussion of the principles of autonomous schools, now widely adopted in other developed countries. The applicability of the concept to Australia is then examined. The paper suggests that school autonomy can—and should—constitute an important element of policy solutions aimed at improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians.

How education policies compound Indigenous disadvantage

Indigenous educational performance

Of the 450,000 people that identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin throughout Australia, it is considered that around half (or over 200,000 people) live in capital cities and major regional communities and have, by and large, successfully integrated into the modern economy and society.² The other half of the Indigenous community, especially those that reside in remote communities, have been denied the economic opportunities afforded to other Australians. Indeed, their position is so dire that their living standards—nutrition, housing, health and personal safety—are as deprived as those of some of the most disadvantaged people in under-developed countries.

The abysmal living conditions and deprivation of opportunity experienced by many Indigenous people in the remote areas is also reflected in their educational outcomes. Indeed, the extent of Indigenous educational disadvantage has been masked by official national and state and territory data collections which aggregate and average out the extent of the problem in these deprived communities. In the absence of

detailed regional/local educational data it is only through a range of *ad hoc* studies that a sense of the true degree of Indigenous educational under-achievement becomes clear. For example:

- In 2003, only six per cent of Indigenous students in the Cape York region of Queensland completed their Year 12 studies, according to a leaked Queensland Government briefing paper for the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).³
- Not one child in the remote Northern Territory community of Beswick/Wugularr, situated 120 kilometres south of Katherine, achieved the Year 3 national literacy test benchmark in 2001, a study for the Fred Hollows Foundation found.⁴
- A similar study for the Thamarrur (Port Keats/Wadeye) region of the Northern Territory found that no student achieved the Year 5 numeracy test benchmark, or the Year 3 and Year 5 reading benchmarks, in 2001.⁵

These case studies indicate that an unacceptably large number of Indigenous children in remote communities are illiterate and non-numerate, and hence unable to cope with the complexities of the mainstream Australian economy and society.

Government schooling and Indigenous educational under-achievement

Noel Pearson once remarked that '[t]he starting point for any honest discussion about indigenous education must be the admission that it is, with few exceptions, a massive disaster and it has been so for a long time.'⁶ There is no shortage of official reports, inquiries, policies and strategies aimed at addressing the problem. There is also no lack of funding.⁷ These funds, however, are being wasted on inappropriate content, a questionable philosophy of education, and poor teaching practices.

Under-achievement is not the result of ethnicity. Indigenous students in many parts of Australia are competing effectively in leading schools against high-achieving non-Indigenous students. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in mainstream Australia send their children to government schools and some are now choosing high-quality non-government schools. However, in remote communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents have no choice. Government schools represent the major education providers.⁸ And students continue to perform abysmally.

A central problem is the state and territory Education Departments' 'one size fits all' mentality. Decision-making has been centralised and parents, students and their communities have little effective input into schooling. The flexibility needed for schools to serve their students and wider community is denied. Remote location families, unlike residents in high-income urban areas, have no alternatives to a government system that imposes uniformity in what subjects are taught and how teachers teach them.

The government school model is failing Indigenous students in remote centres in a number of ways:

- Failed post-modern curricula are imposed on children attending government schools. According to Donnelly (2004), this is typified by learning theories that eschew traditional phonics, grammar and arithmetic, in favour of questionable 'whole language' and 'fuzzy mathematics' approaches to teaching basic literacy and numeracy centred on 'outcomes' rather than syllabus-based curriculum content.⁹ A lack of emphasis on other subjects, such as history, geography, civics and computing leaves Indigenous students with little general knowledge and disengaged from learning.¹⁰ The post-modern curriculum presents huge problems for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. However, without home backgrounds of magazines, books, television and the Internet, a large number of Indigenous children in remote areas are especially disadvantaged by this mode

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of teaching, leaving them unable to master the basics of reading, spelling or arithmetic.

- There is a lack of emphasis on the teaching of English in the early phases of schooling. Unlike all other Australian children, who learn English in Year 1, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in rural and remote government schools are initially taught in the local community's language with English only introduced in the higher grades. Theoretically, 'bi-lingual' teaching should introduce children to English in the early grades. In practice this is often not the case. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote areas do not have access to teaching materials and recreational English and maths that other children access. This belies much of the 'early intervention' rationale of modern education policy, which emphasises the value of teaching children vital skills earlier in life when they are most receptive to instruction.¹¹
- The quality of teaching in remote settlement government schools is generally poor. A continual turnover of often young and inexperienced teachers prevents the ongoing development of ethos and values, curriculum initiatives and continuity for children.¹² There is some evidence to suggest that a significant cohort of teachers, who are the products of the 'outcomes-based' education philosophies, are unable to teach children the basics of literacy and numeracy, as they themselves have an inadequate grasp of these skills.¹³ Furthermore, the frequent absenteeism of teaching staff and the closing down of schools mean that children are not actually in the classroom for a significant proportion of the school year.

The lack of autonomy in government schools heightens the risk that a bad set of educational practices and philosophies, determined by the Education Departments, are applied everywhere. School leaders and quality teaching staff are not free to seek out the best and most appropriate curriculum and pedagogy available. Chronic Indigenous education disadvantage in remote communities is a result of this unsatisfactory situation.

Many Indigenous parents are aware that their children are not being taught the basics. They frequently complain that their children know less English, and are less literate and numerate, than the generations taught by old-style missionaries. They understand that their children are under-achieving and disengaged from education. Parental powerlessness is inevitable when decision-making within the government education system is driven by the political process.¹⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents are only part of the constituency of government schools, which includes organised and influential self-interest groups such as teachers' unions, academics and bureaucrats. State education is captive to provider interests. Compounding this, many parents are unable to express their concerns because of their own poor education in government schools. Their lack of self-confidence aggravates a sense of frustration, animosity and disenchantment towards schooling.

Improving education through school autonomy

School autonomy principles

Centralised government departments have an inherent inertia that impedes change, leaving school principals with far too little power and responsibility for the services they are supposed to deliver. The failure of the government school system to lift Indigenous educational outcomes rests, in part, on the lack of autonomy and accountability at the individual school level. Critically, schools cannot hire or dismiss teachers. This situation makes it difficult for government schools, particularly in remote locations, to make a real difference for Indigenous children.

Enhancing the long-term educational outcomes of Indigenous students in a sustainable manner requires reforms that provide individual schools with greater

educational, administrative and operational autonomy. Combined with other reforms in the school sector,¹⁵ the loosening of central bureaucratic controls from government schools promises a range of benefits to local students and school communities including:

- Encouraging schools to become more responsive and flexible to the learning needs of their students. This could mean, for example, adjusting curriculum standards, teaching methods, and the quality of facilities in order to engage students in learning.
- Allowing schools to build up a team of teachers and administrators that has the skills to provide a wide range of quality educational experiences for students, and supports the educational directions of the school.
- Placing resources where decisions are made, allowing schools to spend their budget and use their assets more efficiently. This ensures that the school can implement its priorities without recourse to decisions made by an agent far removed from the local scene.
- Promoting further links with the local community—including parents, community figures, businesses and industry, sporting clubs and other groups—without the need to seek approval from bureaucracies far removed from the local scene. This can ensure that schools develop into effective ‘community hubs’ drawing people from isolated areas together in the common goal of advancing the education of children.
- Giving real decision-making powers to school councils as appropriate, making the voluntary contributions of time and effort from parents and local people easier, more meaningful and fulfilling.¹⁶

In return for greater freedoms by government, autonomous schools should adhere to a set of explicit accountability measures. These measures would relate to the ability of a school to meet specific educational performance outcomes, such as improvements in literacy and numeracy and ensuring regular school attendance, rather than compliance with centralised bureaucratic processes. By ensuring that these measures are released publicly on a regular basis, autonomous schools would be subject to external scrutiny by local parents and the general community.

It is imperative that decisions affecting the educational prospects of individuals be made as close as possible to those affected by them. Government schools with large Indigenous populations in remote areas urgently need reforms to lift educational standards. Without reform, more taxpayers’ money will be squandered and more children’s lives wasted.

The impact of school autonomy on education

A growing body of evidence has shown that greater school autonomy over a wide range of educational and operational factors is a key element in delivering improved educational outcomes. The following provides a summary of some of the major findings:

- School effectiveness: A growing number of studies have sought to identify characteristics that make some schools more effective in delivering educational success for their students. Chubb and Moe (1990) found that a critical reason why private schools appear to be more effective than public schools is because of their organisational characteristics, which are linked to their autonomy.¹⁷ Woessmann (2001) found that school autonomy in areas such as teacher hiring, setting teacher salaries, choosing instructional methods and purchasing supplies all improved performance in the OECD’s Third International Mathematics and Science Study

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(TIMSS).¹⁸ In a survey of the school effectiveness literature, Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) find that the size of school impacts on students '[t]end to be larger in schools that have governance structures allowing more control of their academic operations.'¹⁹

- Charter schools: Charter schools are schools in the United States which have been given greater autonomy in exchange for meeting certain mandated educational accountability requirements. A recent study by American economist Caroline M. Hoxby found that charter school students were more proficient in reading and mathematics compared to their government school counterparts, and this advantage was greater in those jurisdictions where charter schools were well established.²⁰ A randomised-based study by Hoxby and Rockoff (2004) of Chicago charter schools found that they raised achievement for those students who enrolled in Year 5 or earlier.²¹ Greene, Forster and Withers (2003) found similar positive results in favour of charter schools when measuring test score improvements in 11 states.²² There is also initial evidence that more liberal charter school laws, which provide greater autonomy, produce higher student achievement among charter schools, and between charter schools and conventional government schools (Center for Education Reform, 2004).²³

Principals and teachers in government schools need the freedom and the incentive to seek new learning and operational alternatives to aid struggling Indigenous students. This would involve the separation of individual government schools from a range of public sector educational regulations, transforming individual schools into 'non-systemic' government schools with sufficient autonomy.

Towards greater autonomy for Indigenous schools

The school autonomy model in practice

Remote Indigenous communities are understandably frustrated with the appalling performance of inflexible government school systems. Parents with the financial means are moving their children to non-government boarding schools in capital cities and major regional centres. A small number of students receive scholarships from the Cape York Institute and similar programmes to enrol in high-expectation schools. However, most of the children of welfare-recipient Indigenous families, who represent the majority in remote communities, do not have such opportunities. Autonomous, non-systemic government schools should be a key part of the next wave of education reform.

Government school autonomy would benefit remote Indigenous communities by transforming failed conventional schools into ones that are geared for success. Autonomous schools will give school leaders and quality teaching staff the incentive and opportunity to tailor practices that lift educational standards. State and territory education departments have persistently failed to do this.

What might government school autonomy mean for Indigenous communities? Autonomous schools could take advantage of a broad range of flexible options that include:

- *Curriculum:* Schools with high Indigenous populations must be afforded the opportunity to escape the 'outcomes-based' and failed bilingual education framework that currently plagues government school systems. Indigenous students need to be taught the essentials of English literacy and numeracy on the same basis as non-Indigenous students in high-achieving metropolitan schools from the earliest age possible. Autonomous government schools could also help facilitate an end to other elements of post-modern philosophy that undermine student learning.

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- *Flexible human resource management:* School autonomy would ensure that Indigenous schools could develop systems and practices to bring out the best in teachers and support staff. This could include performance-based pay arrangements linked to productivity and the achievement of positive outcomes in the school. Schools could also develop special remuneration and other tailored incentives to attract motivated, high-quality teaching staff (including mature-aged candidates with suitable experience),²⁴ and have the freedom to retrench poorly performing teachers and other staff.
- *Partnerships with successful education institutions and other providers:* Schools would be free to establish a variety of partnerships with institutions that have a proven track record of success. For instance, schools in remote areas could form educational, governance or other links with successful mainstream schools paving the way for innovations such as the transfer of quality educational practices to the remote school, or the introduction of exchange programmes for good, committed teachers and perhaps senior students.²⁵ Allowing funds and other assets to flow into autonomous schools from various non-government sources, such as universities, private training providers, infrastructure companies, philanthropists, community organisations, local businesses and others would ensure that autonomous government schools in Indigenous communities receive not only additional but better targeted resources to boost educational standards.
- *Flexible administrative structures:* Flexibility in administrative approaches is an important element in the package of changes for flexible schools. For example, to capture the benefits of economies of scale and cost savings, autonomous schools in isolated and rural areas could ‘cluster’ together their back-office human resource and administrative support systems, or individually or collectively hire an agency (other than the government education department human resources division) to perform these services.
- *Parental involvement:* A more flexible, autonomous government school environment could also encourage the parents of Indigenous students to play a greater role in the school. Many Indigenous parents hold equally high educational aspirations for their children as non-Indigenous parents. Enabling parents to participate in school council boards, or in teaching local culture, for example, would instil a sense of ambition and pride in their children’s education.

Indigenous schools, while retaining their autonomy, would also continue to work closely with Commonwealth, state and territory governments on a range of initiatives including the Commonwealth Shared Responsibility Agreements in regional areas and initiatives linking family welfare payments with school attendance.

The success of government school autonomy would depend crucially on the extent of support given to this reform. A number of legal and policy criteria would have to be met if the full benefits of autonomy are to be realised. These include:

- The legislation must allow both for government schools to become autonomous and for new autonomous schools to develop. A variety of suitably qualified individuals or groups, both inside and outside the existing school system, should be free to manage existing schools, or establish new ones.
- Schools should be allowed to ‘opt out’ of, or retain, existing government education and operating standards as they see fit. They should be free to choose the combination of existing government standards and their own that delivers the best outcomes for Indigenous students. Governments must not penalise schools that decide to manage their own affairs.
- All autonomous government schools should continue to receive standard government recurrent and capital funding on the same terms as conventional

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The degree of entrenched Indigenous educational disadvantage requires 'outside the box' solutions.

government schools. Schools should also be able to seek additional funding from non-government sources, including parental contributions, without a reduction of their government funding. This would enable schools to purchase additional education services and other resources for their students.

- The authority that registers autonomous schools should be independent of government education departments.
- A framework for performance accountability measures that will apply to autonomous schools should be clearly specified and made publicly available. These accountabilities should be monitored, and the associated data collected by an independent authority.²⁶

The degree of entrenched Indigenous educational disadvantage requires 'outside the box' solutions. Government schools need to learn from the experience of successful autonomous schools and adapt their own solutions. While school autonomy is not a panacea for the ills afflicting Indigenous education, exemptions from existing government education laws, regulations and policies would benefit students struggling under the current system. The greater the flexibility afforded to schools, the greater the prospect of long-term educational success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The need to face reform challenges

A number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden, have embarked on sweeping measures to promote public school autonomy. During the 1990s a number of Australian states, including Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, introduced similar reforms. In particular, the former Victorian Kennett Government's 'School of the Future' policy was prominent in its comprehensive approach towards implementing school charters and increasing state-wide educational accountability.²⁷

However, since the late 1990's state Labor governments have partially reversed school autonomy reforms in response to fierce resistance by teacher union and bureaucratic lobbies. While the Commonwealth Government has recently revisited this issue, by proposing to provide government school principals greater autonomy over the hiring of staff, curriculum and budgets as a condition for funding,²⁸ its implementation has faced resistance from the states, territories and teacher unions.

Although the appalling state of Indigenous education in remote areas demands fundamental reform, opposition to the autonomous government schools concept remains strong. Much of the opposition from teachers' unions and state education departments rests on the misguided notion that a government school must be directly operated by government to retain its 'public' character or maintain standards. Such political opposition has to be overcome if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote communities are to have access to a decent education.

Centrally managed government schools will remain failed schools unless they are afforded the flexibility, responsibility and accountability needed to improve their standards. Another generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders must not be lost to the deplorable situation provided by the current system. As noted by the former Northern Territory education bureaucrat, Don Watts, 'We are prepared to live with socialised mediocrity because we invented it. Why should we expect Aboriginal people to accept these methods? Lasting solutions must seek to empower Aboriginal people in the governance of their education services.'²⁹ Autonomous schools should be the basis of a comprehensive policy package to improve the long-term educational prospects of Indigenous students.

Lasting solutions must seek to empower Aboriginal people in the governance of their education services.

Endnotes

- ¹ The author would like to thank Prof Helen Hughes, and two referees, for helpful comments and suggestions on a previous draft of this paper. The author assumes responsibility for all remaining errors and omissions.
- ² Helen Hughes, *The Economics of Indigenous Deprivation and Proposals for Reform*, Issue Analysis No 63 (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2005).
- ³ Quoted in Julie Novak, 'Reforming Indigenous school education: The charter school alternative', *On Line Opinion* (14 December 2004).
- ⁴ R G (Jerry) Schwab and Dale Sutherland, *Literacy for Life: A Scoping Study for a Community Literacy Empowerment Project* (Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, 2004).
- ⁵ John Taylor, *Social Indicators for Aboriginal Governance: Insights from the Thamarrur Region, Northern Territory*, Research Monograph No 24 (Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, 2004).
- ⁶ Noel Pearson, 'Urgent need to raise the quality bar', *The Australian* (13 September 2004).
- ⁷ In 2003–04, the Australian Government directed over \$113 million in Indigenous school education specific purpose funding towards government schools. See SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision), *Report on Government Services: Indigenous Compendium 2006* (Canberra: Productivity Commission, 2006), Table 3A.1. The Commonwealth, state and territory governments also provide general purpose funding to government schools, which may be directed to Indigenous students.
- ⁸ While enrolment data by geographic area is not available on a consistent national basis, unpublished data provided by some states reveal that government schools represent the major provider of educational services to Indigenous students. For example, in Queensland, over 90 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary and secondary remote students were enrolled in government schools in 2002.
- ⁹ Kevin Donnelly, *Why our schools are failing* (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2004).
- ¹⁰ Helen Hughes and Jenness Warin, *A New Deal for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Remote Communities*, Issue Analysis No 54 (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2005).
- ¹¹ See James J Heckman, 'The Economics of Investing in Early Childhood', Presentation to the National Investment for the Early Years (NIFeTY) Australia 2006 Conference, http://www.nifety.cyh.com/Documents/PDF/invest-UNSW_all_2006-02-01_12pm_mms.pdf.
- ¹² Veronica Cleary, *Education and Learning in an Aboriginal Community*, Issue Analysis No 65 (Sydney: Centre for Independent Studies, 2005).
- ¹³ According to a recent survey, 56% of surveyed final-year teaching graduates, undergraduates and early career teachers were unable to identify syllables, and three-quarters could not identify the sounds of a word. See Ruth-Fielding Barnsley and Nola Purdie, 'Teacher's attitude to and knowledge of metalinguistics in the process of learning to read', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 33:1 (May 2005).
- ¹⁴ Mark Harrison, *Education Matters: Government, Markets and New Zealand Schools* (Wellington: Education Forum, 2004).
- ¹⁵ See John Merrifield and David Salisbury, 'The Competitive Education Industry Concept and Why It Deserves More Scrutiny', *The Cato Journal* 25:2 (Spring/Summer 2005), 181–95, and Julie Novak, 'Choice matters: What needs to change to make schools competitive?', *Policy* 22:1 (Autumn 2006), 23–7.
- ¹⁶ Brian Caldwell and John Roskam, *Australia's Education Choices*, Report to The Menzies Research Centre (Canberra: The Menzies Research Centre, 2002).
- ¹⁷ According to Chubb and Moe, '... Autonomy has the strongest influence on the overall quality of school organization of any factor that we examined. Bureaucracy is unambiguously bad for school organization', 183. See John E Chubb and Terry M Moe, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1990).
- ¹⁸ Ludger Woessmann, 'Why Students in Some Countries Do Better', *Education Next* (Summer 2001), 67–74.
- ¹⁹ Charles Teddlie and David Reynolds, *The International Handbook of School Effectiveness Research* (London: Falmer, 2000), 184–5.
- ²⁰ Caroline M Hoxby, 'Achievement in Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States: Understanding the Differences', Harvard University and National Bureau of Economic Research (December 2004).
- ²¹ Caroline M Hoxby and Jonah E Rockoff, 'Findings from the City of Big Shoulders', *Education Next* (Fall 2005).
- ²² Jay P Greene, Greg Forster and Marcus Winters, 'Apples to Apples: An Evaluation of Charter Schools Serving General Student Populations', Manhattan Institute Education Research Report (New York: Manhattan Institute, July 2003).
- ²³ Center for Education Reform, *Charter School Laws Across the States: Ranking and Scorecard* (Washington: 2004).
- ²⁴ Jennifer Buckingham, *Good Teachers Where They Are Needed*, Issue Analysis No 64 (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2005).
- ²⁵ Hughes and Warin, *A New Deal for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*.
- ²⁶ Ken Gannicott, *Taking Education Seriously*, Policy Monograph No 38 (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 1997), 157; Center for Education Reform.
- ²⁷ Gannicott, *Taking Education Seriously*; and Caldwell and Roskam, *Australia's Education Choices*.

²⁸ Australian Government, *Learning together—achievement through choice and opportunity: Australian Government funding for schools for the 2005-08 quadrennium*, Discussion Paper (2004).

²⁹ Don Watts, 'Indigenous students deserve better than the average', *The Australian* (12 July 2004). Watts advocated an environment where 'state [school] systems would become loose systems of locally governed state-sponsored schools' via a voucher system for distributing government school funds.

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