

# **Evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program**

**For**

**Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations**

by



Australian Council *for* Educational Research

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## Executive Summary

The objective of the Sporting Chance Program is to encourage improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (boys and girls) using sport and recreation. Such outcomes may include an increase in school attendance, strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling, improved achievement in learning, increased retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent and greater parental and community involvement with the school and students' schooling. The program comprises two elements:

- School-based Sports Academies (Academies) for secondary school students; and
- Education Engagement Strategies (EES) for both primary and secondary school students.

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the extent to which the Sporting Chance Program has achieved its objective. The findings from the evaluation support the conclusion that the Sporting Chance Program is meeting its objective, although the activities that are offered are broader than 'sport and recreation'.

More than 90 per cent of the 1,012 students surveyed and interviewed as part of the evaluation reported a positive attitude toward their schooling, particularly in relation to their attitudes to school, self-identity, sense of pride in being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and self-efficacy as learners.

The professional judgement of teachers and principals reinforces this conclusion, suggesting that the Sporting Chance Program is having a moderate (positive) impact on students in relation to attendance, engagement, achievement, retention and parental/community involvement. 'Moderate' here means that these teachers assess the Sporting Chance Program as having led to improvements which are identifiable as uniquely due to the program but that there remains scope for further improvement. The degree and nature of improvement and hence the scope for further improvement varies across projects and schools. Indeed, the use of more systematic measures, in particular post-school destination data, would assist in getting a clearer picture of its impact.

*Attendance and engagement:* In surveys and interviews schools and providers report improved attendance and engagement in school for students in both the school-based sports Academies and Education Engagement Strategies although the sustainability of this engagement is more evident in the Academies than in the EES projects. Attendance data need careful use; there are different kinds of absence – for example, illness, cultural, unexplained – and these should be taken into account in any data collected for administrative purposes.

*Learning achievement:* The evaluation does not show that, as a result of self-reported views on changes in attitude, attendance and engagement, learning achievement outcomes have improved. In general there is insufficient evidence to show a clear link between Academy or EES participation and improved academic outcomes. Some schools report improved attainment in classroom achievement, such as students gaining higher grades in their work for some subjects or doing better in literacy and/or numeracy activities, but the data for this are inconclusive.

*Retention:* While not all Academies are in a position to show improved retention rates to Year 12 (for example, some have only been operating for a short period or have focused their efforts on younger students and will need more time for these students to move through the school) others have successfully supported students to attain a range of certificates, including Year 12 qualifications, as shown in surveys, interviews and information provided during school visits.

*Parental and community involvement:* Schools in both Academies and EES projects report increased levels of parental and community involvement in the school although this is not as strong as for other performance areas, such as attendance and engagement. There is scope for further community involvement in the provision of post-school support to help students make a successful transition to work or further study.

As part of the evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program, ACER undertook a review of the literature on student engagement and the link between student engagement in school, attitude to school, and attendance and educational outcomes. The review found considerable variation in the way engagement is understood and measured. The findings of the evaluation suggest there are four key components of student engagement in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: (a) positive self-identity, (b) belonging (both cultural and group), (c) participation and (d) attendance.

The literature review shows there are gaps in the research regarding the nature and strengths of the links between engagement and particular educational outcomes. The findings of the evaluation, consistent with the literature, indicate that while the Academies in particular are contributing to improved attendance and engagement, there is not yet clear evidence linking this to improved academic attainment.

There are other benefits to flow from the Sporting Chance Program. Families have expressed pride in their children's participation and performance in the program. Project providers and school staff have referred to the professional and personal satisfaction gained from seeing the positive changes that occur in student confidence, self esteem, behaviour, attendance and engagement in learning.

The most striking endorsement of the Sporting Chance Program has come from the students themselves. Over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students provided feedback on their experiences in the Academies and EES projects. They describe what they have learned, what they like most about the Academy or EES, and the difference these experiences have made to them.

Both the Academies and EES projects are successful in engaging students in school but the very nature of the EES activities mean that the impact is likely to be short-term rather than sustained.

Effective Academies are characterised by:

- highly skilled, enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff members who are capable of building strong and trusted relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- willingness to engage communities in the planning and processes well before the program is implemented
- strong support from the school leadership, other teachers and parents/carers
- an integrated curriculum

- effective communication between provider and school, school and community, provider and community
- sufficient resourcing and funding, including the provision of an environment – such as a designated Academy room – in which students can feel safe and comfortable and where parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff feel comfortable
- strong external relationships, such as with community and business organisations, tertiary providers and potential funders, who can provide the Academy with additional financial and in-kind support and mentoring
- a strong perception (and promotion of) the Sporting Chance Program as an education program and not primarily as a sports program
- recognition of the need to monitor and evaluate their programs

Effective EES projects are characterised by:

- highly skilled (that is, appropriately qualified, trained and/or experienced), enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff who can engage with students
- consistent and regular delivery, without too much time occurring between visits
- a positive relationship with the school
- effective communication, including allowing sufficient time for schools to prepare for the arrival of the EES staff and mentors

## Other findings

Providers were asked about the usefulness of DEEWR's Sporting Chance Guidelines in delivering their projects and, for Academy projects, the importance of the Advisory Committee as a source of support. They were also asked to nominate any particular issues with a view to identifying areas in which the Sporting Chance Program might be enhanced. The most commonly identified source of support from providers was not so much the Guidelines or the Advisory Committees but the workshop for providers which allows them to share experiences and ideas to improve their own projects.

## Unintended consequences

There have been several unintended consequences (both positive and negative) arising from participation in the Sporting Chance Program. The evidence for this is mainly anecdotal. The Academies have both positive and negative unintended consequences while the EES projects have positive ones.

### Positive

One outcome identified in surveys, interviews and small group discussions with Academy project providers, principals, staff, parents and community members, and supported by student responses in interviews and surveys, was an increase in self esteem (typically expressed as students 'feeling good' about themselves) and self confidence as a result of being in the project.

Project providers (in interviews), principals and staff (in surveys) were asked if anything had surprised them about the Sporting Chance Program in their school. Of the 28 staff and principals who reported being surprised by an aspect of the projects, 22 appear to have underestimated the benefits, and six the speed of the benefits, arising from the project. Seven staff members admitted

to being pleasantly surprised by what their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been able to achieve. Four teachers and principals commented on the professional learning gained from (both Academy and EES) projects although the nature of this was not defined.

### Negative

There were few unintended negative consequences arising from participation in the Sporting Chance Program. One was identified as an occasional resentment from others in the school community at the opportunities being given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Several schools also reported a similar response from girls in regard to the disproportionate opportunities being given to boys through boys' only Academies and, in one case, by boys to a girls' only Academy.

Overall, the Sporting Chance Program, despite some limitations, is doing what it has set out to do – to encourage improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## **Recommendations – with rationale**

The following recommendations are based on consideration of a wide range of data, including providers' reports (progress, annual, operational plans), phone interviews with providers, small group discussions with school communities (students, parents/carers, community members), face-to-face interviews (and some small group discussions) with principals and staff, surveys (principals, staff and students) and system level data provided by DEEWR.

The recommendations have been divided into three broad types: those relating to the program's objective and intended outcomes; those derived from key performance indicator data and those relating to project delivery. We provide a short rationale for each recommendation based on our findings. A separate list of recommendations without the rationale is also attached for convenience.

### **1. The Sporting Chance objective**

As currently expressed in the Indigenous Education Targeted Assistance Act (IETA) Guidelines:

*The objective of both elements of the [Sporting Chance] Program is to encourage improved educational outcomes for [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] students (boys and girls) using sport and recreation. Such outcomes may include:*

- *an increase in school attendance;*
- *strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling;*
- *improved achievement in learning;*
- *increased retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent; and*
- *greater parental and community involvement with the school and students' schooling.*

*The development of sporting skills and participation in sport are subsidiary outcomes.*

ACER recommends several changes to the current wording of the Sporting Chance Program objective on the following grounds:

- Despite the statement that sport-related skills and outcomes are to be considered 'subsidiary' rather than primary, the name of the program strongly suggests a sporting rather than an educational focus. Inclusion of 'sport and recreation' in the objective supports this perception. Feedback from small group discussions with parents and community members also suggests this is a public perception. It should be made clearer in

the objective that this is an educational program first and foremost. One way of doing this would be to delete the words '*using sport and recreation*' from the objective as the program uses a far wider range of activities to engage students than is suggested by 'sport and recreation'. For example, projects offer (among other things) department, personal development, cultural trips to museums or libraries, nutrition, workplace visits and leadership opportunities.

- The objective should do more than simply 'encourage'. Any program provider or school community could potentially say they are *encouraging* improved outcomes but the key objective of the program should be to *bring about* tangible improvement. That is, all program providers and schools should be expected to deliver the program in such a way that there is demonstrable improvement in at least some of the intended outcomes. The words 'bring about' will require more accountability from stakeholders than the word 'encourage'.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people remain one of the groups most at risk of poor transition from school,<sup>1</sup> yet currently the intended outcomes do not include anything that recognises how the projects are contributing to post-school pathways. Success here is difficult to define and measure – for example, is a student who chooses to return and contribute to their community after completing Year 12 less 'successful' than one who opts to do an apprenticeship or a university course? At least two of the more effective Academies are aware of their students' post-school destinations so it is not an unreasonable expectation. Another way of thinking about this is to see the role of the Academies as being to prepare students for lifelong learning. That is, students should leave the Academies and/or schools with the *capacity to make informed decisions about future study or employment*; they should have *realistic expectations about the pathways that best suit their interests, skills and needs*; have *genuine choices open to them*; and the *confidence to learn new things*. Some of these things are already being reported anecdotally by schools and providers.
- EES projects are not always able to show they are meeting the Sporting Chance Program objective because the intended outcomes all relate to change over time and the EES projects do not have the same intensive opportunities to engage with students over time as the Academies. The same set of intended outcomes is expected to serve both Academies and EES projects when the two models are very different in purpose and delivery mode. The list of intended outcomes could be expanded to include an educational outcome that could more easily be demonstrated by EES providers.
- The list of intended outcomes could be expanded to include educational benefits not currently captured. For example, several schools referred to Academy students taking on mentoring roles with younger students, and doing things for the community, such as umpiring games on the weekend or coaching teams. Progress reports from providers also refer to these kinds of outcomes in giving qualitative examples of 'significant achievement'. Feedback from surveys and site visits highlights the importance of improved self esteem and self confidence. Both Academies and EES potentially offer leadership opportunities for students. The addition of a new intended outcome that recognises these achievements for

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<sup>1</sup> D. Curtis and J. McMillan, School non-completers: Profiles and initial destinations, LSAY, Research Report 54, 2008.

students, would not be onerous as providers are already asked to give examples in their progress reports.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

That DEEWR change the Sporting Chance Program objective to read:

*The objective of the Sporting Chance Program is to bring about improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (boys and girls). Such outcomes may include:*

- *an increase in school attendance*
- *strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling;*
- *improved achievement in learning;*
- *increased retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent;*
- *increased capacity to make informed decisions about post-school pathways;*
- *greater parental and community involvement with the school and students' schooling;*
- *achievements in other personal/social areas, such as leadership, mentoring or community engagement.*

## **2. Measuring the Sporting Chance Program objective**

### Data collection in general

The quality and amount of useful data provided in the providers' reports, and the quality and usefulness of the feedback being collected by the EES projects, vary quite considerably across projects. Some providers expressed a desire to be able to better capture what they are doing well as did some schools. ACER recommends that DEEWR develop a resource that will support all project providers, and potentially schools, in monitoring and evaluating their projects.

This guide to evaluation needs to make very clear, particularly for new projects, that evaluation is not an 'add on' but a core part of any project. All parties need to be clear about the performance measures that will be used to monitor progress and evaluate impact in each project. (This point picks up on the comment made by a member of the Steering Committee in giving feedback on the performance measures section of the third draft of the report.)

The guide could provide examples of the kind of data that could usefully be collected, examples of tools that could be used to measure impact, and could give case study examples of projects that have been able to show successful outcomes. For example, EES project managers could be encouraged to administer some form of pre- and post- evaluation when visiting schools so that data can be captured about the immediate impact of the activities. Each project could be reviewed in terms of both *process* (that is, the relationship with the school, community, and partners, and the way in which the project is being delivered) and *outcomes* (that is, the difference the project is making in terms of its own objectives and the broader Sporting Chance Program objective).

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

ACER recommends that:

- (a) DEEWR develop resource material to assist providers to introduce better quality measures to monitor and evaluate the impact of their projects, including both the *process* of delivery and *outcomes*.
- (b) DEEWR use the tables on pages 87-89 of the evaluation report as the basis for developing appropriate performance measures.

There are additional recommendations relating to performance measurement.

### Attendance

Attendance is a risky indicator of student improvement. Several schools specifically mentioned attendance data collection as being problematic either because it is an inappropriate measure for their particular circumstances – for example, in a boarding school attendance is 100 per cent; in two schools attendance was already high so showing improvement is difficult – or because it is subject to misinterpretation (for example, the most common reasons for non-attendance given by Academy schools and providers during interviews related to cultural factors, such as funerals, accompanying family members to appointments or attending cultural events, rather than absenteeism).

A more accurate picture could potentially be gained of student non-attendance in Academy schools if providers recorded absences according to whether these are cultural, illness or unexplained. A decrease in unexplained absences, for example, could potentially be one indicator of improved engagement in school. In their progress reports, providers could give a percentage breakdown of those absences known to be related to cultural or family reasons, those known to be related to illness, and those that are unexplained. This would require working closely with schools to ensure the information is accurate but could be potentially more useful data for providers, DEEWR and schools than the current reporting of attendance percentages.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

ACER recommends that DEEWR encourage Academy providers and schools to differentiate between unexplained absences and absences to do with cultural factors or illness when reporting on attendance.

### New intended outcomes

Consideration could be given to developing further performance measures for the additional outcomes that have been suggested.

### Increased capacity to make informed decisions about post-school pathways

Schools have Individual Learning Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 10, 11 and 12. Student progress can be tracked for three years and professional judgements made by staff about each student's capacity for making informed pathway decisions. Additionally, contact could be maintained with students to see what each student is doing twelve months after leaving the Academy. This does not have to be onerous. At least two of the more effective Academies are already able to say what their ex-students are doing; this good practice could be shared with other Academies. One measure of success could be the extent to which student destinations are

consistent with the Individual Learning Plans. Another could be students in phone or face-to-face interviews reflecting on their post-school experiences and how well the Academy prepared them for life after school.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

ACER recommends that Academy project providers be asked to show in their Operational Plans how they intend following up students who have completed Year 12 or its vocational equivalent for at least the next twelve months after students have left the Academy.

#### Achievements in other personal/social areas, such as in leadership, mentoring or community engagement

The feedback obtained through surveys and conversations with principals, staff and students highlighted the importance of improved self esteem and confidence as a result of participation in the Academy projects in particular.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

ACER recommends that DEEWR continue to ask both Academy and EES project providers to provide 'any case studies and/or significant achievements by staff or students as powerful qualitative reporting on the effectiveness of the project' and that these examples are disseminated among providers (electronically, at a DEEWR workshop or in the guidance material developed to help providers to monitor and evaluate) in order to encourage good practice in reporting improved outcomes.

### **3. Project delivery**

The following recommendations are based on the characteristics that have been found during the evaluation to be closely associated with effective Academy and EES projects, particularly the importance of appropriately trained and culturally aware staff, involvement of local community, designated safe space for Academy children, strong external partnerships, and integration into the curriculum of the school.

This latter aspect is particularly relevant to Academies but is also evident in those EES projects which are either delivered regularly or where there has been an effort to align with other activities delivered in the school. The degree of integration could be strengthened in the case of EES providers who visit schools on an irregular basis by encouraging them to contact staff prior to each visit to identify ways in which the visits could be integrated into the school's curriculum, perhaps in the form of pre- and post-visit information or activities. Some existing Academy projects could also investigate how they could align their activities more closely with the school's curriculum goals and outcomes. Operational plans could make clear how this process would be followed.

One excellent source of professional learning and means of disseminating good practice is the providers' workshop facilitated by DEEWR. Feedback on this during the course of the evaluation was consistently positive.

An additional source of support could be provided by DEEWR in the form of a resource that assists project providers to identify potential partners, develop shared objectives, allocate clear roles and responsibilities, and establish strong and sustainable relationships.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

ACER recommends that:

- (a) DEEWR encourage principals to facilitate appropriate professional training for their staff to help ensure a whole school commitment to the Sporting Chance Program. This training could include cultural awareness and information about the objectives, philosophy and delivery of the relevant Academy project.
- (b) DEEWR require Academy and EES providers to describe in their operational plans how they will maintain the professional training and skills of their new and existing project staff, including cultural awareness and information about school protocols and expectations.
- (c) DEEWR resurrect the workshops for providers.
- (d) operational plans for new Academy projects include a proposed consultation and collaboration process with parents/carers and the local community and indicate what measures will be taken to maintain this goodwill and involvement.
- (e) a designated Academy room be provided in each Academy in which students can feel safe and comfortable and where parents/carers, community members and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff can also feel welcome.
- (f) DEEWR develop a resource to assist those Academies that are finding it difficult to initiate and sustain strong external partnerships.
- (g) schools and project managers (both Academy and EES) must embed their activities more into the curriculum, where this is not currently the case.

#### Supporting the less effective Academies and the gender imbalance

Of the 54 Academies, 13 are for girls only, 28 are for boys only and 13 are co-educational. In October 2010, the Academies were catering for 4515 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (1479 females and 2834 males). Currently, there are considerably more boys than girls benefitting from the opportunities that the Academy model can provide. Feedback from the girls' only Academies (based on survey responses, phone interviews and site visit discussions) affirmed the important role that the girls' only Academies play, and/or could potentially play, in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. The feedback also indicated the difficulty that some Academies are having in relation to attracting two-thirds of the funding needed to operate successfully.

#### **Recommendation 7**

ACER recommends that:

- (a) DEEWR review the performance of the less effective academies with a view to identifying if and how these might be better supported and resourced.
- (b) DEEWR consider funding new Academies with a different funding model in the first two years to give these Academies time to become established and develop networks for potential future funding opportunities and partnerships.
- (c) Direct future funding to increase the number of girls only academies to address the current gender imbalance.

# 1. Background

## The Sporting Chance Program

The Sporting Chance Program is an Australian Government initiative that uses sport and recreation as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their schooling. The objective of the program is to encourage improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Such outcomes may include, but are not limited to:

- an increase in school attendance;
- strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling;
- improved learning achievement;
- increased retention to year 12 or its vocational equivalent; and
- greater parental and community involvement with the school and student's schooling.

The Sporting Chance Program has two distinct components, each with its own strengths and limitations. In 2010 there were:

- 54 School-based sports Academies (Academies)
- 5 Education Engagement Strategies (EES)

In this report the word '*project*' is used to distinguish the Academy and EES activities from the Sporting Chance *Program*.

The Academies use sport and recreational activities as a vehicle to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students in school. Students take part in a wide range of activities depending on their interests and on the particular provider. The *Guidelines for Sporting Chance Program School-based Sports Academies* state that:

*There is no single model for the operation of an academy and the Australian Government will not prescribe the design of academies. However, academies must operate in partnership with a registered school or schools and have the approval of the relevant school/education authority. Academies do not have to be physically located at the school/s but they must have an active and cohesive presence within the school/s.*<sup>2</sup>

According to the Sporting Chance Program Fact sheet, many Academies offer 'innovative and high quality sports-focussed learning and development opportunities<sup>3</sup> to develop leadership skills, enhance education and career opportunities, improve the health and well being of learners including self-esteem and confidence, and promote and support positive learning experiences that foster success'. Academies are intensive projects with staff-student contact being maintained on a regular basis throughout the school year.

The EES providers develop strategies to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary and secondary students in schools in regional and remote locations. Generally the EES projects are less

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Guidelines for Sporting Chance Program School-based Sports Academies 2009-2012*, p. 178-189. See <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> See Sporting Chance Program Fact sheet at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Documents/SCPFactsheet.pdf> (retrieved 2 August 2011).

intensive than the Academies with projects varying considerably in terms of the types of activities delivered, the frequency of delivery and effectiveness.

EES providers generally visit:

- between two to 36 regional and remote communities
- one or two times per year up to once a week during school terms
- between one to five days in the one community.

Most of the EES project providers use high profile athletes as role models and mentors to deliver a range of activities that facilitate the development of life skills, improved self esteem and a healthy lifestyle. One provider also assists in the delivery of a certificate course for the participants while another EES project focuses on training teachers in effective techniques to engage students in school.

The Sporting Chance Program is implemented by providers – who can be either external or school-based – working together with schools, education authorities, sporting and recreation bodies, business and community groups. In general, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) contributes one third of the annual operational funding for an Academy with providers sourcing the other two thirds themselves. The EES projects are fully funded by DEEWR. Some EES providers also contribute resources to support the delivery of their projects.

Australian Government funding for an academy is based on the number of secondary students participating in academy activities. The unit cost per student per annum varies and depends on location and the activities delivered by a provider. The annual unit cost per student per annum ranges between \$6,000 and \$7,200 a student. The Australian Government contribution is in general, a one-third contribution to the annual unit cost.

Academies funded through Sporting Chance Program must have an Advisory Committee representing a range of stakeholder groups from the community, although the make-up, contribution and effectiveness of these committees vary from project to project.

The Sporting Chance Program is characterised by strong student demand. In 2007, the Sporting Chance Program supported some 1200 secondary students; in 2011, the program supports up to 11,000 primary and secondary students. Data collected by DEEWR show that in late 2010 there were 22 providers operating 54 Academies and five EES projects. These include 13 girls-only Academies, 28 boys-only Academies, 13 co-educational Academies and five co-educational EES projects. In October 2010, the Academies were catering for 4515 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (1479 females and 2834 males) while 8875 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had participated in the five EES projects.

## **The evaluation**

In December 2010, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was commissioned by DEEWR to undertake an evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program. The purpose of the evaluation is to identify the extent to which the program is meeting its objective. This report presents ACER's findings. All providers participated in the evaluation. Surveys were sent to the principals of all schools in the Sporting Chance Program.

Table 1 shows the providers and programs included in the evaluation.

**Table 1: Sporting Chance Program providers and projects**

<b>Provider</b>	<b>Project name</b>
Australian Football League (ACT/NSW)	Blacktown & Campbelltown Indigenous AFL Academies, NSW
Bluearth institute	Bluearth Project (EES), Darwin and Alice Springs, NT
Catholic Education Office - Diocese of Townsville	Sports Academy for Catholic Schools, Far North Qld
Clontarf Foundation	32 Academy projects across WA, NT and Vic
Country Rugby league of NSW (CRL)	Far West Development Strategy (EES), western NSW
Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)	SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy, Ceduna, Coober Pedy and Port Lincoln, SA
Eagle Edge Solutions	Eagle Edge Academy of Sport, Cunnamulla, QLD
Former Origin Greats, Queensland (FOGS)	ARTIE (Achieving Results Through Indigenous Education), Brisbane and Sunshine Coast, QLD.
Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation	Mid West Netball Academy, Geraldton, WA
Katherine High School	Stronger Smarter Sisters, Katherine, NT
Madalah Limited	Fitzroy Valley Girls Sport Academy, Fitzroy Crossing, WA
National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA)	Walan Barramal, South Sydney Gambirrang, Dubbo, NSW ARMtour (Athletes as Role Models) (EES), Central Desert, NT
New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET)	Girri Girri Sports Academy, western NSW
North Albany Senior High School	The Great Southern Girls Basketball Academy, Albany, WA
Role Models & Leaders Australia	Clontarf Girls Academy, Perth, WA Kalgoorlie Girls Academy, Kalgoorlie, WA Great Southern Basketball Academy, Albany, WA Broome Girls Academy, Broome, WA West Arnhem Girls Academy, Jabiru and Gunbalanya, NT Palmerston Girls Academy, Darwin, NT Centralian Girls Academy, Alice Springs, NT Up4it (EES), Goldfields, Esperance, Kimberley, Pilbara, Midwest regions of WA
Rostrevor College	Rostrevor Indigenous Sporting Academy, Adelaide, SA
Shalom Christian College	Shalom Sports Academy, Townsville, QLD
Stride Foundation	Sport for Life (EES), Coober Pedy, Ceduna, Koonibba, Marree, Port Augusta, Oodnadatta, Leigh Creek, Port

	Pirie, SA
Swan Districts Football Club	Kicking Goals Academies, Port Hedland and Newman, WA
The Leroy Loggins Foundation	Leroy Loggins Basketball Academy, Brisbane, QLD
Victorian Department of Education & Early Childhood Development (DEECD)	Wannik Dance Academy, Bendigo, Mooroopna, and Ballarat, Vic

## 2. Methodology

ACER collected a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data during the course of the evaluation. Much of this information came from schools and project providers. As part of the evaluation, ACER contacted 143 schools with Sporting Chance funded projects. Of these, 87 (or 61 per cent) contributed to the evaluation. Eight additional schools agreed to participate but for various reasons were unable to follow through on their initial consent. Only one school formally declined to participate in the evaluation. Forty-eight schools did not respond to the invitation. The majority of these were schools with EES projects.

### Literature Review

Early in the evaluation, ACER conducted a review of the literature on student engagement to identify current thinking around how engagement is understood, measured, and connects to particular outcomes. The purpose of this review was to gain a better understanding of how the evaluation might contribute to the existing body of research on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schooling and learning, particularly in relation to measures of student engagement and program impact. A separate report was provided and is referred to later in this report.

### Review of DEEWR data

ACER conducted a preliminary analysis of system level quantitative data contained in files provided by DEEWR as part of the contextual information for the Sporting Chance Program. The data covered up to four years from 2007 to 2011 and indicated trends in enrolments, attendance and general academic improvement (literacy and numeracy) as observed by the classroom teacher for students in the projects.

Other data related to contextual information about the case study schools and projects.

ACER also looked at project provider reports submitted to DEEWR, including progress and annual reports and, where available, operational plans.

### Phone interviews

Phone interviews were conducted with the managers of all 22 project providers and some of the individuals involved in delivering or contributing to the projects, including staff, partners or Advisory Committee members. The purpose of the interviews was to gather background data about the case study projects.

## Surveys

Survey data were collected from school principals, staff members and students. Principals and staff had the option of completing the survey by email or in printed form. Student surveys were targeted at students in primary (Years 4-6/7), lower-middle secondary and Years 11-12.

### Principal surveys

Completed surveys were received from principals in 68 (48 per cent) of the total number of schools that were sent the survey. Some schools operate multiple projects. Principals were asked about each project and a total of 78 responses were analysed. Of the 78 survey responses, 55 related to Academies and 23 related to EES projects.

### Staff surveys

The principals of participating schools were asked to nominate a school contact person for ACER to liaise with during the evaluation. This person was then asked to pass on a copy of the staff survey to one or two key people. Of the 194 teachers who responded to the staff survey, 160 were from schools with Academies and 34 were from schools participating in EES projects.

Of the 194 staff who responded, 179 were from Government schools, 12 were from Catholic schools and three were from Independent schools.

### Student surveys

Survey data were collected from 1029 students across a wide range of Sporting Chance Program funded projects. For the purposes of the evaluation, 1012 surveys were included in the analysis. (The remaining surveys were administered to students in Academies and engagement activities that were outside the Sporting Chance Program. For example, one school operates both a girls' Academy and a boys' Academy but only one of these was funded through Sporting Chance.)

Of the 1012 students who completed a survey as a part of the evaluation, 493 were boys (48.7 per cent) and 519 were girls (51.3 per cent).

More detailed information and reports on each of the three surveys can be found in Appendix 1.

### Face-to-face discussions

Face-to-face discussions were held in selected school communities. ACER conducted site visits to 19 schools, representing 12 projects. The list of schools visited can be found in Appendix 2. ACER researchers sought the views of principals, staff members, students participating in the program, parents or carers and members of the community. In schools where students in Sporting Chance funded projects are boarders, it was more difficult to meet with parents, carers and elders. In one such school, several parents provided feedback via written answers to key questions.

### Supplementary material

Where appropriate, ACER examined additional relevant material such as school and project newsletters, website information, media articles.

### Cultural protocols

Two Aboriginal researchers in ACER's evaluation team ensured all evaluation activities were culturally appropriate. They led discussions about the project during most of the site visits. They engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members who might not

otherwise have been available to talk about the project, and had conversations with principals and staff members on the phone or by email to find out more about projects and to encourage schools to contribute their insights to the evaluation. An Aboriginal researcher was present for most site visits to schools. The logistics and timing of some school visits meant this was not always possible.

## Methodological issues

A number of methodological issues needed to be addressed during the course of the evaluation.

A common problem for all evaluators of programs is that of establishing causality. Given that schools are likely to be engaged in a number of other activities or programs at any given time, it can be difficult to attribute improvement conclusively to a particular initiative. Often the best that can be said is that a program *contributed to* the identified outcomes.

Perhaps the most significant methodological issue for the evaluators was that of the language used to describe the various Sporting Chance projects. Not all schools called the same project by the same name. For example, one project might be known variously as Sporting Chance, Role Models & Leaders or Up4it. A Clontarf Football Academy or National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA) might be known by a local name. Two principals who were relatively new to their schools were not aware of their schools being involved in the Sporting Chance Program. To add to the complexity, some providers offer both Academies and EES projects while others support both girls' and boys' Academies. Schools also refer to the initiatives as 'programs' rather than 'projects'. Survey questions needed to accommodate these various scenarios.

The problem with identifying which project is operating in a school was compounded when a principal or staff member was new to the school and did not yet have a strong sense of the origins or purpose of the project or was not sure if the project was even operating in the school. At least two schools were either about to change, or had just changed, their principal during the course of the evaluation. Similarly, some school staff left or commenced during the course of the evaluation. In the case of the EES projects, which might only occur once a year or every six months, a principal might have been in the school for a while but not when the project was previously delivered.

Some schools are implementing two projects, which meant designing surveys that would allow for these projects to be differentiated without burdening principals and staff members with extra work.

For the primary school students (Years 4-6/7) the language used in the survey questions could not be too complex because English may not have been the first language of the students. Surveys were designed to take no longer than 15 to 20 minutes. Questions needed to accommodate the fact that the school might not have had a visit from EES project staff for some time. Some schools were reluctant to participate in the evaluation because of this fact.

Another issue was that some schools were not able to be approached until relatively late in the evaluation. Different jurisdictions have more or less complex processes and protocols associated with conducting research in schools, which meant that some schools were able to be approached early in the evaluation and to have subsequent follow up conversations and emails, while others could not be approached until after school holidays. The evaluation needed also to fit in around National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing and other demands on staff time.

Gaining parental or carer permission for student participation in the evaluation proved difficult for some schools with only one or two student surveys being completed in these schools. Methods of gaining permission vary from school to school. In some cases verbal permission was obtained for the Sporting Chance evaluation; in others permission was gained in person; most parental or carer permission was gained in writing.

In many schools staff members and principals were often hard-pressed to find time to complete the evaluation and it is testament to their commitment to the Sporting Chance Program that they took the time to respond. In many schools, being involved in an Academy or EES project is often merely one part of a teacher's role. At the same time as ACER's evaluation was being conducted some schools were also undertaking other evaluations, with one school having to respond to three evaluations at around the same time.

In general, more principals and staff in schools with Academies participated in the evaluation than principals of schools receiving one of the EES projects. Of the 48 schools who did not respond to ACER's invitation to participate in the evaluation, 30 were EES schools.

### **3. Findings**

ACER was asked to provide a final report which:

- analyses the extent to which the Sporting Chance Program achieves its objective to encourage positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- sets out the contractor's findings on the chief characteristics of student engagement, the link between student engagement in school, attitude to school and attendance and educational outcomes;
- draws on the evidence to analyse whether School-based Sports Academies or Education Engagement Strategies are more effective at engaging students in their schooling;
- draws from the evidence the chief characteristics of effective School-based Sports Academies in terms of successfully engaging students in school, sustainability, governance and funding structure;
- draws from the evidence the chief characteristics of effective Education Engagement Strategies in terms of successfully engaging students in school, sustainability, governance and funding structure;
- sets out, based on the evidence, the most effective strategies to engage students in school, taking into consideration the variety of circumstances in which the projects operate, including gender mix and location.
- reports on the contractor's findings as to whether the Sporting Chance Program has had any unintended consequences, such as an impact on the participants' health and wellbeing, self esteem, self confidence, classroom behaviour and employment.
- makes recommendations on how to position the Sporting Chance Program for the future, based on the research conducted and indicative examples of poor and good practice.

#### **Bringing about positive educational outcomes**

The evaluation shows that the Sporting Chance Program is achieving its objective of encouraging positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Eighty-two per cent of staff survey respondents reported that the objective of the program had been achieved to a

‘moderate’ or ‘major’ extent. Only three per cent of staff (both Academy and EES) reported that the objective of the program had not been met. The most common reasons given for non-achievement of the objective included:

- too early to judge; the project had only been going a short time
- limited time with students ‘thus limiting the impact’
- difficulty in measuring impact (for example, no baseline data may have been collected for the student group; difficulty of attribution when there may be a range of factors influencing outcomes)
- students were already attending and engaged therefore the objective has been met through other means not the Sporting Chance Program
- low attendance and/or discipline problems with a particular group of students

### Attendance

ACER examined four years of systems level attendance data provided by DEEWR but changes in reporting between 2007 and subsequent years, missing data and insufficient contextual information made it difficult to draw sound conclusions regarding attendance patterns for Sporting Chance Program students.

Given one of the distinctive aspects of the Sporting Chance Program evaluation was to obtain the perspective of students, since they are directly influenced by the program, secondary school students were asked to report on whether or not participation in the Sporting Chance Program had contributed to their attendance. In their survey responses, Academy students report that they are coming to school more often since joining the Academy. Eighty-five per cent of girls in the lower to middle secondary years reported that prior to joining their respective Academy project they came to school nearly every day. Since joining the Academy, 96.5 per cent of girls report that they have been attending school every day (a self-reported increase overall of 11.5 per cent). In comparison, boys self-reported a 15.4 per cent increase in coming to school every day since joining an Academy. For Years 11 to 12 students, the increase in self-reported school attendance was 12.5 per cent for girls and 15.3 per cent for boys.

The professional judgement of principals and staff in regard to the perceived impact of the Sporting Chance Program on student attendance was also sought. Around 77 per cent of staff who responded to the survey question that asked whether attendance had improved as a result of being in the Sporting Chance Program reported that attendance had improved to a ‘moderate’ or ‘major’ extent.

Given that some EES providers might only be in a school once or twice a year, it is more difficult to show an impact on attendance over the longer term for this type of project.

### Engagement

A good predictor of engagement with school is whether or not a student feels happy at school and likes to go to school each day.<sup>4</sup> The main source of information about student attitudes to school was student self-reported outcomes from surveys and interviews during site visits. In general,

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<sup>4</sup> K. Hillman, *Attitudes, Intentions and Participation in Education: Year 12 and Beyond*, *LSAY Briefing Reports*. LSAY Briefing: No. 20, August 2010.

student perceptions were consistent with the comments made in interviews with project providers, principals and staff, small group discussions with parents/carers and community members, and surveys completed by staff and principals.

In the surveys, students were asked to respond to a series of six statements about their attitude to school. These statements were common to all student surveys regardless of year level. The purpose of this question was to identify the extent to which students were engaging with schooling. The question was as follows:

School is a place where:

- I am happy
- I feel safe
- I have friends
- I like to go each day
- I like learning new things
- I like playing sport.

Items were measured on a two-point scale 'Yes' or 'No'.

Overall, with the exception of one item (I like to go each day), more than 90 per cent of students reported a positive attitude toward school. Irrespective of Sporting Chance Program type (that is, whether it was an Academy or an EES project), students reported a very positive attitude to school on each of the six attitude-to-school statements (range 77 to 100 per cent). Irrespective of program type, a higher proportion of girls reported school as being a place where they like to go each day. The highest proportion was among girls involved in schools offering the combined EES and Academy projects (100 per cent). Similarly, irrespective of program type, 100 per cent of girls reported that school was a place where they liked to learn new things.

Taking into account both the EES projects and the Academies, with the exception of the statement 'school is a place where I like playing sport', girls showed a slightly higher positive attitude to school than boys: around 89 per cent of girls compared with nearly 72 per cent of boys reported that school is a place where they like to go each day.

### Learning achievement

In general there is insufficient evidence to show a clear link between Academy or EES participation and improved academic achievement although this varies from school to school. Forty-three (55 per cent) of schools reported improved attainment in classroom achievement to a moderate or major extent. This might include students gaining higher grades in their work for some subjects or doing better in literacy and/or numeracy activities. For example, one girls' Academy reports that 88 per cent of girls involved with the project have maintained or improved their academic and behavioural performances at school during the first six months of 2011; levels of literacy have been maintained or improved in 90 per cent of lower secondary students, and levels of numeracy have been maintained or improved in 92 per cent of lower secondary students in this Academy.

Sixty-nine per cent of staff responding to the staff survey reported that learning achievement had improved to 'a moderate' or 'major' extent. Thirteen per cent reported no improvement and 18 per cent reported improvement 'to a minor extent'.

Project providers' progress reports show numbers of students who are receiving specific literacy and numeracy support (where this is provided as part of a particular project) but not the impact of this support in terms of tangible and direct achievement outcomes. Where examples are provided, these are at the level of individual achievement and either too few in number or insufficiently causally linked to the project to show conclusively that the Sporting Chance Program is leading to improved learning achievement.

While there is limited data showing academic improvement as a result of Academy participation, student survey responses and site visit conversations with students suggest the Academy projects are playing a positive role in improving students' self belief in their capacity to learn.

### Retention

Sixty-eight per cent of staff from schools with Years 10-12 reported improved student retention to a 'moderate' or 'major' extent. It could be expected that there would be a lower percentage of staff reporting 'improved retention' (compared with engagement or attendance) given that some Academies have only been operating for a short period and will need more time before being able to show if their students are staying on to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent. Nevertheless there is evidence of Academy students successfully attaining a range of certificates, including Year 12 qualifications with the case studies provide examples of the kind of certification that is being achieved.

### Parental and community involvement

The main source of evidence about improved parental and community involvement is from the staff and principal surveys and, to a lesser extent, from the site visit conversations. Over half (59 per cent) of staff who responded to the question about improved parental/community involvement considered that the Sporting Chance Program had contributed to 'a moderate' or 'major' extent to 'increased parental or community involvement'. If responses reporting 'to a minor extent' are included, these figures suggest that 85 per cent of staff who responded to the survey considered that there has been at least some increase in parental and community involvement. This is important to note as elsewhere in the staff survey, where staff are asked to identify factors critical to the success of a Sporting Chance Program, support from community and parents is one of the main enablers identified.

### Key Finding

The Sporting Chance Program is meeting its objective of bringing about positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Over 90 per cent of students report feeling positive about school, with a higher proportion of girls reporting school as a place where they like to go each day. Schools participating in the Academies report higher levels of impact than do schools participating in the EES. Based on the full range of evidence collected for this evaluation, including interviews with all stakeholders, surveys completed by principals, staff and students, and providers' progress reports, ACER concludes that, of the five intended outcomes (attendance, engagement, learning achievement, retention, parental and community involvement) the impact of

the Academy projects is greater on engagement and attendance than on learning achievement, retention or parental and community involvement. Of these latter three, a strong link between participation in the Sporting Chance Program and improved learning achievement has been the most difficult to establish.

## Characteristics of student engagement

The Sporting Chance Program was designed to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to come to school, engage in learning and stay on at school. Sport was to be the 'hook'. At the beginning of the evaluation ACER undertook a review of the literature on student engagement to tease out some of the assumptions underpinning the program. One reason for doing the review was to identify what is currently known about student engagement and how the evaluation might usefully contribute to current understandings of engagement in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The review found that there is considerable variation in how student engagement is understood and conceptualised, that these different understandings have implications for how engagement is measured, and that few studies have explored the concept of engagement in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. One of the criticisms of current definitions of engagement is that they are too abstract, with the relationship between engagement and learning 'too poorly understood' to fully guide us.<sup>5</sup>

Three dimensions of student engagement are frequently cited in the literature: cognitive/academic, behavioural/participatory and emotional/affective. Purdie (2003) suggests another dimension that is specifically related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.<sup>6</sup> Purdie highlights the importance of positive self-identity in promoting greater commitment and connection to schooling by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Her study of the role of positive self-identity in improving outcomes for these students found that incorporation of the cultural identities of students was critical to the development of a positive cultural identity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>7</sup>

In exploring the concept of engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the What Works program identified three elements as being important: *attendance* in the sense of being physically present at school; *participation* in the sense of 'consistently taking an active part in school activities'; and *belonging* in the sense of (a) feeling comfortable and secure as part of a larger group and (b) 'being part of an enterprise which has some personal meaning and value'.<sup>8</sup> While cultural

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<sup>5</sup> R. Axelson and A. Flick, 2011, 'Defining student engagement', *Change*, January/February, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> N. Purdie, 2003, 'Self-identity and positive outcomes of schooling for Indigenous Australian students'. Paper presented at NZAARE conference, Auckland.

<sup>7</sup> See also R. Craven and A. Parente, 2003, 'Unlocking educational disadvantage: Indigenous community members' perceptions of self-concept research as a potent potential key', University of Western Sydney, Paper presented NZARE AARE conference, Auckland.

<sup>8</sup> DEST, (no date), What Works: The Work Program, [http://www.whatworks.edu.au/upload/1250830979818\\_file\\_5Engagement.pdf](http://www.whatworks.edu.au/upload/1250830979818_file_5Engagement.pdf) (accessed 21 March 2011).

belonging is arguably an intrinsic part of self-identity, for the purposes of this report these dimensions are being treated separately here.

The importance of these elements – positive self-identity, belonging, participation and attendance – in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has been confirmed in this evaluation, particularly in the responses from students (both in surveys and conversations).

This section looks briefly at each of these concepts as illustrated in the Sporting Chance evaluation and re-visits these elements later in the report in the section on performance measures. It is suggested, as a hypothesis that needs further testing, that before the cognitive or academic elements of engagement – as shown in learning achievement outcomes – can occur in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there first needs to be present both positive self-identity and a sense of belonging. The sense of belonging relates both to a broader cultural identity and an affinity with a more specific group, such as an Academy.

### Positive self-identity

The positive difference the Academies are making in regard to self-identity should not be underestimated. Self-identity here is being taken to include feelings about one's self and culture.<sup>9</sup> When asked to describe 'one really important thing you have learned' as a result of being in the Sporting Chance Program, 17 per cent of secondary school students made comments that related either to self-confidence or cultural identity. Nearly one quarter of girls (23 per cent) refer to these aspects compared with 11 per cent of boys. Fourteen per cent of students also mention 'respect' (for themselves and others) and not feeling 'shame' (boys: 19.2 per cent; girls: 9.6 per cent).

Responses illustrating this growth in positive self-identity include:

- 'I have learnt to believe in myself'
- 'I have learnt there is no shame job and never give up'
- 'To respect myself and others'
- 'Confidence and persistence'
- 'To be a good leader and role model'
- 'The Academy has allowed me to realise my potential whilst guiding me through appropriate pathways'
- 'I feel more proud and confident'
- 'That it is important to do my best at everything I do'
- 'Being more confident because I used to be really shy'
- 'I've learned to stand up in front of everyone and not back down'
- 'That I am capable of doing anything I want in my life if I put the work in'.

Integral to this positive self-concept is pride in having achieved as learners. Indeed 71 students (seven per cent of student respondents) refer to learning as an important outcome for them from the program. Students write of learning:

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<sup>9</sup> See N. Purdie, 2003, 'Self-identity and positive outcomes of schooling for Indigenous Australian students', paper presented at NZAARE conference, Auckland.

- new skills, such as first aid
- how to dance and perform
- how to be a leader
- how to support others in a team
- the importance of school and getting an education.

For one student, the ‘one really important thing’ learned was ‘to pass Year 12 and get a job because if you don’t life will be hard’. For another, it was that ‘I can achieve more, doesn’t matter about my background. I can still do things.’ For a Year 8 boy, it was ‘to make my family proud of me. Trying to be someone as well’. Overwhelmingly, students in the various Academies are reporting that they have learned to feel proud of themselves and of what they have learnt.

A recent PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report examining the contextual factors that influence the achievement of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students found that while there were no significant differences in ‘the effort and persistence’ that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal students reported putting into their study, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reported ‘significantly lower levels of confidence in their abilities to handle tasks effectively than their non-Indigenous peers, with lower levels of self-efficacy in general terms, as well as when self-efficacy was assessed in relation to mathematics and science’.<sup>10</sup> The response of students in the Sporting Chance Program evaluation is consistent with other findings about the importance of self-efficacy – that is, belief in one’s own ability – in regards to engagement and achievement.<sup>11</sup> Academy participants are reporting that being in the Academies has made a difference to their sense of themselves as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and as learners.

### Belonging

The evaluation suggests that, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there are two dimensions to belonging: a broad cultural affinity and a group affinity. Both are related to positive self-identity and, arguably, provide a basis for engagement and learning to take place. Positive self-identity involves feeling good about oneself and part of feeling good about oneself, as shown in the students’ survey responses, is feeling good about being Aboriginal. While this finding is not new, the evaluation does highlight something that has perhaps been less well researched: the importance of identifying with, supporting, and being supported by, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a group that has been brought together for a common purpose.

*Cultural belonging:* Students in both small group discussions and surveys commented on the difference that being in the academy has made to their feelings about their Aboriginality and culture. Typical responses included ‘not being ashamed of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture; learning that culture is ‘really important’, that ‘the colour black doesn’t always means something bad’ and learning about ‘my culture and Aboriginal artefacts that my people have done’.

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<sup>10</sup> L. De Bortoli and S. Thomson, 2010, Contextual factors that influence the achievement of Australia’s Indigenous students: Results from PISA 2000-2006, OECD.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, L. De Bortoli and S. Thomson, 2010, *Contextual factors that influence the achievement of Australia’s Indigenous students: Results from PISA 2000-2006*, OECD; and N. Purdie, 2003, ‘Self-identity and positive outcomes of schooling for Indigenous Australian students’, paper presented at NZAARE conference, Auckland.

*Group belonging:* As well as belonging to a broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural group and feeling connected to that culture, fourteen per cent of students (boys: 13.7 per cent; girls: 13.5 per cent) in the surveys wrote of the importance of being part of a team, co-operating with others, learning that more things can be achieved in teams. Girls wrote and spoke about the importance of friendships; boys wrote and spoke about the importance of supporting other team members. At one school the girls have been able to form a network with each other within the school. One student commented that until the program she did not know who the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were – ‘we were practically strangers to each other, now we have formed a big group’. One of the new Year 7 students in the same school reported that she ‘liked being with Aboriginal girls ... We get to know each other, make new friends.’

Comments from students in a range of settings suggest that group belonging is an important feature of their experience in the Academies.

- ‘I work better now than in mainstream school’
- ‘Being around Aboriginal people helps me work’
- ‘Being more confident, being part of a dance group’
- ‘I have learnt the importance of team work’
- ‘Team work – because you need to be a team to do things’
- ‘I learnt that teamwork is an easier and better way of reaching a goal’.

Feedback from staff, principals and project providers highlights the importance of strong and trusted relationships between students and the staff involved in the Academies. Anecdotal evidence from the site visits suggests the Academy model works best where there is a small rather than a large group of staff as this enables students to form close one-on-one relationships.

Schools have reported that their students are proud to be in an Academy, shown for example in a willingness to wear the Academy uniform on excursions and outside the school. Several girls commented in their surveys that they felt proud to be wearing their Academy T-shirts. Other aspects of belonging in a group reported in the evaluation include being with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and making new friends – this was particularly important for girls – and being with a girls’ only or boys’ only group. One girl reported feeling ‘proud of myself being in the girls Academy’. Conversations with students on site visits to schools confirm that, for many students, belonging to the Academy is a source of pride.

### Attendance

Aggregated attendance data are provided by the schools to DEEWR. Principals, staff and students have reported increased attendance as a result of participation in the Academies although the connection between participation in a project and school attendance is problematic. Attendance records are generally favoured by governments and schools as an administratively easy way of identifying if a project is working. The reasoning is usually that if students are engaged, they are more likely to attend, and if they attend this is a sign they are engaged. This is not necessarily the case however. As the South Australian government Social Inclusion Board points out, regular

attendance does not mean a student is fully engaged.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, being absent does not mean students are not engaged with learning. If students are absent from school for cultural reasons, for example, they may be engaged in learning that is important for them, their families and their communities. If attendance is to be used as a measure of engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students then there needs to be a distinction between absences that are to do with cultural business and other absences.

Three schools, for example, raised the issue of Academy students being absent from the Academy for reasons such as funerals, going with the family to medical appointments or on other family business many kilometres away, with two of these schools noting they have a highly mobile population and that it was difficult for either the Academy or EES activities to influence the attendance rate in these circumstances. It was felt that non-attendance in these circumstances was not a reflection of the effectiveness or otherwise of the Academy project.

There are other factors too that can make attendance a problematic measure. For example, in one school where Academy students are full-time boarders, attendance is 100 per cent and so attendance is not a relevant indicator of improvement. Similarly, another school reported that they already had a high attendance rate prior to the Academy being set up and did not see this as a useful measure of improved outcomes in their particular case. For schools involved in those EES projects where there might be six months or more gap between visits, having only a few visits each year from provider staff means it is more difficult to identify a causal link between attendance and the project, although anecdotal comments from primary school staff suggest that attendance is likely to be higher on days where a role model visitor is known to be coming to the school.

### Participation

In the literature, participation refers to positive conduct such as being on-task, following rules and participation in school-related activities.<sup>13</sup> The nature of the Sporting Chance Program means that some degree of physical activity is involved across all year levels. In the Academies where students have chosen to be participants there is likely to be a high level of active participation in day-to-day activities and the feedback gathered during the evaluation confirms this.

Primary school survey respondents indicate that they particularly enjoy playing sport and learning new sporting skills and knowledge when their EES 'visitors' come. They highlight the fun side of playing and being involved in sport and the pleasure gained from team games. They also emphasise the importance of giving something 'a go' and trying their best.

A similar pattern of active participation is shown in the responses from lower to middle secondary school students in the Academies and in the feedback from school and Academy staff. The most commonly occurring theme in student responses to the question 'What is the best thing about being in the program?' was that of developing sporting and sporting-related skills. Meeting new people and having opportunities to go on excursions, camps, trips and travel to other communities further afield were also identified as highlights of the program.

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<sup>12</sup> Social Inclusion Board, 2007, 'Supporting young people's success – forging the links'. Government of South Australia.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Willms, J. (2003). Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation. Results from PISA 2000. Paris: OECD.

For students in Years 11-12, participation becomes less focused on physical activity and more focused on things like attending school, working as a team and developing new skills in areas such as leadership, mentoring or specific skills training.<sup>14</sup>

While this gradual shift in focus over primary, lower, middle and senior secondary levels could be expected through natural maturation, it is the Academies, through their positive contribution to student self-esteem and skills, which are helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to stay on at school to experience these senior years. Overall, students in Years 11-12 recognised the Sporting Chance Program as being more than simply a sport-focused program. They reported being at school because they understood the value of a good education and the benefits that can accrue from completing formal education. Whereas the younger secondary students tended to choose sporting skill acquisition as something ‘really important they had learned’, students in Years 11-12 were more likely to identify skills and knowledge that would be beneficial to them in the future and help them reach their goals.

#### Key Finding

In relation to the four components of student engagement described above - positive self-identity, belonging, participation and attendance - the evaluation (based on student surveys and interviews and supported by staff and principal interviews/surveys and parent and community members interviews) has found that the Sporting Chance Program is making a positive difference to students in relation to increased self-confidence and cultural identity, sense of belonging to a group or team, participation in day-to-day activities associated with the program and increased attendance at school.

### **The link between student engagement in school, attitude to school, and attendance and educational outcomes**

ACER’s review of the literature on student engagement found that there are still gaps in the research in regard to the linkages between engagement and particular educational outcomes. While there is evidence to show a connection between engagement and improved attainment, there is some disagreement among researchers regarding the strength of this relationship. The relationship between attendance, attitude to school and educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is complex and under researched.

In the Sporting Chance Program evaluation students in the lower to middle years of secondary school, consistent with the responses from staff and principals in interviews and surveys, report that their school attendance has increased since being involved in an Academy. They also report increased levels of self-confidence, such as being able to interact better in social situations, as a result of being in the program. Students report feeling a sense of achievement at being able to do things that previously they could not have done because they lacked confidence or were too shy.

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<sup>14</sup> One factor that adds strength to the argument that the Sporting Chance Program is providing students with more than simply the opportunity to participate in sport and develop sporting skills is the fact that at the Year 11 to 12 level there is no statistically significant correlation between the item ‘school is a place I like to go each day and ‘I like playing sport’. In contrast the kids in lower to middle secondary school have a weak moderate correlation of  $r = 0.37$ .

Students report feelings of pride in their culture and who they are as a result of being in a project with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Student survey responses also show that, through the Sporting Chance Program, students have become engaged with school.

The secondary student surveys across all year levels show clearly that the vast majority of students in the Academies are engaged in their schooling. However, the evaluation does not show (based on the self-reported views of students, staff, principals and parent or community members on changes in attitude, attendance and engagement) that academic outcomes have improved. It is not easy to show that improvements in literacy and numeracy are attributable to the Sporting Chance Program given the range of other initiatives schools are generally implementing at any time. Similarly, it is uncertain how much participation in the program has improved performance in other academic subjects. What is evident though is the large number of students who are enjoying being involved in an Academy and the activities and learning that are taking place there.

While it is even more difficult to find a link between engagement, positive attitudes to school, attendance and academic performance for primary school students participating in the EES activities, there is nevertheless a high level of enjoyment shown by those who completed the student surveys.

Overall, there are still gaps in what is known about the links between student engagement in school, attitude to school, attendance and learning achievement outcomes, although the evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program (based on the information gathered from staff, principals, students, parents and community members in surveys and/or discussions during site visits) suggests that the Academies in particular are contributing to improved attendance and engagement in learning. What is not clear yet is whether this in turn is leading to improved achievement. While some staff and principals in surveys and interviews report better student literacy and numeracy results as a result of participation in a Sporting Chance Program funded project, this outcome is not consistent across schools, not widely reported, and needs to be treated with caution owing to the many other factors that can affect student academic outcomes. However, even if the link between learning achievement and participation in the Sporting Chance Program cannot be shown conclusively, there is general agreement (based on surveys and interviews with all stakeholders) that there has been an improvement in student capacity to learn.

#### Key Finding

There is some disagreement among researchers regarding the strength of the relationship between engagement and improved attainment. The evaluation did not find a strong link between the two mainly because there were insufficient data to show attainment. The relationship between attendance, attitude to school and educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is complex and under-researched. The evaluation found that the strongest impact has been on student engagement and, slightly less, attendance but there are little or no data currently to show how these improvements have contributed to improved learning achievement.

## Impact/success of school-based sports Academies in engaging students in school in comparison with the EES

The EES projects have varied approaches, which include training teachers in activities that they can conduct with students, delivering sports clinics or sports-based activities with high profile role models, providing mentoring, conducting health-related activities, running a leadership camp and assisting with the delivery of a certificate course. Visits can range from once or twice a year to once a week during school terms and can last for one day or a week. Two EES projects have more frequent contact with students, with one of these projects engaging with students and teachers once a week.

The Academy projects also offer varied approaches, which include camps and excursions (incentives), interstate trips, support for literacy and numeracy activities, sports-related training, health and fitness activities, leadership and mentoring opportunities, providing role models and mentors and work experience, depending on the particular Academy project. While the number of contact hours per week and staff-student ratios can vary across Academies, the Academy projects generally involve more intensive contact with students.

Direct comparison of the EES and Academy approaches to engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schooling is difficult because the two models are so different. It is more difficult for the EES to show they are meeting the Sporting Chance Program intended outcomes of attendance, engagement, retention, learning achievement and parental and community involvement than it is for the Academy projects because each of these outcomes has a longitudinal element. The majority of EES projects, because of their nature, cannot show improvement over time in these areas. Staff and principals report engagement at the time of the activity for all EES projects but there is no evidence that this is sustained for long periods after the visits or between visits. However, this is not the same as saying the EES projects are not making a difference in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and school communities and should therefore no longer be funded.

The survey data show that both models are capable of successfully engaging students in school. This success depends largely on the quality of the staff, effectiveness of the communication with schools, and quality of the activities. The most effective Academies and EES projects demonstrate these qualities. As one principal commented during a site visit:

*When someone comes in for only an hour a week you don't expect them to change the world overnight, but because [the project] is so well researched, uses a step-by-step approach and is pretty clear about where it's going, I have found that the teachers gradually build up their skills in the approach and use it both in the sessions and back in their classrooms.*

The data collected from schools and providers (from interviews, surveys and small group discussions) show that these activities are enjoyed by students and in some cases by community members too. One principal commented that the 'best thing' about the EES project in his school was that 'students really enjoy [the project] and look forward to it each week. They have developed a good relationship with the coach and are more focused on responsibility and participation rather than being competitive. The professional learning experience for teachers is invaluable.'

For three of the five types of EES projects there is sometimes a considerable gap between activities. For example, in one EES project, most schools had not received a visit for six months and in one

school for more than a year. There was little feedback given by schools in this case. However feedback (from staff, principals, students and parents/carers and community members) during site visits with two EES schools that received visits only twice a year showed the activities were still valued by the schools. One remote school principal with infrequent visits from another EES project was reluctant to criticise the project because having the visits was better than the students not being exposed to these experiences.

When asked (in the staff and principal surveys) to identify the 'best thing' about the EES project (covering all types of EES projects) in their school, thirteen schools referred specifically to the enjoyment that students derived from the activities provided by the visitors: 'The students enjoy the visit and meeting people'; 'The camp to Perth – the kids really enjoy the exposure to new environments, activities and challenges', 'kids getting outside and having fun'; 'sheer enjoyment of fitness program – new approach, new perspective and huge variety of personal challenge activities'; and 'watching students being so engaged in learning because they are learning something they are truly passionate about'. However, there was insufficient evidence to show that the visits have had a more sustained impact on the Sporting Chance Program intended outcomes.

The survey data and anecdotal evidence gathered during the school visits did not show that one kind of EES project was more likely to have a bigger impact than another but did suggest some ways in which the impact of EES projects could be enhanced. The common theme in staff and teacher responses (from surveys and during site visits) about the impact of the EES projects, regardless of frequency, is that while it is too difficult to show longer term impact in relation to the Sporting Chance Program objective, students enjoy the activities very much and there can be other benefits, such as increased staff morale and professional development opportunities and, for students, exposure to rich and diverse experiences that they would not otherwise have had.

#### Key Finding

Both the Academies and EES activities are able to effectively engage students. Both bring educational benefits to students and staff. However, because the EES projects have a less intensive relationships with students it is more difficult for them to show improved outcomes over time in relation to the Sporting Chance Program objective. EES schools report (in surveys and during site visits) that students enjoy the activities and that there can be other educational benefits.

### **Characteristics of an effective school-based sports Academy**

For the purposes of the evaluation, an effective Academy has been defined as one that is meeting the Sporting Chance Program objective 'to a moderate and/or major extent' across all five intended outcomes measured on a 4-point likert scale ('not at all' to 'a major impact'). That is, effective Academies have been taken to mean those Academies that have scored more highly than others on the survey questions asking staff and principals to estimate the extent to which the main Sporting Chance Program has contributed to each of the intended outcomes. These responses are based on the professional judgement of principals and staff and consistent with feedback received from site visits, student responses (in surveys and site visits) and phone interviews with providers. There is a strong correlation across the five intended outcomes and between principal and staff responses in relation to each outcome.

The most effective Academies are characterised by the following:

- highly skilled (that is, appropriately qualified, trained and/or experienced), enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff members who are capable of building strong and trusted relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and who have high expectations of their students
- willingness to engage communities in the planning and processes well before the program is implemented
- strong support from the school leadership, other teachers and parents/carers
- an integrated curriculum
- effective communication between provider and school, school and community, provider and community
- sufficient resourcing and funding, including the provision of an environment – such as a designated Academy room – in which students can feel safe and comfortable and where parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff feel comfortable
- strong external relationships, such as with community and business organisations, tertiary providers and potential funders, who can provide the Academy with additional financial and in-kind support and mentoring
- recognition of the need to monitor and evaluate their programs
- a strong perception (and promotion of) Sporting Chance as an education program and not primarily as a sports program.

*Highly skilled (that is, appropriately qualified, trained and/or experienced), enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff members who are capable of building strong and trusted relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and who have high expectations of their students*

Having a designated, full time project manager, full time project staff, and appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models were seen as critical features of an effective Academy. The qualities mentioned by providers, staff and principals and some parents and community members during the school visits were the need for Academy staff who:

- have a passion for the task
- understand how to communicate with staff and school leaders and build respectful relationships
- are culturally aware
- interact positively with students
- have high expectations of their students
- are appropriate role models
- are 'energetic, quick to praise and extremely positive and encouraging'
- receive appropriate professional training in areas such as mentoring and leadership
- can provide stability
- have a strong focus on teamwork and cooperation, using the group to reinforce expectations and behaviours
- can develop strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- understand the protocols and issues associated with project delivery in a school setting.

Taking students on trips, camps, being available outside school hours, constantly reinforcing behavioural expectations and building self esteem and cultural pride – the difference that dedicated staff can make is evident in the responses of students who report being happy at school and attending regularly. One teacher commented that the students ‘know there is someone there [the Academy staff member] just for them, not for everybody. They really like that ... It gives them a mentor, someone to look up to.’ In one highly effective Academy, staff follow up absentees, going to student homes if needed, asking about their welfare, and consistently reinforcing staff expectations around behaviour, learning achievement and contributions to the team. The importance of committed and capable staff was the most commonly cited characteristic of an effective Academy by providers and school communities (principals, staff and parent/community members) alike.

*Willingness to engage communities in the planning and processes well before the program is implemented*

In the most effective Academies there is respectful and genuine collaboration with local communities. One provider noted that consultation with the Aboriginal community ‘is incredibly important. You need to start months out getting views’. At least three Academies expressed the view that hurrying the consultation process had contributed to a less successful rollout of their projects. ‘It needs time to develop and needs to be accepted by all members of the school community’. Schools need ‘to ensure that family and local Aboriginal Elders are involved from the beginning of the development of the program’.

Effective Academies maintain good relationships with parents/carers. In one school, Academy staff contact all parents each term to talk about how their child is going. ‘These positive calls help to build the relationships with the families and the communities.’ In another school, trips are organised into remote communities for Academy participants to run football clinics with younger children, which gives families and community members an opportunity to share in the achievements of their children. Effective Academies involve parents in camps and trips and events the Academy might be running.

*Strong support from the school leadership, other teachers and parents/carers*

The need for a school leadership team that shares the vision of the Academy was a commonly cited success factor by providers and schools alike. Two schools that have set up their own Academies noted the importance of gaining whole school support and ensuring that all teachers, particularly those new to the school, have a good understanding of the goals and purpose of the Academy.

*An integrated curriculum*

A common refrain among Academies was the need for the project to be integrated into the life of the school and not seen as an ‘add on’. In the most effective Academies, the project is fully integrated into the school curriculum. ‘It is not something that is done after school or at lunchtimes or that requires students to be taken out of class. It is factored into the timetable and all students go to each session as part of their day.’ Students are not ‘punished’ by having to make up work they have missed by being withdrawn from class. An effective Academy also offers tailored projects so all students can experience success, such as tutoring in literacy and numeracy or providing subjects that cater for student interests such as in land care or conservation.

*Effective communication between provider and school, school and community, provider and community*

The more effective Academies have regular and frequent communication with schools. While the principal and staff surveys did not define what was meant by 'open' or 'effective' communication, it appears that in the more effective academies school protocols and line management are understood and followed by Academy staff and that Academy goals and philosophy are understood by school staff.

*Sufficient resourcing and funding and the provision of an environment – such as a designated Academy room – in which students can feel safe and comfortable and where parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff feel comfortable*

The more effective Academies are able to attract the two thirds funding needed under the Sporting Chance Program funding model. They also provide a space for their students in the school where they can meet with fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a comfortable and safe environment. Parents can also go directly to this room. One provider described this space as 'a good physical environment in terms of a specific room with appropriate facilities'. The Academy room in one school was seen as a place 'where the kids learn social / interactive skills; a space for positive peer influence'. Three providers referred to a room that was also safe and comfortable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, carers and staff. Two providers commented that parents did not need to go through the main part of the school to enter the room.

*Strong external relationships, such as with community and business organisations, tertiary providers and potential funders, who can provide the Academy with additional financial and in-kind support and mentoring*

The most effective Academies are supported by a diverse range of community and business partners offering mentoring, financial and in-kind support. These include sporting organisations, businesses and industries which offer work experience and vocational opportunities, universities or TAFEs that offer mentoring and exposure to particular skills or knowledge, state and/or local government which provide financial or in-kind support, health services, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. The most effective Academies have generally been able to attract sufficient external funding to help the project become sustainable.

*Recognition of the need to monitor and evaluate their programs*

Effective Academy projects collect data that show outcomes, such as attendance, enrolment and/or retention data. They seek feedback from students, schools, parents/carers and partners. They are able to identify the specific needs of students and can trace their development from the start of the project until the end. At least two highly effective Academies use post-school destination data to help assess their impact on students.

*A strong perception (and promotion of) Sporting Chance as an education program and not primarily as a sports program*

A common comment among the more effective Academies was that their project was 'not just about sport'. While no Academies focused solely on sporting activities, the more effective Academies

specifically sought to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students, offered leadership and mentoring opportunities, and actively promoted the notion of a project aimed at improving student learning.

There were other success factors which were seen as important but cited less frequently, such as rewarding student improvement (with camps, uniforms or trips away), a strong and supportive Advisory Committee, and ongoing support for students either in the form of out-of-school contact or post-school contact.

#### Key Finding

The most critical factor reported by schools and providers in determining the effectiveness of an Academy is the quality of Academy staff. This was identified by providers and school communities alike. Staff, students, principals, parents and community members all highlighted the importance of having a highly skilled and motivated, designated, full time, project manager, supported by appropriately trained staff, including appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models, with the strong support of the school leadership and an excellent relationship with the community. The other features of an effective Academy can potentially be delivered if this staffing model is in place.

### **Characteristics of an effective Education Engagement Strategy**

It has been harder to define an effective EES project because fewer staff and principals responded to the surveys than did Academy principals and staff. However, for the purposes of the evaluation, an effective EES project has been defined as one in which students have responded positively to the EES activities as reported by principals, staff and students themselves in survey responses. These responses are consistent with the feedback gathered during the site visits to four EES schools, including comments gathered from students in small group discussions.

The most effective EES projects are characterised by the following:

- highly skilled (that is, appropriately qualified, trained and/or experienced), enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff who can engage with students
- consistent and regular delivery, without too much time occurring between visits
- a positive relationship with the school and its community
- effective communication, including allowing sufficient time for schools to prepare for the arrival of the EES staff and mentors.

*Highly skilled (that is, appropriately qualified, trained and/or experienced), enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff who can engage with students*

This includes having high profile Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models or strong models from the community. One school reported that the EES staff member ‘has the ability to introduce, involve and engage with students with the programmed activities with a positive and patient approach. It amazes me every time. His delivery and belief in the project really is the key to the success of it.’ EES schools and providers referred to the need to have participating teachers in the

school who are enthusiastic, willing to get involved in the sessions as participants and have a realistic perception of what will be required of them.

*Consistent and regular delivery, without too much time occurring between visits*

The most effective EES projects appear to offer some regularity and continuity in their activities and visits. One principal reported that '[The provider staff] continued to return and visit with a consistent role model – so many programs will visit once and think they have done their job. Follow up and consistency is really important for students.' Having some ongoing form of communication between visits can help build and maintain rapport between visitors and students. One EES project offers an online service between visits which allows students to contact the mentors. It is not clear how well used this has been though or if it has made a difference to student engagement.

*A positive relationship with the school and its community*

Given that these schools are often very isolated it is an opportunity for the whole school community to participate in the EES activities. One principal commented on 'the degree to which the community enjoy [the role model's] visits'. Another principal commented on the importance of build[ing] relationships with students, staff and community.

*Effective communication, including allowing sufficient time for schools to prepare for the arrival of the EES staff and mentors*

Feedback in surveys and during site visits highlighted the importance of communicating regularly with schools regarding visits. Several schools commented on the need for good communication so that schools know of the visits well in advance and can embed the visits in the curriculum.

The EES projects attracted mixed responses from schools in terms of the impact they are having. On the one hand they are seen to be offering something that schools can benefit from; on the other the limited contact hours available in some of the EES projects means that it is difficult to have a long-term impact.

The main strength of the EES model (regardless of whether student contact is once a year or once a week) is seen to be that these projects provide an opportunity for students to meet positive role models and mentors who, potentially, present other possibilities to the students. The EES projects provide a wide range of practical skills relating to health and fitness awareness, sporting skills, art and music appreciation, grooming and deportment, leadership, self confidence. This is particularly valued in remote schools where there are few opportunities to meet high profile role models.

Typical survey responses from principals and staff, when asked to identify the 'best thing' about the EES project, included giving students learning opportunities they would not otherwise have received, engaging students in enjoyable and challenging educational activities, giving them access to mentors and positive role models, giving staff access to professional development, and having access to EES staff who are 'dedicated to ensuring the students are attending school on a regular basis and to providing an excellent link to the students' families, to maximise the support provided to the students'.

For students, common survey responses were that 'It is very fun and enjoyable'; 'It is fun and you learn lots and make lots of friends'; 'Being happy, playing sport, having races'; 'Learn new skills, play sport'. The level of enjoyment did not differ across EES projects. All were seen as offering students something positive and educationally worthwhile.

The main weakness of the model is seen to be that between visits it is easy for students and schools to forget about the things that have been learned from the visits. For example, one school reported that 'The role models are exciting and engaging for the kids while they are here but [there is] no long lasting effect'. Regardless of EES project, it is difficult to collect data to show ongoing improvement that is a direct result of the EES activities or approach.

#### Key Finding

The EES projects attracted mixed responses from schools. On the one hand they provide a welcome opportunity for students to interact with role models and mentors and to experience a range of educational activities that students would not otherwise have had. On the other hand, the impact can be short-lived. Even where an EES project involves weekly visits, it is difficult to establish a direct causal link between the visits and, say, improvement in attendance, engagement or learning achievement over time. The most effective EES projects are staffed by skilled, trained staff and appropriate role models and communicate regularly and effectively with schools.

### **Effective strategies in engaging students**

Based on the information provided by principals, staff, providers, students, parents/carers and community members (collected through surveys, interviews, small group discussions and providers' progress reports) the following strategies have been effective in engaging students.

- Having committed role models, leaders and project staff members who are able to build positive relationships with students (Academy and EES)
- Valuing culture. An effective strategy to engage students has been to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into the curriculum and activities and to have role models who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Academy students report pride in being Aboriginal and refer to some of the things they have learnt about their culture in their surveys. This does not mean that all Academy staff need to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders but that there does need to be a high level of cultural awareness.
- Offering a tailored curriculum that meets students' needs, such as providing intensive literacy/numeracy help or one-on-one mentoring (Academy)
- Providing opportunities that enable students to experience success, such as giving them leadership or mentoring opportunities (Academy and EES)
- Using a strengths-based approach. For example, 'rewarding' positive outcomes, such as improved attendance, participation, behaviour or achievement with trips away, camps, events, tangible things like Academy caps or bags or shirts (Academy)
- Providing an environment in which students feel safe and supported, a space of their own. Student feedback strongly emphasised the importance of being part of a group, of being with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and of teamwork. Having their own

space helps reinforce this sense of belonging in the school but of also being part of a special group. Several girls mentioned feeling 'safe' in such an environment. Parents/carers and Aboriginal Support Workers or their equivalent are also welcome in this space. (Academy)

- Encouraging strong identification with the Academy through such means as an Academy uniform, Academy room, representing the Academy at outside events. Several schools and project providers reported that their students were proud to wear the Academy shirt.

### Key Finding

The most effective strategies are those which provide a supportive environment with trusted staff, and build on the strengths of the student and his/her culture. Effective Academy strategies include providing a space for students, targeted curriculum activities that enable students to experience success, a strong sense of being part of a particular Academy group, and incentives to improve performance. Effective EES strategies include having enjoyable activities and using project staff and role models who are able to motivate students.

## **Unintended consequences**

There have been several unintended consequences (both positive and negative) arising from participation in the Sporting Chance Program. The evidence for this is mainly anecdotal. The Academies have both positive and negative unintended consequences while the EES projects have positive ones.

### Positive

Project providers, principals and staff were asked if anything had surprised them about the Sporting Chance Program in their school. Twenty-two teachers and principals reported unexpected benefits while six teachers and principals reported being surprised by how quickly benefits could be seen. For example, one principal expressed surprise at '[how rapidly the program could make a difference and re-engage students who historically may have been at risk'.

Two schools reported increased professional learning opportunities for their staff. For example, one staff member confessed to being 'surprised about my own lack of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their cultural traditions. Having spent 7 months working in [the Academy], my awareness of Aboriginal customs and traditions has helped me understand how they live and work as a community, which therefore helps me to better relate to each student'.

One school reported 'a major reduction in fighting to zero per cent of Aboriginal students'; another noted the increased confidence gained by Academy students:

*From my experience being here last year to my experiences this year, I have seen major development in our girls' confidence. Some girls that wouldn't speak or participate much last year have had a great turn around in their actions, confidence and the enjoyment they have at school and within the academy.*

Another reported a closer connection with the local community as a result of the Academy project with one school noting '[some great words of wisdom/advice from older women in the community about valuing education, living together happily and following your dreams and values'.

One Academy manager reinforced the idea that the funding is not only assisting this current generation of young Aboriginal students. There are flow-on effects to younger students coming through who can see, and be inspired by, the achievements of older students who become role models.

Principals indicated surprise at:

*The increase in numbers and the increase in parental involvement. Sports Academy has been win/win for us and the students are always very excited about activities associated with the Sports Academy. Students appear to feel special (in a good way) and have a sense that they are valued in our school (which they are).*

*One of the major surprises was the amount of community excitement and ownership of the program. Completing Year 12 and graduating with a WACE [Western Australian Certificate of Education] has now become a normal expectation amongst Indigenous students. Graduation is celebrated and highly valued amongst the local Noongar community.*

Seven school staff acknowledged that they had been pleasantly surprised by what their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been able to achieve. This implies that there may have been relatively low expectations among these particular teachers prior to the commencement of the Academy project. One of the factors associated with the more effective Academies is having high expectations of students, not allowing excuses for behavioural lapses, requiring students to take responsibility and to contribute to the team. But it is not only having these high expectations that is important; it is providing the supportive environment and trusted relationships with respected staff members that are likely to help these expectations to be met. An unintended consequence of this might be that for some staff at least, expectations of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can achieve will be revised upwards.

### Negative

One unintended consequence mentioned by five schools out of the 87 that took part in the evaluation was some local resistance to the fact that opportunities were being made available disproportionately through the Academy for some students and not others. In two schools there was a concern that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were being given opportunities not equally available to their non Aboriginal peers. One principal expressed surprise by 'the extent to which there has been a racist backlash from the community, and resentment in it from students who can't access [the Academy]'. In two other schools there was a perception that boys were being given opportunities that were not equally available to girls. In one school there was a perception that the girls were being given opportunities not available to the boys: 'There can be some jealousy from the boys in the school that the girls in the sports academy get more opportunities due to the girls being funded and the boys not'.

Another negative unintended consequence of the project in cases where Academy activities are not part of the curriculum is that students who are withdrawn from class to participate in a mentoring session or Sporting Chance activity can sometimes be penalised by having to catch up on missed work, which can have the effect of students getting behind in their mainstream work.

### Key Finding

There are several unintended consequences (both positive and negative) but the number of schools and providers reporting these is small. The main positive consequence reported is surprise at the level of impact and how quickly students have improved. The main negative consequence is an unintended one of fostering some resentment among other students at apparently disproportionate opportunities being provided.

## Other findings

During the evaluation ACER sought feedback from providers about the level and type of support provided by DEEWR. One feature that was particularly appreciated was the opportunity to share experiences with other providers through the workshops convened by DEEWR. This was referred to specifically by several providers who found the get-together both interesting and reassuring – interesting to hear what others were doing and reassuring to know that they were not the only one facing particular problems.

## Issues/challenges

One commonly identified issue related to funding. One principal was surprised by ‘the extent to which school, system and community resource investment is required before supplementary funding from other agencies such as the Commonwealth, can be effective’. The fact that Academy project providers need to bring in other income streams if the projects are to be sustainable was mentioned by a number of providers as being a challenge. Academies need to source two-thirds funding or in-kind support. Variations on the following comment by a project manager were made by several other managers: ‘The biggest challenge has been gaining corporate support and sponsorship’. Some schools commented on the need for greater certainty around future funding, particularly because it takes a while for a project to be set up and to show tangible outcomes.

One manager of an Academy reinforced the idea that the funding is not only assisting this current generation of young Aboriginal students. There are flow-on effects to younger students coming through who can see, and be inspired by, the achievements of older students who become role models.

*Without funding [the program] is not sustainable. The program is a really good model and needs to continue. If it is sustained, there will be fewer problems in the future and the successes now need to be built on. This is changing the lives of these students and must continue as it has the potential to make a generational change if it is sustainable. It is something that is working and needs to be supported.*

Three girls’ academies commented specifically on the difficulty of attracting the other two thirds funding that is needed to supplement the DEEWR funding. These comments were not made in surveys but during small group discussions and interviews on the school visits. Specific examples were given in some schools where it was felt that the girls’ Academies suffered in comparison to the boys’ only Academies in these schools. For example, at one school the girls had less access to the (limited) transport that was available to the girls’ and boys’ Academies than the boys. At another school, the example given was the difficulty of attracting interest from corporate sponsors.

One member of an Advisory Group suggested that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys could move away from their communities to obtain work, many girls remain in the community with limited employment opportunities. She stressed the importance of the girls' Academies because they help open up future possibilities for the girls. This view was consistent with the views of other staff in girls' only Academies who spoke about the particular needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, especially in remote areas and the potential of the girls' only Academies to support these girls.

#### **4. Case Studies**

This section of the report looks at a representative range of 15 projects operated by 12 providers being funded under the Sporting Chance Program umbrella and describes briefly how these are being delivered in a cross section of schools. DEEWR provided a list of project sites from which the final case study sites were selected in consultation with ACER. The final decision was made on the basis of providing the broadest possible range of settings and providers.

The numbers of students who participated in the case studies varied from school to school and project to project. ACER asked each case study school to organise students to take part in small group discussions and for an opportunity, where possible, to observe students engaged in project activities. The range of interactions with students included interviews in groups of 3-6 students, observations of classes (and in one case an opportunity to speak with students in the whole class), observations of students taking leadership roles (such as in an assembly) and engaging in sporting and/or other activities (such as a musical performance).

The projects are listed alphabetically according to the name of the project provider rather than by project name. The information provided about each project is drawn mainly from site visit conversations supplemented by the comments of project providers and in most cases surveys. ACER conducted site visits to 19 schools associated with 15 case study projects. Some of these were for the same project but in very different locations. Some projects have only one school participating, while others have a number of schools across different locations and campuses.

The information available from and about each project and how it is implemented in each school varies considerably. Consequently, the conclusions that can be drawn about the impact on students also vary from project to project. In some cases quantitative and qualitative data show that the project is having a strong impact on students. In other cases the evidence is mostly anecdotal, based on available information, and therefore the impact of these projects is inconclusive.

**Provider: Australian Football League (AFL) (ACT/NSW)**

Name of case study project	Campbelltown Indigenous AFL Academy
Start date	2007
Schools participating in the project	Macquarie Fields High School James Meehan High School Sarah Redfern High School Ingleburn High School
Schools visited	James Meehan High School and Macquarie Fields High School
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	70
Geographical location	Campbelltown, Western Sydney, NSW
Type	Boys' and Girls' Academy

**Introduction**

The Australian Football League (AFL) launched two Aboriginal Academies in Western Sydney in 2007, funded under the Sporting Chance Program, one in Campbelltown and one in Blacktown. The Academies were set up as a practical way to address the social issues affecting young people in these areas, particularly Aboriginal youth, and as a means of increasing levels of engagement in schooling. In addition to a sporting component, the Academies offer skills in leadership, conflict resolution and knowledge of cultural matters. The objectives are to improve school attendance, raise literacy and numeracy levels and increase the number of Academy students who gain employment at the completion of Year 12.

Early morning and afternoon sports training is provided but activities extend far beyond learning football skills. Students attend camps and fitness sessions, develop social networks, meet students from other schools and make connections with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander students. Activities include training in leadership skills and cultural awareness, mentoring, health and nutrition and participation in a range of sports, including football, basketball, golf and netball. Examples of outings include visits to the Mitchell Library and National Museum, and attendance at major sports events. Students can also undertake accredited courses in umpiring, first aid and sports administration. The project offers camps as a reward for school attendance.

**James Meehan High School and Macquarie Fields High School (NSW)**

James Meehan High School is a co-educational secondary school in Macquarie Fields, Sydney, with an enrolment of around 380 students. The AFL Indigenous Academy has been part of the school for five years, with about fifteen Aboriginal students currently involved.

Macquarie Fields High School has an enrolment of about 1000 students, with half the intake being for an academically-based selective entry program. Twenty-four Aboriginal students are enrolled at the school, with six participating in the AFL project.

### Characteristics of the project

- The project has five external staff (four full time and one part time) supported by two staff members in the central office.
- There is a staff-student ratio of four staff to 70 students.
- Student contact hours are around six hours per week.
- There is no Academy room in the schools.
- The project has access to school resources.
- The project is embedded in the curriculum in the form of students' Personal Learning Plans and one session per week within school hours.
- Academy students have access to a school homework club and mentors provided through the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) additional literacy and numeracy support although it is not clear how often students access this support.
- Support for post-school pathways includes Personal Development, Health and Physical Education accredited courses, such as in umpiring, sports training and Auskick and opportunities for taking up AFL SportsReady school-based and full time traineeship opportunities.

### Impact

At each school, the project operates alongside a range of other programs, so it is difficult to attribute increased engagement and attendance to one program in particular. However, student and staff comments indicate that the AFL project is an important part of the range of projects. One principal suggested, the impact of the project 'varies from person to person – some students have benefited greatly in some areas but not necessarily all, for some the benefit has been through [improved] health and nutrition, while for some it has been cultural awareness; with others positive experiences and greater connections with the school and learning outcomes improved. For some the extent [of improvement] has been *major*.'

One school noted that attendance is particularly strong on Academy training days. Most schools reported only minor improvement in student retention. These schools have highly transient families - retention is affected by a range of factors, including families coming and going from the region. For attendance, engagement and learning achievement, schools reported varying degrees of impact. One principal commented that:

*It is difficult to measure the impact the program has had on meeting the objectives using the current evaluation model ... but it is hoped that if attendance rates improve then there would be an impact on results. As attendance rates vary from year to year, it is difficult to say if improvement is a direct result of students engaging with the program. It is easier to measure social outcomes, i.e. improved confidence and self-esteem, reduction in number of negative referrals and suspensions, involvement in leadership activities.*

There are reports of other positive outcomes that are not directly related to the objective of the Sporting Chance Program but nevertheless worthy of note. For example, students are reported to have learned negotiating and decision-making skills and having their horizons broadened. One

school reported that some students 'have a renewed respect and pride [in] their culture and background'. This school also commented on 'seeing the improvement in student attitudes at school'. Close interaction with Aboriginal project staff has also given some school staff an opportunity to gain a better understanding of Aboriginal culture.

### Challenges

Attracting enough students to the project was an issue for one school with a small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. For another, student attendance at some after school Academy activities was a challenge because students were not always willing or able to attend after school particularly if they had other commitments. This situation was addressed by reducing the number of after-school sessions students were expected to attend, incorporating one session into the school timetable, redesigning the project to be more relevant to students, and appointing a full time Academy coordinator to supervise the project across three schools.

At one school, the attendance of participating students was described as being 'near perfect' prior to participation in the project. The school was concerned that the project would be assessed on improvement in attendance figures alone, and that this would be difficult to show from an already high baseline. This school suggested that participation in other leadership activities could be a better indicator, looking at progress reports that are used for Personal Learning Plans and at what the students are involved in overall. This information is readily and easily available and could be looked at over a period of years. It was suggested that the year level advisor could show improvement on baseline data. 'Attendance is just one thing. There are lots of ways to show leadership and participation.'

### Critical success factors

The project has people who are interested and committed, properly trained and supported. The Academy has been 'really strategic in the people they've chosen'. 'The program works because of the people who are doing it – you need enthusiasm or it won't work'. Having a designated full time and committed project officer working with the three schools on the ground is a key factor in the success of the project.

### Overall

There is evidence to suggest students and families are benefiting. The project is diverse and exposes students to a range of experiences to which they would not normally have been exposed. One parent spoke of the pride she felt seeing her son acting in a leadership role at a public event. The evidence of improved educational outcomes for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the two Academies visited is largely anecdotal, mainly in the form of the professional judgements of principals and teachers.

**Provider: Bluearth Institute**

Name of case study project	Bluearth Project
Start date	2008
Schools participating in the project	Batchelor Area School, Batchelor Bradshaw Primary School, Alice Springs Braitling Primary School, Alice Springs Gillen Primary School, Alice Springs Larapinta Primary School, Alice Springs Ross Park Primary School, Alice Springs Sadadeen Primary School, Alice Springs Karama Primary School, Darwin Ludmilla Primary School, Darwin Wulagi Primary School, Darwin
Schools visited	Ludmilla Primary School and Karama Primary School (Darwin NT)
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students 2011)	500
Geographical location	Darwin and Alice Springs, NT.
Type	Boys' and girls' Education Engagement Strategy

### Introduction

The Bluearth project is one of five Education Engagement Strategies being delivered as part of the Sporting Chance Program. The main objective of the Bluearth project is to engage children in their education through physical activity and to increase their retention at school. The activities encourage agility, decision-making, teamwork, resilience, self confidence, ability to concentrate and self-reflection and are delivered to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and as a whole class exercise rather than with particular individuals. The Sporting Chance Program funding supports the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students only.

### Characteristics of project

- The project has two non-school based staff (the coaches) supported by one staff member in the central office.
- The Darwin-based coach works with three schools, the Alice Springs-based coach works with ten schools, and there is a full time manager in Central Australia.
- There is one Bluearth staff member to a full classroom with a teacher.
- Coaches work directly with classroom teachers and students, spending one day a week in each Bluearth school. The coach delivers the activities with the teacher to the students.

- Student contact hours are one hour per class per week. The activities are run in one hour sessions with different year levels each hour.
- The project is embedded in the curriculum in the form of regular timetabled activities.
- Support for literacy and numeracy is provided through the activities. For example, students do counting activities and record their thoughts in student diaries after the session.
- The project does not offer post-school pathways as this is not its purpose and it is only focused on primary school children.
- The Project works exactly the same in each school.

### **Ludmilla Primary School and Karama Primary School (Darwin, NT)**

Ludmilla Primary School is a small government primary school located in inner Darwin. The school has a diverse and partially transient population, with students attending the school coming from the Bagot community, Darwin RAAF Base, and surrounding area. It has a student population of 133 students with around 34 per cent of students being Aboriginal. Bluearth was introduced to the school in 2010 on the recommendation of the former Principal who had had prior experience in the approach.

Karama Primary School, in the Northern Territory, is a government primary school located in an outer Darwin suburb in one of the city's lower socio-economic areas. The school has an enrolment of 247 students – 123 girls and 124 boys – around 46 per cent of whom (122 students) are Aboriginal. The school is ethnically diverse, with 54 per cent of students having a language other than English spoken at home and with many students speaking English as a Second Language or speaking Aboriginal English. In 2009, an opportunity arose for the school to become involved in the Bluearth project and it engaged with Bluearth on a trial basis with several staff participating in 14 weeks of training. This initial experience was well received and as a result the school decided to take up the offer of further training in 2010 when four teachers were trained. A further four teachers have commenced training in 2011.

One coach works in Ludmilla Primary School and Karama Primary School.

### **Impact**

While it is difficult to show a direct causal link between student participation in the project and improved attendance, engagement or learning achievement, all Bluearth schools in the evaluation report that the students are clearly engaged in the Bluearth activities and that some of the positive student behaviour and ways of interacting that occur in the Bluearth sessions have transferred back into the classroom. For example, the project combines high-energy, enjoyable and challenging physical activity with periods of stillness and calm, when students reflect on their performance both as individuals and in relation to others, leading to greater self-awareness and self-knowledge. This kind of reflection and self awareness is also evident in the classroom and was evident in the site visit discussions with a small group of students.

For example, in a discussion with six Year 6 students at one of the Bluearth schools, the children all talked freely, confidently and intelligently about the Bluearth approach. They described the sorts of activities they undertook, the games they played, and the role of meditation and self-reflection. They were able to speak of the benefits they had gained from the program and how they felt they had changed as a result. Above all, they spoke of how much they enjoyed their Bluearth sessions. At

the second school it was clear from discussions with students from grades 4-6 that they all liked the Bluearth sessions very much. There was also some discussion about the non-games aspects of the program, and again it was clear that some of the children liked these elements as well – the stretching exercises, the yoga poses, the periods of stillness.

One principal commented during the site visit that:

*Bluearth is a great opportunity for both students and teachers. The whole program is fantastic in terms of the support it gives to teachers, and the kids love it. It gives something we haven't provided to kids in school before around the 'whole student'. Within the structure of one lesson there are all sorts of different components – so it's not just about the physical activity – it's also about talking about how you feel. There are all sorts of other well-being elements involved in the program. In the past the focus of physical activities has been on playing games and not on the more subtle activities of helping you to relax or meditate or to feel balanced or to talk about your feelings when you do things.*

The main strengths of the project were seen by teachers to be its inclusivity, its well defined aims, its practices grounded in educational theory and research, the participatory way in which the training is imparted, and the sequential yet flexible way in which the project is delivered over a full year. There was general agreement that the project offers significant benefits to both staff and students. Through collaborative, constructive and cooperative physical activities, the project engages students in these activities, challenges them to take risks, and leads them towards taking control of their own behaviour. Feedback from staff in both schools indicates that as a result of Bluearth there has been improved student behavior in relation to self perception and social behavior but mixed responses to the question of whether there have been improved academic benefits for students as a result of the program.

### Challenges

The biggest challenge faced by both Ludmilla and Karama Primary Schools has been the high turnover of school staff, which impacts heavily upon the sustainability of the project. Staff turnover is an ongoing issue across the Northern Territory, and is a problem that individual schools are unlikely to be able to remedy on their own.

Measuring impact on students can also be a challenge as the project focuses on preparing teachers to deliver the Bluearth activities rather than on having the Bluearth staff engaging with students directly. However the project provider suggests that measuring engagement can be done through the professional judgement of teachers 'as it is the teachers who see the changes occurring in their students'.

### Critical success factors

The following factors were identified as being critical to the successful implementation of the Bluearth approach:

- Having a supportive school principal and leadership group
- Having thorough training for the teachers by a competent coach
- Ensuring participating teachers are enthusiastic, willing to get involved in the sessions as participants and have a realistic perception of what will be required of them.

- Having a suitable space in which to undertake the Bluearth activities.

### Overall

Feedback from staff in both schools indicates that as a result of Bluearth there has been improved student behavior in relation to self perception and social behavior but mixed responses to the question of whether there have been improved academic benefits for students as a result of the program. Students and staff both praised the program highly for the benefits it was bringing to teachers in terms of professional learning and to students in terms of helping them to become highly engaged in the non-competitive, inclusive, safe and challenging classroom activities.

**Provider: Catholic Education Office**

Name of case study project	Sports Academy for Catholic Colleges
Start date	2007
Schools participating in the project	St Teresa's College Gilroy Santa Maria College Columba Catholic College Good Shepherd Catholic College Burdekin Catholic High School St Anthony's Catholic College Ryan Catholic College Ignatius Park College Edmund Rice Flexible Learning Centre
Schools visited	St Anthony's Catholic College, Townsville, Qld Edmund Rice Flexible Learning Centre, Townsville Qld
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students 2011)	166
Geographical location	Townsville, Queensland
Type	Boys' and girls' Academy

### Introduction

The Sports Academy for Catholic Colleges was one of the original Academies in the Sporting Chance Program. Schools work with and are supported by the Catholic Education Office, Townsville. There are currently nine schools in the project. The Academy uses a cluster model in the diocese with each school being responsible for developing its own Academy identity within this broader cluster. A range of communal activities is provided. These activities bring together students from all the colleges and include Orientation Days and two Making Trax camps for students, one for Years 8-9 and one for Years 10-12.

### Characteristics of the project

- There are ten Academy staff, including one development officer in the central office and nine school based advisors, who may be teachers or teacher aides or liaison officers.
- The school based advisors provide ongoing support, monitoring and counselling for the Academy students at the school where they are based, including passing on career opportunities (such as information about scholarships, traineeships, apprenticeships or jobs) to interested Academy students.
- The majority of students receive 50 contact hours per term.

- Staff-student ratios vary across schools, ranging from 1:9 to 1:30. However, some school based advisors do receive support from other staff, such as Indigenous Liaison Officers.
- While there is not a specific Academy room in each of the Academy schools, some schools have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander meeting rooms which the Academy can use, and other schools use existing general rooms (classrooms/libraries etc) to meet with Academy students.
- The Academy has access to all school resources, including sports equipment, halls and courts.
- The project is not embedded in the curriculum. Student activities and meetings are conducted during lunch breaks or after school.
- There are no set rules for participation in the camp. The school based advisor (with the principal's approval) decides which students are given the opportunity to go on camp. Most schools use the camp as a reward for the students who are doing the right thing at school (including attendance, behaviour). There are examples of letting students go on camp when they have not necessarily been doing the right thing at school. The rationale is that, by giving them a positive experience on camp, followed by support at school, this might assist in them in re-engaging with school.

### **St Anthony's Catholic College and the Flexible Learning Centre in Townsville**

St Anthony's Catholic College is a Prep to Year 12 Catholic school in Deeragun, a suburb of Townsville, in Queensland. The school operates on two campuses. The primary campus (Prep-Year 5) has an enrolment of about 780 students and the secondary campus (Years 6-12) has an enrolment of about 420 students. There are eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students involved in the Academy. The school based advisor administers the project in the school. Students are not withdrawn from class for this project, but receive extra support in class to meet their individual needs.

Academy students receive extra support in class from a school teacher aide. Academy students are also given assistance with homework help via tutoring after school to meet their individual needs. As part of the program, they also participate in a camp and an induction activity. Students are awarded points for a range of activities, including music, academic achievements, leadership roles, sports participation, church involvement, fundraising, Science Club. Points are displayed on a chart against each individual student's name. Participation in the Makin Trax camp depends on the requisite number of points being gained. Students have been exposed to different career choices at the camp, with a range of different speakers – such as Defence Force representatives, nurses, police officers and park rangers.

The Flexible Learning Centre in Townsville caters for secondary students who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. The Academy at the Flexible Learning Centre comprises fitness training twice a week together with the camp and induction day held for Academy students in Townsville. The fitness training covers a circuit and sometimes additional sporting activities. There is also one 'challenge' per term, which allows for a point system. Currently there are around eight students in the Academy. The Academy is embedded in the curriculum, with special time set aside on the timetable for the activities.

At the Flexible Learning Centre, each afternoon is devoted to sports and recreation for all students, with Academy students choosing to participate in training or the general sports program if they prefer on that day. Junior and senior Academy students work together on one curriculum unit for the Academy. The Academy is further incorporated into the curriculum in that senior students can use the unit as part of their Queensland Certificate of Education.

### Impact

The schools report that it is difficult to ascertain whether the project is making a difference because it is hard to separate outcomes from the overall approach of the schools. However, principals and staff have noted improved attendance, in some cases, increased engagement and an increased sense of confidence and pride. Improvements in overall outcomes for students cannot be directly attributed to the project, but it is one of the projects in the schools that is working to the advantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families. The project allows for additional numeracy and literacy support in the classroom which, reports one staff member, 'in turn increases their chance of gaining positive learning outcomes from their education and future employment'. One teacher, commenting on the improved social wellbeing of students, noted that: 'They are signing up for other projects. They are willing to go out because they have more confidence.'

Major benefits for students have been gained as a result of the Academy camp. For example, the coordinator at one school commented that students were clearly benefiting from a sense of identity and being part of a group. At the camp, students were able to gain certification in a number of areas, such as coaching, basketball refereeing and Responsible Service of Alcohol. The students describe the camp as teaching them team building, and as giving them a sense of pride. 'It was pretty fun. It helps with school, you get to make friends. There are team-building activities, team games, combat skills.' The careers teacher has noticed a marked difference in the students, with much more involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander career opportunities.

*'It's good for the kids to get together, to build an identity, there is a community feel. They are more open, less scared about careers. [At a meeting] they were all asking questions. For them to be able to get to that point is awesome. Before, you didn't know who they were. [You can see] community spirit and identity, it's really important ... We go to expos, the kids love it. They are more relaxed, more confident ... They will actually ask questions. Formerly, they would stare down, not answer. When they realise it's OK to identify, [it's as if they are saying] "I will look you in the eye and respond." Standing up, reading and speaking. I was so proud.*

Because of the camp, students found out about family and other connections, thereby increasing their sense of identity and pride. 'I have added [the friends from camp] to my Facebook, I see them around town, I see them at the shops and at the footy ... Mixing with other Indigenous kids helped me to get up and read at assembly.'

The students also described benefits arising from the orientation or induction day, with skills and activities 'helping to make school fun'.

### Challenges

- Attendance at the Academy is complicated by cultural matters such as going away to funerals. In schools with small numbers of Academy participants it can be hard to provide activities for the remaining students.

- Record keeping for the project can be a challenge for some schools where the school based adviser is also a teacher. The provider reports that school based advisors have mentioned that student data collection for DEEWR have caused the most difficulty for them, mainly because of other demands on their time. For example, although all the advisors have been allocated time by their principals for Academy matters such as data collection, most advisors still have a lot of other things they need to do, such as lesson plans for their own classes and marking student work. Also, most of the advisors working with the Academy students are also responsible for other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs such as the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program which requires further data collection. Having more time (that is, less classroom teaching) would help address the challenge that some of the CEO school based advisors have experienced.
- One school would like to see students having more opportunity to mix with Academy students from other schools. This is difficult because a lot of schools are reluctant to have students miss school.
- In one school arranging a time to meet with all students has also been a challenge. If the school based advisor needs to follow up particular students it is generally done at lunchtime, after school or during class time as the Academy students are not all together during the week except for the lunchtime activities. Students are not withdrawn from any class to participate in Academy activities.
- It is difficult to provide appropriate activities when funding depends on numbers and only a small number of students are involved. Some non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have wanted to join the project. Because of the small numbers in the Academy, it is difficult to exclude them and inclusion might be very positive in terms of overall wellbeing.

#### Critical success factors

- Someone on staff with enthusiasm and passion, not necessarily to do the activities, but to organise it. 'Personnel is a key/critical thing.' It needs to be 'someone who wants to do it – young people at the school are very reactive to staff moods.' The person running the project has to care, be energetic, quick to praise and to be 'extremely positive and encouraging'.
- Make sure sufficient time is allowed in order to be able to do this work properly. 'It should not be lumped in with other duties.'
- Flexibility – 'Be open to change as you need it.' The project coordinator needs to genuinely listen to students – 'Don't make them do it. Discuss, have alternatives – this helps them with [decision making] in their lives. Make them involved.'

#### Overall

The project is clearly making a difference to students, particularly in relation to self-identity and confidence. Students are proud to be identified with the Academy, speaking up more, have more confidence in their ability to do things. The schools as a whole have a clear commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as is evidenced by a range of different programs. This project is an important aspect of that commitment. Students reported feeling more confident and more willing to take on new things as a result of being in the Academy. They placed particular value in the ongoing support provided by the school based advisers, and were very aware of their increased self-confidence. One student commented that if he were advising

his own children in the future 'I would encourage them to join, it would be good for them, I would say it's not just about athletic ability, it's about how you go at school and if you need help, they'll offer you the help.'

**Provider: Clontarf Foundation**

Name of case study projects	Jabiru Clontarf Academy, NT Gunbalanya Clontarf Academy, NT Swan Hill Clontarf Academy, VIC Midwest Clontarf Academy, WA
Start date	Jabiru, Gunbalanya and Swan Hill Football Academies started in 2010. Mid West Clontarf Academy started in 2004.
Schools participating in the projects	Jabiru Area School Gunbalanya Community School Swan Hill College John Willcock College (Midwest Clontarf Academy) Geraldton Senior College (Midwest Clontarf Academy)
Schools visited	Jabiru Area School Gunbalanya Community School Swan Hill College John Willcock College (Midwest Clontarf Academy) Geraldton Senior College (Midwest Clontarf Academy)
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	245
Geographical location	Victoria, Western Australia, Northern Territory
Type	Boys' only Academies

**Introduction**

The Clontarf Foundation uses Australian Rules Football (AFL) as the hook to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys to school, engage them in learning and to fulfill Clontarf's aim of improving *the education, discipline, life skills, self esteem and employment prospects of young Aboriginal men, and by doing so equip them to participate meaningfully in society*. The Clontarf Foundation uses the same Academy model in each school. Academy staff place great emphasis on the importance of attendance and appropriate in-school behaviour and provide practical support to the boys in helping them achieve acceptable standards in both.

The Clontarf Foundation operate 32 Academies in 45 schools. The projects offers a wide range of student activities such as camps, excursions, leadership and team building, health and hygiene, goal setting, guest speakers and workplace visits. The focus is on these types of activities rather than sport as such. This diverse mix of activities is designed to engage the boys by creating an attractive, safe, welcoming and supportive environment. During these activities, the development of a sense of

belonging and of trusted relationships with peers and Clontarf staff, establishes a foundation upon which engagement in school becomes achievable. While some activities are incentives for school attendance, academic effort, general good standing and positive behaviours, many activities are delivered to engage some of the most 'at-risk' and disengaged students who would not otherwise attend school. Camps and excursions are generally incentive-based engagement tools that are also flexible depending on the needs of students. For example, one school described the Clontarf approach to camps and excursions in this way:

*Often camps are identified as being personal development activities enabling the Clontarf staff to make decisions to take some students who may have demonstrated a recent improvement in one or more areas e.g. behaviour. This has proven to be an effective way to encourage students to sustain the improvement over a longer period of time and recognises that for some students there is a need for instant positive reinforcement for any improvement. It also provides an opportunity for staff to work with the student outside of the school environment ... [incentive] activities are identified and students know that they must meet benchmarks in attendance, behaviour and participation in Clontarf activities to be able to attend.*

Clontarf staff induct students into the Academy, help students with their subject selection and participate in a range of support activities, either helping in a whole class situation or withdrawing small groups or individual students to work on a one-on-one basis. Clontarf staff members accompany students on excursions and out-of-school activities and contribute to the planning and integration of learning activities associated with these extracurricular activities. They provide homework classes and tutoring for students and, if needed, will help students get to and from school each day.

Clontarf staff also work across the community to support students in community-based activities and liaising with families. Community-based activities include students visiting primary schools to mentor young students, assisting in National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee week activities or sporting carnivals at primary and regional schools, umpiring football carnivals for younger students or female students, undertaking community service volunteering and representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at conferences and functions.

#### Characteristics of project

- The Clontarf Academies recruit and employ their own staff. Staff members live locally, work full time in the local Academy and are accessible to students at any time.
- Clontarf staff take a holistic approach to supporting each student and develop a thorough understanding of their personal circumstances.
- Across all Clontarf Academies in 45 schools, the Foundation employs 125 staff at a ratio of around one full time staff member to 25 boys including eight dedicated Employment Officers around the regions who work with graduates to secure work or training post-school.
- Clontarf employs 12 staff at their Central Office.
- The Clontarf Academies provide up to 50 contact hours per week with students (this includes not only day-to-day school contact but before and after school, lunchtimes, camps, workplace visits, community visits).
- Each school has its own Academy room.

- The Clontarf Academies have access to school resources, such as a bus (in some locations), computers, and sports equipment but also have their own resources to draw on.
- The Academy activities are part of the normal school week. Clontarf students spend most of their time in the Academy room before school, recess, lunchtime and after school. Contact time for each year group exists during the school timetable each week. The school remains responsible for the delivery of the academic education program.
- The Academy provides literacy and numeracy support including one-on-one tutoring where required. Clontarf staff liaise with school teachers to ensure that the individual needs of each student are met in terms of the delivery of education. In some cases, Clontarf staff work in the classroom as well as after-school homework classes and Academy time for students to catch up on school work.
- Academy support for post-school pathways includes an integrated employment program which creates an expectation that all graduates will find meaningful work. The program involves work experience activities, attendance at TAFE, employment readiness, drivers' licences, Tax File Number, resumes, mock-interviews, guest speakers, employment forums and workplace visits, and introducing students to potential employers which can provide a pathway to work. Mentoring and support of students post-school continues with Clontarf Employment Officers having regular contact with graduates in their workplace or training environment. The employment program commences when the students are first engaged in the Academy. Throughout their years in the Academy, students are exposed to many different industries, companies and jobs via workplace visits, guest speakers, career counselling and work readiness activities. Work experience and school based traineeships are a regular feature of the Academy programs. Clontarf staff work with the school VET coordinators to ensure Aboriginal School Based Training Programs work effectively.
- Clontarf staff members maintain regular contact with parents, including conducting regular home visits. This is a strong feature of the Clontarf model.

**Geraldton Senior College (WA), John Willcock College (WA), Swan Hill Secondary College (Vic), Jabiru Area School, Gunbalanya Community School (NT)**

Geraldton Senior College is a co-educational college with 876 Years 10, 11 and 12 students. It runs a range of academic and vocational programs. Students are able to board at the school's residential colleges. Just over 230 (25 per cent) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled in the school. John Willcock College is the main feeder school for Geraldton Senior College. The Midwest Clontarf Academy was established in 2004 in Geraldton, but was not operating under the Sporting Chance Program until 2007. Initially it was located at the Senior College only, but in 2006 it was extended to John Willcock College. Geraldton Senior College has four full time Clontarf staff while John Willcock College has three full time Clontarf staff.

It is considered a great strength of the program that a graduate of Geraldton Senior College is now a member of the Academy staff. Continuity of staff was identified as a great strength of the team. At least two of the team have been there since the inception of the program. The uniforms, camps, inter-academy games and motivational speakers are all regarded primarily as engagement activities, rather than 'reward' activities.

Swan Hill Secondary College, located in regional Victoria, is a co-educational school of nearly 1000 Years 7-12 students, six per cent of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. The Clontarf project began in the school in 2010. The school was originally approached by a member of the Swan Hill Football Club, who asked if they were interested in talking to Clontarf. The principal knew that the project was an attraction for boys to attend school and that a mentoring system was involved. The Clontarf Foundation organised for a small group from Swan Hill to see their Academies in action in Alice Springs, which gave the school a good insight into how the projects worked and what some of the success factors were. Swan Hill College has two full-time Academy staff members.

The Jabiru and Gunbalanya schools, which together form the West Arnhem College, have two full-time staff on each campus. Jabiru Area School is a Prep to 12 school in the small mining town of Jabiru in Kakadu National Park, 260km east of Darwin. It has a diverse and partially transient population, with students coming from the local township and from small and scattered communities in the surrounding area, some located up to 50 kilometres away. The school has an enrolment of 268 students – 121 girls and 147 boys. Around 57 per cent of students are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and most speak English as a second language. The Clontarf project was introduced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys in Years 7 to 12 in 2010. The Jabiru Clontarf Academy runs independently from the Gunbalanya Clontarf Academy which was established at the same time.

Gunbalanya Community School is a Prep to 12 school in Gunbalanya, a small community in Arnhem Land, 320km east of Darwin. Students come from the local community as well as from a number of homeland centres in the surrounding area, some located up to 100 kilometres away. The school has an enrolment of 322 students – 165 girls and 157 boys – all of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. All speak an Aboriginal language as their first language and English as a second or third language.

### Impact

While the level of impact on students varies from school to school, all Clontarf schools in the evaluation report success in the form of improved engagement, attendance, in-school behaviour and academic outcomes. The provider has been collecting outcomes data for the past 11 years and reports demonstrated improvements in enrolment, attendance, retention, completion and post school engagement for Academy participants.

In the schools visited as part of the case study, there were reports of successful educational outcomes for Academy students. One of the schools visited was very proud of the fact that 17 Mid West Clontarf Academy boys had completed Year 12 in 2010 and that 15 of these boys had achieved the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE). This is the highest number of Aboriginal male students ever to complete Year 12 at this school.

Schools praise the way in which the Clontarf Academy staff have supported senior students with their Academic studies. Two senior students at one school visited as part of the evaluation spoke of how they were looking to the Clontarf Academy to assist them in their transition from school to employment and of the support they had already received in this regard. Teachers, principals and parents spoke of the growth they had seen in many of the young boys since they have come under the influence of the Academy. Boys were reported as having greater self-discipline. The increased

levels of fitness in the students and an upsurge of interest in adopting healthy lifestyles were both said to be directly attributable to the involvement of the students in the project.

At one of the schools visited, student attendance is said to have risen from 65 -70 per cent to 89 per cent in one year, and school staff have observed a marked improvement in behaviour. The school attributes this directly to the two Clontarf workers, who are local and well respected Aboriginal men. They have considerable contact with parents and will go round to collect boys who are 'sleeping in'. They work with students and parents around particular issues. A special room (the Academy room) has been set up for the project, where the boys can go before school, at recess and lunchtime, and after school. Both Clontarf workers are in the room at these times to provide breakfast if necessary, to talk with the boys and to help them set their own goals. Because there have been substantial improvements in attendance and behaviour, the school is hoping for a flow-on effect in literacy and numeracy.

The project was also praised by schools for its emphasis on helping students to graduate and move into employment. For example, one case study school reported that 17 Academy boys completed Year 12 and of these 15 achieved the WACE (Western Australian Certificate of Education) 'and the Academy certainly had a major role in this achievement'. The provider reports that of the 2009 Clontarf graduates, 41 per cent are completing an apprenticeship or traineeship, 9 per cent are undertaking further VET training, 26 per cent are in full time work, and two per cent are at University.

Feedback collected during the site visits referred to benefits for students such as the self-discipline involved in having a routine, in getting up early for a training session, in working to achieve a standard that will result in a reward such as a trip away. Some schools report that benefits have flowed from boys choosing healthier lifestyles through their involvement in the Academy's projects as opposed to sitting at home for much of the day.

The case study schools report other benefits, such as increased levels of confidence which has led to boys becoming involved in school council, speaking at community meetings, and participating in a leaders' group that helps to run Academy activities. Trips away are important engagement activities for all Academy students and are also having a positive impact on students, as they meet other young people outside of their own small community. It was also suggested that there had been a significant improvement in classroom behavior as a result of being involved in a Clontarf Academy. The project is opening up pathways for engagement not only through football, but through other strategies such as cooked breakfasts, a welcoming Academy room, and inclusive 'engagement trips' aimed at low attendees. Schools note the value of having an avenue for engaging students in school 'outside of the teacher domain'.

Parents' perceptions of the benefits related to the structure that it gave to their boys' lives and to the opportunities within the world of football and the training and employment that it offered. Parents who were interviewed also commented on how the project encouraged positive attitudes and greater maturity. One mother said that the project 'helped [her boy] mature', encouraged 'good attitudes' and kept her boy 'in good company'.

In one school community the Academy project had helped improve the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members by helping teachers in the schools and the non-Aboriginal community better understand the needs and motivations of Aboriginal boys.

### Challenges

At one school it was suggested that more needed to be done to help classroom teachers understand the ethos of the Academy. Some teachers perceive participation in the Clontarf Academy to be a 'reward' and do not understand it when they see boys whose behaviour has been far from exemplary being taken on camps or to football.

Gaining the support of the community for a new project was an issue in another school. Selecting staff was an issue initially in two of the five site visit schools as Clontarf recruits and employs its own staff members who are answerable to Clontarf. One school felt there had been insufficient consultation with the school, particularly its leadership team, prior to implementation.

Attendance is an issue at one school. When the Clontarf Academy first commenced there was an upsurge in attendance by secondary aged boys and young men. However the numbers were not sustained and many of those who had come back in, disengaged again. The Academy accepts that there are still some young people in the community beyond its reach but it is trying various strategies to reach the low attendees to try to get them back to school.

### Critical success factors

The list of critical success factors identified by the many Clontarf schools in the evaluation is long. Commonly cited ones include:

- Quality staff who can relate to the students are fundamental to the project. One school suggested: 'You need the right people for the job. Project coordinators build a relationship with the school and the teachers, and with the parents. You have to get the trust of the kids.' Another suggested: 'Enough well-trained, committed personnel who know never lose sight of the fact that the prime purpose of the project is to make the boys' life prospects better.' As one staff member explained: 'It's all driven by what is best for the boys.'
- A supportive school principal and administration who share the vision and commitment of the Academy.
- Structure and routine in the project. One of the Clontarf staff commented: 'A few boys were really at risk. The program has turned them around, given them structure and routine. It has given them someone to talk to.'
- Autonomy within school guidelines – 'The school is supportive of whatever we want to do if it is within the guidelines. We pretty well have free rein.'
- The external funding is crucial – it's not just an extra source of support. A sufficient and consistent funding source is important.
- Every Academy has its own dedicated Academy Room within the school grounds. This is a vibrant, welcoming environment where students and parents/carers can feel comfortable.

### Overall

While central to the Clontarf Academies, football is not the primary focus. The project is primarily about improving educational outcomes, school completion, lifestyle, health and fitness,

employment, positive and informed decision making and life skills. A major strength of this project is that it is run by staff who have the respect of the students, the families and the school. They are role models for these boys, and are important figures in their lives. Another strength is that participation in the project is linked to appropriate behaviour and respect. Further, the project operates alongside the school programs, without disrupting school procedures or timetables, and there is ongoing contact with school staff. One principal commented that 'we don't see Clontarf as a separate identity – it's got to fit in'. In some schools there has been considerable training and professional learning before the project started. Above all, it is the calibre of the staff that is making this Academy model so successful across so many different communities.

**Provider: Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS–SA)**

Name of case study project	SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy (SAASTA)
Start date	2008
Schools participating in the project	Coober Pedy Area School Ceduna Area School Port Lincoln High School
Schools visited	Coober Pedy Area School and Ceduna Area School
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	71
Geographical location	South Australia, remote
Type	Boys’ and girls’ Academy

### Introduction

The SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy (SAASTA) is a school-based project which is intended to support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in achieving their South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) qualification. SAASTA is centrally managed and coordinated by full time staff in the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) based in Adelaide, coordinated at the school site by a SAASTA Coordinator (a teacher in each of the schools), delivered by teachers in the schools and supported by Aboriginal support workers.

The project mainly assists students in Years 10 to 12. The Academy seeks to improve attendance and retention for these students by providing training in a number of sports – including football, basketball, aquatics and athletics – within a curriculum context. SAASTA offers accredited SACE subjects which are timetabled into the school curriculum and develops curriculum resources for the classes. SAASTA subjects include Integrated Learning (a subject based on the Power Cup in Adelaide) and Certificate 2 in Community Recreation as part of the curriculum. For years 10, 11 and 12 there are reward trips away for high attendance and coaching and umpiring certificates.

One interviewee from a partner organisation suggested the project is ‘focused on obtaining important life skills. Teamwork, leadership, these are the main skills. We’re not just providing sporting ability.’ Sporting Chance Program schools include Ceduna Area School, Coober Pedy Area School and Port Lincoln High School. SAASTA also operates in another nine schools across South Australia which are not funded under the Sporting Chance Program.

### Characteristics of the project

- SAASTA has a full time manager, state-wide curriculum coordinator, program coordinator and administrative officer at Head Office. Coober Pedy Area School has an Academy Liaison Officer employed by the provider on a part time basis. Ceduna Area School and Port Lincoln High School each have a full time teacher who is also an Academy Liaison Officer on a part time basis. employed by the provider. In addition, there are other school staff (mostly part-

time) in the three schools. Teachers deliver the Academy subjects which are part of the curriculum, supported by Aboriginal Community Engagement Officers.

- The staff-student ratio varies across the three schools but is around two staff per 24 students. One teacher delivers SAASTA classes full time and one supports SAASTA as needed.
- Staff contact hours with students are ten hours per week, for two subjects per week although this depends on the school timetable and student subjects.
- There is an Academy room in each of the three schools.
- The Academy has full access to the resources of the school in which it is located.
- The project is embedded in the curriculum as part of SACE.
- Literacy and numeracy support is provided to all students in the Academy in these three schools in different ways. In one school SAASTA students are grouped together for English and maths and receive in-class support from the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer. In another school in-class English support is provided by the Student Service Officer while in the third school the class is vertically streamed with in-class support provided by a Student Service Officer.
- Support for post-school pathways includes a Career Expo during the Power Cup Carnival where students have the opportunity to discuss employment and education options as part of their Power Cup activities. Year 12 SAASTA students participated in a two day leadership workshop aimed at identifying post-school options. SAASTA has a strong working relationship with the Port Adelaide Football Club and South Australian National Football League.

Ceduna Area School is a government Reception to Year 12 school in Ceduna, a coastal town in South Australia. Around 540 students are enrolled, of whom about 26 per cent are Aboriginal. The Academy Liaison Officer at Ceduna Area School is a teacher who works delivering the Academy classes with the support of five part-time academy staff who are based in the school.

Coober Pedy Area School is a Reception to Year 12 remote school in South Australia. It has an enrolment of about 300 students, of whom around one third are Aboriginal. The SAASTA project commenced in both schools in 2009. At Coober Pedy Area School, the Academy Liaison Officer is employed part time and is supported by four part time Academy staff based in the school.

### Impact

Of the six Year 12 students enrolled in 2009 and 2010, four students completed their SACE. The remaining two students came very close to achieving their SACE, only narrowly missing out on a passing grade in one subject each. The provider also reports that a further ten Port Lincoln High School 2010 Aboriginal SACE completers were supported to complete SAASTA SACE units in Year 11.

Forty-two students from the three DEEWR-funded schools completed a SACE unit (40 Year 11 completions and 2 Year 12). Across the three sites, students achieved a total of 53 Nationally Accredited Certificates, including 21 Senior First Aid, 13 Grass Roots (Football Federation South Australia), 11 Star Athletics (Athletics Australia) and eight Surf Rescue (Surf Life Saving South Australia) certificates.

The provider reports significantly higher levels of participation and attendance at State-wide events. In 2010 there were four Year 12 students; in 2011 there are ten Year 12 students. There are currently 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking SAASTA curriculum units for SACE in Years 10 and 11. The provider also reports that a large percentage of SACE completers gained employment or went onto further training. Of the eleven 2010 SACE completers, eight students gained employment (one sports-based traineeship and three education sector trainees), two students were accepted into University although one student deferred and is undertaking a TAFE course.

SAASTA has established a traineeship program in conjunction with the South Australian National Football League (SANFL) called the 'Pathways to Excellence Program'. The program commenced in 2010 with eleven trainees across the state, including one at Ceduna Area School and Coober Pedy Area School. Trainees have the opportunity to complete a one or two year traineeship while undertaking a Certificate III in Sport and Recreation (1 year option) or a Certificate III in Community Recreation (2 year option). Students are mentored and assisted with employment pathways over the duration of the traineeship including pathways outside of the sporting arena.

One principal described SAASTA traineeships as 'the best traineeship I've ever seen – structured but flexible. They are linked to so many avenues ... Students are talking about being doctors, lawyers, health workers'.

Both schools visited report noticeable differences in participating students. These include:

- Students who had 'major behavioural problems' in previous years but had not exhibited these problems after joining SAASTA.
- The project 'makes kids feel special, which is an important part of the project. It's a pride and identity thing – "it shows who we are".' This extends to feeling pride in wearing the special shirts that come with belonging to SAASTA and having their own Academy room where 'they can go and feel safe'. There is a noticeable improvement in self esteem: 'the change in attitude and self esteem has been quite remarkable'.
- An ongoing benefit to students is that they are case managed and mentored for Years ten to twelve. They have a chance to do traineeships, and can give something back to the community. Students are talking about being doctors, lawyers, health workers.
- One Year 12 student initially did not want to join the project: 'I made assumptions; I thought it would just be about football.' Other students also thought the project :

*...would be about going to Adelaide to play football, but as we progressed, we realised it was about leadership and Indigenous pathways ... It was a lot more than I expected, I liked it. We've done coaching, survival techniques, national parks with a Duke of Edinburgh Award group with us. We've done communication, leadership skills, role models to other kids. I'm keeping my mind open to anything.*

- Students also are said to benefit from the routine and structure of the project.
- Both Academy and school staff benefit by seeing what students can achieve.

## Challenges

- Distance and isolation affect delivery of the project significantly. Issues include: the difficulty in some remote areas of attracting and retaining teachers and Aboriginal support workers. Other factors affecting delivery are the mobility of the population and the travel required to attend state-wide events.
- Family mobility makes it difficult to show improvement in attendance. 'It is a major thing for 70-80 per cent attendance to be achieved'. An example of how mobility might affect attendance is that if a family matter requires attendance at Adelaide or Port Augusta then the whole family is likely to go, which will then affect attendance data. Another school also reported that the attendance requirements of the project have been difficult to meet. Requiring 75-80 per cent attendance has not worked: 'Sometimes 60 per cent attendance is better than none. We have had strict guidelines, but that didn't work.' Support workers in the project have commented that there is a lot of day-to-day variance in attendance, which makes it difficult to teach, plan and assess.

## Critical success factors

- A supportive school leadership 'with a willingness to commit to programs that support these students'. One principal in a school that supports the project referred to the importance of the theory behind the project:

*A lot of students wouldn't be here [otherwise]. As a program, as a strategy for retaining kids, it is working at this site ... Kids 16 or 17 years old, they can be inward, there's often a shame job ... We can now talk to them, they're interested. The fact that they are at school is the crucial thing ... Some of them I doubt would be here at all. There were some concerns it runs against traditional lessons, but they are here and they are learning literacy and numeracy ... They're doing SACE without realising it.*

- The support of Aboriginal staff: the advice and support of these workers, and their relationship with the students, is considered very important.
- The support of the community: 'If they are not on side no-one turns up.' Have communication with key people whom the community respects.
- Designated key personnel – teachers/leaders
- Routine and structure and a good physical environment in terms of a specific room with appropriate facilities
- SAASTA is embedded into the curriculum. One coordinator commented:

*Because it is incorporated into the mainstream timetable, students who are taking mainstream subjects are no longer a minority in these classes. This is very important for the majority of them. There are also strong leaders in the group that need to be challenged further – they can go off to be one or two in the mainstream. It works both ways. They get support as a group plus have their individual needs met in mainstream.*

## Overall

The project appears to be having a noticeably positive impact on participating students. While attendance as an indicator of success is problematic in remote areas with high family mobility, schools report on the benefits students have gained in terms of positive self-identity, strong sense of belonging to a defined and supportive group of fellow Academy students, and achievement in terms of completing units and certificates as part of SACE.

**Provider: Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation**

Name of case study project	Midwest Netball Academy
Start date	2008
Schools participating in the project	Geraldton Senior College John Willcock College
Schools visited	Geraldton Senior College and John Willcock College
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	80
Geographical location	Geraldton, Western Australia, regional
Type	Girls' only Academy

### Introduction

The Midwest Netball Academy is managed by the Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation. The Academy aims to provide a positive sporting environment that encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls to attend school and broadens their long-term education, training and career prospects. The girls attend the Academy at two campuses – Geraldton Secondary College (upper secondary) and John Willcock College (lower secondary). The netball Academy was set up at a time when the Clontarf Midwest Football Academy was seen to be bringing about improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys and it was thought that a netball Academy could have a similar impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls.

### Characteristics of the project

- There are two full time Academy staff employed by the provider: the Academy Coordinator and an Academy coach (who is based at the school) who work with students from both schools. They are supported by a part-time senior project officer based at the Youth Centre where the provider is based. Originally the Academy Coordinator was school-based but it is currently based at the Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation.
- There are around five contact hours with students per week
- There is an Academy room within both schools.
- The project has access to school resources through both schools.
- The project is separate from the curriculum.
- The project does not provide specific literacy and numeracy support.

### **Geraldton Senior College and John Willcock College (WA)**

Geraldton Senior College is a co-educational college with nearly 900 Years 10, 11 and 12 students. It runs a range of academic and vocational programs. Students are able to board at the school's residential colleges. Just over 230 (25 per cent) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are enrolled in the school. John Willcock College is the main feeder school for Geraldton Senior College. In the first two years of its operation, an average of 55 girls were involved in the Academy which was

run by the coordinator and two Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers. When the project was operating with a school-based coordinator, the Academy ran successful camps and clinics.

### Impact

It is difficult to identify the extent to which the Sporting Chance Program objective and anticipated outcomes are being met as the data collected during site visits and from surveys are inconclusive. Stakeholder consultations during the site visits suggest that the project has suffered from no longer having a full time school-based coordinator to drive the Academy and deliver the project. The main issue here is that there is no longer a coordinator based at the school to deliver the project.

The girls themselves describe the benefits as 'learning about respect and pride'; 'being friends, getting along, learning new things'; 'being respectful to one another and respecting myself'; learning 'the leadership of being in the Academy and playing that role'; and 'don't be shame'. For one young student the Academy was 'a safe, fun and happy place' which showed her 'how to help and support others and keep motivated'.

### Challenges

There have been several key challenges that the project provider and schools have needed to address. A key challenge has been the difficulty of maintaining a viable Academy across two campuses without a school-based coordinator. Without this it has been difficult to maintain positive contact with the Academy girls.

Another difficulty highlighted by the provider and consistent with data collected from other girls' sporting Academies in the Sporting Chance Program evaluation, is the difficulty of attracting ongoing and substantial partner funding in the same way that some other Academies have been able to do.

As the project is not embedded into the mainstream curriculum it is a challenge to maintain regular contact with the girls.

### Critical success factors

Several factors have been identified as critical to the success of a girls' Academy such as this. These factors are not necessarily present currently but are needed for the Academy to succeed:

- Adequate and secure funding (from other sources to make up the necessary two thirds required of academies)
- A more secure source of funding would in turn enable a full time, highly able coordinator to be based in one of the schools to promote and deliver the project.
- Community support.

### Overall

The Midwest Netball Academy was set up to meet an identified need: that of re-engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls in learning and providing them with post-school options and possibilities. It began well and the girls can identify the difference that participation has made. The interviews with a range of people involved in the project highlight the important fact that it is not the activity or sport that is the key to the success of a project but the personnel: their capacity and willingness to build relations, their commitment, enthusiasm, knowledge and skill. The recruitment

and retention of such personnel requires appropriate resourcing and the Academy has found it difficult to attract the two-thirds funding needed to provide this.

**Provider: National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA)**

Name of case study project	Walan Barramal (Hold Strong)
Start date	2007
Schools participating in the project	Walan Barramal: Marrickville High School; Tempe High School; Alexandria Park Community School (Sydney, NSW)
Schools visited	Marrickville High School and Alexandria Park Community School
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	78
Geographical location	Walan Barramal Sydney, NSW
Type	Boys and Girls Academy

### Introduction

NASCA was founded in 1995 but has been involved in the Sporting Chance Program since 2007. NASCA operates two Academies in New South Wales (Walan Barramal in Sydney and Gambirrang in Dubbo) and also delivers the EES project ARMTour in remote Northern Territory schools. Walan Barramal Academy operates in three schools in South Sydney– Marrickville High School, Tempe High School and Alexandria Park Community School. The academy uses sport to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to stay on at school and make positive life decisions. The Academy also seeks to improve post-school options for these students. Academy students enjoy a wide range of activities, including first aid, fitness, sports clinics, an AFL training course, cultural awareness and work experience opportunities. NASCA provides a camp once a year for Academy students in all three schools as a reward for good attendance and participation in the Academy. The NASCA project officer runs a breakfast and fitness program at one of the three schools

### Characteristics of the project

- A full time project officer employed by the provider coordinates the Academy across the three schools and a part-time Education Project Manager is based in the central office. There are no school-based staff employed in the Academy.
- The project officer spends at least one full day per week with students from each school, delivering the Academy program over three hours in two sessions. The project officer also spends time with students at camp, workshops, after school activities and sporting events.
- Project activities are provided at lunchtimes and after school or for intensive blocks of time, such as a three week surf safety / learn to swim program with Surf NSW. The other two days are spent doing program coordination and extra cross-school activities, such as sports carnivals.
- Literacy and numeracy support is provided to all students in the Academy. This is generally done through small group mentoring, which can involve either helping students in the classroom or withdrawing students to work one-on-one with them. The Academy project officer also spends time in the classroom helping students with their school work and home

work. Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) university tutors are also available to help interested Academy students with their homework.

- Support for post-school pathways is provided in the form of the project officer working with students on their Personalised Learning Plans to help them identify future options and exposure to a range of industry experts who come to the schools to speak with students about potential career and education pathways. Academy students also go on excursions to a wide variety of local businesses. NASCA also runs a Careers and Aspirations program which involves team-oriented workshops aimed at building self confidence and self esteem.

### **Marrickville High School and Alexandria Park Community School (Sydney, NSW)**

Marrickville High School and Alexandria Park Community School are part of the Walan Barramal Sporting Chance Academy, which was set up in 2007. Marrickville has an enrolment of about 250 students. The number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students has dropped from about 30 eighteen months ago to about 12 now. Four to five of the Marrickville students are currently in the NASCA project. The school joined the NASCA project because at the time it was appropriate for a particular cohort of students who were good at sport but not engaging with school. 'It seemed like a good way to hook them in'. The person in charge of the project then was particularly good at developing positive relationships with students and worked effectively in introducing and organising the project.

Alexandria Park Community School is a partially selective, co-educational Kindergarten to Year 12 school with two campuses and an enrolment of 390 students. Around 25 per cent of students are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. The school joined the project because staff saw sport as a vehicle to increase student engagement, goal setting and long term opportunities. They wanted to take on something the students were interested in and to increase role model and mentoring opportunities.

The full time NASCA-appointed coordinator works closely with both schools. Students are taken out of class to do the activities.

### **Impact**

Perhaps the main impact has been in the area of career aspirations. The provider reports that as a result of the project, some students who would not previously have thought about going to university are now identifying careers they could do and seeing themselves at university. The school reports that some students have identified future careers in carpentry, veterinary science, singing and youth work. One of the older students in a small group discussion said he would like to come back after he has finished school to help with the project. He thinks the project is 'good for young fellers, you can look after the little fellers.'

Students have also benefited through increased self esteem, confidence, ability to resist negative peer pressure and capacity to make positive lifestyle decisions. One student said that she 'feels more confident, good about myself' when she finishes project activities. She feels better about talking in front of the class. When asked what she thought about the project, she said that it 'helps kids learn.'

The camp is particularly important for students in terms of building relationships and learning new skills. Students at one school described the camps and activities as 'a lot of fun' and a way to make

more friends from other schools. They also discovered family connections at the camp. 'It's mad, it's great. It's like a good opportunity to find out where you came from. They would advise other students to join: 'It will be fun if you join, you'll get to go on camps and learn things about the culture.' At the camp, 'we learned proper things about the culture, where we're from and where others are from too.

Students are benefitting because they are gaining access to a lot of experiences they would not normally have. project gives them sports and career access, role models and mentors. 'They know there is someone there (the liaison officer) just for them, not for everybody. They really like that ... It gives them a mentor, someone to look up to.'

### Challenges

When numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the projects are not high the project provider struggles to meet contractual obligations.

One principal thought it was important 'not to throw too much change into a successful program – they need some stability. We pull back a bit, don't overexpose them too much, as they might miss engaging with schooling [in other ways]. It's about striking the balance, maintaining the success.'

### Critical success factors

- Allowing sufficient planning time. 'For an effective project, take a lot of time to plan'. Make sure teachers understand the project.
- 'Try to spend a lot of time giving information to students and families about what's expected – they will often be wary about what's involved'
- 'Have a confident coordinator who communicates well with students and staff – otherwise it won't work'

### Overall

This model has worked well owing to NASCA's reputation as an Aboriginal organisation, the quality of the teaching staff in the project, the community and parents who support the project, and the link with the corporate sector which helps support the activities. Academy schools are reporting increased student engagement, retention and attendance, with some very marked improvements in some cases.

## Provider: Role Models & Leaders Australia

Name of case study project	West Arnhem Girls' Academy, WA
Start date	Role Models & Leaders Australia started operations in 2008. The West Arnhem Girls' Academy started in 2010.
Schools participating in the project	Jabiru Area School and Gunbalanya Community School (which together make up West Arnhem College)
Schools visited	Jabiru Area School and Gunbalanya Community School
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	83
Geographical location	Western Australia and Northern Territory, remote
Type	Girls' only Academy

### Introduction

Role Models & Leaders Australia is based in Western Australia and delivers seven girls' Academies and an EES project. The focus of the Academy project is on engaging girls in education using sport as a hook but also catering for girls who are not interested in sport by giving them healthy options. The program also has a focus on mentoring; sports and extra-curricular activities; work placement & work readiness; and leadership, teamwork and vision development. The Academies are designed to be delivered through the curriculum. Mentors work with the girls and the project works best when it is embedded in the curriculum.

### Characteristics of the project:

- Each of the Academies operates from a common framework of operation but varies to accommodate the needs of the girls and schools in each location.
- Each Academy operates under the guidance of a Program Manager and a number of Development Officers depending on the number of girls enrolled. In general, Academies with 65 enrolments are managed by one Program Manager and one Development Officer. As numbers increase additional Development Officers are employed. For example, West Arnhem Girls Academy has a Program Manager and two Development Officers while Palmerston Girls Academy has one Program Manager and four Development Officers. In summary, there are twenty one staff members (Program Managers and Development Officers) across the seven Academies. There are five staff (mix of full time and part time) supporting the Academies in the central office).
- The staff to student ration is approximately 1:32.
- Contact hours across the Academies vary but as a general rule there are up to seven hours per week direct contact via scheduled times; ongoing mentoring and support provided by staff throughout the day and before school, at recess, lunch and after school; after school, evening and weekend sports and general activities; and numerous sports carnival, camps, excursion and tours.

- Each Academy has an Academy Room allocated for the use of Academy staff and students. This room provides a central and safe environment for the girls, supports program delivery, and enables access to Academy staff who are available to provide support and guidance to the girls. The room also provides a ‘home’ for the girls and point of contact for parents, community and school staff. Role Models and Leaders Australia in collaboration with the host school furnishes and maintains resourcing of the room from its allocated budget resources.
- The Academy has access to available school resources such as computing and transport where available.
- In general, the Academy program is embedded into the curriculum through designated timetabled sessions and access to the girls before and after school, and at recess and lunch times during each school day. The Academy program operates through a mixture of in-school and out-of-school sessions and activities.
- Academy staff members provide literacy and numeracy support as part of the allocated timetabled sessions and through programs such as study skills, homework classes and study support sessions. In some cases professional tutors engaged by the school access the girls through the Academy, providing a safe and supportive environment in which to work with the girls. Mentoring in literacy and numeracy is undertaken by Academy staff, school staff and external mentors engaged by the school. Mentoring is undertaken in small group and one-on-one situations.
- Assistance with post-school pathways includes providing work placements and building student’s understanding of the workplace; working closely with the School-to-Work Transition Officer to ensure successful post-school transitions; helping students who are interested in working or acquiring a school-based apprenticeship; and supporting students involved in Vocational Education and Training. Academy staff members also support students through workplace visits and follow-ups. They provide ongoing support to keep the students motivated to attend their work placements, and also to maintain good attendance to ensure they keep their apprenticeships.

### **Gunbalanya Community School and Jabiru Area School**

Gunbalanya Community School and Jabiru Area School are both part of the West Arnhem Girls Academy, which is open to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls from Year 7 to Year 12 (although the Sporting Chance funding is for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students only) and operates across both the Jabiru and Gunbalanya campuses. Each campus has a full time Development Officer while a Project Manager based at Jabiru visits Gunbalanya several times a week.

In the Academy, there is an emphasis on healthy lifestyles through sport, and the girls train for and play a variety of sports including netball, basketball and football. There is also acknowledgement that not all girls like sports and this is taken into account when preparing the calendar of activities for the project. There is a girls’ Academy room at each school where the students can meet to socialise, play games, and study, and the room also serves as a place where girls can get help and advice from staff when difficulties or personal problems arise.

Gunbalanya offers an Academy session as part of 'Crew Day' each Friday which has a strong focus on health and wellbeing activities, including personal development and leadership, skills development and drug and alcohol awareness. At Jabiru, in addition to the girls' Academy activities on various days, the provider has also delivered a component of the health curriculum. Both schools offer before and after school activities.

### Impact

Impact on students varies across the girls' Academies provided by Role Models & Leaders. The level of success is closely related to the nature of the relationship with the school. The schools report that the attendance rates and classroom behavior of those who are enrolled in the Academies have improved significantly, especially within the senior school, and that the projects have provided the incentive that has resulted in a number of students re-engaging with their studies. Gunbalanya has achieved a 20 per cent increase in attendance rates compared with 2010.

In Gunbalanya and Jabiru, the West Arnhem Girls' Academy is still relatively new and needs more time to develop. However, it was recognised even at this very early stage that the project is offering girls and young women who have grown up in a close-knit community and know each other well, new ways of interacting with each other beyond the established patterns outside of school. In particular it was said that the Academy structure allowed the girls to discover that they were all experiencing the same challenges and issues and that they were not alone or different from anyone else. The Academy is also providing a pathway for young women to learn a variety of new skills such as working together and being confident enough to ask questions and to receive answers.

### Challenges

- Getting the right staff and ensuring there is succession planning because some staff will build their skills and move on
- Working closely with communities and ensuring genuine consultation occurs is of critical importance
- Ensuring the girls' Academy, which like all Academies is required to source two thirds of its funding, is as well resourced and supported as the boys' Academy that is also on-site, including each school site having its own coordinator rather than having to share across campuses and better access to transport
- Recognising that while the Academy program operates from a common template each school context is different and flexibility is required to address the needs of the girls. Each Academy must be mindful of the local context in the effective provision of the Academy program. As a result the nature of the program, types of activities and sports focus needs to vary and respond to the needs of the girls
- Ensuring adequate housing is available to project staff and adequate space for Academy activities to be carried out
- Ensuring all Academy staff have a proper induction to working in communities, with an emphasis on the 'culture of collaboration'
- Securing ongoing DEEWR and other external funding that will give some certainty to Academy projects.

### Critical success factors

- Having the right staff. 'Securing the right role models and staff to lead the girls. It's all about the relationship.' The essential qualities for Academy staff were said to be a passion for the task, knowledge of the local community and Indigenous context, an understanding of how to communicate with teachers and the school hierarchy, and the ability to interact positively with teenagers. With respect to relationships, it was acknowledged that without the support of the school and local communities the Academies would fail, so the ability to build respectful relations with school staff and leaders and the community was also seen as critical.
- Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female role models from the community who are passionate and committed
- There is a need to constantly review what is being done to ensure that staff do not lose sight of what they are trying to achieve; provide staff with professional development in such areas as leadership and mentoring
- Keep things simple – 'We don't always need to be going on big expensive trips. We can do good things locally as well' and this builds greater connection with the local community and culture

### Overall

In the two remote schools visited, which together form the West Arnhem College, it is too early to see an impact given that the Academy only commenced in 2010. However, both schools have acknowledged some changes already in girls' attitudes to school and an increase in attendance.

**Provider: Rostrevor College**

Name of case study project	Rostrevor Indigenous Sporting Academy
Start date	2007
Participating schools	Rostrevor College
Schools visited	Rostrevor College
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	35 FT students and 153 PT students
Geographical location	Adelaide, South Australia
Type	Boys' only Academy

### Introduction

Rostrevor College is a large K-12 boys' school with boarding facilities. Around four per cent of its students are from an Aboriginal background (all boarders). The college has had a long association with Aboriginal communities. Initially its links were with urbanised communities but they have now expanded to include remote communities such as Maningrida, Geraldton, Coober Pedy and Arnhem Land. The Rostrevor Indigenous Sporting Academy set up by the college seeks to adopt appropriate teaching and learning strategies with an Indigenous perspective in education to bring about an improved standard of literacy and numeracy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Ten of the 37 Academy students undertake a modified integrated learning curriculum program with separate classes, and 27 students are in the mainstream classes. The modified program includes vocational education units of study intended to be of relevance and benefit to students' home environments, including a range of trade skills. The Academy has developed two programs in numeracy and land care/conservation specifically for the boys and also offers opportunities for them to conduct football clinics in remote communities as part of a Certificate in Sport and Recreation. The Academy also offers the opportunity for the boys to play in the Academy band and to participate in a range of cultural and sporting events, such as a Reconciliation Dinner. All the Academy students receive additional assistance with homework and tutoring after school.

Together with the Academy Manager, Academy students deliver five sports clinics in metropolitan, remote and regional areas of South Australia and Northern Territory, targeting some 150 Aboriginal students per year.

### Characteristics of the project

- The Head of Academy is a full time staff member who is responsible for the boys' induction, overall academic performance and welfare, and relations with community members. There are seven part-time school-based staff.
- The staff-student ratio is one teacher for ten students in the intensive class.

- Contact hours per student are 12 hours per week for full time students and 27 hours per term for part time students (who participate in the sports clinics). Other activities take place after school, on weekends and during school holidays depending on the activity.
- The school provides a classroom for Academy purposes.
- The Academy can draw on the wider school resources to support its students.
- The project is embedded in the curriculum with the majority of students attending mainstream classes and the intensive group having daily timetabled classes.
- Students in the non-mainstream class students receive intensive literacy and numeracy support on a one-to-one basis during the day and significant after-hours tutoring support for homework and study. The other Academy boys receive literacy and numeracy support for homework via tutoring.
- Support for post-school pathways is provided in the form of careers counselling, partnering with a technical college to get work experience, some school-based apprenticeships, attending Vocational Education Training courses, and attending university and TAFE open days.

### Impact

Rostrevor College is bringing about positive educational outcomes for its Aboriginal students across a range of measures. Attendance is not an issue as the boys board on the premises. The retention rate of the Academy students is very high, as is the Year 12 success rate. Since its inception, the project has seen over 20 Aboriginal students graduate with their Year 12 South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). School data shows that of the 16 students who graduated with Year 12 in 2009, three went on to university study, three were employed in the mining industry, five undertook trades apprenticeships and pursued football careers, one engaged in Youth employment counselling and four students returned to their communities. Of the four students completing Year 12 in 2010, three obtained university entrance and one undertook an electrical apprenticeship.

For the Academy students who are currently in Year 12, commencing an apprenticeship or pursuing further study at university are the most popular post-school destinations. Students who intend going into the workforce at the end of 2011 have indicated they would like to work as park rangers, in mining, and in mechanical or electrical trades. The career choices identified by students are in line with the type of education they aspire to complete, which suggests the Academy is preparing them well for their future pathways.

In term 3 2011, all ten students enrolled in the Academy class achieved a C grade or better for Numeracy for Work and Community Life. One of the mainstream students was selected as the South Australian NAIDOC Young Person of the Year. He, like a few other mainstream students, is being targeted for scholarships by universities. Another Year 12 mainstream student is a finalist in the South Australian Training Awards for his outstanding performance as a Westpac trainee.

### Challenges

Coming from remote areas to a city environment and a structured daily schedule is a major life change for students in the Academy project. The support needs of some students can be very high, especially for those in the integrated learning/modified project, and while essential, this level of support is very resource-intensive. The cost per student is also high so maintaining this level of partner funding contributions is a challenge.

There is currently only one Aboriginal staff member in the project (in the boarding house) and the school is seeking to employ additional Aboriginal staff.

The College has identified the need to have better base level (literacy/numeracy) data for Academy students entering the project in order to better track improvements during students' time in the project. The school is investigating using an external tool for this purpose as many incoming students do not have NAPLAN results.

#### Critical success factors

- Offering tailored projects so all students can experience success (for example, by offering integrated learning, specialised curriculum, broad mainstream curriculum, varied pathways and by incorporating Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum to increase learner engagement).
- Having a supportive and dedicated Academy manager who develops strong relationships with students and their families, together with in-class volunteer support, and a structured integration project and regular leadership events and activities.

#### Overall

The Rostrevor Indigenous Sports Academy is clearly making a difference in the lives of the Aboriginal boys who participate in the project and life of the college. During the site visits students spoke of the pride they and their families feel in their achievement. They talked about their aspirations and the possibilities and opportunities opened up by their participation in the Academy. The completion rate is high and the school is confident that the students leave with the skills to undertake work or further study.

**Provider: Shalom Christian College**

Name of case study project	Shalom Sports Academy
Start date	2010
Schools participating in the project	Shalom Christian College
Schools visited	Shalom Christian College
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	80
Geographical location	Townsville, Qld
Type	Girls' only Academy

### Introduction

Shalom Christian College is a co-educational Uniting Church school in the Townsville area. It has a student population of around 228, all of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Some day students come from Townsville and Palm Island but the majority are boarders from Western Australia, Northern Territory and other remote areas. Originally the school ran a small Academy (not under the Sporting Chance Program) for both girls and boys who were elite athletes but this meant many students who wanted to participate were missing out. The school was successful in gaining Sporting Chance funding in 2009 and a girls' only Academy was set up in the following year to improve attendance, literacy and numeracy, self-confidence and leadership skills in the girls. Any girl in the school can participate in the Academy. The Academy helps with traineeships, accommodation and access to courses.

Activities include fitness work, sports training across a range of sports, an annual outdoor education camp, health and wellbeing activities, certificate courses and work experience. All Academy students complete their first aid training and receive their First Aid Certificate. The girls are also given the opportunity to travel to places they haven't been before and to teach different sports to younger students in remote communities. Students benefit from the Academy's partnership with James Cook University which offers training, mentoring and participation in specialised sports science programs. The annual camp focuses on leadership, teamwork, communication and resilience with outdoor and indoor activities. The school offers a Year 13 program, which Academy staff helped design and implement to provide Academy students with future career and study options.

The project works on goals and rewards and building a positive work ethic. Students are given rewards based on attendance in class – for example, 110 hours in the classroom leads to an Academy shirt. Other rewards include a sports bag, football and trophy.

### Characteristics of the project

- The project is managed by a full time teacher from the school supported by two other fulltime teachers, a Teacher's Aide and a school-based trainee.

- All Academy students attend mainstream classes and are taken out of class during a different period each week to undertake gym and other sports Academy activities. This occurs for each student once or twice per week. The rotating timetable means that students do not miss the same lesson more than twice in one term. Students are generally seen each morning by an Academy staff member when they receive their attendance card which has to be signed by their teachers to earn their term rewards.
- The Academy staff-student contact hours are generally between 40 and 80 hours per week during term time.
- Students have timetabled Academy classes once or twice a week. The Academy also runs internal and external sporting programs five days a week. The rotating timetable sees the different academy groups taken by different staff each week - depending on the students some may follow a set program and others have a more flexible program. The Academy is designed for maximum participation and flexibility to promote student engagement at school.
- While there is not a designated Academy room set aside specifically for the girls to use outside class time, the school does provide a room where the girls can do Pilates and yoga. Boys have access to this room outside the girls' timetabled use.
- The Academy is able to use the resources of the school.
- The project is embedded into the school's curriculum with students undertaking a timetabled sporting activity each day as part of their studies.
- All Academy students receive extra support in maths and English classes from the Teacher Aide with a small number (ten students) attending accelerated literacy and numeracy classes and operating on an alternative timetable with extra maths and English classes.
- The school supports post-school pathways in several ways. There are opportunities for girls to take up PASS Australia traineeships (which are offered through an external Indigenous Employment Program for Years 10-12) and to participate in the Learn Earn Legend Program with the North Queensland Cowboys rugby league team (which helps students identify a career pathway and provides work experience, mentoring, self-esteem development and exposure to a range of industries).
- Students can also complete first aid and a range of certificate courses with the assistance of Academy staff. For example, the Academy supports trainees in Certificate 2 in Community Recreation at PASS Australia by sending one of its Academy staff members to work with the girls. The Academy initiated this relationship and venture. Girls undertaking Certificate 3 and 4 in Fitness are school-based trainees in the Academy. The Academy aims to provide at least one or two students each year with the opportunity to undertake a school-based traineeship within the Academy. While other work experience placements and jobs undertaken by the girls are not solely done by the Academy staff, these staff members are heavily involved in helping students to apply for positions and to become work ready. The provider sees this 'as one of our primary objectives in translating school attendance into real life outcomes'.

### Impact

The project's objective of improving educational outcomes for its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been met to a major extent. The school reports that attendance has improved and students come to the Academy motivated and engaged. They come back more

regularly after visits with their families in remote areas and there is much less absenteeism after these visits. The student's comments were consistent with the schools' view that the girls want to be at school. For example, one student reported 'It helps me stay in class because I want to earn my shirt and sports bag and do the sports classes'.

Surveys of staff involved with teaching senior students in the Academy show that 88 per cent of the senior girls involved with the project had maintained or improved their academic and behavioural performances at school during the first six months of 2011. Levels of literacy were shown to have been maintained or improved in 90 per cent of lower secondary students. Levels of numeracy were shown to have been maintained or improved by 92 per cent of lower secondary students involved in the Academy. Ninety-four per cent of the students involved with the Academy in 2010 achieved a first aid certificate.

The Academy currently has six students completing a Certificate 2 in Community Recreation, one student completing a Certificate 3 in Fitness, one student who has finished her Certificate 3 in Fitness, one student who is completing a Certificate 4 in Fitness and one student who is completing a Certificate 3 in Business Administration. Over 50 per cent of Academy students in Years 10-12 have undertaken work experience placements in 2011.

The Academy experience has changed the way in which many of the girls see their futures and the possibilities available to them. One student commented 'When I was little I only thought I could be a hospitality worker [like my mother] but since I have done my traineeship with the Sports Academy I know I can go to uni and be a physio or health worker'. Several interviewees talked about wanting to go on to Year 13. One student reported that 'The Academy helped me to get my PASS traineeship and that has made me and my family very proud'.

The Academy currently has some students working with Academy staff on high level maths and English which they need in order to pass James Cook University's Tertiary Access Exam. Some of these girls spend their Sports Academy time working towards their goal of being able to go to university.

The project has opened up opportunities for the girls not only in their chosen sport but in providing opportunities to take on leadership roles within the school, coach junior teams and speak publicly to the school population, parent groups and others about their experiences. Some girls have gained in self esteem and confidence from travelling to remote communities in Queensland and the Northern Territory to work with students in those schools and be role models. Through this travel they have learnt about other communities, knowledge they did not have before participating in the Academy. One student noted how 'the Academy has given me confidence because I meet new people and I am not scared to talk to people now'.

### Challenges

The school notes that 'if senior sports Academy staff left they would be hard to replace given that the job requires excessive amounts of unpaid overtime'.

There are also challenges for the Academy arising from the fact that many of the girls come from remote communities. Weather and the difficulties associated with remote travel can make it hard for students to get back to school on time after holidays for example, or after an extended period

away for cultural matters (such as funerals). The provider identified this as a challenge for the Academy because it affects not only attendance but also continuity of study and, potentially, student performance.

### Critical success factors

- The project is fully integrated into the school curriculum so that it becomes a way of life for the school and the girls. It is not something that is done after school or at lunchtimes or that requires students to be taken out of class. It is factored into the timetable and all students go to each session as part of their day.
- A passionate, dedicated and skilled project manager and committed staff.
- A close relationship with communities, even though parents and carers are often living many thousands of kilometres away. The parents are keen to hear about their child's achievements and Shalom College staff contact all the parents each term to talk about their child and how they are going. These positive calls help build relationships with families and communities. A common theme in the conversations with girls in the Academy during the site visit was the pride their parents and families feel in their daughters' achievements.
- External partnerships with organisations that have become closely connected to the students. For example, James Cook University sends out sports science students to work with Academy students and give them extra high performance training.

### Overall

This project has been very successful in building confidence and improving attendance and learning outcomes for the girls. The Sporting Chance Program funding has enabled the school to implement a project that has helped develop a 'work ethic' in the students and has given them a high quality environment in which to succeed.

**Provider: Stride Foundation**

Name of case study project	Sport for Life
Start date	2008
Schools participating in the project	Coober Pedy Area School Oodnadatta Aboriginal School Maree Aboriginal School Leigh Creek Area School Ceduna Area School Crossways Lutheran School Koonibba Area School Flinders View Primary School Port Augusta Primary School Willesden Primary School Airdale Primary School Port Pire West Primary School
Schools visited	Coober Pedy Area School and Ceduna Area School
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	400
Geographical location	remote and regional, South Australia
Type	Boys' and girls' Education Engagement Strategy

**Introduction**

The Stride Foundation delivers the Sport for Life program, an EES, to 12 remote and regional schools in South Australia. Stride works with Elders, school and community leaders, local sporting associations, Red Cross, Aboriginal Health and Aboriginal Councils to provide a program that is intended to increase engagement and contribute to healthy outcomes for students. The role models who go out to schools as part of this program talk to students aged ten to 15 years about sport and healthy living. For example, some of the activities in the Sport for Life program include looking at how healthy living choices influence goals and wellbeing; the importance of self respect and respecting others; the choices people make and how these impact on our lives; sporting activities with role models such as Aboriginal football stars, and non-sporting activities such as leadership and goal-setting. The program is inclusive, not restricted only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

### Characteristics of the project

- Two full time staff members, employed by the Stride Foundation, travel to remote schools to deliver the project, supported by two full time local coordinators, one based in Ceduna and one in Coober Pedy. There are currently four role models travelling to schools in 2011 and one staff member in the central office. Typically at any one Sport for Life session there would be two role models, the Stride staff member running the session and two school staff members.
- The ratio between staff and students is one adult per 10-15 young people.
- Stride staff hold a one day workshop twice per year in 12 different remote communities in South Australia.
- Because it is characterised by twice yearly visits rather than having an ongoing presence in schools, this project does not have a specific room for students, does not access school resources, is not embedded in the curriculum, does not provide specific literacy/numeracy support and does not focus on post-school pathways.

### **Coober Pedy Area School and Ceduna Area School**

Sport for Life began in both schools in 2009. (Brief contextual Information about each school was provided earlier in the report in the description of SAASTA.)

### Impact

Currently, there is insufficient data to show a clear causal relationship between the Sport for Life activities and improvements in student attendance, engagement, learning achievement, and retention and in improved parent and community involvement in the two schools. The project provider acknowledges that engagement with sport is a tool and to show the impact on education outcomes is not easy. It is especially difficult to measure any longer term impact given the infrequent nature of the visits to schools. Nevertheless, schools report that these visits and activities are important in a remote school where diverse experiences and high profile role models are not readily available. The benefits for the students include increased self-esteem and positive attitudes towards school, 'with students pushing and supporting each other, working together'. Schools recognise that the visits expose students to learning opportunities that they would not otherwise experience.

### Challenges

- It is difficult to show impact based on only two visits a year. Schools report that the one-off nature of the project, with little or no follow up after visits and a long gap before the role models come again, means it is hard for students to build relationships with the role models. The provider reports that they would 'embrace the opportunity' to deliver the Sport for Life workshop quarterly, were funding available to support this, as these would allow for more in depth evaluation.
- The main issue for Stride is delivering the program in remote communities as it is sometimes hard to get to them because of the weather. There is the added difficulty of fitting in with the timetable in each of the schools and with the school calendar and to have role models available all at the same time, one that suits the school and everyone else involved.
- Staff turnover in remote schools means Stride might need to deal with different staff on each visit. Additionally, the provider reports that often on arrival at schools *the numbers of*

*students that will take part in the workshops will vary from what was originally discussed with the project manager.* There might be timetable changes or students leaving the activities and being replaced by other students. The provider has addressed these issues by being highly adaptable to the circumstances of the visit and needs of the school.

- Commitment's schools and teachers have and the extra curriculum activities often mean students come and go from the workshops.
- Teachers in one school suggested they would like more communication and meeting time to talk with staff from other schools about their programs, and time for coordinators across schools to discuss the programs themselves. The provider would also like to have funding to be able to bring coordinators together on a regular basis and provide ongoing professional development for them.

#### Critical success factors

- It is important to understand the culture of the specific school and to develop relationships with the staff and school.
- It is important to consult with the community and base things on their need, using the existing resources and support to avoid duplication.
- There needs to be good preparation and targeted activities. Several schools commented on the need for good communication so that schools know of the visits well in advance and can embed the visits in the curriculum.
- Having engaging and motivating role models of both genders is important if the visits are to be memorable and inspiring for the students.

#### Overall

Students enjoy the role model visits when they occur but the infrequent nature of the visits is an issue in terms of achieving the Sporting Chance Program objective. It is difficult to have a lasting impact if the role models only come once in six months or, for one school, in 12 months. Yet the students love the visits of the sporting heroes and during the visits have a chance to interact with the mentors while learning new skills.

**Provider: Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD-Vic)**

Name of case study project	Wannik Dance Academy
Start date	2010
Schools participating in the project	Ballarat Secondary College Eaglehawk Secondary College Mooroopna Secondary College
Schools visited	Eaglehawk Secondary College
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (2011)	60
Geographical location	Regional Victoria
Type	Girls' only Academy

### Introduction

The Wannik Dance Academy project is delivered as part of the broader Wannik Education Strategy of the Victorian Department of Education, Early Childhood and Development (DEECD). This strategy provides a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving outcomes for Victoria's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Koorie) students.

The Wannik Dance Academy project is aimed at re-engaging young Koorie girls in schooling. The focus is on positive strategies to encourage school attendance and participation. It also seeks to provide potential pathways to employment in the performing arts for Academy participants. Dance is the 'hook' for engaging the girls. The project seeks to link culture, dance and education in an engaging manner.

The Academy offers reward camps for improved attendance; dance classes and training; mentoring; a focus on healthy living, life skills and cultural workshops; leadership workshop; and trips to dance festivals.

### Characteristics of the project:

- All Academy staff are full time, employed by DEECD and school-based. The Academy coordinator in each of the three schools is a Leading Teacher which is a senior position within DEECD whose full time duties are assigned to the academy. Other staff working within the academies include tutors, Koorie Engagement Support Officers and teachers of dance.
- There is one staff member in the central office assigned to the academies.
- The Staff-student ratio across the academies is 1:11. There are four classroom contact hours with students per week in dance sessions. Homework clubs, tutorial support and one to one advisory sessions with the dance leader can add up to another four hours per week.
- There is an Academy room in each of the three schools.

- The project has access to school resources.
- The project is embedded in the curriculum and runs as a separate class within the school. When a small number of students have had to be withdrawn from other classes that is always on the proviso that they are assisted by the Wannik Dance leading teacher and tutors to make up the time and the work missed.
- The project offers literacy and numeracy support through the provision of dedicated tutors, the Wannik Dance leading teacher and homework support.
- The project works within the Managed Individual Pathways Program within Victoria to provide support for post-school pathways.

### **Eaglehawk Secondary College (Vic)**

Eaglehawk Secondary College is a co-educational, Year 7 to 10 school in Bendigo, a regional town in Victoria. The school has an overall enrolment of around 600 students, including about 45 Koorie male and female students. The Wannik Dance Academy commenced in the school in 2010. There are 13 Koorie girls in Years 7 -10 participating in the project.

#### Impact

The project has only been operating a short time but already schools are reporting that attendance has improved, girls are more engaged in their learning. In one school attendance is said to be 'at or above that of all students in the school'. In this school all four Koorie participants in Year 10 have progressed on to Year 11 and one of these students has started a school-based apprenticeship. The other two Academy schools report similar improvements. One school reports that 'Our data indicates that attendance has improved. Student surveys highlight improved morale, student empowerment and enthusiasm for the project and for learning. The individual students learning evidence, when looked at as a whole, indicates that students have made learning improvements'. The third school also reports that students 'are engaging more in their literacy and numeracy at school. They are more cooperative and responsive to expectations and more motivated to try harder'.

Participating schools report increased confidence and self-esteem, which has transferred to the classroom, with teachers reporting that girls are now prepared to 'have a go' in class, and are more confident about asking for help.

The project has also contributed to a strong feeling of group identity. One student commented that until the project she did not know who the other Koorie students were. 'Before the Dance Academy, we were practically strangers to each other, now we have formed a big group'. One of the new Year 7 students said she 'liked being with Aboriginal girls ... we get to know each other, make new friends.' One staff member reported that the girls 'learn to work as a team ... they look out for each other, like sisters'. These comments, common to all dance Academies, show the additional benefits that an Academy project can provide, including making school a more enjoyable experience. One school also reports that, as a result of the project, some girls have identified as being Aboriginal for the first time.

#### Challenges

Perhaps the main challenge has been to reconcile the differing expectations/perceptions of the school and its local community about the project. Because the project is associated with the Wannik

strategy, there were expectations among some community members that the dance project would have more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. The school has sought to gain the support of the community throughout. Considerable lead-up time was allowed in the setting up of the Academy to ensure any community reservations could be discussed and addressed.

Another challenge initially was the difficulty of removing students from class for the project, with concerns about students missing other work. In Years 9 and 10, students in one school can choose Dance Academy as an elective subject. In Years 7 and 8, they are withdrawn from regular classes. This was particularly problematic for English and maths. Students are now removed from maths only and have special small group maths classes at another time. The school reports that this arrangement is working well, with no staff concerns about withdrawal. This handling of the timetabling differs from school to school in the Wannik Dance Academies.

### Critical success factors

- The role of the Koorie Engagement Support Officer has been critical in maintaining community support.
- Having an appropriately skilled project manager and staff– ‘It is essential that students can trust the person in charge of the project. If the students trust the teacher in charge they will accomplish great things, by doing it just because it’s you’; schools need ‘to ensure that the Dance Academy leader has the skills and abilities to engage students and families into the project. This person must be culturally sensitive and have a passion for student improvement’; the Academy needs ‘committed, skilled and dedicated staff who are passionate about dance and experienced in working with young girls’.
- Strong leadership and whole school support – ‘it interrupts the girls’ regular school program so it is vital that the school supports [the involvement of the girls in the Academy classes.
- Community support – the local community need to get behind it; ‘it needs time to develop and needs to be accepted by all members of the school community’; schools need ‘to ensure that family and local Aboriginal Elders are involved from the beginning of the development of the program’; there needs to be ‘lots of consultation with the local Koorie community prior to the program beginning’.
- Appropriate resourcing – staff, learning spaces and funding.
- Having the support of the other Wannik Dance Academies in Victoria has been important for each school in the project.

### Overall

Principals and staff of the three Wannik Dance Academy schools report that since the project began attendance has improved and girls are more engaged in their learning. They also report increased self esteem and confidence among Academy students. Having all the Koorie girls together in one project has also given these students an increased sense of belonging to the school, and has allowed them to develop leadership and other talents. While this is not directly related to the Sporting Chance Program objective, it is nevertheless a positive additional outcome of the project.

## 5. Performance measures

The 2009 Office of Audit and Evaluation (Indigenous Programs) performance audit of DEEWR's management of the school-based sports Academies element of the Sporting Chance Program highlighted the need to 'revise the program's objective to better reflect the outcomes which the Sporting Chance Program can reasonably be expected to achieve and to facilitate effective measurement of program performance'. The report went on to say:

*The program's performance measurement framework could be improved by revising the current suite of performance indicators and developing new indicators so that they are relevant and adequately measure progress towards achieving program objectives. This should be supported by baseline data and performance targets to facilitate the assessment of future performance and quantify the desired level of improvement.*

The audit concluded that:

*most of the academies' efforts are directed toward achieving intermediate and readiness to learn outcomes – that is, helping students to come to school and improving their behaviour and engagement in the classroom. Owing to the limited performance data available, OEA was unable to comment on the extent to which academies have improved students' enrolment, attendance, retention and engagement. However, there is consistent anecdotal evidence from schools that the program has a positive impact on the educational experiences of Indigenous students.<sup>15</sup>*

DEEWR acknowledged this issue in its framing of the scope of the ACER evaluation. The collection of performance data has changed over the life of the Sporting Chance Program. In its first year of operation (2007) the Program collected student attendance, retention, completion and exit data. However, participating schools viewed this as an onerous task and as a consequence the data set was revised to include student attendance and learning improvement data.

There is still limited performance data, such as learning achievement data that shows a clear link between, say, the literacy and numeracy support provided to students by most Academies and the improved academic performance of these students, but there is (as the 2009 Audit found) 'consistent anecdotal evidence that the program has a positive impact'. Academies are still directed at 'helping students to come to school and improving their behaviour and engagement in the classroom'. Most schools appear to have their own methods of tracking individual student progress which is not necessarily consistent across schools. The EES projects also have their own methods of collecting data, such as pre and post activity questionnaires for teachers. In their reports to DEEWR, providers are given an opportunity to include 'case studies and/or significant achievements by staff or students as powerful qualitative reporting on the effectiveness of the project'. These case studies provide a rich source of data about the impact that the projects, particularly the Academies, are having on individual 'at risk' students.

### Attributes of performance measures

Performance measures provide key pieces of information in order to:

- evaluate a program (processes and outcomes)
- learn to what extent a program may or may not suit other contexts

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<sup>15</sup> Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs), 2009, *Performance Audit of The Sporting Chance Program*, Department of Finance and Deregulation, Commonwealth of Australia.

- learn what could be improved and how best to make these improvements.

Therefore the measures need to be focused on the program and context in which it is operating. The most efficient way of making this linkage is via a statement of the program's goals, the methods used to obtain these goals, and the rationale for these methods. Some researchers advocate the use of a logic model in making this linkage.<sup>16</sup> ACER's experience with logic models is that they can tend to be too abstract, too formulaic and inhibit thinking about how and why the program operates as it does, especially when the program is implemented across a wide range of settings.

The context often has a powerful influence on the selection of methods used by a program. The context is also likely to include other programs and policies that are being implemented that may impact on the program's effectiveness. A full understanding of the context is needed to help establish to what extent outcomes can be fairly ascribed to the program.

The measures need to be as objective as possible. The data need to be easy to collect, reliable, valid and not impose undue burdens on schools. ACER's experience suggests that reliance on administrative data, collected for purposes other than research, can be problematic, mainly because data that have been collected for an intended purpose may not easily accommodate research purposes.

Schools and programs vary in the ways in which they collect data and measure the impact of their programs. Currently, program providers report to DEEWR on such things as achievement of student number target, attendance and degree of improvement in literacy and numeracy.

#### Measuring the performance of the Sporting Chance Program

The objective of the Sporting Chance Program is to encourage improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using sport and recreation. This is a broad objective which potentially covers a wide range and degree of behaviours, attitudes and achievements.

One principal highlighted the difficulty of measuring success in relation the Sporting Chance Program:

*It is difficult to measure the impact the program has had on meeting the objectives using the current evaluation model ... As attendance rates vary from year to year, it is difficult to say if improvement is as a direct result of students engaging in the program. It is easier to measure social outcomes i.e. improved confidence and self-esteem, reduction in number of negative referrals and suspensions, involvement in leadership activities.  
(Principal survey response)*

The following tables show the kinds of performance measures that could be used to measure the impact of the Sporting Chance Program in general and student engagement more specifically. These are suggestions only. It is not expected that all schools and providers would use all of these measures. For example, one Academy has held occasional family BBQs as a means of encouraging community interest in, and engagement with the school Academy. Attendance at these functions could be tracked over time.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, See Schacter, Practitioner's Guide to Measuring Performance of Public Programs, Institute on Governance Ottawa, Canada, available at: <http://schacterconsulting.com/docs/toolkit.pdf> Viewed Feb 2011.

**Table 2: Measuring student performance: Sporting Chance Program**

Objective	Outcome	Possible performance indicator or measure
To encourage positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Increased school attendance	Counts of days absent (identifying types of absence)
	Strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling	Happiness at school (sense of belonging) Connectedness with school (positive self concept, participation) Affective response to learning (participation, attendance) Numbers of suspensions, referrals, exclusions, time-outs and other means used by schools to manage challenging and/or disengaged behaviour
	Improved achievement in learning	Literary level Numeracy level Life skills Ongoing teacher assessment Student portfolios

	Increased retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent	Grade progression and/or apparent Year 7-12 retention rates
	Greater parental and community involvement with the school	<p>Frequency, quality and duration of parent and community contact with the school, such as number of parents and community members attending:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- an information night about the Sporting Chance Program or Academy project</li> <li>- an EES day of role model visits</li> <li>- parent-teacher interviews</li> <li>- Sporting Chance activities (eg dance performance, BBQ for Academy families)</li> </ul>
	Post-school options	<p>Number and percentage of students in study</p> <p>Number and percentage of students in a traineeship</p> <p>Number and percentage of students in an apprenticeship</p> <p>Number and percentage of students studying at TAFE</p> <p>Number and percentage of students studying at university</p> <p>Number and percentage of students in work (full-time, part-time, casual)</p> <p>Number and percentage of students doing something other than the above</p>

**Table 3: Dimensions of engagement**

ACER proposes that student engagement could be measured against each of the four dimensions identified in the course of the evaluation.

- *Positive self-identity* is critical to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' engagement and the capacity to learn new things.
- *Sense of belonging* includes having affinity with the broader cultural group and the specific group of the Academy.
- *Participation* includes involvement in activities (both in-school and out-of school, such as mentoring, umpiring, training others) and classroom/school behaviour.
- *Attendance* recognises that there are different kinds of absences, including absence for reasons to do with culture.

Dimension	Performance indicator or measure	How measured
Positive self-identity	Happiness at school (sense of belonging) Connectedness with school (positive self concept, participation)	Student self-report (using a short bank of items tapping into this dimension) Professional judgements by program and school staff
Sense of belonging	Happiness at school (sense of belonging) Connectedness with school (positive self concept, sense of belonging, participation) Affective response to learning (participation, attendance)	Student self-report (using a short bank of items tapping into this dimension) Professional judgements by program and school staff
Participation	Affective response to learning (participation, attendance)	Student self-report (using a short bank of items tapping into this dimension) Professional judgements by program and school staff Administrative data (eg number of suspensions, time-outs, expulsions)
Attendance	Affective response to learning (participation, attendance)	Administrative data (identifying types of absence) Student self-report

## 6. Conclusion

The findings from the evaluation support the conclusion that the Sporting Chance Program is meeting its objective of encouraging improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using sport and recreation, although the range of activities is considerably broader than 'sport and recreation'.

The professional judgement of school staff suggests that the Sporting Chance Program is having a moderate (positive) impact on students in relation to attendance, engagement, achievement, retention and parental/community involvement. That is, these teachers assess the Sporting Chance Program has having led to improvements which are identifiable as uniquely due to the program, but that there remains scope for further improvement. While the degree and nature of improvement, and hence the scope for further improvement, varies across projects and schools, the evidence collected during the evaluation shows there are key practices (described below) that appear to characterise the more effective Academy and EES projects and are potentially replicable in new and existing projects.

Schools and providers report improved *attendance* and *engagement* in school for students in both the Academies and EES although the sustainability of this engagement is more evident in the Academies than in the EES projects. While not all Academies are in a position to show improved *retention* rates to Year 12 (for example, some have only been operating for a short period or have focused their efforts on younger students and will need more time for these students to move through the school) others have successfully supported students to attain a range of certificates, including Year 12 qualifications.

In general there is insufficient evidence to show a clear link between Academy or EES participation and improved *academic outcomes*. Some schools report improved attainment in classroom achievement, such as students gaining higher marks in their work for some subjects or doing better in literacy and/or numeracy activities, but the data for this is inconclusive. Schools in both Academies and EES projects report increased levels of *parental and community involvement* in the school although this is not as strong as for other performance areas, such as attendance and engagement.

As part of the evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program, ACER undertook a review of the literature on student engagement and the link between student engagement in school, attitude to school, and attendance and educational outcomes. The review found considerable variation in the way engagement is understood and thus measured. The findings of the evaluation suggest there are four key components of student engagement in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: positive self-identity, belonging (both cultural and group), participation and attendance.

The literature review shows there are still gaps in the research regarding the nature and strengths of the links between engagement and particular educational outcomes. The findings of the evaluation indicate that while the Academies in particular are contributing to improved attendance and engagement, there is not yet clear evidence linking this to improved academic attainment.

Both the Academies and EES projects are successful in engaging students in school but the very nature of some of the EES activities mean that the impact is likely to be short-term rather than sustained.

For the purposes of the evaluation, an effective Academy has been defined as one that is meeting the Sporting Chance Program objective 'to a moderate and/or major extent' across all five intended outcomes measured on a 4-point likert scale ('not at all' to 'a major impact'). That is, effective Academies have been taken to mean those Academies that have scored more highly than others on the survey questions asking staff and principals to estimate the extent to which the main Sporting Chance Program has contributed to each of the intended outcomes. These responses are based on the professional judgement of principals and staff and consistent with feedback received from site visits, student responses (in surveys and site visits) and phone interviews with providers. There is a strong correlation across the five intended outcomes and between principal and staff responses in relation to each outcome.

The most effective Academies are characterised by the following:

- highly skilled (that is, appropriately qualified, trained and/or experienced), enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff members who are capable of building strong and trusted relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and who have high expectations of their students
- willingness to engage communities in the planning and processes well before the program is implemented
- strong support from the school leadership, other teachers and parents/carers
- an integrated curriculum
- effective communication between provider and school, school and community, provider and community
- sufficient resourcing and funding, including the provision of appropriate physical spaces – such as a designated Academy room – in which students can feel safe and comfortable and where parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff feel comfortable
- strong external relationships, such as with community and business organisations, tertiary providers and potential funders, who can provide the Academy with additional financial and in-kind support and mentoring.
- recognition of the need to monitor and evaluate their programs
- a strong perception (and promotion of) Sporting Chance as an education program and not primarily as a sports program.

It has been harder to define an effective EES project because fewer staff and principals responded to the surveys than did Academy principals and staff. However, for the purposes of the evaluation, an effective EES project has been defined as one in which students have responded positively to the EES activities as reported by principals, staff and students themselves in survey responses. These responses are consistent with the feedback gathered during the site visits to four EES schools, including comments gathered from students in small group discussions.

The most effective EES projects are characterised by the following:

- highly skilled (that is, appropriately qualified, trained and/or experienced), enthusiastic, culturally aware and dedicated staff who can engage with students
- consistent and regular delivery, without too much time occurring between visits
- a positive relationship with the school and its community
- effective communication, including allowing sufficient time for schools to prepare for the arrival of the EES staff and mentors.

There are several unintended consequences (both positive and negative) arising from the Sporting Chance Program but the number of schools and providers reporting these is small. One outcome identified in surveys, interviews and small group discussions with Academy project providers, principals, staff, parents and community members, and supported by student responses in interviews and surveys, was an increase in self esteem (typically expressed as students 'feeling good' about themselves) and self confidence as a result of being in the project. Twenty-two schools underestimated the benefits, and six the speed of the benefits, arising from the project. Seven staff members admitted to being pleasantly surprised by what their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been able to achieve. Four teachers and principals commented on the professional learning gained from (both Academy and EES) projects although the nature of this was not defined.

There were few unintended negative consequences arising from participation in the Sporting Chance Program. One was identified as an occasional resentment from others in the school community at the opportunities being given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Several schools also reported a similar response from girls in regard to the disproportionate opportunities being given to boys through boys' only Academies and, in one case, by boys to a girls' only Academy.

The most striking endorsement of the Sporting Chance Program has come from the students themselves. Of the 1012 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who completed a survey as a part of the evaluation, 493 were boys (48.7%) and 519 were girls (51.3%). Around ten per cent were from schools participating in EES activities, 85 per cent participated in Academy experiences and five per cent were from schools offering both Academy and EES experiences. Additionally, small groups of students were interviewed in each of the site visits to schools participating in the case study projects.

Students describe what they have learned, what they like most about the Academy or EES, and the difference these experiences have made to them. The Year 11-12 students have indicated their future study and career aspirations. Overwhelmingly, the feedback gained from these students is positive, particularly in relation to their attitudes to school, self-identity, and sense of pride in being Aboriginal and self-efficacy as learners.

Overall, the Sporting Chance Program, despite some limitations, is doing what it has set out to do – to encourage improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## Appendix 1: Descriptive statistics

This section of the report describes the main findings from the data collected through the surveys, phone interviews and site visits.

### Surveys

After jurisdictional and diocesan permission had been obtained to approach schools in the Sporting Chance Program, ACER sent an email invitation to the principal of each school seeking their consent for their school to participate in the evaluation. Of the 143 schools approached, 86 schools took part in the evaluation.

### Principals' perspectives

While a majority of schools were willing to take part in the evaluation in some cases the surveys were not completed in time. For example, one principal was on long service leave, gave permission for staff and students to be surveyed but this did not occur in the timeframe available. Some principals felt they were not in a position to comment because they were either new to the program or school or were in the process of moving on to another school. One principal was willing to complete a survey but reluctant to burden her staff with anything extra to do. Another principal willingly completed a survey but requested that his students not be involved in a survey. A small number of principals indicated that it was difficult to comment on an engagement strategy if it had not been delivered in the school for some time. Of those principals who completed surveys, the vast majority felt the Sporting Chance Program in their school was worthwhile and having a positive impact on their students.

### Demographics

Responses were received from the principals of 68 schools. However, 10 schools had two programs running in parallel. As principals were asked about each program, a total of 78 responses were provided to the study. Table 3 shows the distribution across states and territories. Responses were received from two Independent, eight Catholic and 58 government school principals.

Table 3: Distribution of programs across states and territory

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	NSW	19	24.4
	NT	15	19.2
	QLD	8	10.3
	SA	5	6.4
	VIC	8	10.3
	WA	23	29.5
	Total	78	100.0

Of the 78 programs that data was provided about by principals, 55 were Academies and 23 were EES projects. Of the 55 Academy programs, 19 were Clontarf Football Academy programs, and of the 23 EES programs, eight were part of the Country Rugby League, Far West Development Strategy. There was a wide range in the period of time the programs had been active in the schools (from less than one month through to in excess of ten years). The average period was 41 months – about three and a half years.<sup>17</sup> Most programs had been active for between 10 and 49 months.

Principals were asked to describe the main reason for the school participating in the program. Many provided more than one reason, and for the analyses reported here the first reason given was taken as the main reason. They were grouped according to whether the program was an Academy or EES. Rationales for Academy programs nearly all related to educational or related outcomes (increased engagement with school, better attendance, improved learning). In contrast, EES programs were more likely to refer to the opportunity for students to be exposed to a role model.

The objectives of the program were also described by the principals. For Academy programs, the most frequent objectives were to either improve attendance or retention or to improve engagement (35 of 55 responses fitted into these categories). For EES programs, objectives related to specific skills and encouraging students to be inspired to set long term goals (often by giving access to role models). Only one EES program was reported to have an objective related to attendance or retention, and none explicitly addressed engagement. Thus, there was a stark difference in the objectives for the two types of programs reported by principals.

Principals were asked to assess the extent to which the main objectives of each program had been achieved. On a scale from 1 ('Not at all') to 4 ('To a major extent'), the average score was 3.4, which substantively means somewhat above 'To a moderate extent'. An analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference in this score for Academy or EES programs. Principals were given an option to indicate that they could not say whether the program had achieved its objectives. Only four used this option. The counts are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Program type by the extent to which objectives are being achieved (counts)**

Program Type	Not at all	To a minor extent	To a moderate extent	To a major extent	Total
Academy	2	4	13	33	52
EES	0	4	7	10	21
Total	2	8	20	43	73

Where the program was seen to have achieved its goals to a 'major' extent, principals often provided a quite detailed account, for example, one wrote of an Academy program:

*We are still very much in the formative stages with the program but already we are seeing a change in the attendance patterns of the students involved in the program. The students who attained their first target were so proud of their achievements and also*

<sup>17</sup> The standard deviation was 33 months which reflects the very wide spread in the distribution.

*were able to attend a [football club] game as a reward. The change in the self-talk of the students who failed to achieve their goal from term 1 was extremely positive and focused towards turning this around so that they were able to be acknowledged and celebrated their achievements with the other students.*

For Academy programs, attendance and retention were used by most of the principals as the indicators for programs achieving their objectives. Principals with EES programs at their school tended to be less specific, referring to 'support for the school' or other unspecified objectives.

Principals who saw the program at their school as having achieved its objectives to a 'moderate' extent explained this by either indicating the problems which stopped the program from achieving its objectives to a 'major' extent, or by describing those features which had been achieved and which allowed the judgement to be made. Of those factors which had inhibited the programs' achievements, principals pointed to:

- high staff turnover
- lack of good evaluation data (so limiting their capacity to assert a strong outcome for the program)
- internal school politics
- infrequent attendance at schools (EES programs only).

Those factors which promoted the success of the programs were:

- new staff replacing other staff seen not to be fully committed to the program
- increased attendance and retention of students at the school (Academy programs only)
- increased engagement by students at school.

Of the four principals at schools where an Academy program was judged to have achieved its objectives to a 'minor extent', one indicated that it was too early to judge, one indicated the evaluation of the program had been inadequate, and one pointed to a failure in the program to spend sufficient time with the students. One principal with an EES program indicated that it had only achieved its objectives to a minor extent because the program was run too infrequently at the school. .

Of the two principals who indicated that an Academy program had not achieved its objectives 'at all', one was critical of its failure to engage the most at-risk students choosing instead to exclude them from it. (The other principal did not provide any further information.)

Principals were asked to think back to when the program was introduced to the school, and their expectations about the likely improvement the program would make to a range of educational outcomes. These outcomes included school attendance, student engagement, learning achievement, student retention and parental and community engagement with the school. Analyses were conducted to investigate the extent to which there were any likely differences between principals' perceptions for Academy and EES programs. Again a four-point scale was used, and the mean score for each type of program was compared. For all but student engagement there is a statistically significant difference which implies that principals were, on average, more optimistic about the Academy programs producing these outcomes. Substantively, principals were, on average, likely to

have expected these outcomes to a 'moderate' extent for Academy programs, and to a 'minor' extent for EES programs.

Principals were then asked to judge to what extent the program had, at the time of completing the questionnaire, contributed to these five outcomes. A similar set of analyses was undertaken and these showed that the expectations of the principals appear to have matched the outcomes. Principals, on average, indicated that the Academy programs were more likely to have achieved these outcomes than EES programs. There were statistically significant differences on four of the five areas, with the fifth – student engagement – close to significant. Further investigation (using Cohen's D as a measure)<sup>18</sup> indicated that the effect sizes – being a measure of the practical importance of the differences – was moderate to large (0.5 to <1.0). These differences are, in summary, therefore likely to be real and to be important.

As one way of identifying unintended consequences, principals were asked if anything had surprised them about the program in their school. There was little difference between principals with Academy or EES programs. Nearly all those who reported being surprised, appear to have underestimated the benefits, or the speed of benefits flowing from the program. Only two principals reported negative, unintended consequences. One wrote:

*The extent to which there has been a racist backlash from the community, and resentment in it from students who can't access the Clontarf Academy (non-Indigenous or females).*

The other pointed to discrepancies between the opportunities and resources available to girls compared to boys, with girls becoming discouraged. Positive notes were more often sounded:

*How rapidly the program could make a difference and re-engage students who historically may have been at risk.*

*The dedication of the students, their focus on real goals, the rapport developed between students and non-Koori instructor and staff, the sense of joy when the girls perform. And lots more.*

*I was surprised to witness the extent of self-belief and positive Indigenous identity in the students. This has been more than significant.*

Good staff, a good relationship between the program and the school, and strong support for the program from the school leadership and in the provision of resources (including timetabling) were seen by principals – irrespective of the type of program in their school – as essential for their program's success in other schools. Principals from schools with EES programs were more concerned about consistency in delivery and timeliness in program delivery. Principals from Academy programs were much more likely to stress the need for community support and meaningful engagement with parents and family.

Many of the factors identified as essential for success, were also seen to be the main challenge faced by the programs. Staffing, staff turnover, in-school organisation and logistics, attracting and

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<sup>18</sup> This is a standard measure of effect size which is a method for establishing the size of an effect, as opposed to the existence of an effect.

retaining students, engaging the community and parents, and engaging teachers with the program were all cited as challenges. There was a wide range of challenges common to Academy and EES programs, possibly reflecting the diverse settings of the schools. A sense of how complex these settings can be may be gathered by one principal's assessment of the challenge the program faced:

*Retention and engagement. The program initially required a huge commitment from students to attend 3 after-school sessions of 2 hours duration each week. Many students have part time jobs or other commitments after school which affected attendance. Some of the activities lacked relevance for students and were repetitive and external presenters were not always effective in delivering content. The program relied on goodwill of schools and volunteer teachers to supervise sessions after school*

Here there are in-school logistics, staffing, community relations and student needs intersecting around the program's implementation. This can be seen also in another principal's assessment of the main challenge:

*Time to do things. At times it is almost a full time position just looking after the Indigenous cohort. There is a mass of paperwork for the academy, for scholarships and for various programs that are unique to Indigenous students. Most time is for love and sometimes it is at the expense of other students and programs within the entire school.*

Ten principals reported that the program had not faced any challenges in their schools.

Principals were asked to identify the one change that they would most improve the program in their school. There was little difference between principals with Academy and EES programs. Both saw increased or improved staffing, increased funding, improved management and a better connection between the school and the program as changes they would make. Five principals said there was nothing more that could be done to improve the program in their schools.

In order to get a sense of the achievements of the programs, principals were also asked to describe the 'best thing' about the program in their schools. An impact on students and on teachers was commonly cited:

*Students really enjoy Blueearth and look forward to it each week. They have developed a good relationship with the coach and are more focused on responsibility and participation rather than being competitive. The professional learning experience for teachers is invaluable.*

*The increase in cultural pride and involvement in mainstream education of Aboriginal Students. They are supported and encouraged to take on leadership roles, like standing up at assembly.*

*Seeing students who otherwise had various issues at school find a real sense of purpose and direction.*

*Seeing the Academy girls more involved in the school academic and social life has been a pleasing outcome. They are not only part of a caring, supportive group, but they are also becoming contributing members to the wider school community.*

## Staff perspectives

### Demographics

As part of the evaluation ACER sought the views of staff members involved in the program to identify the characteristics, impact and challenges of Sporting Chance funded programs. Principals of schools participating in these programs who consented to their school's participation in the evaluation were emailed a copy of a staff survey to be distributed to one or two key staff members with knowledge of the program and its impact on students in their school. Staff members included school-based coordinators, Indigenous Education Workers and their equivalents in each state/territory, classroom teachers, and other staff members involved in either Academies or EES programs. In some cases, the coordinator was the principal or deputy principal. Many of those coordinating at the school level appeared also to have teaching responsibilities. In a small number of schools most teachers of the Academy students completed surveys.

Of the 194 teachers who responded to the staff survey about the Sporting Chance Program, 160 were from schools with Academies and 34 were from schools participating in one of the EES programs.

Of the 184 staff who responded, 179 were from Government schools, 12 were from Catholic schools and three were from Independent schools. Table 6 shows the number of staff respondents in each of the six states and territories that have Sporting Chance Programs. \*Note that Queensland and Victoria do not have EES projects.

**Table 6: Number of staff responses by state and territory and program type**

Jurisdiction	Academy	EES	Total
NSW	13	9	22
NT	79	11	90
QLD	7	*0	7
SA	14	5	19
VIC	10	*0	10
WA	37	9	46
Total	160	34	194

Over half of the staff survey respondents (56 per cent) reported being involved in the program for more than two years, with 20 per cent having been involved for less than one year. The longest time a teacher had been involved in a program was nine years – which pre-dates the Sporting Chance funding – and the shortest time reported was three months.

When asked to identify the main objective of the Sporting Chance Program, staff respondents indicated the most common objectives as being to improve attendance, engagement and/or retention. For example, one staff member suggested that the Sporting Chance Program is intended 'to increase school participation and attendance, connect the students in with mentors to maximise their potential and overcome barriers to achieve better outcomes in school and in life'. Another respondent believed the purpose of the program is 'to keep non attending students at school longer,

to improve attitudes towards school and to get them through Year 12'. For another it was about students having 'the opportunities to develop their leadership skills, attitude, sportsmanship and teamwork.'

Attendance, retention and engagement were also reported to be important objectives by staff whose schools are involved in one of the engagement strategies. Additionally, staff in these schools reported that the Sporting Chance Program was aimed at involving and engaging students in a sporting activity. In these responses there was more of a focus on 'fitness and fun'. For example, common responses were 'to engage students in physical activity'; 'To promote living a healthy, happy, positive life'. One staff member reported that the program at their school was intended 'to get students interested in rugby league and show them its safety aspects in the hope that more students will sign up for the local competition'.

Staff members were asked to estimate the extent to which they thought the main objective of the Sporting Chance Program (as embodied in their own local program) has been, or is being, achieved. Table 8 provides a breakdown of staff responses to this question.

**Table 7: Breakdown of staff responses regarding the extent to which the main objective of the Sporting Chance Program is being achieved**

Not at all %	To a minor extent %	To a moderate extent %	To a major extent %	Unable to say %
3	9	34	48	6

The vast majority of staff thought the objectives of the program were being met to a 'moderate' or 'major' extent with only three per cent reporting that the objectives were not being met at all.

Teachers who reported that objectives are being met to a 'major' extent commented that:

- 'Students, through the program have gained newfound confidence to go and finish Year 12 and beyond.'
- 'It is a very effective way of catering for the needs of Indigenous students.'
- 'Students' enjoyment and skill level have improved to a level that instils confidence.'
- 'Programs have made a difference to student attendance, engagement and success.'

Staff who reported that the objectives were met to 'a minor extent' or 'not at all' suggested that 'students spend too much time out of class', 'the scope of the program is limited' and that 'there needs to be more communication between programs'. Some teachers believed that it has not improved retention as students who are involved in the program attend school anyway. Some staff were also not optimistic that the program has improved attendance in schools. Only a minority of respondents reported that the program had not met the objectives.

Most staff members who reported that the program is achieving its objectives to a 'moderate' or to a 'major' extent drew mainly on anecdotal experiences to support their views, while others referred to data such as NAPLAN or retention rates to support their statements. For example, one respondent noted that:

*Student attendance at school has shown marked improvement as has the confidence and self-esteem of the participants (and their families/carers). Several students have improved*

*their outcomes to the stage that they received scholarships/traineeships after their first year in the program.*

One staff member drew on attendance rates prior to the program being delivered and since commencement:

*When looking and comparing students reports, testing results (e.g. NAPLAN), and attendance rates from previous years when [the Academy program] wasn't available for these girls, there has been an outstanding increase. Some students, for example, have gone from having an attendance rate of 20-30% to 70-80% across all classes.*

Staff were asked if anything about the program had surprised them. This question is partly about expectations being fulfilled or not. Sixty per cent of respondents reported that the Sporting Chance Program did not surprise them while 39 per cent reported that the program did surprise them in some way. (One per cent of respondents did not answer this question.)

Of those who expressed surprise, most staff members were surprised in a positive way. Examples of unexpectedly positive outcomes were the increased self confidence that staff had observed in students, high levels of enjoyment by students and the extent to which other students wanted to be part of the program. One respondent noted 'how much the students enjoy Sports Academy and how much effort they are willing to put into their "normal" classes in order to be selected to attend'.

It was also surprising to some staff to see the level of dedication by colleagues involved in the program. One commented on:

*How much effort and work the staff put in to better the life and future prospects for the Academy members. [The coordinator] goes above and beyond what normal teachers do and gives up a lot of his own time to take these kids away to events and to place local events.*

On the other hand, this kind of involvement could also become a negative for one teacher, who reported that while it was good that teachers were involved in these programs, the school then has one less staff member available.

Table 8 shows a breakdown of staff responses to the question regarding the extent to which the Sporting Chance Program in their school is contributing to improved attendance, engagement, learning, retention and parental or community involvement.

**Table 8: Breakdown of staff responses in relation to extent of improvement**

Outcomes	Not at all (%)	To a minor extent (%)	To a moderate extent (%)	To a major extent (%)
Improved school attendance	6	17	40	37
Strengthened engagement	6	14	37	43
Improving learning	13	18	40	29
Increasing retention	12	19	31	38
Increased parental/ community involvement	15	26	34	25

Note: Row percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding or missing data.

Table 8 shows most teachers reporting that the program has contributed to these improved outcomes to 'a moderate' or 'major' extent, but with a significant minority of staff also reporting that the program has contributed to only a 'minor extent' or 'not at all' to these aspects.

If 'moderate' and 'major' extent responses are combined, it can be seen that the highest reported area of improvement (80 per cent) is in student engagement followed by improved school attendance (77 per cent). It could be expected that there would be a lower percentage of staff reporting 'improved retention' as some schools cater only for younger students and are not in a position to see students going on to upper levels of schooling. In many schools, too, the programs have only been operating for a short time and so it is not yet clear if students starting out in 2010 or 2011 will remain at school for the long term.

Over half (59 per cent) of those who responded to this question considered that the program had contributed to 'a moderate' or 'major' extent to 'increased parental or community involvement'. If responses reporting 'to a minor extent' are included, these figures suggest that 85 per cent of staff who responded to the survey considered that there has been at least some increase in parental and community involvement. This is important to note as elsewhere in the staff survey, where staff are asked to identify factors critical to the success of a Sporting Chance Program, support from community and parents is one of the main enablers identified.

As with the principals' survey, staff members were asked: 'If the [Sporting Chance Program] were to be set up in another school what two things would be essential for it to succeed?' The most commonly mentioned critical success factors for staff in both types of Sporting Chance Programs (Academies and EES) were the following:

- Quality of leadership and staffing
- Quality of communication
- Support from community, parents and teachers and school
- Ongoing funding and resourcing

The quality of staff and leadership was mentioned by at least half of those who responded to this question. Words like 'appropriate', 'enthusiastic' and 'dedicated' were commonly used. Similar descriptors were used to identify the kind of leadership needed with some respondents referring specifically to the level of commitment and support needing to be exhibited by leaders. In this context 'leaders' encompassed, directors/principals of schools, team leaders, external/internal mentors and role models, instructors and program coordinators.

Typical responses include:

- 'Having staff that understand the needs of the students and are able to adapt the education they provide to these students so it meets the level of the learner and therefore provides them with the opportunity for success'
- 'It is essential that the students can trust the person in charge of the program. If the students trust the teacher in charge they will accomplish great things, by doing it just because it's you'

- ‘The teacher needs to get excited about it and fully involved’
- ‘Staff who have energy, enthusiasm and flexibility’.
- ‘Mentors, staff who can develop young [students] into respectful, knowledgeable, professional, successful participants in society’
- ‘Support from school administration’
- ‘A strong team leader who is committed to developing a relationship with the school and wider community to improve student outcomes’.

Another factor considered by staff to be critical to the success of the program is the quality of communication associated with the program. One respondent commented that:

*Effective communication is the key to running the program successfully, as well as ensuring that the job is shared between a group of school staff. This has been one of the reasons I believe the program has been so successful at this school.*

Communication incorporates a range of connections and information-generation methods as suggested by these responses:

- ‘Program providers providing plenty of notice prior to coming out to a school’
- ‘Regular visits’
- Consistent contact – ‘more regular updates, maybe emails, video conference’
- ‘Regular presence and attendance of Academy staff in school environment’
- ‘Clear communication between the Academy/program and the school around objectives and expectation of the students involved’
- ‘Consistency with the delivery of the program eg the same day every week’
- ‘Good communication between the [program] facilitator and teacher’.

Those respondents who identified increased community involvement as a critical success factor referred to ‘more staff and parents being involved’; ‘support from community, parents, teachers and school’; ‘high parental involvement’; ‘acceptance from the community’; and ‘consultation and agreed protocols with the local Aboriginal community’. One respondent called for ‘community support – the community need to get behind it’. Another suggested that there should be ‘link persons in the Aboriginal communities whom the staff can contact and use as go-betweens with the community and the school’. Others thought the key was ‘relationships – building relationships with the students, the school, the families and the community’.

It was not only community and parental support that was considered important in the success of these programs. A number of staff referred to ‘whole school’ support or ‘commitment from the school’. One suggested that school staff need ‘to embrace the program’. A specific example was provided by one respondent who suggested that his/her school needs to understand what role their particular program plays in students’ lives and then support the way the program operates.

Staff also identified ongoing funding and resourcing as an important factor in the success of a program, including the provision of appropriate physical spaces for students and equipment. The importance of this factor was reflected in the responses to a survey question about suggested improvements.

For staff in both types of Sporting Chance Programs, the main suggestions for improvement were the following:

- Additional staff and resources
- More or continued funding
- Better allocation of time, organisation and public relations
- Support from the community.

Those respondents who suggested 'additional staff and resources' often reported that there needs to be more staff support and more staff involvement for Sporting Chance to improve. It was suggested that more time could be allocated for the program, and more resources (such as a school bus and literacy resources) could be committed. Reference to 'highly skilled' and 'experienced' staff, 'a starter session' that would give a theoretical context to staff, and appropriately trained and culturally aware staff suggest that professional learning is also important.

Several suggestions were made in relation to starting the Academy program earlier (that is, in primary schools) and to providing more support for students in their post-school transition.

Respondents were asked to nominate 'the best thing' about the Sporting Chance Program from their perspective. The 'best things' listed by staff in schools with an Academy were providing opportunities for students; improving student engagement with school, especially with the disengaged students; and improving school attendance. One staff member stated that the best thing was the 'ability of girls improving in academic and resilience areas and a commitment by some senior girls to complete education and become role models for younger students'. Students' level of enjoyment and growth in self confidence were also considered highlights of the program. Improved literacy and numeracy results and the leadership shown by older students were also reported as among the best things to come out of the program.

Other highlights identified by Academy program school staff include:

- support for students who otherwise would not have attended school
- teaching values/responsibility and team work
- students who have left school completing Year 12 and moving into the workplace
- the engagement in and connection of Aboriginal students to the programs.
- Aboriginal students achieving their goals and moving into further employment/training.  
Increased numbers of Aboriginal students completing senior years schooling.

The 'best things' listed by staff in schools involved in one of the EES projects were providing opportunities for students; improving student engagement with school; health promotion; and improving school attendance.

Other aspects highlighted include:

- 'Kids getting outside and having fun'
- 'Students gaining qualifications and health promotion'
- 'Watching students being so engaged in learning because they are learning something they are truly passionate about'
- 'Giving children opportunities'

- ‘Kids having the opportunity to have some fun at school’
- ‘The kids’ excitement’
- ‘The students enjoy the visit and meeting different people. It is usually a positive experience for the kids.’

Overall, staff involved in the Sporting Chance Programs report that the programs have had a positive impact on their students. Staff responses indicate that for such positive outcomes to be maintained, continued support in the form of ongoing funding and community support is needed, as well as a highly capable and dedicated staff, strong and committed leadership and better communication, not only between schools and program providers, but within schools themselves. Staff survey responses also suggest that teachers involved in these programs would benefit from support in the form of professional learning.

While fewer schools reported on the EES projects than on the Academies in relation to the impact of student engagement, some tentative observations can be made. Figure 3 below shows that staff and principals shared common views, on average, about the impact of the Sporting Chance Program in their school on each of the following:

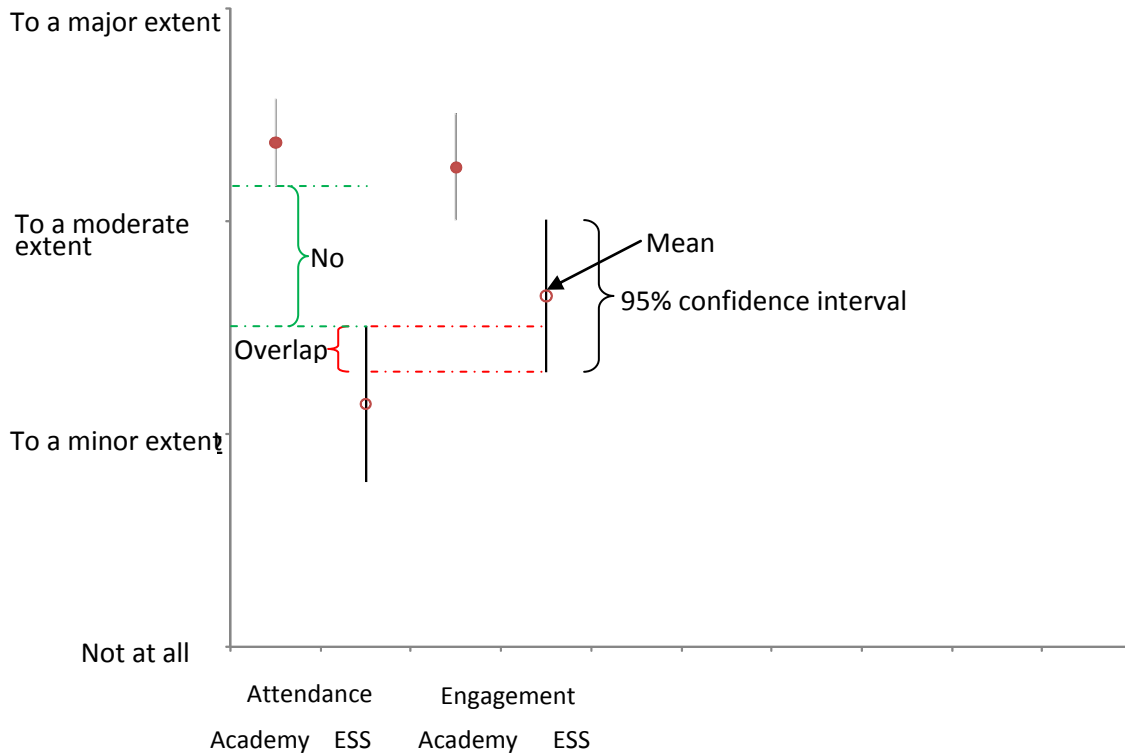
- Attendance
- Student engagement
- Learning achievement
- Student retention
- Parental and community involvement.

Figure 4 is an error bar chart. Error bar charts are designed to show if (and where) there is a statistically significant difference between two or more average scores or means. Statistical significance is a pointer to establishing if any observed differences are real or whether the observed differences have arisen by chance. A statistically significant difference provides a basis for claiming that the differences are real.

To assist reading Figure 4, Figure 3 was prepared. Across the horizontal axis at the bottom of Figure 3 there are four categories. These are two groups respondents from Academy and from EES projects, for each of two variables (‘attendance’ and ‘engagement’). The average rating given by each group is marked by the circle placed in the middle of the vertical lines. The confidence intervals around the mean are represented by these lines. These are set using the convention value of 95 per cent. If the confidence limits as depicted by the vertical lines overlap, then there is no statistically significant difference between the averages. We cannot be confident that the differences are real.

In Figure 3, for example even though the average score for attendance for EES projects has a lower mean score than the average engagement score for EES projects, the confidence limits overlap – this is shown by the red lines – and hence we cannot be confident that the differences are real. This difference may have arisen by chance. In contrast, there is no overlap in the lines marking the confidence intervals between Academy and EES projects for the attendance variable. This is marked by the green lines on the graph. The conclusion drawn for this is that it is probably true ( $P > 0.05$ ) that the observed difference between these two groups is real.

**Figure 3: An error bar chart with mean scores showing error bars based on 95% confidence intervals**

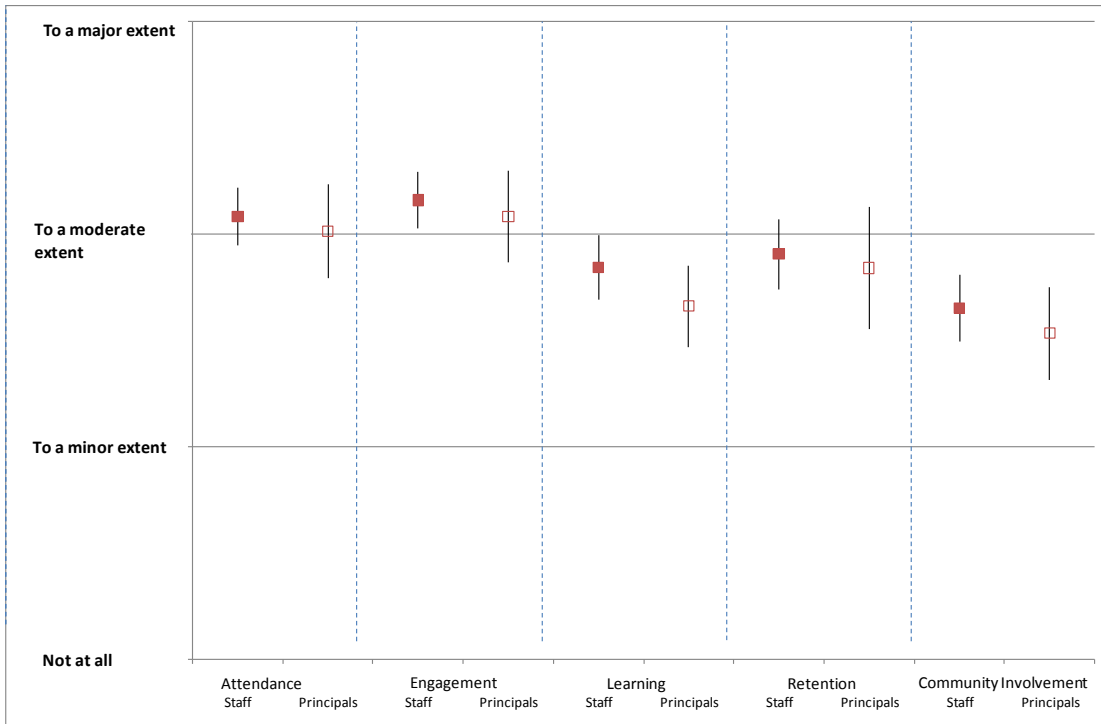


In Figure 4, there are no statistically significant differences between staff and principals for each outcome. Most projects were seen to have contributed, on average, to a moderate extent to these intended outcomes. The impact on attendance and engagement appears, on average, to have been greater than on community involvement. (The differences are statistically significant.<sup>19</sup>)

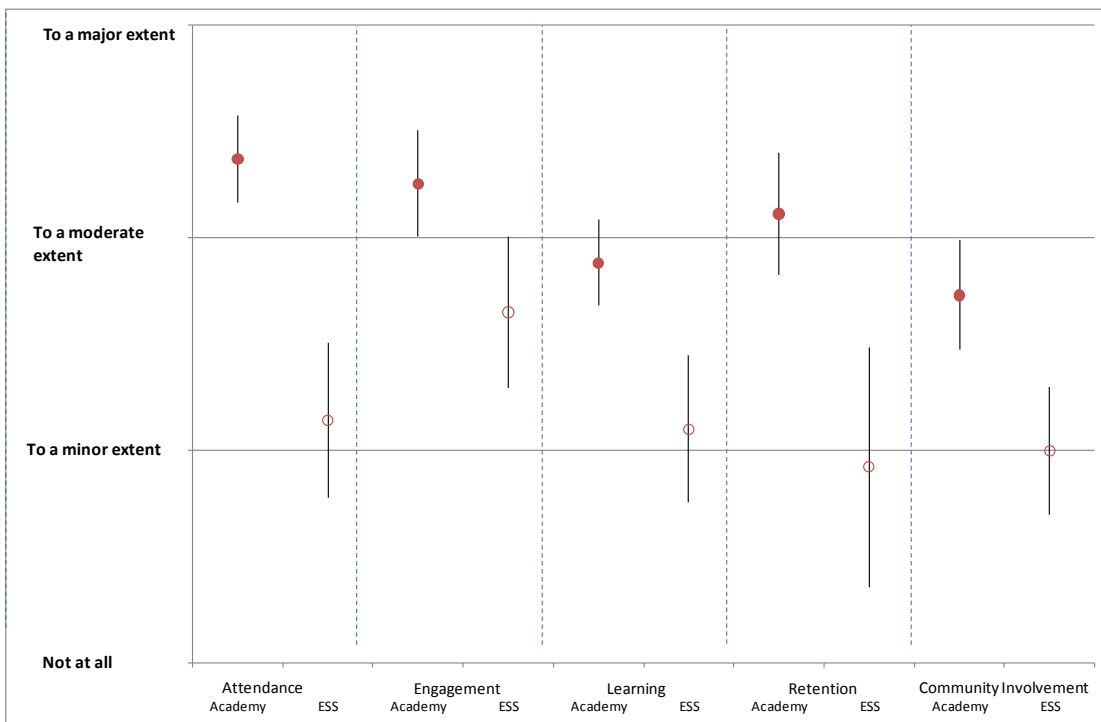
Academy projects were seen by principals and by staff to have had a stronger impact, on average, than the EES projects. Figure 4 shows the average rating given by the principals. All differences between each pair of comparisons are statistically significant except for principals' responses regarding student engagement. However, even here, the difference is very close to statistical significance.

Figure 5 shows the average rating given by the staff. All differences between each pair of comparisons are statistically significant, again showing that Academy projects were reported to have had a stronger impact than EES projects.

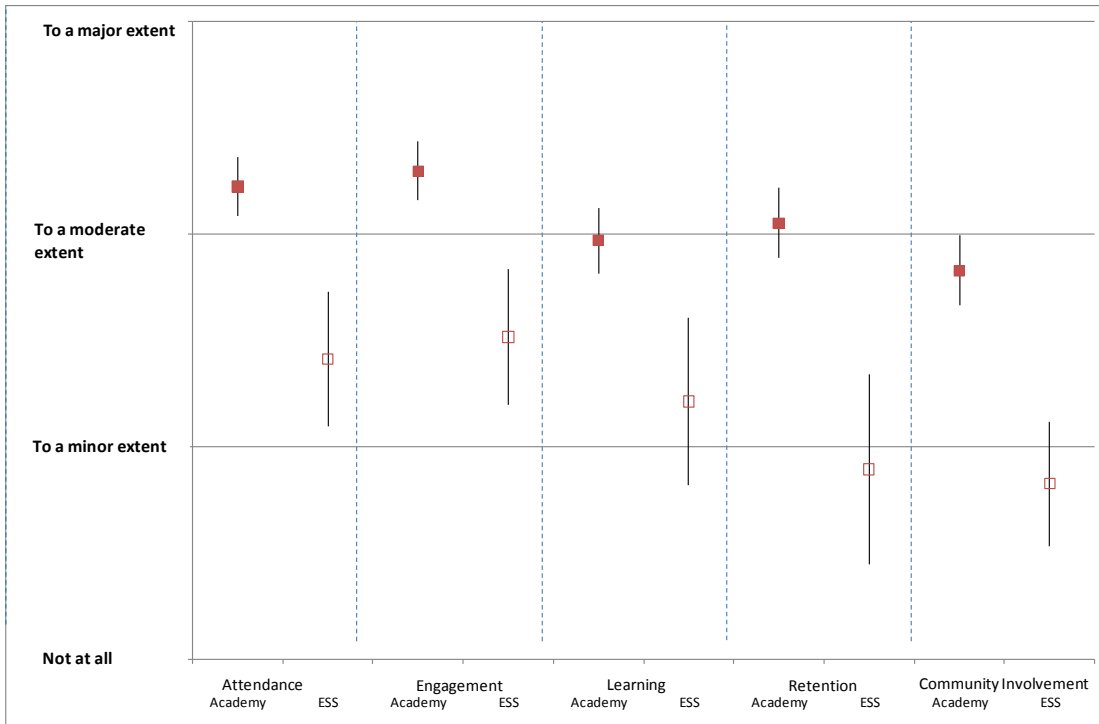
<sup>19</sup> The test of statistical significance takes account of the size of the sample. The small number of EES programs is therefore not a major issue when looking at these figures.



**Figure 4: The extent to which the Sporting Chance Project has contributed to a range of outcomes contrasting staff and principals' views (mean score showing error bars based on 95% confidence intervals)**



**Figure 5: The extent to which the program has contributed to a range of outcomes contrasting principals' views from Academy and EES projects (mean score showing error bars based on 95% confidence intervals)**



**Figure 5: The extent to which the program has contributed to a range of outcomes contrasting staff views from Academy and EES projects (mean score showing error bars based on 95% confidence intervals)**

It could be expected that the primary schools with an EES project would report a lower level of impact across all outcomes given the infrequent nature of delivery in comparison with the Academies.

## Student perspectives

### Demographics

Survey data was collected from 1029 students across a wide range of Sporting Chance funded programs. For the purposes of the evaluation, 1012 surveys have been included in the analysis. The remaining surveys were administered to students in Academies and EES programs that were outside Sporting Chance funding.

Of the 1012 students who completed a survey as a part of the evaluation, 493 were boys (48.7%) and 519 were girls (51.3%).

Table 9 shows the distribution of students participating in the Sporting Chance evaluation by state and territory.

**Table 9: Distribution of students by state and territory**

Sporting Chance Program	Total	Per cent
New South Wales	156	15.4
Victoria	88	8.7
Queensland	121	12.0
South Australia	76	7.5
Western Australia	335	33.1
Northern Territory	236	23.3
Total respondents	1012	100.0

Table 10 shows the distribution of students participating in the evaluation by program type and gender. Over 85 per cent of participating students were involved in a program connected to an Academy.

**Table 10: Distribution of students by program type and gender**

Sporting Chance Program	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Education Engagement Strategies	50	10.1	56	10.8	106	10.5
Sporting Academies	419	85.0	458	88.2	877	86.7
Sporting Academies and Education Engagement Strategies	24	4.9	5	1.0	29	2.9
Total respondents	493	100.0	519	100.0	1012	100.0

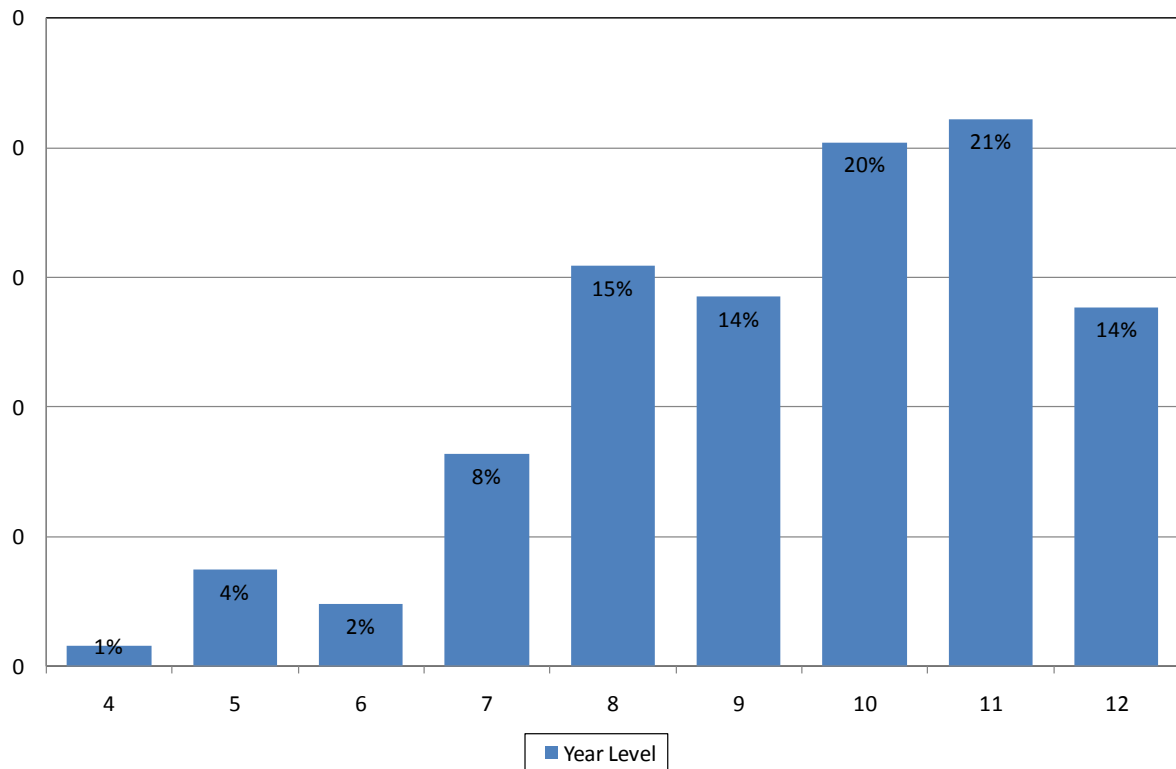
Table 11 shows the distribution of students by program provider. Surveys were received from students who were involved in individual programs offered by 20 providers. The vast majority of survey responses came from students in the Clontarf Foundation (26.1%) followed by Role Models and Leaders Australia (16.1%).

**Table 11: Distribution of students by program provider**

Sporting Chance Provider	Total	Per cent
Australian Football League	12	1.2
Bluearth Institute	18	1.8
Catholic Education Office - Townsville	48	4.7
Clontarf Foundation	264	26.1
Country Rugby League	59	5.8
DECS - SA	7	.7
DEECD - Wannik	35	3.5
Eagle Edge Solutions	2	.2
Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation	26	2.6
Katherine High School	20	2.0
Leroy Loggins Foundation	10	1.0
Madalah	24	2.4
NASCA - NT Remote	4	.4
National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy	35	3.5
NSW DET	34	3.4
Role Models and Leaders Australia	163	16.1
Rostrevor College	30	3.0
SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy	30	3.0
Shalom Christian College	61	6.0
Swan Districts Football Club	130	12.8
Total providers	1012	100.0

Distribution of the sample by broad year level categories shows that 9.4 per cent of the sample comprised students in primary school (Years 4 to 6/7), 55.5 per cent of students were in lower to middle secondary school (Years 7/8 to 10) and 35.1 per cent of students were in upper secondary school (Years 11-12). A small percentage (2.4%) of students did not indicate their year level on their survey form.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of students by year level at school. Students in Year 10 and 11 comprised the largest proportion of participants (41.3 per cent).



**Figure 5: Distribution of sample by Year level at school**

**General findings**

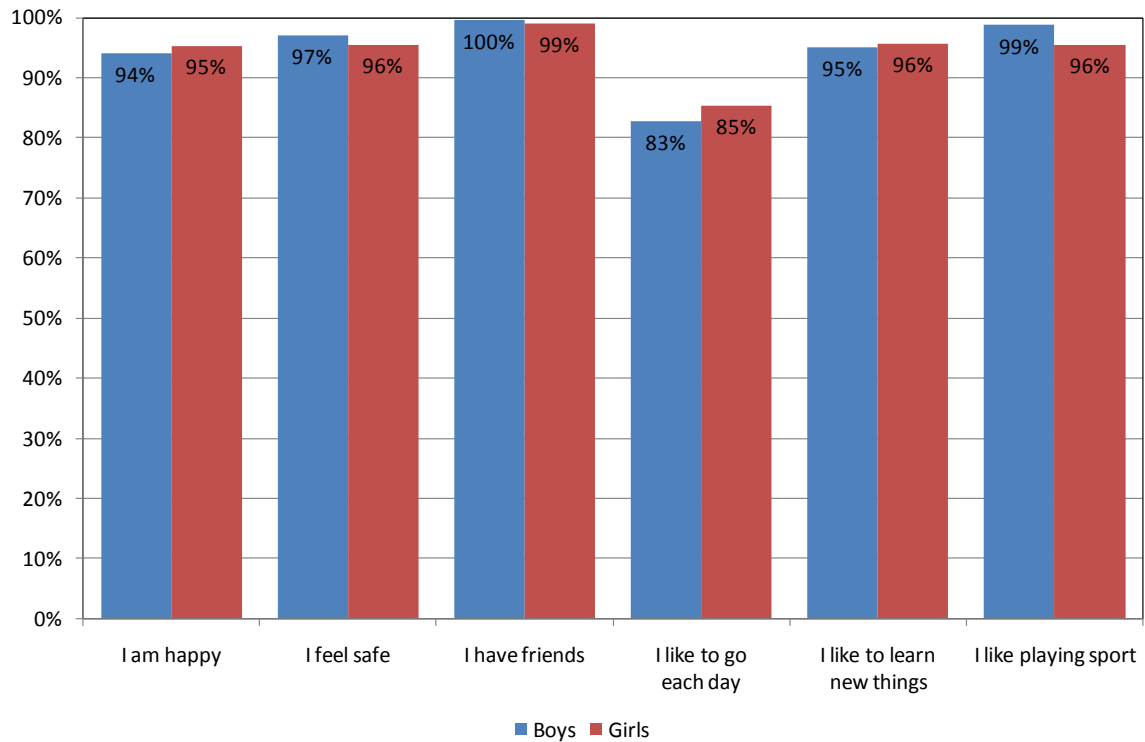
Students were asked to respond to a series of six statements about their attitude to school. These statements were common to all student surveys regardless of year level. The purpose of this question was to identify the extent to which students were engaging with schooling.

School is a place where:

- I am happy
- I feel safe
- I have friends
- I like to go each day
- I like learning new things
- I like playing sport.

Items were measured on a two-point dichotomous scale ‘Yes’ or ‘No’.

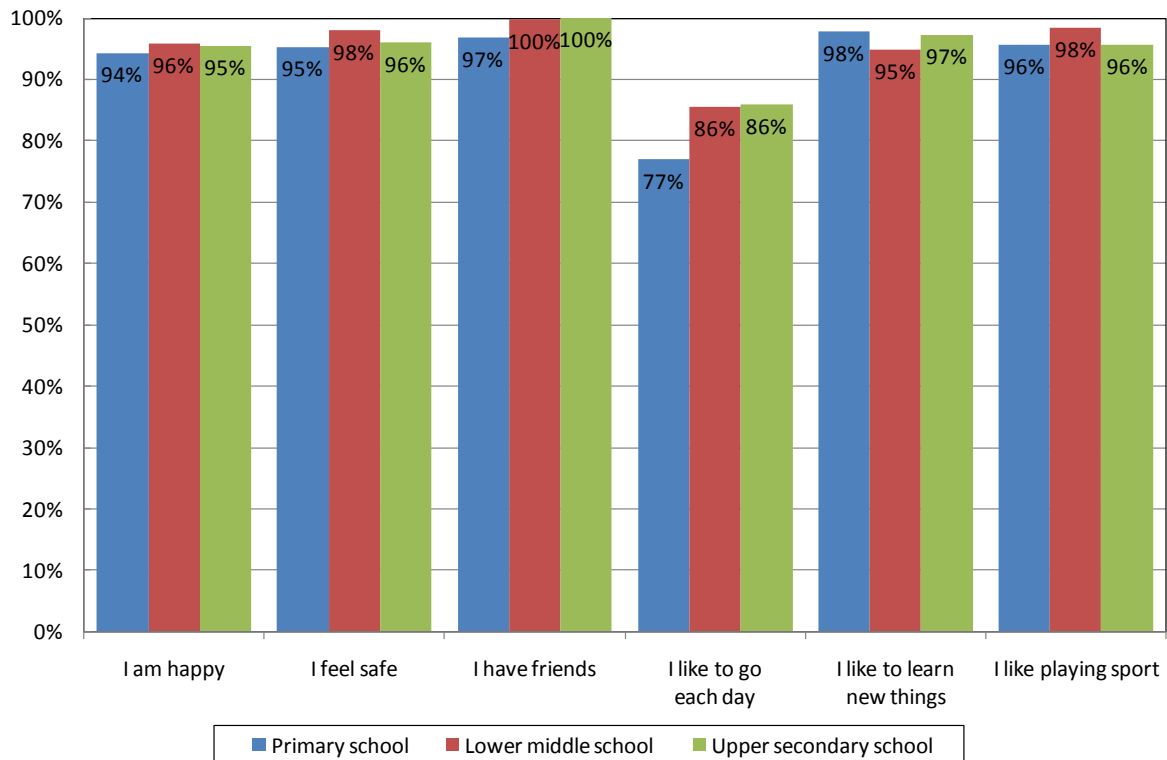
Figure 6 shows the proportion of students by gender, irrespective of program type and year level, who responded ‘Yes’ to each statement about their attitude to school. Overall, with the exception of one item, more than 90 per cent of students reported a positive attitude toward school.



**Figure 6: Student attitude to school by gender**

Both boys and girls reported a slightly lower positive response to the item ‘school is a place where I like to go each day’ (boys: 82.8%; girls: 88.5%) than to the other five items. While not statistically significant, this was the biggest observed difference between boys and girls in terms of responses to the six items.

Figure 7 shows the proportion of students by broad school year level grouping who responded ‘Yes’ to each statement about their attitude to school. Overall, students at the primary school level appeared to report a slightly less positive attitude toward school than students in secondary school.

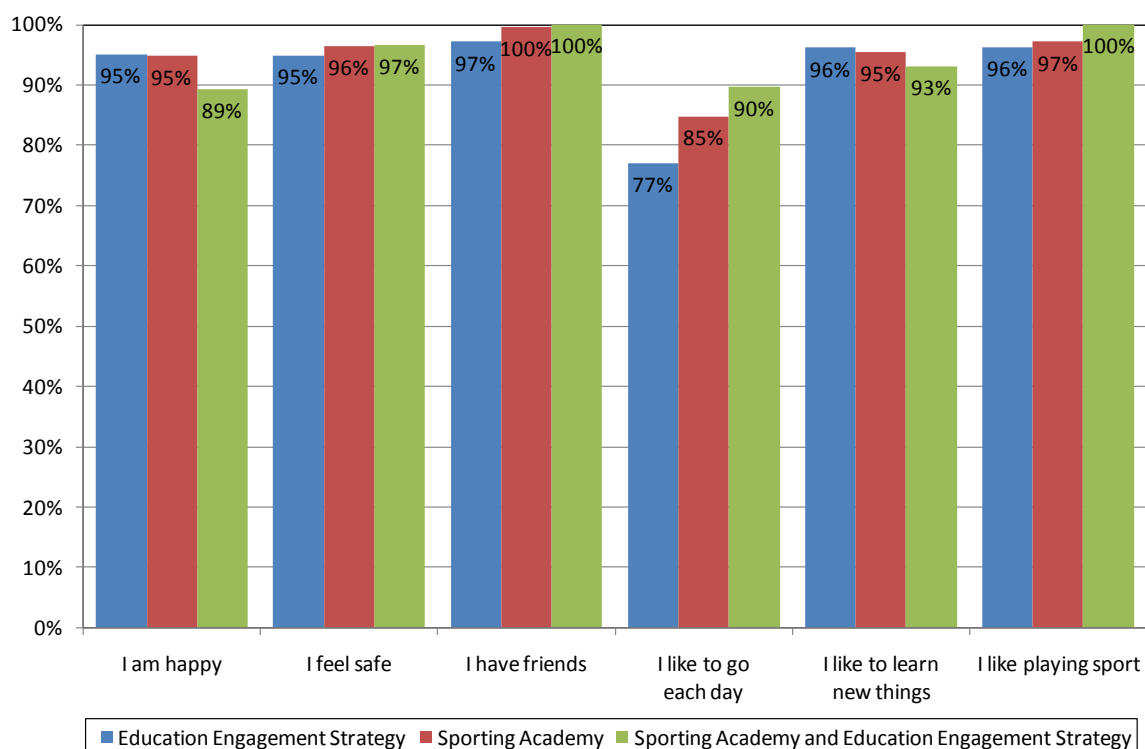


**Figure 7: Student attitude to school by school level**

As with Figure 6, Figure 7 shows that students reported the least positive attitude toward the statement ‘school is a place where I like to go each day’. The lowest proportion of students reporting school as being a place they like to go each day were at the primary school level (77.0 per cent).

Figure 7 shows the proportion of students and their attitude to school by the type of Sporting Chance Program they are involved in.

Overall, irrespective of Sporting Chance Program type, students reported a very positive attitude to school on each of the six attitude-to-school statements (range 77 to 100%). Across the six statements, irrespective of Sporting Chance Program type, students reported the lowest level of attitude to school for the item ‘school is a place I like to go each day’.



**Figure 8: Student attitude to school by Sporting Chance Program**

Figure 8 shows students participating in EES programs were the least positive with respect to the statement ‘school is a place I like to go each day’. This finding is a recurring theme and not surprising given that the engagement strategies are delivered less frequently, and sometimes with a considerable gap between events, and that students are unlikely to think much about the activities or program until the next visit.

Overall, students who were involved in the Academies reported slightly higher levels of being happy at school and feeling safe at school in contrast to the students involved in the EES or combined Academies and EES.

Table 12 shows the distribution of student responses to the six attitudes-to-school statements by Sporting Chance Program type and gender. Overall, all girls involved in a combined Academy and EES project reported a positive attitude toward school. Girls attending an Academy also reported a higher positive attitude to school than their male counterparts.

Irrespective of program type, a higher proportion of girls reported school as being a place where they like to go each day. The highest proportion was among girls involved in the combined EES and Academy projects (100 per cent). Similarly, irrespective of program type, 100 per cent of girls reported that school was a place where they liked to learn new things.

**Table 12: Distribution of attitude to school statements by Sporting Chance Program type and gender**

School is a place where...	EES		SA		SAEES	
	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %	Boys %	Girls %
I am happy	91.7	98.1	94.7	97.0	87.0	100.0
I feel safe	95.7	94.2	97.3	97.6	95.8	100.0
I have friends	100.0	94.6	99.5	100.0	100.0	100.0
I like to go each day	71.7	81.5	83.8	89.3	87.5	100.0
I like to learn new things	93.9	98.2	95.4	97.3	91.7	100.0
I like playing sport	91.8	100.0	99.5	94.3	100.0	100.0

Overall, the data do not suggest that one type of program is having a more positive impact on students' engagement with school than another. The results for the students involved in the combined SAEES programs need to be interpreted with some degree of caution as the number of students is very small.

A good predictor of engagement with school is whether or not a student feels happy at school and likes to go to school each day. Taking into account both the EES projects and the Academies, with the exception of the statement 'school is a place where I like playing sport', girls showed a slightly higher positive attitude to school than boys: around 89 per cent of girls compared with nearly 72 per cent of boys reported that school is a place where they like to go each day.

#### Primary school

Students in primary school (Years 4 to 7/8) who have participated in an EES program were asked to respond to the following question: 'Sometimes my school has people visit. They might help with [the particular activities that the provider focuses on such as basketball, dance, games] or other sporting things. What do you like best when the visitors come?'

Students were asked to write their response. Written responses were categorised to identify recurring themes in order to conduct further analysis of the responses against other variables.

Overall, students in schools participating in an EES program reported that playing sport was the aspect that they liked best when a visitor came to their school (boys: 47.4%; girls: 38.3%). The second most commonly recurring theme identified by students was learning new sporting skills and sporting knowledge (boys: 39.5%; girls: 38.3%).

These results suggest that boys find aspects of the EES projects which involve playing sport and being physically active more engaging than girls. However, 39.5 per cent of boys and 38.3 per cent of girls reported learning new sporting skills and knowledge as the best part of the EES projects.

In contrast, a slightly higher proportion of girls reported learning new things that will help them with their school education as being what they liked best (boys: 10.5%; girls: 17.0%).

Students were also asked to draw a picture of the activity they most like doing. The purpose of this question was to give students another way of providing their viewpoints. As with the open-ended question, the content of the students' drawings were categorised on the basis of key themes. This process also allowed the content of drawings to be linked back to the students' survey data. Overall, three broad themes emerged from the drawings:

- 'People playing sports', including using sporting equipment
- 'Social aspects', including talking with friends in groups in the playground, and
- 'School grounds' including buildings, playgrounds and sporting fields (basketball courts, ovals with no people included).

The drawings showed that boys had a slightly higher tendency to identify with sporting activities and equipment than girls. Eighty-six per cent of boys in contrast to 79 per cent of girls included in their drawings elements of playing sport, sporting equipment and playing fields. In comparison, a slightly higher proportion of girls depicted in their drawings elements reflecting social aspects of school life. Thirteen per cent of girls and ten per cent of boys depicted images of children sitting under trees with friends talking in groups, standing in groups talking, or sitting in class talking in small groups.

A similar proportion of boys and girls depicted images of school grounds and buildings including sporting fields (boys: five per cent; girls; eight per cent). A distinction was made between sporting fields that were solitary without any children using them, as opposed to fields on which children were playing. An image of children playing on a basketball court, for example, was coded as playing sport.

Overall, the results suggest that primary school girls involved in the EES projects report a higher incidence than boys of school being a place where they are happy, they like to go each day, they like to learn new things, and they like playing sport. In contrast, a slightly higher proportion of boys in the EES projects report school as a place where they feel safe, and have friends compared to girls.

However, examination of the responses given by students when asked to identify what they like best when the visitors come to school, and examination of the content of students' drawings, suggests that playing sport or sport-related elements (equipment) have a more significant impact on boys than girls. In contrast, aspects of social dimensions such as talking in groups with friends, being with friends, and forming strong friendships are integral aspects of the school experience for girls.

In general, at the primary school level, students focused more on the aspects associated with playing sport and developing skills and rules related to a specific sport than on other aspects of the programs. They also highlighted the fun side of playing and being involved in sport and the pleasure gained from playing team games. Students also emphasised the importance of giving something a go and trying their best. In this respect students noted the importance of accepting each other and not being judgemental.

#### Lower to Middle Secondary School

Students in the lower to middle years of secondary school (Years 7/8 to 10) were asked to respond to a series of four statements that could reflect a possible change in their attitude to school as a result of participation in a Academy.

The statements were as follows:

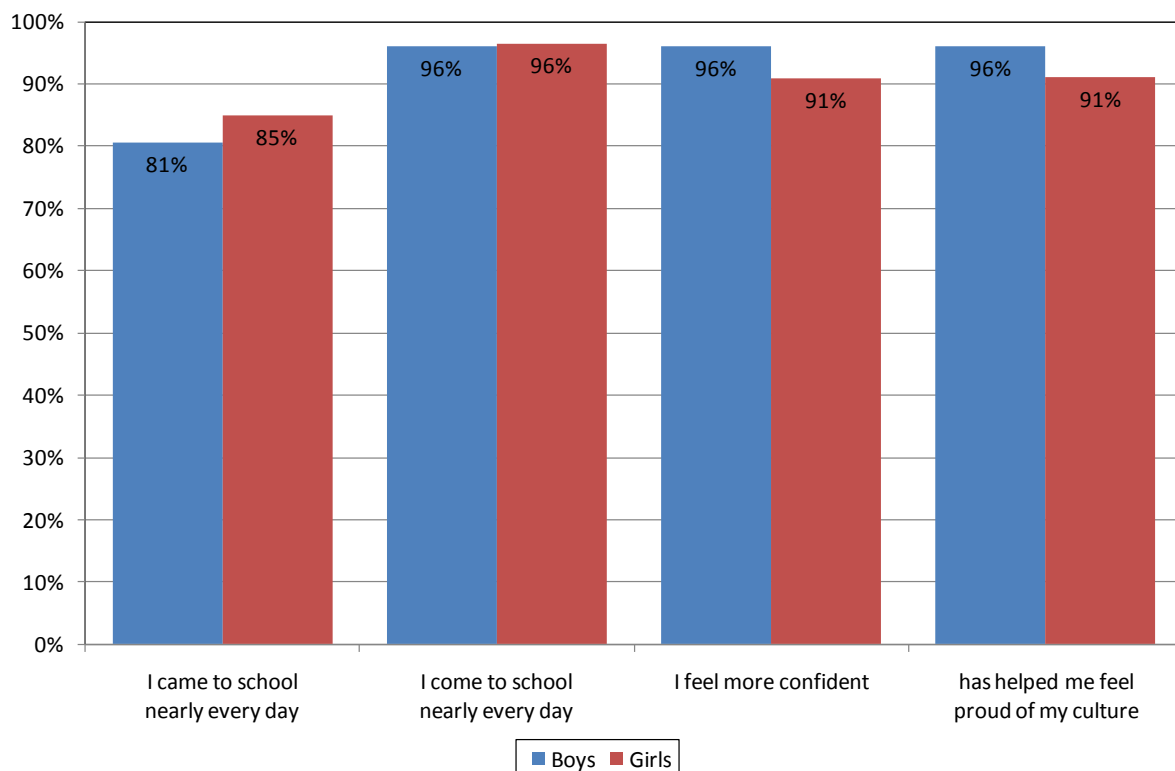
My school is a place where

- Before I joined the [XXX] academy, I came to school every day.
- Since being in the [XXX] academy, I come to school every day.
- Since being in the [XXX] academy, I feel more confident.
- The [XXX] academy has helped me feel proud of my culture.

Items were measured on a two-point scale 'Yes' or 'No'.

Figure 9 shows the proportion of students by gender who responded 'Yes' to each statement about their attitude to school. Overall, with the exception of one item, more than 90 per cent of students reported a positive attitude toward school for each item.

Figure 9 shows 85.0 per cent of girls reported that before they joined their respective Sporting Chance Program, they came to school nearly every day, This figure had increased to 96.5 per cent since starting in their respective programs (a self-reported increase overall of 11.5 per cent). In comparison, boys self-reported a 15.4 per cent increase in coming to school nearly every day since joining an Academy.



**Figure 9: Student reporting of improvement in school attitude by gender**

Overall, on all items with the exception of 'I came to school nearly every day', boys and girls report very similar responses to each statement. In general, both boys and girls report a very positive attitude to the impact their respective program has had on their attitude to school, their self-confidence, and how they feel about their culture.

Students in the lower to middle secondary school (Years 7/8 to 10) who were participating in a Sporting Chance Program were asked to respond to the following statement: 'Please share with us one really important thing you have learned from being in the program'.

Students were asked to write their response. Written responses were then categorised to identify recurring themes in order to conduct further analysis of the responses against other variables.

The most commonly occurring 'really important thing' students reported as having learned from participation in an Academy was that of developing sporting skills (boys: 15.5%; girls: 24.1%). Another recurring theme identified by students was learning to respect others and themselves, and acceptance of others (boys: 20.6%; girls: 8.8%). In addition, working as a team and learning the benefits of team work was cited as an important thing students had learned (boys: 15.5%; girls: 17.9%) and the development of self-confidence (boys: 4.6%; girls: 16.4%). Attending school regularly and the benefits to be gained from going to school were also important to students (boys: 8.4%; girls: 6.9%). Other things cited by students as having been important to have learned included leadership skills, social skills, and coming to understand the importance of an education in attaining future goals, such as getting a job. Students also cited the importance of culture and identity. Students acknowledged the importance of learning about setting goals and the opportunities that the Sporting Chance Program had opened up to them. Some students reported behavioural aspects they had learned, including discipline and responsibility, as being important.

These results suggest that, for boys, important elements they have gained from the program are focused on respecting others, respecting themselves and accepting others; working as a team; the development of social skills; the ability to set goals; and recognising opportunities and the importance of attending school. In comparison, important elements highlighted by girls as having been learned from the program included developing sporting skills, working as a team, developing self-confidence and respecting others, themselves and accepting others. In addition, the importance of culture and identity, attending school, and developing social skills were all identified as being important for girls.

Students were also asked 'What is the best thing about being in the <<ProgramName>> program?' Written responses were categorised according to recurring themes. The most commonly occurring theme students reported as being the 'best thing' about being in their program was developing sporting skills and allied skills (boys: 25.6%; girls: 29.4%). Meeting new people, and the associated social skills to interact with unfamiliar people, were also cited (boys: 16.6%; girls: 17.6%). Opportunities to go on excursions, trips, camps, and travel (within the community, state or territory and interstate) were also reported to be one of the best aspects of the program (boys: 22.0%; girls: 16.1%).

Other aspects of the program highlighted by boys in response to this question included learning new things that they would otherwise not have had an opportunity to experience (boys: 9.4%; girls: 8.6%), and being part of a team (boys: 7.6%; girls: 2.7%). In comparison, girls identified helping others (boys: 2.7%; girls: 7.8%), and teachers and staff looking after students' wellbeing (boys: 3.1%; girls: 6.3%) as being highlights of the program.

Taking into consideration both the important learning and best aspects of the programs as highlighted by students, it appears that for boys and girls there are different facets of the program

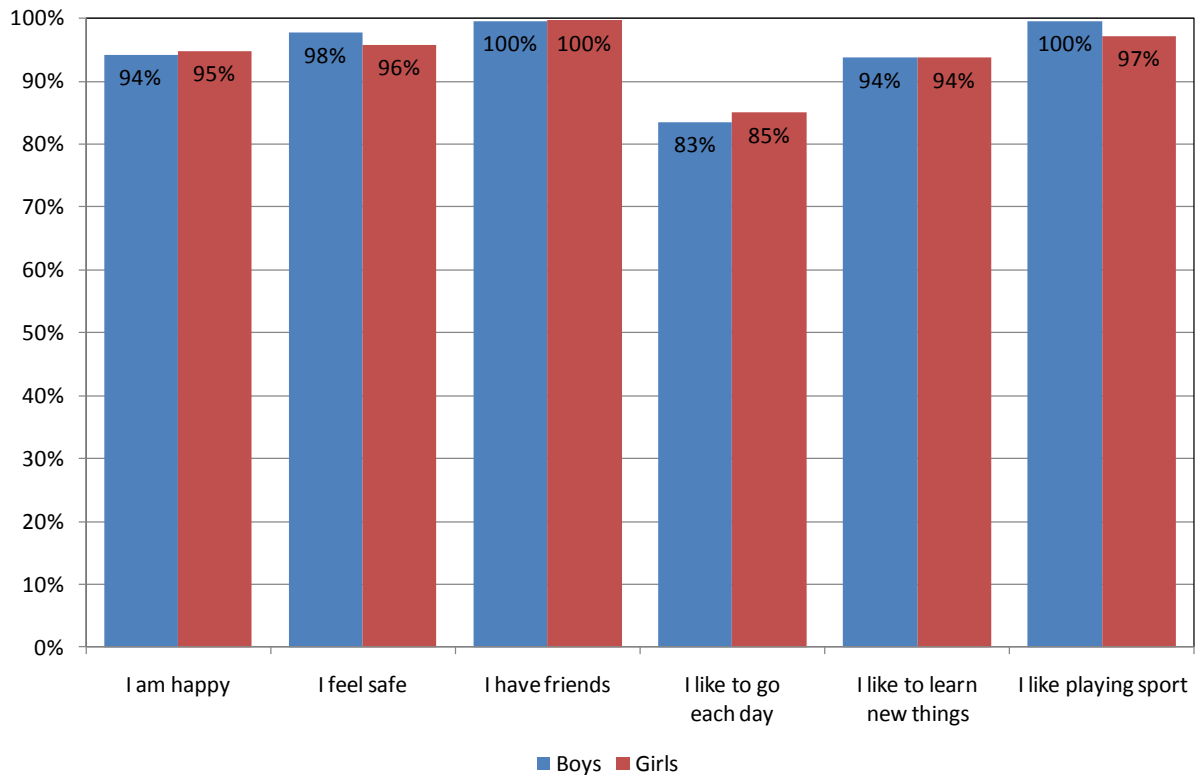
that students identify as being important. For both boys and girls, developing sporting skills is clearly an important part of the program but it appears that the Academies are also providing students with other important skills necessary for life beyond school. In the case of boys, these skills include the capacity for leadership and being a role model, being part of a team, and learning new life skills that could potentially be taken back into their communities.

In contrast, girls have identified meeting new people and making friends as significant and important aspects of the program. The development of lasting and close friendships is considered an important benefit of the Academy program for girls. Similarly, girls place considerable importance on the qualities they have learned in relation to helping others and being supportive of each other and of younger students. In addition, girls recognise the importance of people (staff, teachers) and other significant people involved in their program in looking after their wellbeing, supporting them and being there to provide a safe, caring and supportive environment that is non-judgemental.

Overall, students in the lower to middle years of secondary school report that their school attendance has increased since being involved in the Sporting Chance Program. They also report increased levels of self-confidence as a result of being in the program, such as being able to react differently in social situations. Students report their feelings of achievement at being able to do things that previously they could not have done, because of a lack of confidence, and at their ability to react differently in social situations.

Students report feelings of pride in their culture and who they are as a result of being in a program with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Importantly, students have also highlighted the significance of being in a boys' only or girls' only class at school. They have also identified that irrespective of race or colour everyone is equal and that if they work hard they can achieve their goals.

Student survey responses also show that, through the Sporting Chance Program, students have become engaged with school. Figure 10 shows students attitude towards and subsequent engagement with school by gender.

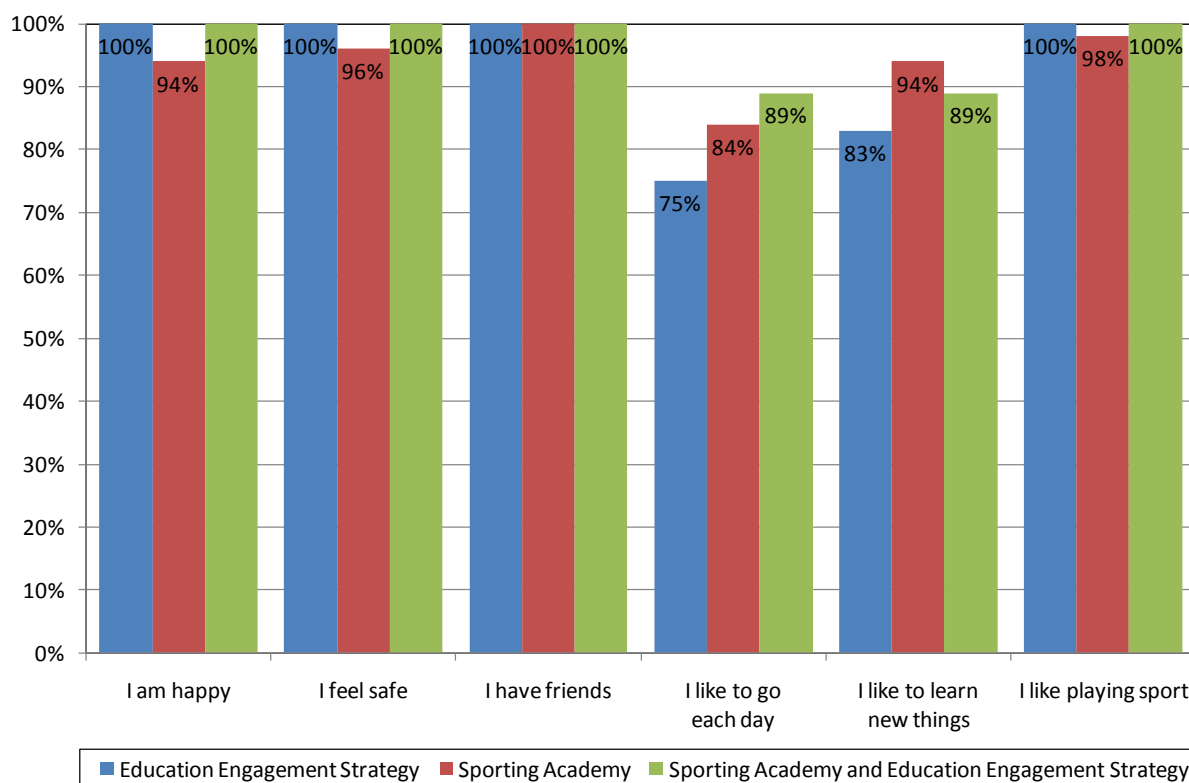


**Figure 10: Student attitude to school by school level, lower to middle secondary**

Figure 10 shows that across the six attitude-to-school statements, all students in lower to middle secondary school report more than 90 per cent on each item with one exception. Around 83 per cent of boys and 85 per cent of girls report that school is a place they like to go each day.

Figure 11 shows the proportion of students in lower to middle secondary school and their attitude to school by the type of Sporting Chance Program they are involved in.

Overall, irrespective of Sporting Chance Program type, students report a very positive attitude to school on each of the six attitude-to-school statements (range 75 to 100%). Across the six statements, irrespective of Sporting Chance Program type, students reported the lowest level of attitude to school for the items 'school is a place I like to go each day' and 'I like to learn new things'.



**Figure 11: Student attitude to school by Sporting Chance Program**

Figure 11 shows students participating in EES projects were the least positive with respect to the statement ‘school is a place I like to go each day’ and ‘I like to learn new things’.

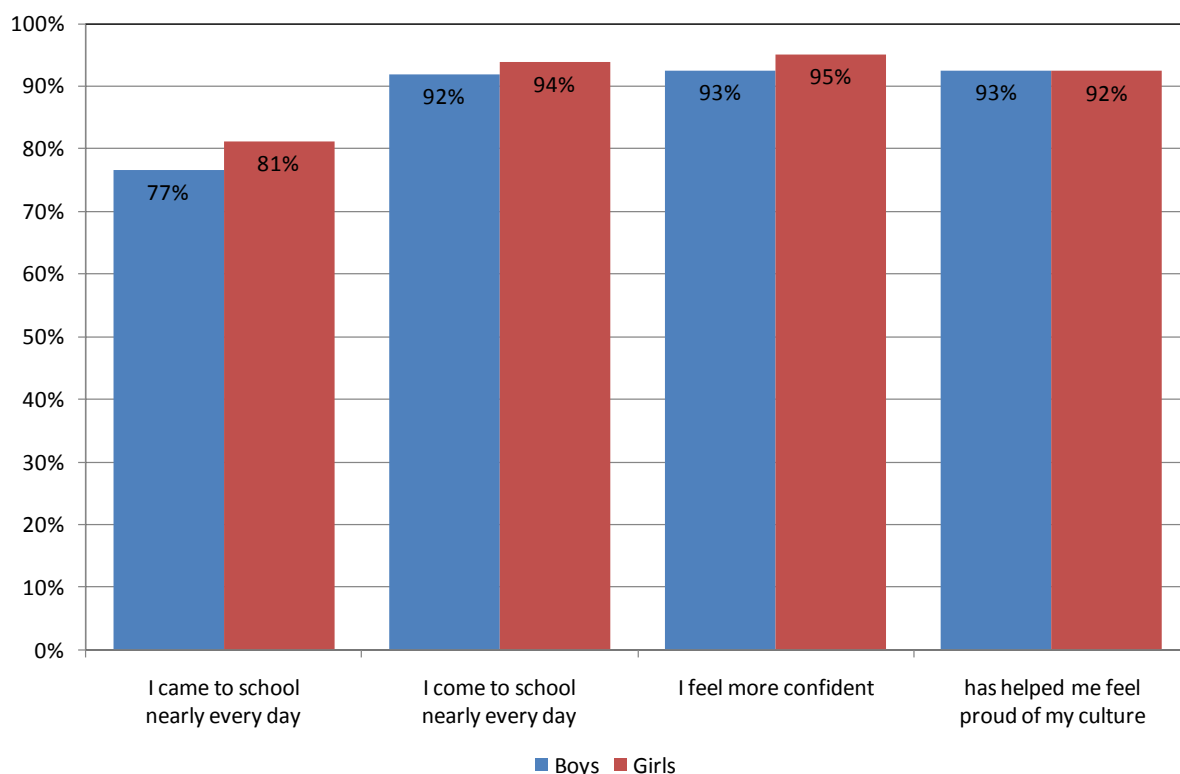
Overall, students who were involved in combined EES and Academy projects reported the highest level of positive attitude to school. Students reported 100 per cent on four out of the six items. However Figure 7 should be interpreted with a degree of caution given the small sample sizes in the EES program (n=12) and SAEES program (=18).

### Years 11-12

Students in Years 11-12 were asked to respond to the same set of four statements reflecting a possible change in their attitude to school from students in lower to middle secondary school. Items were measured on a two-point scale ‘Yes’ or ‘No’.

Figure 12 shows the proportion of students by gender who responded ‘Yes’ to each statement about their attitude to school. Overall, with the exception of one statement, more than 90 per cent of students reported a positive attitude toward school for each statement.

Figure 12 shows a 12.5 percentage point increase in girls’ self-reported attendance at school before and since joining their respective Academy. Similarly, boys showed an increase in their self-reported school attendance prior to and since joining their program (15.3 per cent increase).



**Figure 12: Student reporting of improvement in school attitude by gender**

On all items excluding ‘I came to school nearly every day’, both boys and girls in Years 11-12 report a very positive attitude to the impact their respective program has had on their attitude to school and on their self-confidence and how they feel about their culture since their involvement in an Academy.

Like their counterparts in lower to middle secondary school, students in Years 11-12 were also asked to respond to the request to share ‘one really important thing you have learned from being in the program’. Written responses were categorised on the basis of recurring themes.

The most commonly reported ‘really important thing’ Years 11-12 students learned from being in their program related to the importance of attending school (boys: 18.7%; girls: 11.0%). A further recurring theme identified by students was learning to respect others and themselves and acceptance of others (boys: 15.7 per cent; girls: 11.7 per cent). The importance of culture and identity, and learning about their culture, were identified as being important to both boys and girls (boys: 9.0 per cent; girls: 9.7 per cent). Working as a team and learning the benefits of team work were cited as important things students had learned (boys: 11.4 per cent; girls: 6.2 per cent). More girls than boys identified improved self-confidence as an important outcome of participation in an Academy (boys: 4.2 per cent; girls: 15.9 per cent). Girls also identified more strongly with developing new skills that would help them in the future (boys: 6.0 per cent; girls: 13.8 per cent) and making new friends (boys: 3.6 per cent; girls: 6.2 per cent). A slightly higher proportion of boys (13.9% than girls 10.3%) reported developing sporting skills as an important benefit from the program.

Other skills students cited as being important to have learned included leadership skills and the capacity to be a role model. Students also acknowledged the importance of learning goal setting and being exposed to a variety of opportunities that they would not otherwise have had.

These results suggest that the most important things Years 11-12 boys have gained from their Sporting Chance Program are:

- recognition of the importance of attending school
- respecting and accepting others and respecting themselves
- the importance of culture and personal identity
- working as a team
- the development of broad general skills that will help them in the future.

For Year 11-12 girls, the most important elements of the program relate to:

- respecting and accepting others and respecting self
- the development of broad general skills that will help them in the future
- recognition of the importance of attending school
- development of self-confidence
- the importance of culture and personal identity.

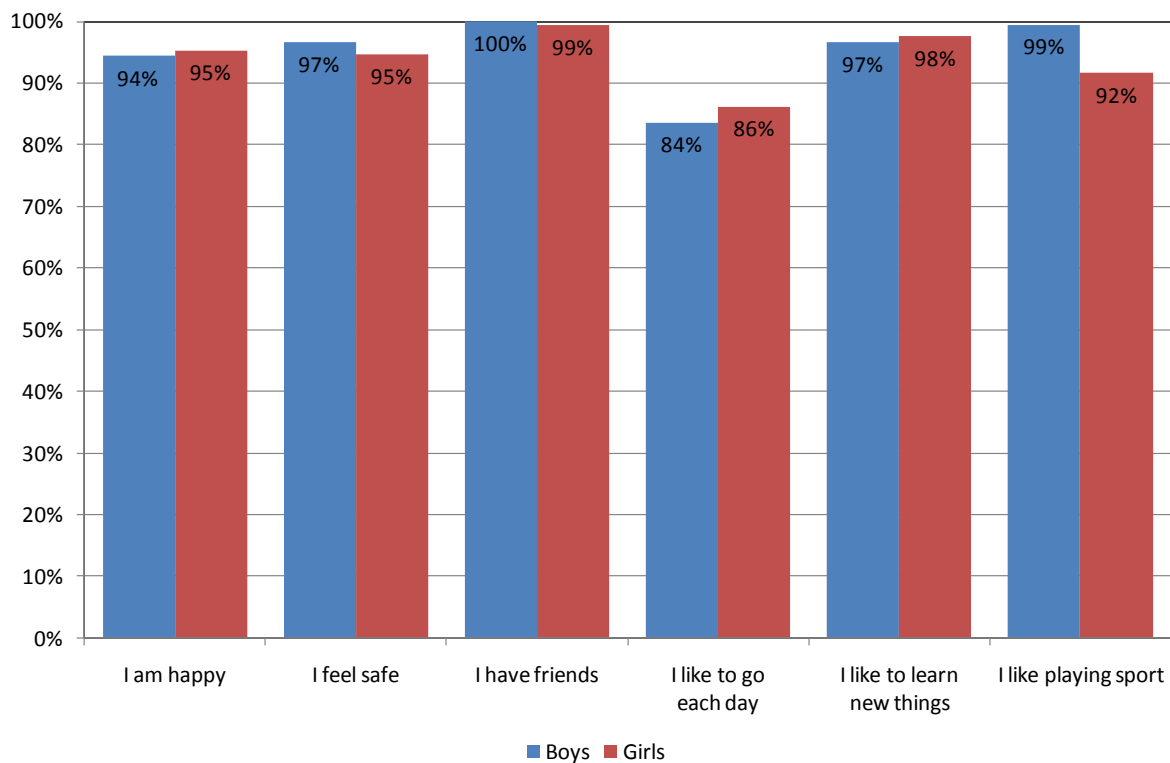
Students in Year 11-12 were also asked to respond to the question 'Would you tell a friend to join the <<ProgramName>> program?' Overall, 87.1 per cent of boys and 79.3 per cent of girls indicated they would recommend this.

The most commonly reported reason for encouraging a friend to join the program focused on the learning of new skills that would help students with their education (boys: 25.8%; girls: 17.2%). The chance to experience new opportunities and set goals that would help students to succeed was another commonly cited reason to join the program (boys: 22.6%; girls: 18.7%). Students also recognised the significance of having access to supportive staff in a supportive environment (boys: 11.6%; girls: 16.4%). Students reported that the program was fun and they gained great pleasure from being involved in a variety of activities both social and skill based. Of particular significance to girls in recommending the program to friends was the opportunity to develop new friendships (boys: 7.7%; girls: 18.7%). Friendships appear to play a very important role for girls beyond being solely for the purposes of social interaction.

Of note is the fact that, at the Year 11-12 levels, the acquisition of sporting skills was only identified by one male student and two female students as a reason for recommending that a friend should join an Academy. This suggests that while the program has a sporting and recreation focus students are aware of other important skills and knowledge they have gained from participation in the program.

Only five students provided a reason for not recommending the program to a friend. Reasons included that the student's friends were already attending the program, they had Indigenous friends who would not be eligible to join the program, and the program was boring and friends would not want to have to do school work. One student recognised that while their friends might start the program they would be unlikely to persevere and would not appreciate the benefits to be gained.

Students in Year 11-12 also demonstrated through the Sporting Chance Program their level of engagement with school. Figure 9 shows students' attitudes towards, and subsequent engagement with, school by gender.

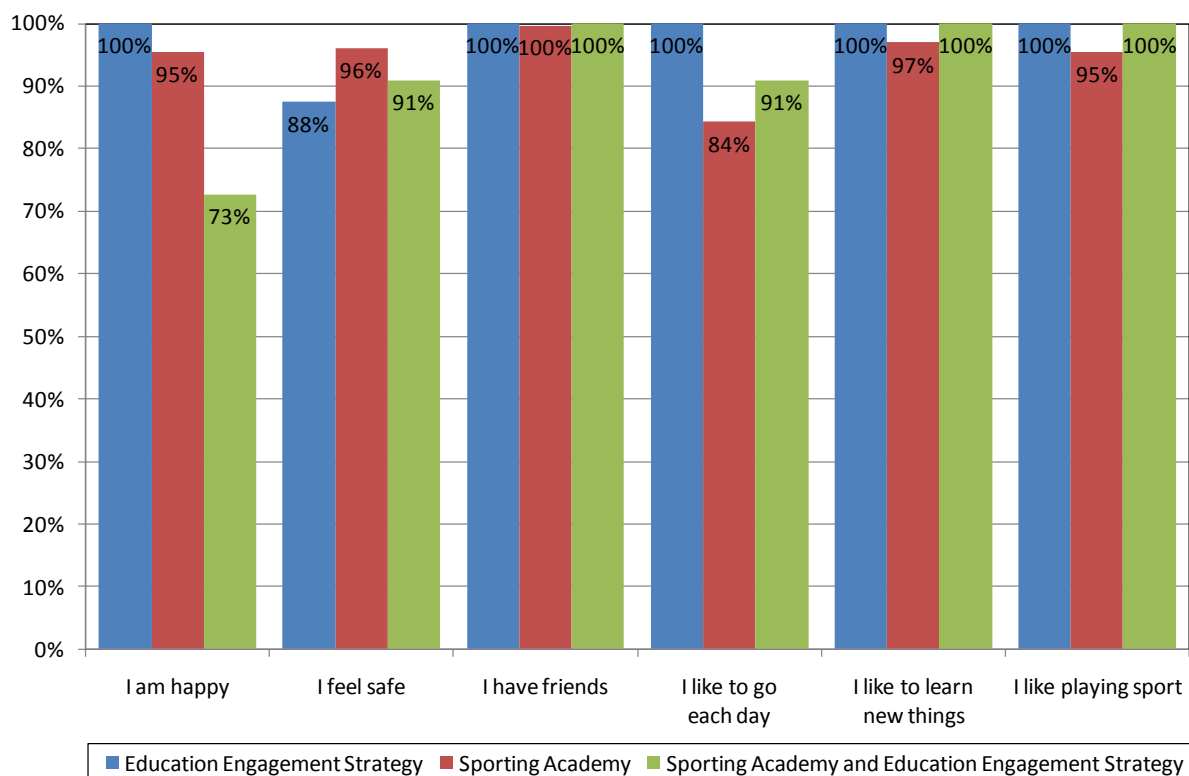


**Figure 13: Year 11-12 student attitudes to school**

Figure 13 shows that in Years 11-12, 83.6 per cent of boys and 86.2 per cent of girls report that school is a place they like to go each day. Responses to the other five statements were all in excess of 90 per cent, irrespective of gender. The greatest difference observed between boys and girls was in relation to the statement 'school is a place where I like playing sport' (boys: 100.0%; girls: 91.0%).

Figure 13 shows the proportion of students in Years 11-12 and their attitudes to school by the type of Sporting Chance Program in which they are involved.

Irrespective of program type, students report a very positive attitude to school on each of the six attitude-to-school statements (range 73 to 100%). Across the six statements, students attending combined Academy and EES projects reported the lowest attitude level for the statement 'school is a place I am happy' (72.7%), while students attending an Academy project reported the lowest level of attitude to school for the statement 'school is a place where I like to go each day'(85.4 per cent).



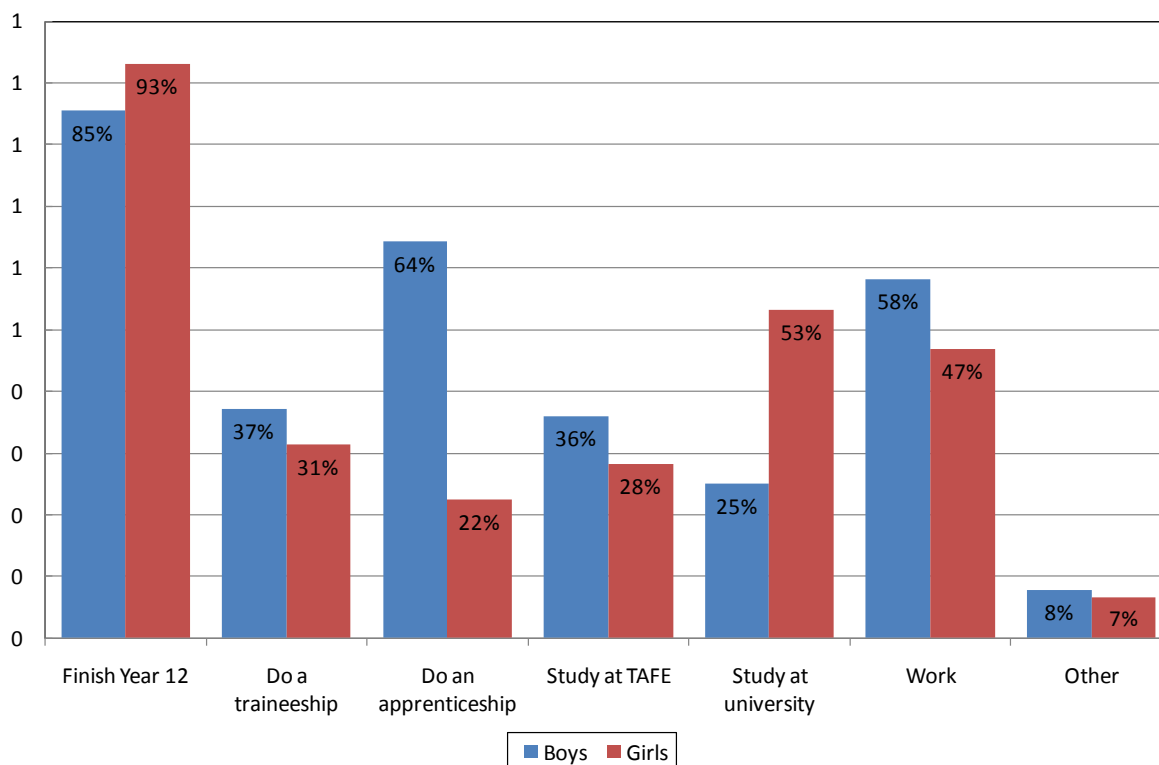
**Figure 14: Student attitude to school by Sporting Chance Program**

Figure 14 shows students participating in combined Academy and EES projects were the least positive with respect to their attitude to school.

Overall, students in Year 11-12 who were involved in the EES programs reported the highest level of positive attitude to school. Students reported 100 per cent on five of the six items. However it should be noted that Figure 10 should be interpreted with a degree of caution given the small sample sizes in the EES program (n=8) and SAEES program (=11).

Students in Years 11-12 were also asked to respond to the question ‘*What do you plan to do in the next couple of years?*’ Students were provided with seven post-school destinations including completing Year 12 and asked to tick all the boxes that applied to them.

Figure 15 shows the intentions of those Year 11-12 students who responded to this question. Overall, more than 89 per cent of students plan to complete Year 12.



**Figure 15: Year 11-12 students study and work aspirations over the next couple of years**

Figure 15 shows that 64.2 per cent of boys plan to undertake an apprenticeship, while 37.2 per cent want to do a traineeship. Thirty-six per cent of boys intend to study at TAFE. Overall, 53.2 per cent of girls plan to study at university in contrast to 25.0 per cent of boys.

Students who responded they would like to work were asked to indicate what kind of work they would like to pursue. Just over 50 per cent of students reported wanting to work as a labourer. This included working as mechanics, electricians, working in the mines, carpenters and bricklayers. Students also indicated they would like to work in an area related to sport, including being a professional sports person, and within sport and recreation. Students also reported wanting to work on a farm or in a role that involved animals. In addition students reported they planned on working in retail, primarily in a shop. Students also indicated they would like to work with children in either a school or in child care setting or possibly work with staff from the program they were in. Being a police officer was also a popular career choice.

Overall, students in Years 11-12 recognised the Sporting Chance Program as being more than simply a sport-focused program. They reported being at school because they understood the value of a good education and the benefits that can accrue from completing formal education. Younger secondary students tended to choose sporting skill acquisition as something ‘really important they had learned’, whereas students in Years 11-12 were more likely to identify skills and knowledge that would be beneficial to them in the future and help them reach their goals.

## Correlation analysis

An analysis of the correlation between two variables can be used to investigate the association between them. If there is a significant positive correlation, it does not imply that one factor depends on the other or there is a cause-effect relationship between them – it simply means that they occur together. Further analysis and investigation is needed to determine the nature of the association. Correlation values range from  $-1$  (a negative correlation – as one goes up the other goes down) to  $+1$  (a positive correlation – as one goes up so does the other). One of the most commonly used measures is the Pearson correlation coefficient, which is abbreviated as  $r$ .

Correlation Analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between the number of years students reported being in the program by level of school (lower to middle secondary and Year 11-12) and the six attitude to school statements. This analysis was not conducted for the primary school students as they had all reported this was their first year in the program.

Of particular interest when examining the lower to middle secondary students and Year 11-12 students, was the relationship between the Year level and the statement ‘School is a place where I like to go each day’. This variable was used as a quasi school engagement measure. Table 13 shows the correlations between statements examining attitude to school, and level of school for students who had been in the Sporting Chance Program for one to three years.

**Table 13: Correlations between school attitude items, level of school and one to three years in program**

School is a place where...	I like to go each day	
	Lower to middle school	Year 11-12
I am happy	0.40	0.34
I feel safe	0.22	0.34
I have friends	ns	--
I like learning new things	0.41	0.44
I like playing sport	0.37	ns

Note: 1. -- at least one variable is constant.  
 2. Correlation is significant the 0.01 level (2-tailed)  
 3. ns – correlation is not statistically significant

Table 13 shows that at the Year 11-12 level students who had been in the Sporting Chance Program for between one and three years showed a higher correlation between school being a place where they like to go each day and school being a place where they like learning new things ( $r= 0.44$ ). In contrast, at the lower to middle school level there was a correlation of between students liking to go to school each day and school being a place where they like playing sport ( $r= 0.37$ ), however, for students in Year 11-12 there was no statistically significant difference between these two variables.

Table 13 suggests that at the Year 11-12 level less emphasis is placed on the sporting aspects of the Sporting Chance Program and a greater emphasis is placed on learning new things through education per se.

Further correlation analyses were conducted looking at the relationship between number of years in the program and each of the variables, looking at changes in student attitude to school before and after they had joined the program and school level (lower to middle secondary and Year 11-12). These items were examined to explore changes in attitude to school since starting in the Sporting Chance Program.

Correlation analysis showed a positive correlation between students' self-reported daily school attendance and self-confidence since joining the Sporting Chance Program ( $r=0.23$ ). Students in lower to middle secondary school who had been in the program between one and three years reported a moderate correlation of ( $r= 0.17$ ) followed by students in Year 11-12 who had been in the program for the same number of years ( $r=0.20$ ).

Correlation analysis also showed a positive correlation between students' self-reported daily school attendance since joining the Sporting Chance Program and the program having helped students feel proud of their culture ( $r=0.29$ ). Students in lower to middle secondary school reported a low moderate correlation of ( $r= 0.39$ ). There was no observable statistical difference for students in Year 11-12.

The same correlation analysis as above was conducted for students who had been in the Sporting Chance Program for four or more years. There was no statistical difference for students in the lower to middle years of secondary school, however, students in Year 12 showed a moderate correlation between feeling more confident since joining the program and the program having helped them feel proud of their culture ( $r=0.33$ ).

### Primary school

Overall, the results of the student surveys show that at the primary school level students place more emphasis on the fun side of the program and the fun associated with playing sport and learning new sports and games and sporting skills. Students also reported enjoying the interaction with visitors to their school. Only one student commented on the fact that they were learning about getting fit. Generally for the younger students the focus was perceived to involve participating in fun activities. However, this should not detract away from the fact that students are having a positive experience with school and are attending school. Through the interconnection of positive experiences that students identified and the interweaving of these experiences with the curriculum, students are being provided with a positive view of education which is more likely to result in students wanting to come to school and build on the skills they are already developing.

### Lower to middle secondary school

At the lower to middle secondary school level, while students reported that learning sporting skills was an important part of the program for them (20.1%), students also report broader skills related to sport that they had identified as being important to them. Students were identifying skills that were beneficial to sport that could be transferable to other aspects of their life at school and into the future, including learning respect for others, themselves and acceptance of others (14.3%), working as a team (16.8%), increased self-confidence (10.9%) and the importance of attending school (7.6%). Students acknowledged that the skills they developed through the Sporting Chance Program would be useful in helping them identify and work toward setting and achieving goals. There was also recognition that the skills students had gained through the program would not have

been possible if students had remained in their previous school (which did not have a Sporting Chance Program).

### Years 11-12

At the Year 11-12 level, there was a further identified shift towards recognition of the importance of education. Students also demonstrated they had made a connection between the importance of the allied skills learned during the program and how they positively played a role in enhancing and complementing their education. At Years 11-12, 15.1 per cent of students reported attending school as being one really important thing they had learned through the Sporting Chance Program, followed by the importance of respecting others and themselves and acceptance of others (13.8%). Students were also acknowledging the importance of respecting their teachers, elders in their community and family members. The development of sporting skills accounted for 12.2 per cent of students' most important thing they had learned. It was also reported that at the Year 11-12 level that the development of self-confidence (9.6%), the importance of working as a team (9.0%), developing role model skills (3.9%), developing leadership skills (5.1%) and recognising the importance of their culture, identity and also the history of their culture were significant for students. A number of students reported they found it very important that they were in single sex classes and this had helped them a lot with their studies.

Of note was the fact that students in Years 11-12 were reporting that they were applying what they had learned during the Sporting Chance Program to their education and also to their thinking about their future aspirations. A number of students reported that it was as a result of the Sporting Chance Program that they had started to positively and enthusiastically start looking at setting future goals in the belief that they would be attainable. There was recognition that students appreciated the opportunities and experiences they had been given through the program and they could realistically see themselves either pursuing post school education or entering the work force. Students further acknowledged, as a result of increased self-confidence, they realised that just because they were from an Indigenous background it did not mean it was not impossible for them to achieve goals and that everyone was equal. At the Year 11-12 level, it was apparent from the responses students provided that they had developed a positive and optimistic outlook about their future.

## Appendix 2: Site visit schools

List of schools where site visits took place

School	Location	Project	Provider
James Meehan High School	Macquarie Fields NSW	Campbelltown Indigenous AFL Academy	Australian Football League - ACT/NSW
Macquarie Fields High School	Macquarie Fields NSW	Campbelltown Indigenous AFL Academy	Australian Football League - ACT/NSW
Alexandria Park Community School	Alexandria NSW	Walan Barramal (Sth Sydney)	National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA )
Marrickville High School	Marrickville NSW	Walan Barramal (Sth Sydney)	National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA )
Edmund Rice, Flexible Learning Centre	Townsville QLD	Sports Academy for Catholic Colleges	Catholic Education Office Diocese of Townsville
St Anthony's College	Deeragun QLD	Sports Academy for Catholic Colleges	Catholic Education Office Diocese of Townsville
Shalom Christian College	Condon QLD	Shalom Sports Academy	Shalom Christian College
Geraldton Senior College	Geraldton WA	Midwest Football Academy Midwest Netball Academy	Clontarf Foundation Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation
John Willcock College	Geraldton WA	Midwest Football Academy Midwest Netball Academy	Clontarf Foundation Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation
Clontarf College	Perth WA	Non case study school	Clontarf Foundation
West Arnhem College Gunbalanya Campus	Gunbalanya NT	Gunbalanya Football Academy West Arnhem Girls Academy	Clontarf Foundation Role Models & Leaders Australia
West Arnhem College Jabiru Campus	Jabiru NT	Jabiru Football Academy West Arnhem Girls Academy	Clontarf Foundation Role Models & Leaders Australia
Ludmilla Primary School	Ludmilla NT	Bluearth project (EES)	Bluearth Institute
Karama Primary School	Karama NT	Bluearth project (EES)	Bluearth Institute
Rostrevor College	Woodforde SA	Rostrevor Indigenous Sports Academy (RISA)	Rostrevor College
Ceduna Area School	Ceduna SA	SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy Sport for Life Program (EES)	SAASTA Stride Foundation
Cooper Pedy Area School	Cooper Pedy SA	SA Aboriginal Sports Training Academy Sport for Life Program (EES)	SAASTA Stride Foundation
Swan Hill College	Swan Hill VIC	Swan Hill Football Academy	Clontarf Foundation
Eaglehawk Secondary College	Eaglehawk VIC	Wannik Dance Academy	DEECD, Wannik Unit

### Appendix 3: Participating schools

List of schools who contributed to the evaluation

Alexandria Park Community School	NSW
Bourke Public School	NSW
Cobar High School	NSW
Cobar Public School	NSW
Collarenebri Central School	NSW
Cowra High School	NSW
Denison College of Secondary Education (Bathurst & Kelso Campuses)	NSW
Doonside Technology High School	NSW
Dubbo College Senior Campus	NSW
Forbes High School	NSW
Hermidale Public School (Hermidale)	NSW
Ingleburn High School	NSW
James Meehan High School	NSW
Lightning Ridge Central School	NSW
Macquarie Fields High School	NSW
Marrickville High School	NSW
Narromine High School	NSW
Nyngan High School	NSW
Nyngan Public School	NSW
Plumpton High School	NSW
Rooty Hill High School	NSW
Sarah Redfern High School	NSW
St Brigid's Primary School Coonamble	NSW
St Patrick's Primary Brewarrina	NSW
The Canobolas Rural Technology High School (Orange)	NSW
Walgett Community College – Primary & High School	NSW
Wellington High School	NSW

Casuarina Senior College	NT
Centralian (Middle School and Senior Secondary College)	NT
Dripstone Middle School	NT
Gillen Primary School	NT
Gunbalanya School	NT
Jabiru Area School	NT
Karama Primary School	NT
Katherine High School	NT
Ltyentye Apurte School, Santa Teresa	NT
Ludmilla Primary School	NT
Mount Allan School (Yuelamu)	NT
Palmerston High School	NT
Ross Park Primary School	NT

Cunnamulla State High School	QLD
Edmund Rice Flexible Learning Centre	QLD
Gilroy Santa Maria College - Ingham	QLD
Glenala State High School	QLD
Good Shepherd College - Mt Isa	QLD
Ipswich State High School	QLD
Redbank Plains Senior High School	QLD
Shalom Christian College (Townsville)	QLD
St Anthony's College - Deeragun	QLD

Airdale Primary School Port Pirie	SA
Ceduna Area School	SA
Cooper Pedy Area School	SA
Crossways Lutheran School	SA
Flinders View Primary School - Port Augusta	SA
Marree Aboriginal School	SA
Port Lincoln High School	SA
Rostrevor College	SA

Bairnsdale Secondary College	VIC
Ballarat Secondary College East and Wendouree Campus	VIC
Eaglehawk Secondary College - Bendigo	VIC
Mildura Senior College	VIC
Mooroopna Secondary College	VIC
Robinvale Secondary College	VIC
Swan Hill College	VIC
Warrnambool College	VIC

Broome Senior High School	WA
Clontarf Aboriginal College - Perth	WA
Cue Primary School	WA
Eastern Goldfields College	WA
Esperance Senior High School	WA
Fitzroy Valley District High School	WA
Geraldton Senior College	WA
Halls Creek District High School	WA
Hedland Senior High School	WA
John Willcock College	WA
Karalundi Aboriginal Educational Centre	WA
Kununurra District High School	WA
Mount Magnet District High School	WA
Newman Primary School	WA
Newman Senior High School	WA
Newton Moore Senior High School	WA
Norseman District High School	WA
North Albany Senior High School	WA
Roebourne District High School	WA
Wiluna Remote Community High School	WA
Yandeyarra Remote Community School	WA
Yule Brook College	WA

## Appendix 4: Abbreviations and acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFL	Australian Football League
AIME	Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience
ARMtour	Athletes as Role Models
ARTIE	Achieving Results Through Indigenous Education
BHP Billiton	Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited Billiton
CRL	Country Rugby League, NSW
DECS SA	Department of Education and Children’s Services South Australia
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
NSW DET	New South Wales Department of Education and Training
EES	Education Engagement Strategy
FOGS	Former Origin Greats, Qld
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NASCA	National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OEA	Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs)
P-12	Prep (Preparatory) to Year 12
Qld	Queensland
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
SA	South Australia
SAASTA	South Australian Aboriginal Sports Training Academy
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SES	Socioeconomic status
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WACE	Western Australian Certificate of Education