

8 August 2012

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT **NO IMPROVEMENT IN THE LITERACY OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS**

The Auditor-General, Peter Achterstraat, today called on the Department of Education and Communities to do more to improve the literacy of Aboriginal students in NSW Government schools.

“By Year Three around 40 per cent of Aboriginal students are at or below minimum standard for reading. Unfortunately, this is almost triple the rate of non-Aboriginal students,” said Mr Achterstraat.

“By Year Five around 50 per cent of Aboriginal students are at or below the minimum standard,” he added.

Notwithstanding gains at individual schools, NSW test results over the last decade show no discernible signs of improvement in the overall performance of Aboriginal students.

“Unless there is a change in approach, the government’s goal to halve the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2018 looks unattainable,” said Mr Achterstraat.

“The Department has an extensive range of programs that can be utilised to assist Aboriginal students to improve literacy, but lacks the systems to identify and track those students at risk and support their needs,” said Mr Achterstraat.

Schools use a variety of means to increase the involvement of Aboriginal parents and the Aboriginal community including programs that promote cultural awareness, language, and the development of personalised learning plans.

“I would like to see a greater focus on Aboriginal community members being used as in-class tutors, Aboriginal learning processes such as story-telling, and a stronger emphasis on literacy in students’ learning plans,” said Mr Achterstraat.

While the Department of Education and Communities has an important role to play, all government agencies and the community need to work together to improve educational outcomes of Aboriginal students.

Mr Achterstraat concluded:

“Goals can be aspirational, but school targets need to be realistic and achievable.

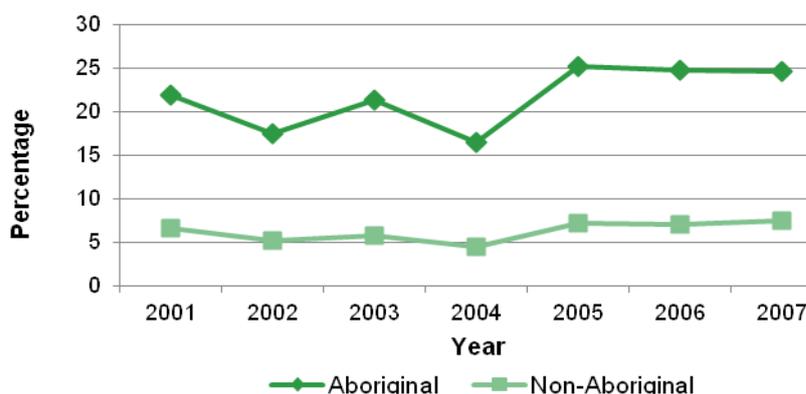
Those individuals most in need should be pinpointed and their progress closely monitored.

All Aboriginal students who perform at or below National standards in literacy should be provided with the additional support they need.”

Further information

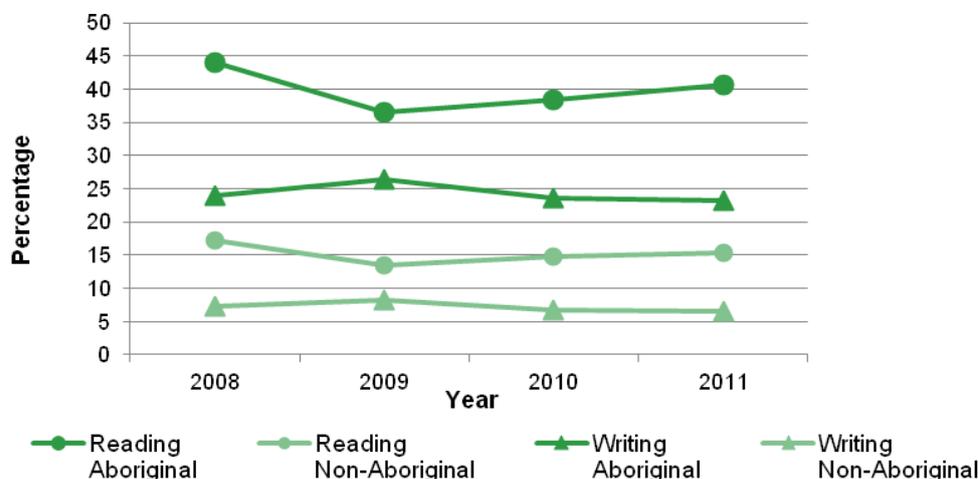
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Year 3 Literacy: Percentage of students below the minimum standard, 2001 to 2007



Source: NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2011. Based on testing program prior to NAPLAN.

Year 3 NAPLAN Reading and Writing: Percentage of students at or below the minimum standard, 2008 to 2011



Source: NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2011. Based on NAPLAN test results.

Some interventions schools use to improve the literacy of Aboriginal students

The Department has a range of interventions to improve literacy of all students including those aimed at Aboriginal students such as:

- a school community partnership agreement between the school, families and Aboriginal communities
- Aboriginal community members employed as in-class tutors
- pre-schools, transition to school programs
- assessments which make it possible to put programs in place for students as soon as they arrive in kindergarten
- personalised learning plans that are updated using NAPLAN results and input from parents, Year Advisers, the Aboriginal Education Officer and Head Teachers
- a school attendance plan, in consultation with parents and the Aboriginal community, which includes targets for improved attendance
- an Aboriginal Education Officer who can liaise with parents and build community relationships
- microphones worn by teachers and students or hearing loops to support students with hearing difficulties
- learning support staff to enable one-on-one attention in small classes or groups
- homework centres, libraries, Books in Homes programs and holiday study workshops
- individual professional learning plans for all staff, which includes training in Reading to Learn and Accelerated Literacy
- teachers employing Aboriginal learning processes such as story-telling, the use of symbols, 'hands-on' methods and emphasising relevance to community and country.