
Literacy Standards in Australia

First published 1997

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This publication was supported by a Grant from the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department.

Cover designed by Benjamin Forster
Formatted by Benjamin Forster

Printed by J S McMillan Printing Group

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Masters, Geofferey N.
Literacy Standards in Australia

Bibliography.
ISBN 0 642 23676 3

1. Literacy - Australia - Evaluation. I. Masters, Geofferey N. II. Forster, Margaret III. Australian Council for Educational Research. IV. Literacy Standards in Australia

379.240994

Preface

Literacy is vital for every Australian's personal, social and cultural development. Good literacy skills are essential for each individual to participate confidently in a modern democratic society.

Providing young people with the key literacy skills that will enable them to make the most of their education, employment and training opportunities is a central policy objective of the Federal Government. A school's first mission is to provide each child with sound literacy skills in the early years.

Research shows that low levels of literacy are directly linked to behavioural problems in the classroom, the likelihood that a student will finish formal education before Year 12, and the likelihood of being unemployed after leaving school. We must ensure that when students end their schooling, they are properly prepared for work.

A national literacy and numeracy goal: *That every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level*, was agreed to by Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers in March 1997. This national goal represents community expectations for all schools in literacy and numeracy.

A National Plan to improve the literacy and numeracy levels in schools will begin next year with support from all Australian Governments. Under the Plan, all children's achievements in literacy and numeracy will be measured against national benchmarks.



Australia's first national survey of school literacy for sixteen years, titled the *National School English Literacy Survey*, was conducted in August-September 1996. The Survey provides, for the first time, a national map of the broad range of literacy achievement in key aspects of literacy—namely, Reading, Writing (including Spelling), Speaking, Listening and Viewing. It will give us a reliable national picture of the English literacy performance of Australian school students in Years 3 and 5.

I asked the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to prepare *Literacy Standards in Australia* to inform the benchmarks process and to provide the wider Australian community with information about the performance standards in reading and writing of Australian school children.

The results show that while some students are achieving high literacy standards, a disturbingly high number of Australian school children are failing to meet a minimum acceptable standard in literacy.

It is essential that Australian schools take up the challenge and set in place strategies which will ensure that every child develops sound literacy skills. This challenge must be met for the sake of our children and Australia's future.

Literacy Standards in Australia represents an important step in building community support for an intensive national effort to bring literacy to young Australians. I commend this very significant report to everyone interested in our children's education and their future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Kemp". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

DR DAVID KEMP,
Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training
Canberra, September 1997

Introduction



Literacy Standards in Australia has been prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research at the request of the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training to show how Australian primary school children are performing in relation to clear performance standards in reading and writing. Underlying this report is the belief that virtually all students are capable of meeting satisfactory performance standards in literacy.

Students' literacy skills at the end of primary school are an important determinant of their likely success in secondary school, a significant influence on their abilities to capitalise on post-secondary education, training and work opportunities, and a factor in their capacity as adults to participate fully in Australian society.

Students' foundational skills in reading and writing are established during the early years of school. Mastery of fundamental reading and writing skills by the end of Year 3 is essential if students are to make adequate progress during their primary years. The extension of these fundamental skills by the end of primary school is essential if students are to be successful learners across the curriculum in secondary schools and beyond.

The findings reported here are based on data collected as part of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey. The Survey performances of Year 3 and Year 5 students are reported against performance standards in reading and writing. The skills required to meet these standards are described and illustrated.

The reading and writing performance standards in this report reflect standards embodied in the work carried out under the direction of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs to develop literacy 'benchmarks' for Australian schools¹, and are informed by the professional judgements of literacy specialists involved in the development of these benchmarks.

Assessment tasks from the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey are used to illustrate—through concrete examples—Year 3 and Year 5 students' performances in reading and writing. These examples will be useful in communicating reading and writing performance standards to students, teachers, parents and the wider community.

National School English Literacy Survey



The reading and writing performances reported here are based on the results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey conducted in government and non-government schools in all States and Territories of Australia over a 6-week period in August-September 1996.

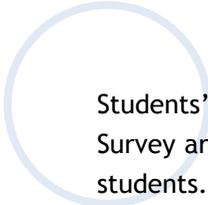
The Survey was conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research under the direction of a Management Committee comprising representatives of all States and Territories, the Commonwealth, the National Catholic Education Commission, the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations, the Australian Education Union, and the Independent Education Union of Australia.

A nationally representative sample of 7454 Year 3 and Year 5 students participated in the Survey. These students constituted the 'Main Sample' at each Year level. A special sample of 773 Year 3 and Year 5 Indigenous students provided additional information about the literacy achievements of a group of Indigenous students, a significant proportion of whom live in rural and remote parts of the country.

The Survey collected evidence about a broad range of literacy skills in writing (including spelling), reading, viewing, speaking, and listening. Students participating in the Survey undertook standardised ('common') tasks in each of these five aspects of literacy². In writing and speaking, samples of student work and teachers' classroom assessment records also were collected for analysis. All participating teachers were trained in the assessment procedures and worked with external assessors to assess student work against common marking guides provided by the Australian Council for Educational Research.

Year 3 and Year 5 students' performances in the Survey were reported on specially constructed reporting scales in writing, reading, viewing, speaking, and listening. Further details of the Survey scale construction are contained in the report *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*.

Setting Performance Standards



Students' reading and writing results in the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey are reported here against performance standards for Year 3 and Year 5 students. These standards specify minimum acceptable levels of performance on the reading and writing tasks used in the Survey.

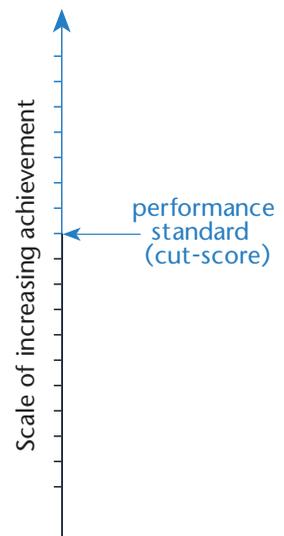
In practice, a performance standard is the minimum score (sometimes called a 'cut-score'³) that a student can attain and still be judged to have performed at a satisfactory level for that student's age or Year group. Students scoring at or above the cut-score are considered to have met the performance standard; students scoring below the cut-score are considered not to have met the standard. The process of deciding on minimum acceptable scores always involves professional judgement.

Performance standards on the reading and writing scales of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey were set with reference to work underway to develop benchmarks in reading and writing. ACER asked the writers of the benchmarks to consider reading and writing performances in the Survey and to judge whether particular performances illustrated 'benchmark' achievement or 'below benchmark' achievement. These judgements were then used to establish

cut-scores on the Survey reading and writing scales. (The method used to establish reading and writing performance standards is described in more detail on pages 45-51.)

An important point about the process used to set performance standards on the Survey reading and writing scales is that, consistent with usual standard setting practices, this process was designed to yield an exact cut-score, not multiple cut-scores or a range of scores. As Yen (1997) notes: 'Communication becomes clearer if it is possible to identify one particular cut-point as being of central importance and to report the percent of pupils above that cut-point. When the percent above the cut-point increases, the public will understand that performance has improved'⁴.

In the report *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*, an analysis was undertaken of students' Survey performances in relation to the draft reading and writing benchmarks. The Survey Management Committee decided to indicate the *range* of scores on each scale within which the draft benchmark was located, and to report the percentages of students performing clearly below, within, and above that range⁵.



The Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training asked the Australian Council for Educational Research to set standards in the form of cut-scores on the Survey scales in the belief that information about how school children are performing in relation to clear performance standards in reading and writing would be useful information for the Australian community. Information about the kinds of skills demonstrated by students performing at and below these standards also was expected to be useful in informing the benchmark development process. The Survey cut-scores, because they are derived from judgements made by the benchmark writers, can be thought of as operational interpretations of the standards which the reading and writing benchmarks are intended to convey.

Findings

In assessing levels of reading achievement in the Survey, attention was paid to four aspects of reading: ability to read and interpret a range of fiction and non-fiction texts with a degree of critical awareness; ability to understand main themes, ideas and points of view; appreciation of the writer's craft; and awareness of the relationship between the communication medium and the message in written texts.

The percentages shown opposite are based on a nationally-representative sample of all Year 3 and Year 5 students in Australian schools ('Main Sample'). Figures for Indigenous students are based on a special sample of Indigenous students, a significant proportion of whom live in rural and remote parts of the country. It should be noted that the Indigenous percentages are not representative of the performances of *all* Indigenous students in Australian schools, but only of Indigenous students in schools reporting at least five Indigenous students in each of Years 3 and 5.

The percentages shown for subgroups of the population (male/female; English-speaking language background/language background other than English; low/medium/high socio-economic background) are based on the Main Sample only.

	Percentage meeting the standard	Percentage not meeting the standard
Year 3		
Main Sample (total)	73	27
Males	66	34
Females	77	23
Language Background other than English	62	38
English Language Background	73	27
High Socio-economic Status	88	12
Medium Socio-economic Status	72	28
Low Socio-economic Status	62	38
Special Indigenous Sample	19	81
Year 5		
Main Sample (total)	71	29
Males	65	35
Females	76	24
Language Background other than English	56	44
English Language Background	72	28
High Socio-economic Status	87	13
Medium Socio-economic Status	71	29
Low Socio-economic Status	47	53
Special Indigenous Sample	23	77

The complete distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students' performances on the Survey reading tasks are shown opposite for the Main Sample.

Students with the lowest levels of reading performance are at the bottom of the picture; students with the highest levels are at the top. The Year 3 and Year 5 performance standards are marked. Students located above each horizontal line are considered to have met that standard (shaded portion of each distribution).

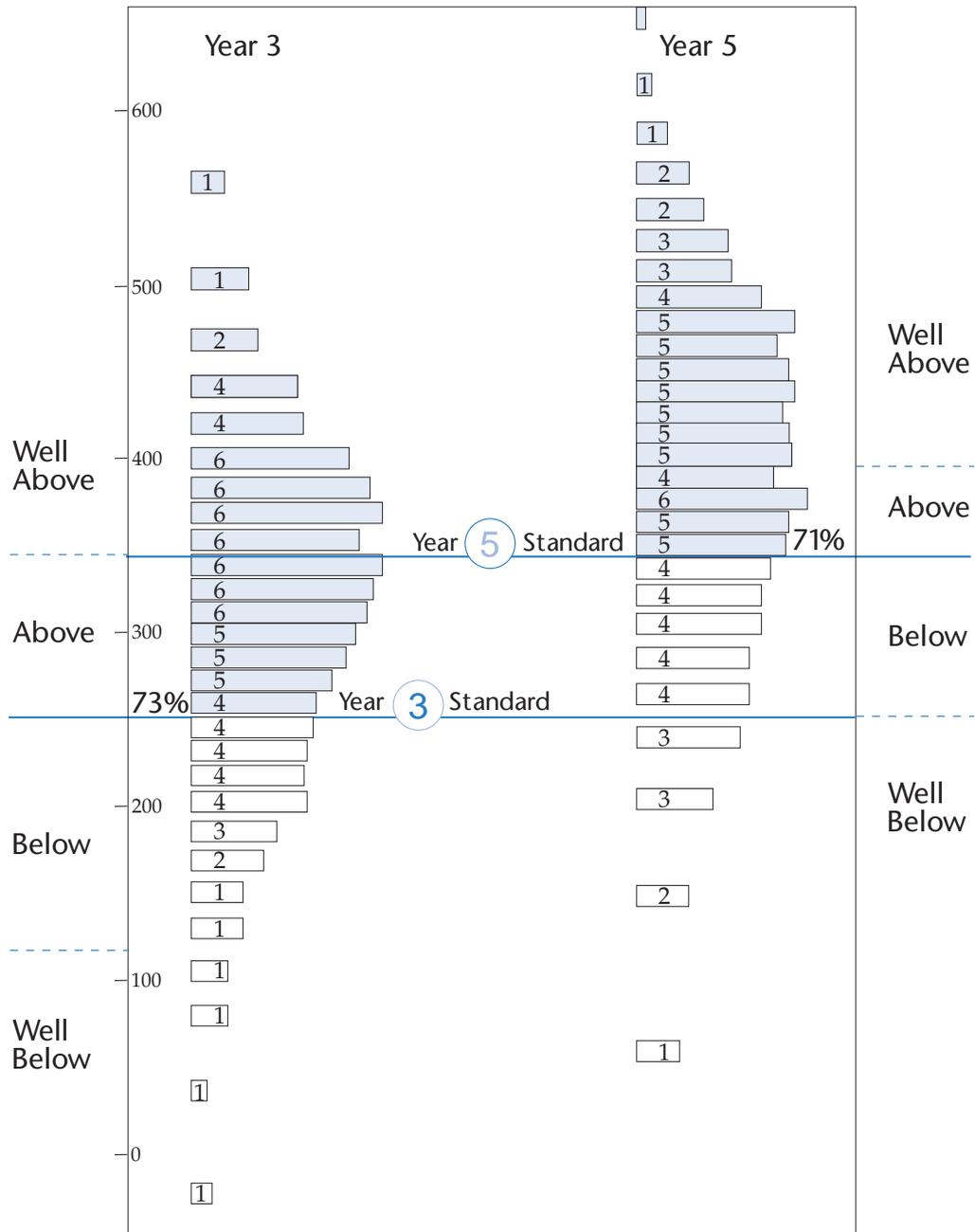
To meet the Year 3 performance standard, students must read texts and answer questions like those on pages 24-25.

To meet the Year 5 performance standard (and so to be well above the Year 3 standard), students must read texts and answer questions like those on pages 26-27.

The lowest performing Year 3 students (well below the Year 3 standard) read texts and answer questions like those on page 34. Other students performing below the Year 3 standard read texts and answer questions like those on page 35.

Some students perform well above the Year 5 standard, reading texts and answering questions like those shown on pages 40-41.

Reading



In assessing levels of writing achievement in the Survey, attention was paid to three features of students' writing: quality of thought (including students' abilities to express ideas, to write imaginatively, to develop an argument clearly and logically, and to support a point of view); language control (including spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary); and sense of purpose and audience.

In the Survey, spelling was assessed as an aspect of writing. In other words, the percentages of students achieving the writing standards are based on assessments of writing which *include* attention to spelling. Separate assessments also were made of students' spelling achievements based on their Survey writing. These spelling assessments are reported in *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*.

The percentages shown opposite are based on a nationally representative sample of all Year 3 and Year 5 students in Australian schools ('Main Sample'). Figures for Indigenous students are based on a special sample of Indigenous students, a significant proportion of whom live in rural and remote parts of the country. It should be noted that the Indigenous percentages are not representative of the performances of *all* Indigenous students in Australian schools, but only of Indigenous students in schools reporting at least five Indigenous students in each of Years 3 and 5.

The percentages shown for subgroups of the population (male/female; English-speaking language background/language background other than English; low/medium/high socio-economic background) are based on the Main Sample only.

	Percentage meeting the standard	Percentage not meeting the standard
Year 3		
Main Sample (total)	72	28
Males	65	35
Females	81	19
Language Background other than English	63	37
English Language Background	74	26
High Socio-economic Status	90	10
Medium Socio-economic Status	73	27
Low Socio-economic Status	70	30
Special Indigenous Sample	29	71
Year 5		
Main Sample (total)	67	33
Males	59	41
Females	74	26
Language Background other than English	63	37
English Language Background	67	33
High Socio-economic Status	81	19
Medium Socio-economic Status	67	33
Low Socio-economic Status	57	43
Special Indigenous Sample	24	76

The complete distributions of Year 3 and Year 5 students' performances on the Survey writing tasks are shown opposite for the Main Sample.

Students with the lowest levels of writing performance are at the bottom of the picture; students with the highest levels are at the top. The Year 3 and Year 5 performance standards are marked. Students located above each horizontal line are considered to have met that standard (shaded portion of each distribution).

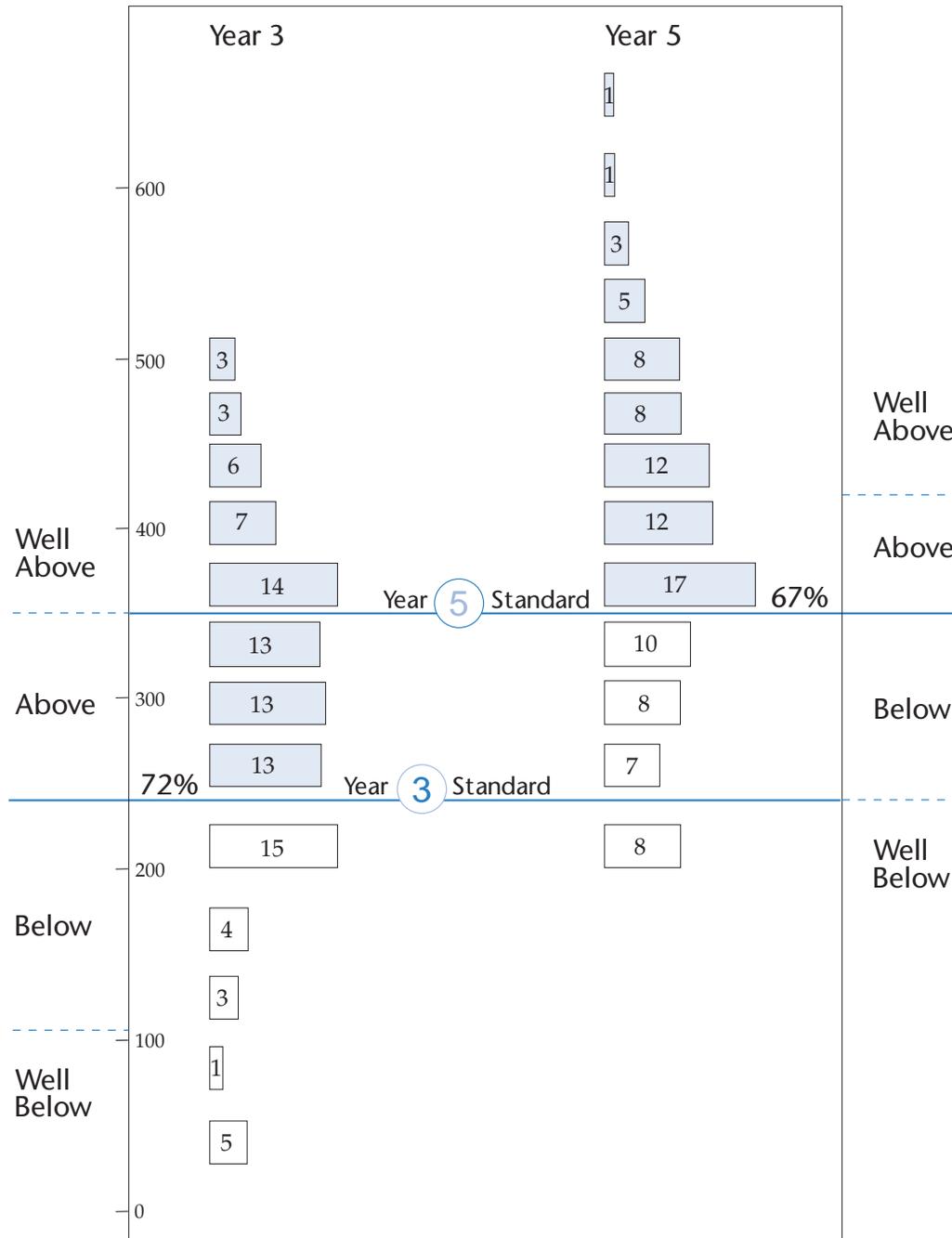
To meet the Year 3 performance standard, students must produce at least *some* writing of the kind shown on page 29.

To meet the Year 5 performance standard (and so to be well above the Year 3 standard), students must *consistently* produce writing of the kind shown on pages 30-31.

The lowest performing Year 3 students produce writing well below the Year 3 standard (see writing examples on page 36). Other students performing below the Year 3 standard produce writing of the kind shown on page 37.

Some students perform well above the Year 5 standard. At least 50% of their writing is of the kind shown on pages 42-43.

Writing



In Summary

Approximately 70% of all students in Years 3 and 5 met the identified performance standards in reading and writing. Slightly more Year 3 students met the Year 3 standards than Year 5 students met the Year 5 standards.

A significant percentage (more than 30%) of Year 3 students met the Year 5 performance standards. Slightly fewer than 10% of Year 5 students did *not* meet the Year 3 standards.

Girls met the standards more often than boys (by about 11 percentage points).

Students from English language backgrounds met the standards more often than students from language backgrounds other than English.

Students from high socio-economic backgrounds met the standards more often than students from low socio-economic backgrounds (a difference of more than 20 percentage points). The gap between these subgroups increased from Year 3 to Year 5.

A very low percentage of students in the Indigenous Sample met the standards. For many students in this special sample, English was a second language.

Standards Illustrated

Year **3** Standard

To meet the Year 3 standard, students must read texts like these . . .

extract

Some iguanas live in trees while some prefer to stay on the ground. Although they look fierce, most iguanas are vegetarians. They eat fruit, leaves and other parts of plants. Iguanas living on beaches even eat seaweed.

Reading features

- makes meaning from a combination of picture and simple text (eg infers the meaning of a word from picture clues);
- locates explicitly stated information in a complex presentation of text, photograph and diagram;
- makes connections between pieces of factual information in a simple text (eg recognises the main idea in a paragraph or poem) and draws simple inferences.

A Solar Eclipse



During a solar eclipse the moon blocks out the light from the sun.

Fear and Fascination greet Asian eclipse The Age-Herald 23/10/1903



School-children as they watch the solar eclipse through hole-in-the-card games in Japan.

A solar eclipse happened in South East Asia today.
On the island of Basilan people believe that eclipses are caused by a gigantic bird trying to swallow the sun.
The people make loud noises with pots and pans to scare the bird away.

WARNING
These children are watching the eclipse in a very dangerous way. Remember never look directly at the sun at any time. You may damage your eyes.
It is much safer to watch an eclipse on television.

..... to answer questions like these ...

Most iguanas are vegetarians. This means that they only
eat fruit and vegetables

Most iguanas are vegetarians. This means that they fruit,
leaves and other parts of plants

What did the people of Basilan Island do when they saw the solar eclipse?

Made loud noises with pots
and pans to scare the bird away.

**73% of Year 3 students
met the Year 3 standard**

Year **5** Standard

To meet the Year 5 standard, students must read texts like these . . .



THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

DOES LIFE EXIST ON OTHER PLANETS?

ONLY A MATTER OF TIME

With so many sightings of UFO's, there has to be life on other planets . . . It's only a matter of time before we contact one of these alien ships.

Pedro

LEAVE THEM ALONE

If there is life on other planets we should leave them alone. We've almost destroyed our planet, why destroy theirs?

Anna

A 100 PER CENT CHANCE

I think there is a 100 per cent chance that there is intelligent life in outer space.

Phuong

HOW SMART ARE THEY?

Some people think the best evidence that intelligent aliens exist is the fact that we've never seen them!

'Astro'

WEATHER THAT SIZZLES

I think Mars is the planet most likely to hold other life forms. Mars doesn't have:

* poisonous gases like Venus,
* gravity that would crush you like Jupiter, or

* weather that would sizzle you like Mercury.

Zoe

NEXT MONTH'S TOPIC

DO WE NEED LAWS IN SPACE?

extract

So while I worked at home, planning each scene in detail, Shelley drove around and around, finding things, taking photos, and then showing them to me. This went on for weeks and weeks, until I was starting to say yes to things which weren't quite right just so we wouldn't have to look any more. But even when I wanted to give in, Shelley wouldn't. She just kept on looking.

Eventually we found two wonderful terrace houses, whose owners were quite happy to let a film crew in for a week of shooting. We found the good-natured, smart and lovable dog who acted as Gonzo. We found a Fiat Bambino – the tiniest, silliest car I had ever seen – and we found the tree.

Reading features

- interprets an illustration using accompanying text (eg uses a caption to identify and interpret details in a picture);
- interprets detail in a complex presentation of text, photograph and diagram (eg infers relationships among illustrated and described steps in a procedure);
- recognises another layer of meaning in text (eg recognises irony in a poem, infers connection between newspaper heading and story, interprets relationships between characters when they are not directly stated);
- recognises a writer's stance on an issue;
- identifies the purpose of linguistic features (eg capitalisation of words, pronunciation guides, inverted commas).

..... to answer questions like these ...

Here is a letter about next month's topic DO WE NEED LAWS IN SPACE?

“Not long ago, some scientists crashed a satellite into Jupiter, just so it could collect information about the planet. I think that is totally irresponsible.”

Who do you think wrote it?

Zoe

Phuong

Anna

If John was working at home while Shelley went looking for the right houses, why did John write that ‘we found two wonderful terrace houses’?

because they are both in it together.

Because John told Shelly what to look for and she found it

71% of Year 5 students met the Year 5 standard

To meet the Year 3 standard, students produce writing like this ...

There was a boy how went for a walk he saw a van so he did not cross the road. Because there was a van coming, the van went and he cross the road. With Ben was the dog. They were coming home from school. that is the way he had his bag on his back. And the van was out side he house. And a box was on the front step. And it had a name it said private, keepout, confidential. On the front of the box. And it had a name on it the name was Steffy Armstrong and he said she is at the

Writing features

- uses simple sentences;
 - uses simple conjunctions (eg 'and' and 'but');
 - controls common punctuation some or all of the time (eg capital letters, full stops);
 - spells high frequency words correctly most of the time;
 - writes in a way that generally can be interpreted by others;
 - produces writing which shows a basic understanding of the task *but which...*
- contains a repetitive sentence structure;
 - suggests a plot but lacks coherence (eg incomplete, gaps in the story logic);
 - contains irrelevant details;
 - shows little shape (eg brief or long and disjointed, repetitive, strays from task);
 - relies on assertion rather than argument;
 - relies heavily on the provided prompt (eg copies phrases);
 - incorporates two or more ideas with little development.

..... but must produce at least some writing like this ...

I think birds should be in their own habitat also be kept in a cage because it depends if they can protect themselves. I think they should be in ^{their} own habitat because they are part of nature, they can feed themselves, its cruel to keep them in a cage and if they fly away it means they want to stay there. I also think the little birds like the budgie should be kept in a cage because cats can eat them.

Mountain Adventure
One Trent and I went on a plane trip to Texas. We were going to go mountain climbing. On the way the plane crashed on a high mountain. Suddenly a huge creature appeared kind of like a fox crossed with an eagle. It said I am Griffin this is my mountain since you crashed here in shale help you find the closed town called mombuck. Where you can stop to eat and drink as much as you like.

Writing features

- controls simple sentence structure and makes an attempt at more complex structures;
 - makes an attempt to vary sentence beginnings;
 - attempts to shape piece structurally (eg notion of beginning and end);
 - spells many common words correctly;
 - writes legibly;
 - produces writing which shows some evidence of planning, revising and proof reading;
 - shapes a distinguishable story-line in a narrative;
 - identifies key events, main characters, settings in a narrative;
 - expresses opinions based on personal experience;
 - shows a degree of coherence (eg logical sequence of events), *but*...
- displays little sense of conscious control of content; comments on issues briefly and superficially; uses a narrow range of ideas (eg incorporates a few inter-related thoughts); defines characters minimally (eg characters are given names).

72% of Year 3 students met the Year 3 standard

Year **5** Standard

To meet the Year 5 standard, students
must *consistently* produce writing like this ...

One day a boy named John was walking home from school when he saw his dog Jack. He grabbed Jack and took him home. On their way across the road there came a post van which stoped at his front door. He went around the back to put Jack in the back yard and to fix the fence where Jack had got out. When he had fixed the fence he went around the front to see what the post man had brung. It was a parsel that had confidential keep out private on it. I picked it up and took it in side. I didn't open it untill mum got home and asked her if I could open it. It was lots and lots of little boxes in side untill in a little box there lied a cristel diamond ring & carrot

Writing features

- controls simple sentence structure and makes an attempt at more complex structures;
- makes an attempt to vary sentence beginnings;
- attempts to shape piece structurally (eg notion of beginning and end);
- spells many common words correctly;
- writes legibly;
- produces writing which shows some evidence of planning, revising and proof reading;
- shapes a distinguishable story-line in a narrative;
- identifies key events, main characters, settings in a narrative;
- expresses opinions based on personal experience;
- shows a degree of coherence (eg logical sequence of events), *but...*
- displays little sense of conscious control of content; comments on issues briefly and superficially;
- uses a narrow range of ideas (eg incorporates a few inter-related thoughts);
- defines characters minimally (eg characters are given names).

I think that kids should earn
them selfs some money.

Like they could dig up the garden,
they could get the (cloth) clothes of
the line and many other things.

Your family might have a roster for
dowing the washing up or dowing the
gate. The kids; kids might earn 40c
for one job.

You might have deductions for
not making there beds or having (there
bed) messy room.

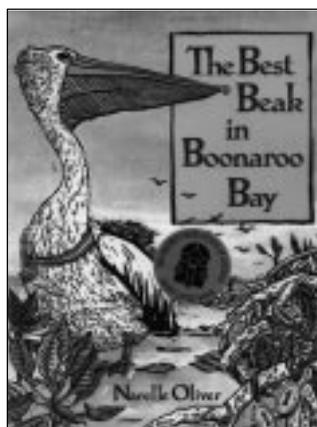
You may have some shopping
to do and you could say "you
can have five dollars to spend
and no more" most liklie) libley
they will go and spend it all
in one go. They will most
probley go and spend (all) it
on (sum) junk.

Performance Below Year 3 Standard

Students performing below the Year 3 standard

read texts like this:

... to answer questions like this (well below the standard):



Teacher says: "Think about the story that might be in this book.

Write two or three sentences to tell the story."

it mit be about a plek and co
one ~~one~~ it and put a bit of rop
around its nak and besone said ^{to the} ~~that~~
if ~~pick~~ you have a The Beaks

Everybody thinks that they have got
the best beck

Reading features

- recognises and uses basic organisational features of text (eg recognises title of story; predicts key elements of story from title).

.....or texts like this:



Reading features

- recognises text genre (eg story book from book title);
- interprets pictures to predict what happens next in an illustrated story (eg predicts a plausible ending);
- locates explicitly stated information in comic strip narratives (eg locates details in captions to an illustrated story).

... to answer questions like this:

Look at this picture.



The words are missing from this part of the story.

Write a sentence to go with this picture.

He flew closer to the sun.

he was so close to the sun
that he was almost burnt
He was close to sun

Students performing below the Year 3 standard

produce writing no better than this (well below the standard)...

I heard a Griffen and we fierye
oherr to setinheime and I see my m
and ehrs wess FieFn
and on the weay we seer a Bld
Pnewy yih Biehrs and Sibs.

Monday me and foc
bloct the sun at and
Mimum Sen me
androc bloct in the sun
at and my mum gav
me a smuc and setme
too my rom and stabett
foc and roc was
neva been Senagen
bounuhomenon ofeshr.
agen. **End**

Writing features

- uses some basic conventions (eg writes from left to right, puts spaces between words);
- produces some known words, or words represented by their initial letter;
- uses some correct initial letters and other sounds;
- produces writing *which...*
 - can be read back by the child at the time of writing;
 - consists of a list of unrelated ideas and events;

consists of one or two sentences with little development or shape;
consists of words dictated to a scribe;
consists of a drawing with a few words or word-like symbols.

..... or this ...

Bigfoot nely got shot but he discovered he could run very fast. Then he went to a jungle and he jumped on a branch then he fell. then peple came and said hos that. And when he wach up he find his dad. Then he soan a cave then he soan a skeleton.

There was a boy how went for a walk he saw a van so he did not cross the road. Because their was a van coming, the van went and he cross the road. With Ben was the dog. They were coming home from school. that is the way he had his bag on his back. And the veta was out side he house. And a box was on the front step. And it had a name it said private, keepout, confidential. On the front of the box. And it had a name on it the name was steffy. Armstrong and he said she is at the

Writing features

- uses simple sentences;
- uses simple conjunctions (eg 'and' and 'but');
- controls common punctuation some or all of the time (eg capital letters, full stops);
- spells high frequency words correctly most of the time;
- writes in a way that generally can be interpreted by others;
- produces writing which shows a basic understanding of the task *but which...*

contains a repetitive sentence structure;
suggests a plot but lacks coherence (eg incomplete, gaps in the story logic);
contains irrelevant details;
shows little shape (eg brief or long and disjointed, repetitive, strays from task);
relies on assertion rather than argument;
relies heavily on the provided prompt (eg copies phrases);
incorporates two or more ideas with little development.

Performance Well Above Year 5 Standard

Students performing well above the Year 5 standard
read texts like these ...

ODD SPOT

A scientist scanning the Universe with the radio telescope at Parkes NSW, picked up the same strange signal, at the same time, every night for four months.

Convinced he was being signalled by an intelligent alien life form, he began an in-depth investigation – only to find he was picking up signals from the microwave in the canteen downstairs!!



RADIO TELESCOPES

One way of exploring the Universe from the Earth's surface is by radio telescope. Many objects in space, exploding galaxies for example, give out energy in the form of radio waves. These waves penetrate the Earth's atmosphere and can be picked up by radio dishes like the one at Parkes, NSW. In this way astronomers can 'see' what is happening in space.

extract

Finding a tree sounds easy, but it was actually very hard. It had to be big and beautiful, and give us a terrific view – and it also had to have a branch that the actors playing Jason and Mr Flinders could sit on safely. It took a long while, but at last Shelley found the tree too – just in time for filming.

Last, but not least, we needed a 'spacething'. A friend of mine played around with various bits and pieces and came up with a remarkable and peculiar 'spacething' – which also grated cheese!

Reading features

- interprets idiomatic language (eg 'last but not least');
- infers meaning from figurative language;
- recognises the connection between presentation style and nature of information (eg appropriateness of question & answer format for interview data);
- recognises how linguistic features (eg exclamation marks) support ideas implicit in text.

..... to answer questions like these...

Why are there exclamation marks at the end of the ODD SPOT piece of writing?

Because it was Silly and stupid because it was
only a microwave.

The article on radio telescopes says in this way astronomers can 'see' what is happening in space.

Why is the word 'see' in inverted commas?

So you know they can't really see it but have an
idea of what it looks like.

Because they can't actually see but can see
through the telescope

Why was the spacething 'Last, but not least'?

It was the last thing
they needed but most
important

Because it was last but not
the least important.

Students performing well above the Year 5 standard produce writing mostly like this ...

Beep, honk, bzzzzz, zip, eeee-o, ding, ding. Jake was waiting to cross the road with his dog Bengie. Bengie was barking at the trucks, fire engines, police cars, vans, buses and every other noise in the air. Jake kept telling him to be quiet he was annoyed with Bengie.

Vroom--eueek a delivery van stopped at Jake's house across the road. Jake was excited his family hardly ever got a parcel. Wooosh a mysterious wind blew around Jake and Bengie as if it was holding them back, telling him not to cross the road. Vroom the van had gone but the wind had not, Bengie stopped barking, Jake sighed with relief.

Kids need money to cope with every day life.

It is true that most kids expect to be paid for places when they go to places because their parents em heeps more money than kids for eg my dad earns protly more than a thousand a month and I only get \$10 a week for pocket money out if I want the money I have to wash-up make my bed ect. so I em my pocket money and so dose my friend Talia. And if we want to the Museum its about \$5 to get in and if I had to pay for that my \$5 of there is half a weeks pay gone.

Kids need money so they know what its like living by them selfs and saving and spending the right amount so we need to talk about the money we have so adults can help us kids buy the right things not so we spend our money on something silly.

Writing features

- uses some organisational conventions (eg general introductory statement to a report);
- uses a variety of sentence forms (eg simple and complex sentences);
- uses appropriate punctuation most of the time;
- shapes writing with a clear beginning and end, and possibly paragraph divisions;
- uses appropriate vocabulary most of the time;
- spells most words correctly;
- produces writing to express a clear point of view;
- imitates or parodies genre (eg mystery narrative);
- develops a few related arguments;
- displays some degree of critical distance;
- incorporates some detailed reflection on personal experience;
- incorporates ideas, details and events, most of which contribute to the story-line;
- incorporates prompts plausibly (eg visual narrative prompt);
- develops characterisation (explicitly or implicitly);
- considers impact on audience (eg explores aspects of surprise, humour, suspense).

..... or this ...

The Box

One fine sunny day, James was walking home from the bus stop, when his dog, Fido, met him at the corner. As James and Fido headed for home, James saw the special delivery van pull up outside his house.

James was very curious, as his family rarely had parcels. He started to walk a little faster, in order to be the first to the parcel. Fido started to pull on the lead that James had clipped onto him. He finally broke free and had a good sniff at the parcel.

As James neared the house he broke into a run. James finally reached the front door, puffed and panting. He bent down to pick up the parcel, when all of a sudden he read the stickers. They read: confidential, keep out, and private. He ignored the writing,

Hi, I'm Eric Carobakas and your probably wondering why I'm talking to you, well I'm going to tell you a story so listen carefully.

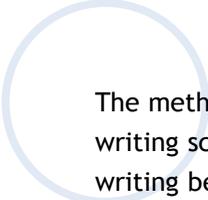
It was a crisp winter morning and I was just arriving home from the park with my younger brother James and dog Max. James was sulking along behind me, not wanting to leave the bright colours of the park equipment behind.

We were just coming around the corner when I spotted a post van ambling along the road towards us. I thought that someone must be having a birthday or anniversary party or something like that and tried to think of who it might be but without luck. Much to my surprise the van stopped outside our house. I caught a glimpse of a man with a large parcel.

Writing features

- revises writing to be consistent in content and style;
- experiments with rearranging sentences;
- controls grammatical structures and punctuation in complex sentences;
- organises writing into a coherent whole appropriate to context (eg paragraphs for a narrative, headings and sub-headings for informational text);
- uses precise and effective vocabulary;
- approximates the spelling of particularly difficult words using patterns and conventions;
- develops a sustained and integrated narrative (eg time order, consistent point of view, appropriate structure);
- develops a coherent argument justifying a point of view;
- uses detailed evidence to support a point of view;
- develops characterisation convincingly (eg discusses motives, feelings);
- shows a developed sense of audience;
- shapes writing to effectively engage reader.

Method Used to Establish Standards



The method used to establish performance standards on the Survey reading and writing scales involved two steps. The first step was to analyse the reading and writing benchmarks (July 1997) being developed under the direction of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

The benchmarks, which consist of indicators or descriptors of the essential reading and writing skills expected of Year 3 and Year 5 students, are being developed by literacy specialists from throughout Australia under the direction of a Benchmarking Taskforce comprising nominees of State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers, the National Catholic Education Commission, the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations, and the Curriculum Corporation. The benchmark development process is summarised in an Appendix to this report.

The purpose of the benchmark analysis undertaken here was to establish the extent to which the National School English Literacy Survey addressed the reading and writing skills described in the benchmarks under development, and to estimate regions on the Survey reporting scales within which the Year 3 and Year 5 benchmarks were broadly located.

This analysis showed that the Survey tasks addressed many, but not all, benchmark indicators, and that some Survey tasks addressed reading and writing skills not described in the benchmarks. There was sufficient overlap of the skills identified in the benchmarks and the skills assessed in the Survey to allow the approximate location of the Year 3 and Year 5 benchmarks on the Survey scales to be estimated.

The second step was to ask the writers of the literacy benchmarks to make direct judgements of each reading and writing assessment task used in the Survey. The benchmark writers were asked to judge whether each task illustrated 'benchmark' performance or 'below benchmark' performance. The purpose of this step was to locate a cut-score (the performance standard) in relation to the Survey tasks on each scale.

In Year 3 reading, for example, the writers were asked to consider each reading task in turn and to indicate whether the ability to complete that task exemplified 'benchmark' reading or a level of reading competence below the Year 3 benchmark. The writers worked together in making each judgement. The details of these task-by-task judgements are reported in *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*.

The cut-score or performance standard was then located above most tasks judged to be 'below benchmark', but below most tasks judged to exemplify 'benchmark' performance or better. This performance standard on the Year 3 reading scale is shown on page 17 as a horizontal line.

Year 3 and Year 5 performance standards established in this way define three regions on the Survey reporting scales: below the Year 3 standard; above the Year 3 standard (but below the Year 5 standard); and above the Year 5 standard. In this report, the reading and writing performances of students who perform well below the Year 3 standard and of students who perform well above the Year 5 standard also are described (see pages 33-43).

Reading Standards Described

The reading skills assessed in the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey can be categorised into those corresponding to performance below/well below the Year 3 performance standard; above the Year 3 standard (but below the Year 5 standard); above the Year 5 standard; and well above the Year 5 standard. The categorisation of Survey reading skills is shown opposite. This categorisation makes it possible to describe the kinds of reading skills typical of students in these regions of the Survey reading scale.

The skills assessed in the Survey have been organised into rows to make it easier to see the development of particular kinds of reading skill. Some of these skills relate to students' abilities to extract meaning from combinations of text and pictures; some involve the ability to find explicitly stated information and to infer meaning which is not stated directly; and still others describe the ability to use linguistic features such as inverted commas, capitalisation of words, and exclamation marks to obtain meaning from text.

Reading

Below Year 3 Standard	Above Year 3 Standard	Above Year 5 Standard	Well Above Year 5 Standard
Recognises text genre (eg story book from book title).			
Recognises and uses basic organisational features of text (eg recognises title of story; predicts key elements of story from title).			
Interprets pictures to predict what happens next in an illustrated story (eg predicts a plausible ending).	Makes meaning from a combination of picture and simple text (eg infers the meaning of a word from picture clues).	Interprets an illustration using accompanying text (eg uses a caption to identify and interpret details in a picture).	
Locates explicitly stated information in comic strip narratives (eg locates details in captions to an illustrated story).	Locates explicitly stated information in a complex presentation of text, photograph and diagram.	Interprets detail in a complex presentation of text, photograph and diagram (eg infers relationships among illustrated and described steps in a procedure).	Recognises several pieces of reworded information from a long text.
	Makes connections between pieces of factual information in a simple text (eg recognises the main idea in a paragraph or poem) and draws simple inferences.	Recognises another layer of meaning in text (eg recognises irony in a poem; infers connections between newspaper heading and story; interprets relationships between characters when they are not stated directly).	Interprets idiomatic language and infers meaning from figurative language.
		Identifies the purpose of linguistic features (eg capitalisation of words; pronunciation guides; inverted commas).	Recognises how linguistic features (eg exclamation marks) support ideas implicit in text.
		Recognises a writer's stance on an issue.	
			Recognises the connection between presentation style and nature of information (eg question and answer format for interview data).

Writing Standards Described

The writing skills assessed in the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey can be categorised into those corresponding to performance below/well below the Year 3 performance standard; above the Year 3 standard (but below the Year 5 standard); above the Year 5 standard; and well above the Year 5 standard. The categorisation of Survey writing skills is shown opposite. This categorisation makes it possible to describe the kinds of writing skills typical of students in these regions of the Survey writing scale.

The skills assessed through the Survey have been organised into rows to make it easier to see the development of particular kinds of writing skill. Some of these skills are concerned with the ideas that students express and the appropriateness of their writing for the context and audience (eg development of argument or storyline); some relate to students' control of linguistic structures and features (eg conventions of punctuation); and still others are based on evidence of processes or strategies that students use when writing (eg planning, proof reading).

Writing

Below Year 3 Standard	Above Year 3 Standard	Above Year 5 Standard	Well Above Year 5 Standard
Shows a basic understanding of the writing task and writes in way that generally can be interpreted by others.			
Produces writing with little shape (eg produces story plots which lack coherence, contain gaps in logic and are incomplete; produces writing in the form of a list of unrelated ideas and events).	Attempts to shape piece structurally (eg notion of beginning and end, distinguishable story-line in a narrative).	Shapes writing with a degree of coherence (eg logical sequence of events).	Shapes writing with awareness of audience (eg explores aspects of surprise, humour, suspense; imitates or parodies genre).
Produces writing with limited ideas (eg relies on the writing prompt, contains irrelevant details, relies on assertions rather than argument).	Incorporates two or more ideas with little development (identifies key events, defines characters minimally).	Incorporates a few interrelated ideas (eg comments on issues briefly and superficially, identifies key events and characters in a story, expresses opinion based on personal experience).	Develops a few related ideas or arguments (eg expresses a clear point of view showing some critical distance, develops characterisation and incorporates ideas, details and events most of which contribute to story-line).
Shows a limited control of writing conventions (eg repetitive sentence structure: then I, then I, then I).	Shows control of basic writing conventions (eg writes simple sentences and uses simple conjunctions such as and and but, and controls common punctuation such as capital letters and full stops some or all of the time).	Attempts more complex sentence structures; attempts to vary sentence beginnings; and shows some control of a wider range of punctuation.	Uses a variety of sentence forms; uses appropriate punctuation and vocabulary most of the time; begins to adopt conventions of structured format.
		Shows some evidence of planning, revising and proof reading own writing.	Revises writing to be consistent in content and style.

NOTES

1. References made in this report are to the reading and writing benchmarks (as at July 1997) being developed by the Curriculum Corporation under the direction of the Benchmarking Task Force.
2. The reading and writing tasks on which the percentages in this report are based are part of ACER's *Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART)* for middle and upper primary English.
3. Livingston, SA & Zieky, MJ. (1982). *Passing Scores: A Manual for Setting Standards of Performance on Educational and Occupational Tests*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service.
4. Yen, WM (1997). The technical quality of performance assessments: standard errors of percents of pupils reaching standards. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice* (in press).
5. See Appendix 3 of *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Appendix

Benchmark Development

Following the July 1996 meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), at which it was resolved to develop an agreed national framework for reporting achievements in English literacy and numeracy, a Benchmarking Taskforce was established to develop draft national benchmarks for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The Benchmarking Taskforce comprised nominees of State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education, the National Catholic Education Commission, the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations, and the Curriculum Corporation.

At the March 1997 MCEETYA meeting, Ministers agreed to the goal 'that every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level'. Agreement was reached on a National Plan under which all students would be assessed by their teachers so that every child's literacy and numeracy needs could be addressed, and early intervention strategies implemented for students experiencing difficulties.

The measurement of student progress was seen as an essential element of the agreed National Plan, with benchmarks—in the form of described minimum standards of student achievement at particular Year levels—being used primarily for State and Territory level accountability, and in the development of strategies for improving levels of literacy and numeracy achievement.

At the June 1997 MCEETYA meeting, the draft reading and writing benchmarks for Years 3 and 5 were approved for use in further consultation prior to their final approval at the end of 1997. Following the June 1997 meeting, consultations on the benchmarks being developed were conducted with key academics and national education interest groups such as parent groups, principals' associations, teacher professional associations, business groups, and Indigenous education consultative bodies.