
**THE HON. ROSS FREE MP
COMMONWEALTH MINISTER FOR
SCHOOLS, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING**

Some twenty-one years ago, the Commonwealth Minister for Education said in this journal how honoured he was to contribute a few words to that first issue of *The Aboriginal Child At School*. Today, as the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, I too am honoured to be asked to contribute to this journal.

Looking back over the past twenty-one years it is easy to see how many aspects of our lives in Australia have changed. Included in the changes is the education of all children at school, and that includes the schooling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Some things, however, do not change, much as we would want them to. As many of you will know, the Commonwealth is currently undertaking a review of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, known to many of you as the 'AEP'. The final report of this review is not due for another couple of months or so, but we already have some evidence that the gaps which have existed for so long between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and other Australian children are still with us, even though there are some encouraging signs of progress.

What your journal has been able to do, however, and I sincerely hope that it will continue to do, is provide teachers, parents and other educators with the benefits of other people's experiences, sharing with colleagues those activities which have been successful, as well as being prepared to discuss the difficulties which often surround our work. Many of the articles from past editions have been able to reflect for your readers some of that inestimable joy that teachers and children can share together when genuinely successful learning takes place. For that, many educators will go on reading *The Aboriginal Child At School*.

As we head towards the end of this century, it may well be that the journal will address some of the key issues of reconciliation, acknowledging schooling as a means of bringing about in our children, and in their adulthood, a nation for whom 'a fair go' is a natural way of life.

I wish *The Aboriginal Child At School* a happy twenty-first anniversary.

Ross Free

