

CHAPTER 7

ESTABLISHING LEARNING PRECINCTS

1. The main thrust of this report is the strengthening of a learning culture within the Territory's secondary schools, primarily through a shift toward a pedagogical orientation, as described in Chapter 3. This means that the educational needs of young people in terms of how they learn, shift to centre stage. As a consequence of this, the ways in which these young people are grouped, the ways in which staff and other resources are acquired and utilised, the ways in which learning spaces and the people within them are organised, managed and governed, and the ways in which a whole range of decisions are made must align with this pedagogical orientation.

2. To allow for the significant level of change required to plan for and establish learning precincts, the review team recommends staged implementation. This section of the report, then, is concerned with five matters
 - identifying learning precincts
 - processes for building precincts in a carefully stepped manner
 - ways in which the various learning precincts could be managed and governed
 - relationships between the various learning precincts, and
 - relationships between government and the learning precincts individually and collectively.

Identifying Learning Precincts

3. The move towards learning precincts in the NT should build on the existing relationships schools have with each other, such as geographic proximity, shared programs, shared history, or shared culture and language groups. The Central Land Council saw the value in
 - strategies that allow schools in communities that are connected through shared language and culture ties to meet and work out a combined approach to schooling.*There are many initiatives that are being taken at this very moment, within and outside of education, that are creating alliances between communities and the schools within them, that should be the basis on which schools come together to make a precinct. These include the move to Regional Authorities for Town Councils, discussions about integrated services delivery to groupings such as the Warlpiri Triangle, and the Western MacDonnells group, and educational initiatives like the Arrernte Language Circles. Group Schools such as the one in the Katherine region are already substantially aligned, and one of these could quite easily be one of the first remote groups that could come together to form a precinct.

4. While there will be generic features that apply to all Learning Precincts, no two will be the same in every way. Different arrangements will evolve because of different contexts, and the possibilities vary between urban, regional and remote schools and their communities.

Urban Learning Precincts

5. It is anticipated that urban precincts can be formed relatively quickly, particularly in the more established areas of Darwin. The Palmerston and Rural area presents an early opportunity for an innovative approach, as the Northern Territory Government has made a commitment to the construction of additional secondary facilities in the area. The current Palmerston High School is at capacity, and there is predicted student growth in the town and the adjacent rural area. The form these new facilities will take has not been decided, although preferences have been expressed in some quarters for a senior secondary facility that is co-located with the Charles Darwin University (CDU) on its Palmerston campus.
6. As the review team is of the opinion that Learning Precincts will offer the best educational service to secondary-aged young people, the construction of a senior secondary college on the Palmerston campus of the university would be in accord with our integrated services approach, and therefore has the in principle endorsement of this review. However, there are other options that could be suitable, for example the construction of a new 'model' middle school, with Palmerston High School becoming the Year 10-12 campus. Therefore decisions should not be made about this until discussions have been held with Palmerston High School and its community and also with Taminmin High School and its community, as these schools and the new educational facilities will form part of the Palmerston and rural precinct. Existing facilities would not need to be duplicated, as, under a precinct model, they would be able to be accessed by all students enrolled in the schools in the precinct.
7. A Palmerston and Rural Learning Precinct could comprise Palmerston and Taminmin High Schools, and the new secondary education facility when it is completed, and they could join with some of the following primary schools: Adelaide River, Bakewell, Bees Creek, Berry Springs, Douglas Daly, Driver, Dundee Beach, Durack, Girraween, Gray, Howard Springs, Humpty Doo, Middle Point, Moulden Park, Woodroffe, and possibly with Batchelor and Jabiru Area Schools. It may be that some of these area and primary schools will wish to come together in a different grouping as a precinct consisting of outlying or remote schools. This will be a matter for early negotiation with DEET, and it would be up to the schools to come together with a proposal as outlined in the section of this chapter on remote precincts.

8. As a starting point for the formation of Learning Precincts in the Darwin urban area, logical groupings that might be considered for these are

Darwin and Nightcliff High Schools join with the following primary schools: Stuart Park, Parap, Nightcliff, Larrakeyah, Alawa, Ludmilla, Jingili and Belyuen

Dripstone and Sanderson High Schools and Casuarina Senior College join with the following primary schools: Anula, Moil, Karama, Leanyer, Malak, Manunda Terrace, Nakara, Henbury School, Wagaman, Wanguri and Wulagi and Don Dale Education Centre.

Regional Learning Precincts

9. Katherine and Nhulunbuy High Schools are the only secondary schools responsible for secondary education in their respective towns, and because of the size of the student populations they have little option but to be 7–12 comprehensive high schools. To enable them to accommodate the new stages of schooling, they should create 7–9 and 10–12 sub-schools within this arrangement. In each of these towns BIITE, CDU and a number of non-government agencies provide VET and other programs. It would be of significant benefit to students as a part of precinct building activity to examine existing infrastructure and resource availability beyond the school, with the intention to maximise use and formal collaboration between all agencies.
10. Tennant Creek High School is the only secondary school in the town and again has little option but to remain as a Years 7–12 comprehensive high school, but it should also create 7–9 and 10–12 sub-schools. As is the case for Nhulunbuy and Katherine, the extent of provision in Tennant Creek could be enhanced through the development of formal arrangements with other education providers.
11. Alice Springs currently has three government schools providing secondary education. Alice Springs and ANZAC Hill High Schools cater for students from Years 7-10, while Centralian College caters for students in Years 11 and 12. Centralian is an amalgamated TAFE and senior secondary college, and provides senior secondary education for students in Alice Springs. It has a long-standing arrangement with the two junior high schools to provide VET offerings for students. At the time of writing Centralian College is merging with the CDU, to take effect at the commencement of 2004. DEET and CDU are developing a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure senior secondary provision. Unlike other precincts, clause(s) will need to be included in the Memorandum of Understanding between the University and DEET to enable stages of schooling continuity in any precinct which includes Centralian College.

12. As a starting point, logical groupings that might be considered for these regional precincts would be

Katherine High School join with the following primary schools: Casuarina Street, Clyde Fenton, Katherine South, MacFarlane, Kintore Street School, Mataranka and Pine Creek

Tennant Creek High School join with Tennant Creek primary school and other remote schools in the Barkly region

Alice Springs and ANZAC Hill High Schools join with what is now Centralian College, under a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure continuity of the stages of schooling with CDU, and join with the following primary schools: Bradshaw, Braitling, Gillen, Larapinta, Ross Park and Sadadeen

Nhulunbuy High School join with the Nhulunbuy Primary School and existing Arnhem remote cluster schools.

13. As in the case of urban precincts, it should be noted here too that some of these schools might wish to come together in a different grouping as a learning precinct consisting of outlying or remote schools. This would be a matter for early negotiation with DEET, and it is up to the schools concerned to come together with a proposal as outlined in the next section.

Remote Learning Precincts

14. Because of differing capacities and capabilities of remote schools and communities to govern and manage their affairs, implementation of the preferred model of learning precincts will have to be phased in, alongside necessary capacity and capability building within the future precincts.
15. It is recognised that most remote schools may take some years before they become fully self-managing precincts, and that there will be interim stages along the way which gradually reinforce effective relationships and growing responsibilities for improving educational delivery.
16. While remote schools will form part of precinct arrangements for DEET management purposes, their uniqueness in terms of geographical location, student population, levels of literacy and numeracy and the dysfunction of some communities in which they reside warrant that these schools be considered differently. There is much happening in remote Indigenous schools that was generated by the 'Learning Lessons' report, and by other initiatives such as the moves towards integrated services delivery that have been occurring both formally and informally.

17. It is not the intention of this review to interfere with the planning and direction that are happening in some remote communities as a result of this, but rather to complement these emerging arrangements. DEET's Secondary Indigenous Education Strategy, for example, has the full support of this review team, the only proviso being that the approach should be adapted so that the rollout of secondary education focuses on provision at a precinct level rather than in individual schools.
18. We envisage that a number of schools in these areas will join together on mutually agreed terms for the benefit of not only secondary education, but education and training in general for all members of the community. However, in relation to secondary education, the review team is concerned with anomalies in providing staff and infrastructure for secondary education delivery in very small communities, and with the fact that many of the current schools are not recognised by the Northern Territory Board of Studies (NTBOS) as secondary education providers (see Chapter 2). These obvious disparities need to be recognised and dealt with if students in these communities are to be given opportunities similar to those available for secondary students studying elsewhere in the Territory.
19. As indicated in the preceding chapter, the review team has taken note of the Community Controlled Schools pilots, which may have the potential to inform change in other communities. Those schools and the people concerned with them at the community level might be well placed to lead the formation of a precinct in their group.

Staged implementation

20. The Northern Territory is comprised of a range of communities that have widely diverging levels of ability to govern and manage their affairs, and so implementation of the precinct model of school organisation will need to be phased in, alongside necessary capacity and capability building within the groupings that are established.
21. Those groups of schools and communities ready to form precincts will be supported and encouraged to do so as soon as practicable. Those that are not yet ready will be assisted to develop their capacity and capability to achieve precinct status in a set of defined stages. There will be different levels of support and professional development required by precincts at different phases of their development.
22. This review has used the phases proposed by the Learning Lessons Implementation Steering Committee (LLISC) for the development of community-controlled schools as a model for the stages for establishing learning precincts.

23. Because it is possible that major stakeholders, for example some principals or community leaders, may be more focused on their own local constituency than on the greater picture of a collaborative whole, the review team recommends that the development and implementation of the precinct be led by an outside facilitator or consultant, an Interim Head of Precinct (IHoP), who does not have a pre-formed agenda, and with no direct responsibility for any one school. They can then be free to carry primary responsibility for the work.
24. The need for an integrated services or whole-of-government approach is crucial to the development of precincts. This needs to be a coordinated at two levels
- departmental: DEET should work with other government departments and services to develop a mechanism to generate plans and commitment to them, Territory wide
 - delivery: those responsible for education (that is, within the proposed precinct) should work with local representatives or officers from other government departments and services, and with other community members, to develop a group or mechanism to manage local coordination. This group might also be concerned with enterprise development (obtaining funding for new activities, selling services, starting small businesses, and so on).
25. Once a basic set of partnerships is agreed upon by the schools and DEET working together, an initial implementation group should be formed consisting of relevant DEET staff working with the current principals of those schools, with community leaders and representatives of existing School Councils. This group will be responsible for Phase One of the implementation process as defined below, to prepare a plan, which can then be let out to tender for the engagement of a consultant or facilitator, or become the basis for a contract for the appointment of an IHoP. Four major phases are identified for the development of precincts.
26. Before a precinct can be finally formed as a self-governing entity, the process of consultation and development, followed through from Phase One to Phase Three, must result in a strategic plan for the new precinct that fulfils the principles and recommendations of this review, and is able to be approved by DEET on the following grounds
- educational validity, providing for dynamic and purposeful pedagogies
 - feasibility, in terms of the resources available to the precinct
 - maximum sharing, in the use of resources and facilities
 - strong support, of the relevant communities and schools.
- DEET will need to position itself to be able to provide the support required for precinct planning, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Phase One: Action planning and preparation

27. A detailed precinct development plan is constructed. The role of DEET in helping to put together databases, profiles, inventories and costings will be crucial at this point. Key elements identified for Phase One include

- development of baseline school and community profiles, infrastructure audits and datasets, including a detailed assessment of the current capability and standards of the DEET-managed school programs in each community, and a full costing of current provision and the cost of implementing the precinct model, site by site. This profile should also address the current local provision of alternative programs designed to re-engage those young people who have disconnected from mainstream schooling. These programs may or may not be funded by DEET (for example, some may be run with Commonwealth funding) and thus this profile must identify how each of these programs relates to ongoing services and structures
- an analysis of existing resources with an assessment of those that can more effectively be directed to other purposes within the precincts by consolidating functions and eliminating duplication
- undertaking a community asset inventory¹⁶ and a knowledge mapping exercise to assist in the establishment of resources for successful precinct development. These will identify existing human, physical and social resources and any gaps in these. The following groups should be targeted: parents; enterprise and industry; all volunteer clubs and associations; heads or local representatives of all local, NT and Commonwealth government agencies; universities and other public and private learning providers. A community learning plan would be developed in Phase Two based on these audits
- development of detailed community consultation project terms of reference and tender or contract briefs for managing Phases Two and Three
- development and implementation of a communication strategy, where staff, students, parents and the community can have input so they and DEET are kept fully informed of progress in precinct development
- design of an evaluation process for development of the precinct as a whole, modelled on one developed centrally by DEET. This is a process for evaluating progress towards building community capacity and capability to undertake increasing responsibility.

¹⁶ Standard procedures for this process are set out in regional and community development manuals such as Kretzman, J. & McKnight, J. (1993), *Building communities from the inside out*. ACTA Publications: Chicago.

Phase Two: Community consultation / information sharing

28. This phase should commence within two to four months of completion of Phase One, subject to timing of the tender process to engage consultants or of the appointment of an IHoP. This phase will be led by the consultant, facilitator or IHoP working with the original planning group, and involves

- consultation and discussion with the school staff, parents and community leaders about the options for educational service delivery and pedagogies, including alternative programs, rationalisation and re-allocation of resources and for precinct organisation within their communities as a group. The discussion of options will need to be based on the profiles, audits and costings conducted in Phase One, in order for them to be realistic
- education of all school staff (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and DEET management about the implications of increased precinct responsibility for how they work together, and to build staff capacity to operate in a precinct environment
- consultation with relevant unions, local enterprises and businesses, other agencies and service providers about the implications of moving to a precinct model for those communities, and how they might all work together in an integrated services model
- development of a community learning plan based on the community asset inventory and knowledge map developed in Phase One. This plan would specify formal and informal learning paths for each group and how these would achieve the goals for the precinct over the implementation phase
- negotiation of a strategic plan for development of the precinct, including a social compact¹⁷ between the precinct's interim governing body (who represent the community) and DEET, setting out the roles and responsibilities of both parties. It should include the agreed deliverables and outcomes and the funding levels for each year of the period of precinct development. It should also include the communities' responsibilities in terms of supporting student attendance, providing opportunities for work experience or extra training, sharing facilities or staff and ensuring an acceptable level of safety to school employees and students. Parents, the local town/community council or regional authorities and local industry or business should be given the opportunity to be part of the negotiations.

Phase Three: Capacity and capability building

29. This phase should commence as soon as possible after commencement of Phase Two, and develop concurrently with Phase Two. This phase would also be led by the consultant, facilitator or IHoP, and involve

¹⁷ Compact: an agreement between two parties

- establishment of an interim precinct governing body, led by the consultant, facilitator or IHoP, which might be a group of the principals of all the member schools, representatives of School Councils and parents, together with community leaders, for example, those who are experienced or capable and available at the time and, for Indigenous communities, traditional Indigenous leaders
- negotiation with unions about staff arrangements, including arrangements for staff who do not wish or are unsuitable to stay in the schools under that particular precinct's model
- training for DEET staff who will have responsibility for developing and maintaining the relationship between DEET and the learning precinct's governing body, both in the interim, and when high levels of self governance are achieved
- implementation of the community learning plan developed in Phase Two, including training for potential precinct governing body members, particularly training in planning, financial management, governance and educational theory and practice
- negotiation of an agreed governance model and structure for delivery of education which will be implemented when sufficient capacity and capability have been built over time
- development and negotiation of a strategic plan that conforms with the recommendations of this review, and subject to the accountability systems outlined in Chapter 12.

Phase Four: Governance and continuing evaluation

30. This phase commences on completion of Phase Three in each learning precinct, with the strategic plan and governance structures submitted to DEET for approval, as outlined above. Once such approval has been gained, a Head of Precinct is appointed, the precinct governance structure is implemented, and together they take responsibility for educational service delivery, making decisions at a local level and reporting to DEET. Completion up to Phase Three might occur very rapidly in some areas, particularly in larger town centres, but may take much longer in places where capacity and capability are at lower levels.
31. Reports from the evaluation process agreed in Phase One might need to be provided bi-annually in the development phases (Two and Three above), until the learning precinct has established a viable operation. Once the precinct is fully established, strategic planning and evaluation will occur on a three yearly cycle. As part of precinct planning, schools will continue to plan their own activities within guidelines established by the precinct. The plans of schools will affect precinct plans, and *vice versa*.

Operation of precinct governance structures

32. As indicated above in Phase Three of precinct development, each learning precinct is expected to develop a proposal for its own governance structure for approval by DEET. It will develop its own written constitution, standing orders and standard operating procedures that are appropriate to its circumstances. To assist precincts in this task, DEET should provide a variety of models from which they can choose. These models might, for example, suggest a certain number of members of any board that might be established, whether all or some should be appointed or elected, whether 'representation' or 'expertise/stake' might be better criteria for membership in different circumstances, whether co-option is likely to be viable, whether students may or may not be eligible for membership and so on. The review team believes that a constitution, at least, should be developed in collaboration with the precinct community, and that it should be approved by the Minister, as is the case for the current School Councils.
33. A learning precinct's members will be in the best position to judge who will be most appropriate to lead them in carrying out their work, and this will be reflected in the constitution. Nevertheless, if there is to be a board or governing committee of some kind, the Chair should be elected by and from its membership. The review team recommends that the Head of Precinct should be the chief executive officer of the precinct, and therefore believes it is unlikely such HoPs would be eligible to stand for election to the post of Chair.
34. Each governing body will be best placed to decide upon its structure to enable it to carry out its activities and appoint from its membership people responsible for such activities. Again, various models from which the precinct can choose should be available through DEET. Each governance structure will fund its operations from precinct resources. If there is a board or committee, it is likely that sitting fees and travel expenses will need to be funded in this way.

Responsibilities of precinct governance structures

35. Governing bodies will be responsible for developing precinct plans at strategic and operational levels, and, these plans will determine the allocation of resources through the budgetary process. The plans and budgets would require DEET approval.
36. The most important resource that can be brought to bear in the education of young people consists of the people who work with them. The particular balance of skills, attitudes, knowledge and the like required will differ from precinct to precinct. In particular, staff will need to align themselves with their precinct's goals. It is the review team's opinion that this alignment of staff will be achieved best if the each precinct can determine

its required staffing mix, select staff, deploy them, and manage their performance. Each learning precinct through its government structure, is best placed to determine its needs in regard to physical assets and should manage them as appropriate to precinct need, with its approved budget. Similarly, we believe each precinct, acting within guidelines established by DEET, should be responsible for broad issues to do with the curriculum and pedagogy in each of its schools.

37. Choices concerning goals, human resources, asset management, curriculum and pedagogy are frequently very complex ones. The complexity is compounded when it is recognised that these choices must be acceptable to the community they serve. As a result, learning precincts should not make such choices without appropriate consultation, and what is acceptable consultation will differ from precinct to precinct, as local requirements are taken into account.

38. Achieving effective outcomes depends on a combination of conditions. Real responsibility, authority and power go hand-in-hand with access to and control over financial resources. The review team's proposal to shift considerable responsibility, authority and power to the various precincts in regard to deploying staff, managing assets, deciding upon the focus for curriculum and pedagogy in the broad and so on will, therefore, eventually require a similar shift in access to and control over financial resources. That is, single line budget allocations should be made to the governance structure, which should be responsible for the proper use of the funds allocated to it.

Relationships between precincts

39. It is not the intention of the review team to promote the creation of a series of learning precincts that are independent silos, interacting with Government or other systemic agencies but separately from each other. Ways in which a precinct intends to interact with other precincts, especially with those that share their geographic borders, should be reflected in their strategic and operational plans. We have also suggested the development of 'sister precinct' relationships between urban and remote precincts.

40. The Heads of Precinct should meet on a formal basis with DEET at regular intervals. The purpose of these meetings is to provide input into the policies and strategic direction of the system. It could also be a forum for the sharing of information, discussion of system-wide issues and problem solving.

Relationships between DEET and precincts

41. The establishment of learning precincts, with their responsibilities and authorities, through their governing structures to make many decisions regarding educational delivery and learning within their respective schools, will require changes in the responsibilities and authorities of DEET and in the way it goes about its business. The review team sees a 'new' DEET supporting rather than directing secondary education within the Territory, while nonetheless being responsible to the Minister for its high quality.
42. Toward the ideal end of the spectrum, such support is most likely to involve the provision of guidelines to facilitate the work of the various precincts and school-based personnel. These guidelines will, for example, include those concerning pedagogical development, management of staff and facilities and school and precinct leadership and administration. Other forms of support will also be required, especially during early years of implementation and in those precincts that do not yet have sufficient capability to fulfil their responsibilities in an effective and efficient manner.
43. Support for development of the precincts will, in turn, require DEET to build its own capacities and capabilities to enable it to provide this support. Developments in this regard will require some re-structuring within DEET, and this is taken up in Chapter 11.
44. DEET will have a significant role to play in assisting the various precincts in their interactions with the proposed Quality Services Agency (see Chapter 12). The nature of relationships that are developed between precincts and the Quality Services Agency are critical to success.

Links between the Quality Services Agency and the precincts

45. It is envisaged that a Quality Services Agency will be established as an independent body that reports to the Minister for Education. The agency will have a role to monitor the quality of the processes and outcomes of the precincts.
46. The precincts provide an innovative way forward that will allow young people to benefit from all the educational resources and other support services available in their region. They will promote smooth transitions between stages of education, and effective preparation for life beyond school, whether it be work, work and further study, of community participation in enterprise activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishing Learning Precincts.

It is recommended that

- 17.** to assist in the planning for learning precincts, NT DEET
 - work with schools their communities and other relevant agencies to develop Learning Precincts as defined in this report according to the specific and different needs of urban, regional and remote areas
 - when a particular set of partnerships is agreed upon, work with an initial implementation group to be formed, consisting of the current school principals and school community representatives, to prepare a plan for precinct development, following the phases outlined in Chapter 7.
 - as a matter of priority, hold discussions with the Palmerston and Taminmin High Schools communities and the wider Palmerston and outer Darwin communities to determine the most appropriate option for the new secondary education facility in Palmerston, and that options considered be in accordance with the Learning Precinct model as outlined in this report
 - as a matter of priority, hold discussions with the CDU so that the memorandum of understanding between DEET and the university regarding Centralian College is in accordance with the Stages of Schooling and Learning Precinct models
 - work with its own schools and any non-Government schools that wish to be involved with a precinct, to establish individually negotiated Memoranda of Understanding about the terms of their participation.
- 18.** to assist in the establishment of Learning Precincts NT DEET work with schools to
 - implement the introduction of Learning Precincts through a staged process according to the four phases of precinct development as outlined in this report. The development of precincts should coincide with the movement of Year 7 into high school in the Top End, and with Year 10 consolidating with Years 11 and 12 at the same time, planned for 2006
 - adopt as guidelines for precinct development and implementation the advice provided in this chapter about the responsibilities and operation of learning precinct governance structures, about relationships between precincts and between them and NT DEET, and about links between the Quality Services Agency and the precincts.