



**National Catholic Education Commission**

**Indigenous Student Trends in  
Catholic Schools  
1985-2004**

**Report from the  
NCEC Working Group on Catholic Schools Data**

**June 2005**

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## Indigenous Student Trends in Catholic Schools

1985-2004

### 1. About this Report

1. This report is a new direction for the Working Group on Catholic Schools Data. Where previous reports to NCEC on data related to Australian Catholic schools have been compendium reports on trends and issues relating to Catholic schools and Catholic students in non-Catholic schools, this report is the first to focus on a specific topic.
2. Drawing from the NCEC Australian Catholic Education Statistics (ACES) database, this report specifically focuses on the enrolment trends of Indigenous students in Catholic schools; and examines the proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic and non-Catholic schools.
3. The starting point for this report is a 'snapshot' of the Australian Indigenous population and Indigenous students in Catholic schools using the latest available data. The report then examines enrolment trends for Indigenous students in Catholic schools, and examines these trends by geography, and by some characteristics of the school. Where previous reports from the Working Group have reported enrolment trends at national and state levels only, this report analyses the trends at diocesan and other geographic levels such as city and country from 1985 to 2004.
4. Following the reporting of Indigenous enrolment trends in Catholic schools, the question of equity of enrolment share for Indigenous students in Catholic schools is examined through four central questions:
  - 1) Is the proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools representative of the broader Indigenous community?
  - 2) What proportion of the Indigenous students are in Catholic and non-Catholic schools?
  - 3) What proportion of Catholic Indigenous students are in Catholic schools?
  - 4) How does the increase in Indigenous student enrolments compare to the increase in Students with Disabilities (the only other specific funding targeted student group) in Catholic schools?

5. Indigenous people are the most socially and educationally disadvantaged group of people in Australia today. Social, economic, educational and health issues for many Indigenous people are sadly equal to the worst standards of any country in the world. And there are many barriers to improvement. Many of these issues are beyond the boundaries of education, but it is the teachers and school systems which confront these issues daily.
6. The Working Group has provided a 'base report' for enrolment trends in Indigenous education, and deliberately makes no attempt to link the trends to the broader social and educational issues relating to Indigenous education. The reasons for the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in school attendance, literacy and numeracy, and post-compulsory school retention are complex and beyond the charter of the Working Group.
7. However, this report is intended to provide a starting point to assist commissions and dioceses in identifying Indigenous enrolment trends in Catholic schools, and it is the recommendation of the Working Group that the issues, implications and opportunities identified in the report be articulated and reported by NCEC. As a result, the section titled 'Issues and Implications' has been included, but deliberately not written to enable others with expertise in Catholic Indigenous education to contribute to this report.
8. As a consequence, this report is necessarily an interim report about Indigenous enrolments in Catholic education; and following direction from NCEC, will be further developed (including additional research and analysis if required) to provide an understanding of Indigenous education in Catholic schools in Australia.

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## 2. About the Data

9. The data analysed in this report is available to all states and dioceses through the Australian Catholic Education Statistics (ACES) database. This report's data in the ACES database is drawn from two primary sources – the annual DEST Schools Census, and the national Census of Population and Housing, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) every five years.
10. The accuracy and validity of Indigenous statistics are often questioned, as Indigenous populations have been a) subject to dispute regarding how people should be defined as Indigenous, and b) unequivocally undercounted. The definitional issue relates to whether self-identification should be considered to be the sole legitimate determinant for Indigenous identification for an individual, or whether Indigenous identification of the person should be linked to community identification, heritage identification and/or administrative identification.
11. Self-identification is important to the accuracy of the data; because ultimately, the individual's willingness and desire to identify as being Indigenous affects the completeness of Indigenous statistics. The legitimacy or otherwise of Indigenous self-identification however, will remain a discussion for other forums, and the Working Group's research in this report proceeds on the validity of the self-identification definitions from the two government agencies collecting the source data in this report.
12. The question of the undercounting of the data also needs to be addressed. The following sections outline the accuracy of the enumeration of Indigenous students and populations analysed in this report.

### **DEST Annual Schools Census**

13. Indigenous students identified in the DEST annual schools census are defined as “Those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Where school records do not include this information, schools may wish to seek advice from the student in question or a parent or guardian. It is important to note that Indigenous persons exercise a choice in identifying their Indigenous status and identification of Indigenous status by other parties is to be discouraged.”

14. Although the Commonwealth Government provides funding to Catholic schools and Catholic systems for Indigenous students through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP), DEST conducts negligible data verification of the number of Indigenous students reported annually.
15. With limited verification by DEST, it is inevitable that in the twenty years of data collection of the Indigenous enrolment statistics, there will have been a small number of inaccuracies reported in the data. However, this does not diminish the validity of annual Indigenous student statistics within the context of this report. Small inconsistencies have occurred, and even in the ACES database in 2004, the exact number of Indigenous students when aggregated by sex, individual grade for all schools do have minor discrepancies (of one or two students) to the state and national Indigenous student totals. These minor differences are of negligible importance to the validity of the data overall however.
16. Statistics in the ACES database provide a twenty-year analysis of Indigenous student enrolments for every individual Catholic school in Australia; and critically, annual changes in the data are consistent within schools, and within states over time. As a result of this consistency over such a lengthy timeframe, readers should have confidence that the Indigenous data for Catholic schools provides an accurate reporting of Indigenous student trends.
17. While DEST annual data has a high level of internal validity, caution should be taken if comparing absolute numbers of Indigenous students from the DEST annual census to other national or state-based educational datasets, such as the Basic Skills Test (BST), English Literacy and Language Assessment (ELLA) or Secondary Numeracy Assessment (SNAP). Indigenous identification by the student, their parent(s), and by the school will vary at the different ages of the student, and by programs identification definitions for specific educational and funding programs and purposes.

### **ABS Population Census**

18. Indigenous populations from the five-yearly ABS population census have been historically under-represented, primarily through self-identification, ABS collection strategies, or as a result of Commonwealth legislation. Until the 1967 Referendum, 'Aboriginal' people were defined as people being more than 50% Aboriginal descent, and were identified in the ABS census simply to exclude them from the official population figures (as the



Constitution required). The Constitutional requirement that Aboriginal people be excluded from the official population figures was revoked as a result of the 1967 Referendum.

19. Whilst the ABS has essentially used the same self-identification question in the census since 1981, the unusually large increase in the number of Indigenous people enumerated from census to census places a question mark over the validity of census data when investigating the Indigenous population. **Table 1** shows the dramatic increase in the Indigenous population in Australia over the last three censuses.

**Table 1:** Change in the Indigenous population, Australia, 1991 to 2001 Census

Australian Indigenous population (1991 Census)	265,189
Australian Indigenous population (2001 Census)	409,770
<b>Change in Indigenous population from 1991 to 2001 Census</b>	<b>+ 144,581</b>
<b>Percentage increase of Indigenous population (1991 to 2001 Census)</b>	<b>+ 35%</b>
Percentage increase of non-Indigenous population (1991 to 2001 Census)	+ 10%

Note: Australian population excludes External Territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

20. The increase of 35% in Indigenous people from the 1991 to 2001 Census simply cannot be explained by natural increase alone; so part of the reason for this increase was due to other factors. These included the increasing propensity for people to identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent; changes in the transmission rate (the rate at which couples - where one partner is Indigenous - identify their children as Indigenous on the census form); and changes in census editing procedures; census undercount; and the decreasing non-response to the question on Indigenous status on the census form.
21. The ABS' Indigenous Enumeration Strategy (IES) has impacted on the 2001 census count in some areas. For the 2001 Census, the ABS committed significant resources to improving the coverage and accuracy of the count of the Indigenous population through an Indigenous Enumeration Strategy. The IES consisted of special collection procedures and census awareness activities, including the use of specially designed forms for use by interviewers in some Indigenous communities; the employment of Indigenous people to assist with census enumeration; a variety of awareness activities designed to address cultural barriers that might have discouraged Indigenous peoples from participating in the census; consultation and liaison with Indigenous organisations; and a special recruitment for Indigenous people to assist with the census collection.

22. The ABS also implemented an evaluation plan for Indigenous communities which captured information and assessed the success of the collection activities and response of the Indigenous communities; and reconciled census counts with administrative data sources for particular Indigenous communities. Additionally, the ABS arranged for three independent researchers from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) to accompany census collectors to assess the effectiveness of the IES in a selection of remote locations.
23. Changes in the ABS census processes at the 2001 Census, and the increase in the individual's willingness to identify as being Indigenous have clearly improved the accuracy of Indigenous census data, and readers should have confidence in the ABS Indigenous data for the 2001 Census. Paradoxically however, improvements to the data capture and processing by the ABS for the 2001 Census have highlighted the inaccuracies of previous census data; and comparisons between censuses for Indigenous populations from censuses prior to the 2001 Census should be considered in the context of both the increasing Indigenous population (which did occur), and improvements to the collection of Indigenous data. This is not to infer that Indigenous counts from previous censuses are entirely unreliable (they are not), but rather that there are other factors relevant when directly comparing Indigenous counts between population censuses.

#### **About the ABS Census Data**

24. The ACES database includes the count of the number of people who (self) identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander from question on the Census form: *Is the person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?* However, for us to understand the proportion of Indigenous students in non-Catholic schools, the database incorporates customised (purchased) data from the ABS which 'cross tabulated' those students who identified as being Indigenous on the Census form to the type of school they attended. This enables quantifying and understanding regarding the number of indigenous students in (primary and secondary) Government, Catholic and 'Other Non-Government' schools.
25. The ACES database incorporates an additional customised subset of the Indigenous student population from the ABS Census, which cross tabulated Indigenous students by school type by the religious identification of the family. That is, the data provides the number of Indigenous students from Catholic and Non-Catholic families attending Government, Catholic and 'Other Non-Government' schools. This enables us to quantify

the proportions of Indigenous students attending Catholic schools, as well as the proportions of Catholic Indigenous students attending non-Catholic schools. **Table 2** illustrates the structure of this dataset.

**Table 2:** Typology of customised census data: Indigenous children attending school – Religion of parents by type of school being attended

		Children in Catholic Family	Children in Non-Catholic Family	Children not in Family	Total Children
Infants/ Primary	Government				
	Catholic				
	Other Non-Government				
	Total Primary				
Secondary	Government				
	Catholic				
	Other Non-Government				
	Total Secondary				

26. As with previous reports from the NCEC Working Group on Catholic Schools Data, the census data for ‘Catholic students’ is based, and remains based upon two key propositions: (1) that parents choose the school their child attends; and (2) that parents choose the religion of their child. As such, the Working Group’s research on Indigenous student trends proceeds on the assumption that students have been, and continue to be enrolled in Catholic schools as a conscious act of one or both parents and that students described as Catholic on the ABS Census form reflect the conscious decision of their parents. Consequently, the identification of the parent’s religion/denomination was, and is essential in identifying potential enrolments in the Catholic sector. As a result, Catholic Indigenous students includes students **where one or both parents had identified as being Catholic on the ABS Census return**. The rationale for this being that parents have a greater role in determining whether the child is likely to be enrolled in a Catholic or Government school than does the child; and therefore, the religious identification of both parents was more important than the religious identification of the child for this project.
27. As with the Indigenous identification question on the Census form, the ABS census question “*What is the person’s religion?*” is a self-identification question. Importantly, this is the only question on the census form for which the ABS instructions specifically states that “Answering this question is **OPTIONAL**” (ABS emphasis). It should be noted that the

ABS Census data in this report refers only to those people who self-identify as being Catholic. The data cannot be used to indicate the level of **commitment** to the Catholic Church (such as Church attendance or even those people being baptised as Catholic). As such, a proportion of the people (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) self-identifying as Catholic in the population census are likely to have negligible commitment to the Catholic Church. Identifying ‘committed’ Catholics, whether attending Catholic, Government, or Other Non-Government schools is currently not available, and would require research beyond the scope of any government census.

### Comparing the Datasets

28. While we can be confident that the datasets for the DEST annual Census and the ABS 2001 Census have validity by themselves, the question remains as to how closely do Indigenous student counts align between the datasets? **Table 3** shows that, at the national level, the enumeration of the number of Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic schools in 2001 (the year of the last ABS population census) was not significantly different between the DEST dataset, and the two ABS customised datasets. Given the different collection methods of the agencies, this is a remarkable similarity between the two sources of data.

**Table 3:** Comparison between Indigenous students in Catholic schools at DEST 2001 Schools Census and ABS 2001 Population Census

	Primary	Secondary	Total
DEST Annual Schools Census	6,279	3,563	9,842
ABS Census: Indigenous Students Dataset	6,261	3,738	9,999
ABS Census: Indigenous Catholic Students	6,241	3,688	9,929

29. As the table shows, the discrepancy between the number of Indigenous primary students enumerated in the DEST census in 2001 was only 18 students different to the ABS Censuses count of Indigenous students, and only 38 different to the number of Indigenous students from Catholic and non-Catholic families datasets. For secondary students, the difference was slightly higher (175 and 125 students difference from DEST), and overall the difference between DEST and the ABS datasets were 157 Indigenous students and 87 Indigenous (Catholic and non-Catholic) students.
30. The slightly larger difference between the DEST census and the ABS Census in 2001 for secondary students is not unexpected, as issues relating to Indigenous student mobility

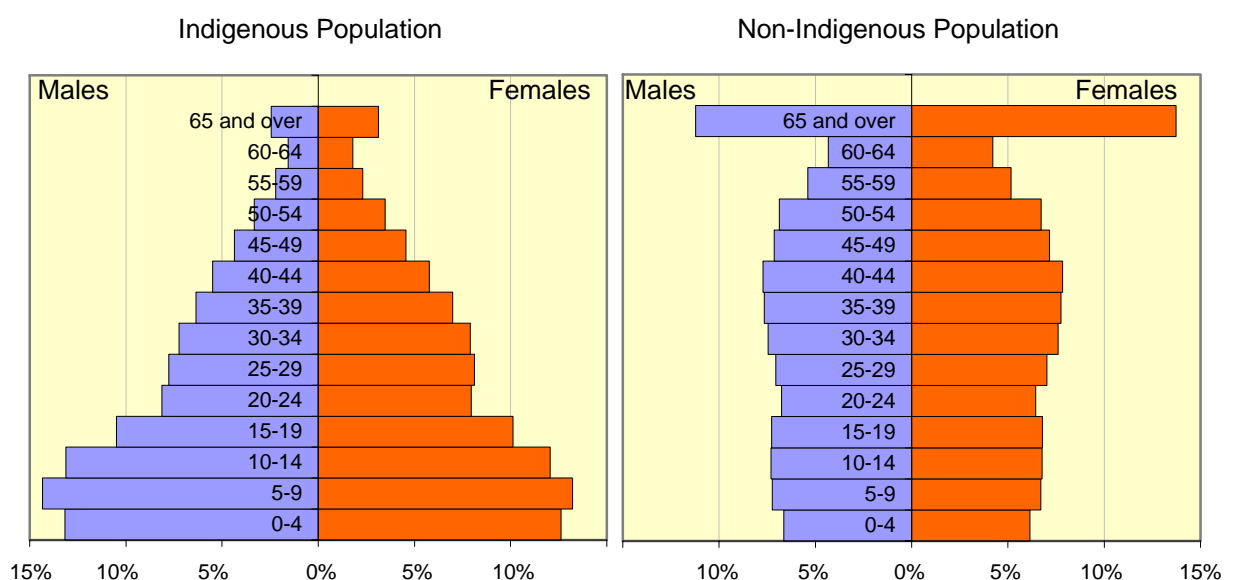
between school sectors, truancy and some parent's awareness of their student's school attendance (when completing the census form) would all be partial explanations for the differences between the datasets for Indigenous students in secondary Catholic schools in Australia.

31. In conclusion, Indigenous statistics in this report are drawn from the DEST annual schools census and the ABS population census. This section has shown that readers should have confidence in the accuracy and validity of the Indigenous student data recorded and analysed in this report. The DEST dataset provides an important and accurate time-series for understanding Indigenous student trends in Catholic schools in Australia, while the ABS Census provides the most accurate and comprehensive enumeration available for Indigenous populations and Indigenous students in all school sectors in Australia. Furthermore, when the datasets are brought together, the student counts in the datasets are so similar that readers can have confidence in the use of both datasets – whether each dataset stands alone, or when the datasets are brought together to help us understand enrolment trends and issues for Indigenous students in non-Catholic schools.

### 3. The Australian Indigenous Population

32. According to the latest ABS Census, there were 410,000 people who identified as being Indigenous at the 2001 Census. Of these people, 90% identified as being Aboriginal, 6% identified as being Torres Strait Islander, and 4% identified as being both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This was a recorded increase of 145,000 Indigenous people from the 1996 Census.
33. The median age for Indigenous Australians was 20 years of age, compared to 35 years of age for the non-Indigenous Australian population; and almost half (46%) of Indigenous Australians were under the age of 18, compared to one-quarter (25%) of the non-Indigenous population. Less than 3% of Indigenous people were aged 65 years or older, compared to more than 12% of the non-Indigenous population. **Graph 1** highlights this significant difference in the age distributions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia.

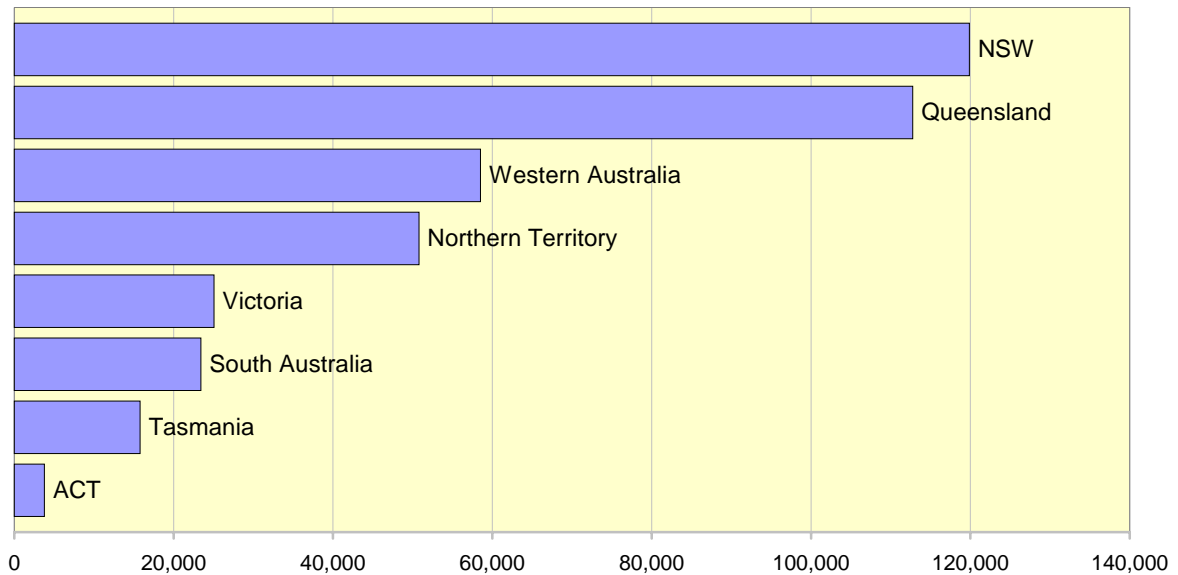
**Graph 1:** Age distribution of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, Australia, 2001 Census



34. More than half of all Indigenous Australians at the 2001 Census lived in NSW and Queensland, with the majority residing outside the capital cities. **Graph 2** and **Table 4** show that New South Wales had the greatest number of Indigenous Australians (120,000);

and that the Northern Territory, with almost one in four people being Indigenous, was the state/territory with the highest proportion of Indigenous people in the population. Victoria, with 25,000 Indigenous people in the state, has a significantly lower proportion of Indigenous people than any other state or territory.

**Graph 2:** Number of Indigenous persons by State and Territory, 2001 Census



**Table 4:** Indigenous persons by State and Territory, 2001 Census

	Number of Indigenous people	Indigenous as % of state/territory total population	% of Australian Indigenous Population
NSW	119,865	1.88%	29%
Victoria	25,078	0.54%	6%
Queensland	112,772	3.09%	28%
South Australia	23,425	1.60%	6%
Western Australia	58,496	3.20%	14%
Tasmania	15,773	3.45%	4%
Northern Territory	50,785	24.11%	12%
ACT	3,789	1.21%	1%
<b>Australia</b>	<b>409,983</b>	<b>2.16%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: Australian population excludes External Territories of Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

35. The Indigenous population had a slightly larger number of people identifying as Anglican than Catholic at the 2001 Census, with 23.2% of the Indigenous population identifying as Anglican, compared to 23.0% identifying as Catholic. This contrasts with the non-Indigenous population, where a larger proportion of people identified as being Catholic (26.4%) than Anglican (20.5%).
36. Indigenous people are disadvantaged across a range of socio-economic factors which impact on the individual. They experience lower income than the non-Indigenous population, higher rates of unemployment, poorer educational outcomes, lower rates of home ownership and higher rates of incarceration. The physical and social environments in which people live determine to a large degree whether they live productive lives relatively free of serious health and are fully able to participate in education. This is particularly the case for Indigenous people who still suffer disproportionately from some of the consequences of European settlement, in particular the impact of infectious and chronic diseases and social dislocation. Many Indigenous people live today in conditions of clear economic disadvantage due in part to their lower educational and employment levels.
37. Australia's Indigenous population does not experience the same health status, in terms of mortality, as that experienced by the total Australian population. For example:
- Babies of Indigenous mothers are twice as likely to have a low birth weight than babies of non-Indigenous mothers;
  - Infant deaths accounted for 7% of all Indigenous deaths, compared to only 1% of non-Indigenous deaths;
  - Three-quarters of Indigenous males and two-thirds of Indigenous female deaths occurred before the age of 65 years;
  - The estimated life expectancy at birth for Indigenous males and females is approximately 20 years below that of the total Australian population;
  - Overall, the Indigenous population is dying at three times the total population rate.
38. Indigenous children are over-represented in child protection systems across most of Australia. Indigenous children aged 10-17 years are placed under care and protection orders and in out-of-home care around six times that for non-Indigenous Australian children. The rates of incarceration in juvenile detention centres for Indigenous



Australians aged 10-17 years are far higher than those for non-Indigenous Australians, and 43% of all 10-17 year olds in detention centres are Indigenous Australians.

39. Alcohol and drugs are significant social and health issues in some Indigenous communities and while several surveys have shown that overall, Indigenous adults were less likely to drink (42%) than non-Indigenous adults (62%), the ABS National Health Survey found that those indigenous people consuming alcohol were more likely to have consumed alcohol at hazardous levels (29% compared with 17% for non-Indigenous Australians). The AIHW National Drug Strategy Household Survey also found that illicit drug use among Indigenous people (57%) was higher than for non-Indigenous Australians (37%).
40. The 2001 Census highlighted many of the social and economic indicators relating to the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Seventy percent of Indigenous people did not complete post-compulsory schooling, compared to only 46% of non-Indigenous people. Less than one in every five Indigenous adults has a university degree, compared to two in every five non-Indigenous adults. Increasingly the computer is becoming relevant to a student's education, but at the 2001 Census, only 18% of Indigenous children used a computer at home, compared to 49% of non-Indigenous children.
41. Less than a third of households with Indigenous people are home owners compared with more than two-thirds of non-Indigenous households. Indigenous people are more than twice as likely as other households to be living in rental accommodation. Many Indigenous peoples, especially those living in remote communities, do not have adequate quality housing, reliable supplies of water and electricity or adequate sewerage and drainage systems. Four times as many discrete Indigenous communities use bore water as their main source of drinking water than use a town's water supply. In communities that are not connected to the town water supply, over a quarter have failed water quality tests at least once during the previous twelve months.
42. The above statistics are a just a few examples of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia today, and reinforce the social and educational disadvantages of Indigenous students, which impact on the students, the teachers and the Catholic and non-Catholic schools that educate Indigenous students each day.

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#### 4. Indigenous Enrolments in Catholic Schools: The 2004 Snapshot

##### The National Snapshot

43. In 2004, there were 10,975 identified Indigenous students in Australian Catholic schools, which represented 1.6% of all students in Catholic schools. Of these students, the 6,733 primary students represented 61% of all Indigenous students, while the remaining 39%, or 4,243 Indigenous students were in secondary education.
44. The proportion of Indigenous males and females were almost the same, with 5,514 males students comprising 50.2% of students and the 5,461 female students comprising 49.8% of Indigenous students. This is almost identical to the proportions for that of non-Indigenous students.
45. Indigenous students were predominately enrolled in Catholic schools outside of the capital cities, and overall, 70% of Indigenous students were enrolled outside of a capital city. By comparison, only 32% of non-Indigenous students were enrolled in Catholic schools outside of the capital cities of Australia. Seventy-five percent of the Indigenous primary students were enrolled in schools outside of the capital cities, and 61% of Indigenous secondary students were still enrolled in Catholic schools outside of the capital cities.

**Table 5:** Summary information: Indigenous students in Catholic schools, Australia, 2004

	Number	%
Total Indigenous students	10,975	1.6%
Primary	6,733	61%
Secondary	4,239	39%
Male	5,514	50.2%
Female	5,461	49.8%

46. **Table 6** reports that the apparent retention rate for Indigenous students from Catholic primary schools to Catholic secondary schools is greater than 100%, which indicates that many Indigenous students commence their Catholic education in secondary schools. The retention rate for girls from Catholic primary to Catholic secondary schools is almost identical for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, with the retention for both being just under 118%. Interestingly, the retention of Indigenous boys from primary to

secondary is significantly higher than for non-Indigenous boys however, with Indigenous boys having a retention rate of 123% compared to non-Indigenous boys of 114%.

47. The apparent Retention Rate for post-compulsory schooling (students in Catholic schools staying from Year 10 to complete Year 12) is significantly different between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Where 78% of non-Indigenous male, and 86% of female students are retained from Year 10 to Year 12, less than 60% of Indigenous students are retained from Year 10 to Year 12. And importantly, the Apparent Retention Rate for Indigenous males and females is almost the same, unlike for non-Indigenous students, where the rate for female students is significantly higher than for male students.

**Table 6:** Apparent Retention Rates, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, Australia, 2004

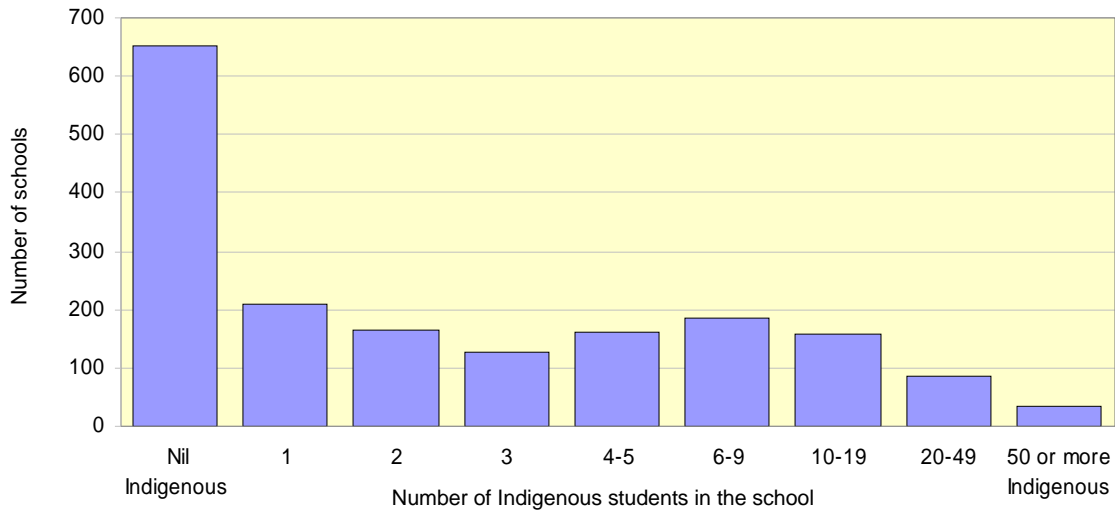
	Indigenous Males	Non-Indigenous Males	Indigenous Females	Non-Indigenous Females
Primary to Secondary	122.7	113.6	117.4	117.7
Year 10 to Year 12	58.8	78.3	59.4	86.3

Note: NSW, ACT Vic and Tas retention are from Grade 6 (primary) to Grade 7 (Secondary). SA, NT, Qld and WA are from Grade 7 (primary) to Grade 8 (secondary).

48. Six hundred and fifty one Catholic schools in Australia had no Indigenous students enrolled in 2004, which was 37% of all Catholic schools in Australia. However, as **Graph 3** highlights, one-fifth of the 63% of schools with Indigenous student enrolled had only the one Indigenous student enrolled. And nearly half (46%) of all Catholic schools with Indigenous students enrolled had only one, two or three Indigenous students in the school. This has significant implications for the delivery of specific Indigenous targeted programs.
49. There are relatively few schools with large numbers of Indigenous students enrolled at the school, and only thirteen Catholic schools had more than 100 Indigenous students enrolled. Six of these schools are located in Broome Diocese, four are in the Diocese of Darwin, two in Townsville Diocese and one school in the Archdiocese of Perth. Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrur Catholic school at Port Keats (322 Indigenous students) and Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School, Bathurst Island (215 Indigenous students), which are both in the Northern Territory, are the two schools with the largest number of Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic schools in Australia.
50. There are eleven Catholic schools in Australia which have 100% Indigenous enrolments. However, these include Catholic schools at Bowraville (a campus of St John's College,

Coffs Harbour in Lismore Diocese) with only six students, Hammond Island (Cairns Diocese) with fourteen students and Derby (Broome Diocese) with nineteen students.

**Graph 3:** Number of Indigenous students in Catholic schools, Australia, 2004

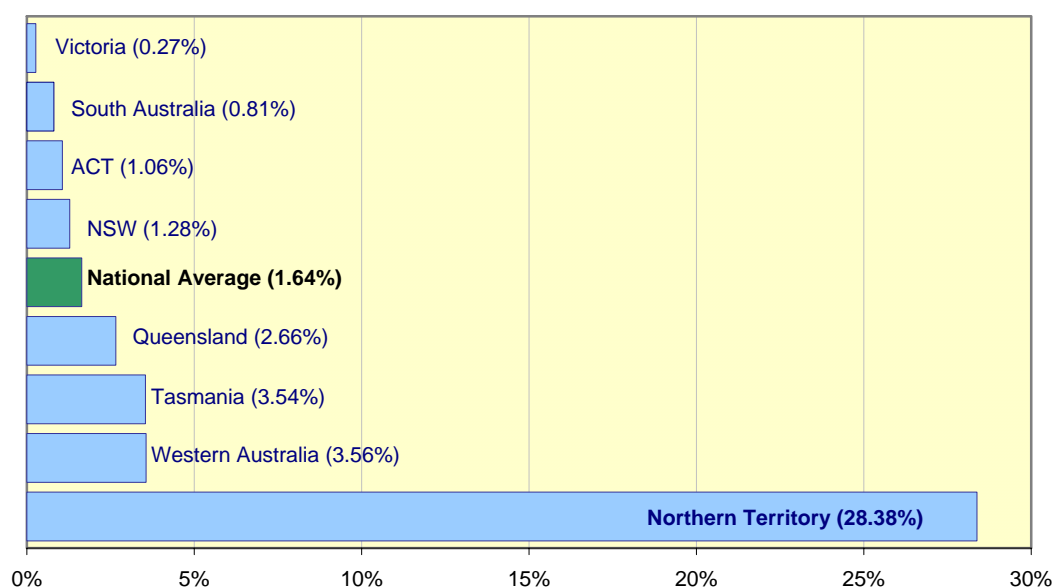


### The State and Territory Snapshot

51. NSW (3,040 Indigenous students) and Queensland (2,962 Indigenous students) were the states/territories with the largest number of Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic schools (**Table 7**). Northern Territory, with 28% of students being Indigenous, was easily the state/territory with the highest proportion of Indigenous students enrolled, while Victoria, with 484 Indigenous students had the percentage of Indigenous students in Catholic schools (**Graph 4**).

**Table 7:** Indigenous students in Catholic schools by State/Territory, 2004

	Indigenous Students	Indigenous as % of all students enrolled	% of Indigenous Students
NSW	3,040	1.28%	28%
Queensland	2,962	2.66%	27%
Western Australia	2,168	3.56%	20%
Northern Territory	1,310	28.38%	12%
Victoria	484	0.27%	4%
Tasmania	462	3.54%	4%
South Australia	367	0.81%	3%
ACT	183	1.06%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,976</b>	<b>1.64%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Graph 4:** Indigenous students, as proportion of all students, by state/territory, 2004

52. The majority of Indigenous students in every state and territory were enrolled in Catholic primary schools, and most states had their proportion of their Indigenous students in primary and secondary schools close to the national average of 61% for primary and 39% for secondary. Northern Territory had the highest proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic primary schools, with two in every three Indigenous students being a primary student. Queensland had the highest number of Indigenous students in secondary schools, and also the highest proportion, with almost half (46%) of Indigenous students being enrolled in secondary education (**Table 8**).

**Table 8:** Number and proportion of primary and secondary Indigenous students by State/Territory, 2004

	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
NSW	1,949	1,091	64%	36%
Queensland	1,598	1,364	54%	46%
Western Australia	1,426	742	66%	34%
Northern Territory	883	427	67%	33%
Victoria	279	205	58%	42%
Tasmania	270	192	58%	42%
South Australia	218	149	59%	41%
ACT	110	73	60%	40%
<b>Australia</b>	<b>6,733</b>	<b>4,243</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>39%</b>

53. Apparent Retention Rates for Indigenous students at anything less than the national level has little meaning in Catholic schools due to the small number of Indigenous students moving from one grade to the next. For example, the Apparent Retention Rate for Indigenous girls moving from Grade 6 (the last year of primary school in Victoria) in 2003 to Grade 7 (the first year of secondary school) in 2004 is 110%, but this is only an increase from the 19 Indigenous girls in all Catholic schools in Victoria in Year 6 to the 21 Indigenous girls in Year 7 last year. And for post-schooling retention, the effect is even more pronounced, with there being only two Indigenous female students in Year 12 in the ACT Catholic schools last year.
54. Because of the obvious issue in calculating the Apparent Retention Rates for Indigenous students, this report does not provide the retention rates for each state individually. Rather, **Tables 9 and 10** provide the total number of students in each of the relevant grades every each state and territory, and to enable readers to calculate the Apparent Retention Rates if they wish.

**Table 9:** Indigenous male and female students in Catholic schools in last year of primary school in 2003 and first year of secondary school in 2004

	Boys			Girls		
	Last year of primary school in 2003	1st year of secondary school in 2004	Change	Last year of primary school in 2003	1st year of secondary school in 2004	Change
NSW	127 →	133	+ 6	108 →	119	+ 11
Qld	77 →	159	+ 82	72 →	138	+ 66
WA	88 →	89	+ 1	94 →	70	- 24
NT	37 →	36	- 1	48 →	57	+ 9
Vic	20 →	11	- 9	19 →	22	+ 3
Tas	15 →	19	+ 4	24 →	20	- 4
SA	11 →	15	+ 4	15 →	18	+ 3
ACT	8 →	8	Nil	8 →	12	+ 4
<b>Australia</b>	<b>383 →</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>+ 87</b>	<b>388 →</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>+ 68</b>

**Table 10:** Indigenous male and female students in Catholic schools in Year 10 in 2002 and Year 12 in 2004

	Males			Females		
	Year 10 in 2002	Year 12 in 2004	Change	Year 10 in 2002	Year 12 in 2004	Change
NSW	83 →	42	- 41	42 →	48	+ 6
Qld	159 →	137	- 22	125 →	96	- 29
WA	92 →	69	- 23	41 →	29	- 12
NT	27 →	34	+ 7	7 →	13	+ 6
Vic	8 →	17	+ 9	5 →	11	+ 6
Tas	21 →	9	- 12	6 →	7	+ 1
SA	12 →	14	+ 2	10 →	12	+ 2
ACT	8 →	6	- 2	5 →	2	- 3
<b>Australia</b>	<b>410 →</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>- 82</b>	<b>241 →</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>- 23</b>

55. **Table 11** shows the proportion of schools in each state and territory by the number of Indigenous students enrolled in the school in 2004. The table shows that there is significant diversity between the states regarding the number of Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic schools. For example, two-thirds of the schools in South Australia have no Indigenous student or only one Indigenous student in the school, while no school in the Northern Territory has less than 10 Indigenous students in a Catholic school. Queensland and ACT have a low proportion of their schools with no Indigenous student enrolled, which contrasts to Victoria, where two-thirds of the Catholic schools have no Indigenous student enrolled.

**Table 11:** Number of Indigenous students in Catholic schools, by state and territory, 2004

	Nil Indigenous Students	1-3 Indigenous Students	4-9 Indigenous Students	10-49 Indigenous Students	50 or more Indigenous Students
NSW	29%	32%	22%	16%	—
Queensland	12%	29%	31%	25%	3%
Western Australia	30%	27%	21%	16%	7%
Northern Territory	—	—	—	53%	47%
Victoria	67%	25%	7%	1%	—
Tasmania	—	18%	40%	40%	3%
South Australia	34%	33%	25%	9%	—
ACT	13%	26%	39%	23%	—
<b>Australia</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>2%</b>

### The Diocesan Snapshot

56. **Table 12** orders all dioceses in Australia by the number of Indigenous students enrolled in the Catholic schools in the diocese, and records each diocese's proportion of all Indigenous students in Catholic schools in Australia in 2004. **Table 13** records Indigenous students as a proportion of all students in the diocese.
57. The Diocese of Darwin (which is effectively the Northern Territory), and the Diocese of Broome were the dioceses with the largest number (**Table 3**), and the largest proportions of Indigenous students in Australia (**Graph 2**). These two dioceses combined have almost one-quarter of the Indigenous students enrolled in the Catholic schools of the Australian dioceses.

**Table 12:** Indigenous students in Catholic schools, by Diocese, 2004

	Indigenous Students	Proportion of total Indigenous Students
Darwin	1,310	11.9%
Broome	1,251	11.4%
Townsville	913	8.3%
Brisbane	845	7.7%
Perth	680	6.2%
Cairns	511	4.7%
Hobart	462	4.2%
Lismore	433	3.9%
Armidale	392	3.6%
Rockhampton	390	3.6%
Sydney	379	3.5%
Maitland-Newcastle	335	3.0%
Parramatta	333	3.0%
Canberra-Goulburn	331	3.0%
Bathurst	313	2.9%
Toowoomba	304	2.8%
Adelaide	297	2.7%
Wilcannia-Forbes	227	2.1%
Wollongong	224	2.0%
Geraldton	191	1.7%
Melbourne	170	1.6%
Wagga Wagga	147	1.3%
Sandhurst	141	1.3%
Broken Bay	109	1.0%
Ballarat	104	1.0%
Port Pirie	70	0.6%
Sale	69	0.6%
Bunbury	46	0.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,977</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 13:** Indigenous students, as proportion of all students, by Diocese, 2004

	Proportion of Diocese's students
Broome	73.16%
Darwin	28.38%
Townsville	8.82%
Wilcannia-Forbes	8.58%
Armidale	6.72%
Geraldton	6.29%
Cairns	6.20%
Hobart	3.54%
Bathurst	3.16%
Toowoomba	3.12%
Rockhampton	2.96%
Lismore	2.49%
Maitland-Newcastle	1.96%
Wagga Wagga	1.71%
<b>National Average</b>	<b>1.64%</b>
Port Pirie	1.52%
Perth	1.38%
Canberra-Goulburn	1.34%
Brisbane	1.21%
Wollongong	1.03%
Sandhurst	1.00%
Adelaide	0.73%
Parramatta	0.72%
Ballarat	0.67%
Bunbury	0.65%
Broken Bay	0.49%
Sale	0.49%
Sydney	0.48%
Melbourne	0.12%



### A snapshot of Capital Cities and the Rest of the State

58. As reported earlier, the majority of Indigenous students are in Catholic schools outside of the state's capital city, with seven in every ten of the Indigenous students enrolled in a Catholic school outside of the capital city. This is a significantly different proportion to that for non-Indigenous students. **Table 14** shows that the distribution between city and 'country' is similar in all state's other than South Australia, where three-quarters of Indigenous students are enrolled in Catholic schools in the Adelaide metropolitan area.

**Table 14:** Proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools, capital city and rest of state, by states and territories, 2004

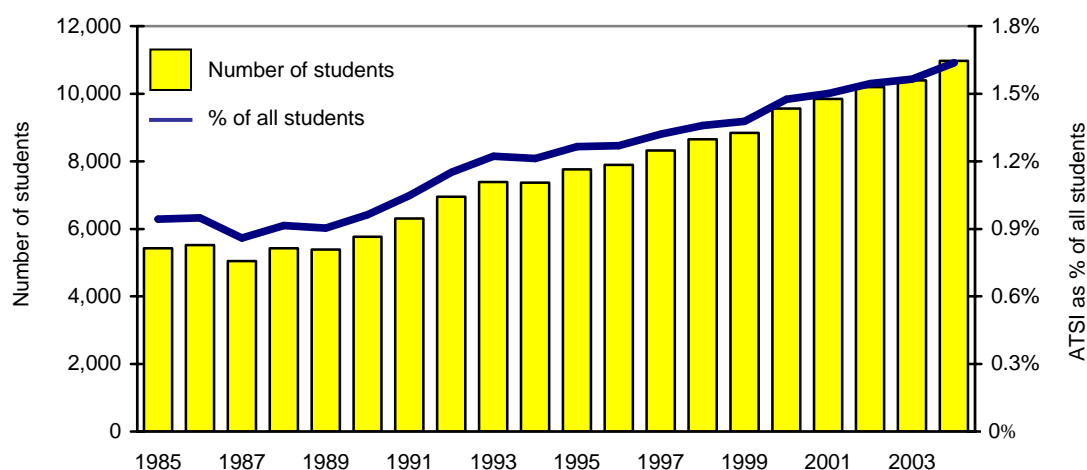
	% of Indigenous students in the State		% of Indigenous students in the State
Sydney	30%	Rest of NSW	70%
Melbourne	29%	Rest of Victoria	71%
Brisbane	23%	Rest of Queensland	77%
Adelaide	76%	Rest of South Australia	24%
Perth	25%	Rest of Western Australia	75%
Hobart	35%	Rest of Tasmania	65%
Darwin	31%	Rest of Northern Territory	69%
<b>All capital cities</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>All areas outside of capital</b>	<b>70%</b>

Note: The geographical classification for the ACT has no 'rest of state'.

## 5. Indigenous Student Trends in Catholic Schools, 1985-2004

59. There has been an increased openness of Catholic schools to Indigenous students in recent years. The number and proportion of Aboriginal Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic schools has doubled over the period 1985-2004 (**Graph 5** and **Table 15**). This increase is likely to be maintained for the foreseeable future, especially given the increased levels of financial and other support now available for Indigenous students. One of the key factors has been the significant increase in the level of Commonwealth Government support mainly through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP). Apart from the Commonwealth program, many dioceses began to develop more systematic enrolment and support policies in response to the Statement by Pope John Paul II to the Indigenous community at Alice Springs in 1986 (**Appendix 1**).

**Graph 5:** Number and percentage of Indigenous students in Catholic schools, Australia, 1985-2004



**Table 15:** Number and percentage of Indigenous students in Catholic schools, Australia, 1985-2004

Year	ATSI Students	ATSI as % of all students
1985	5,423	0.9%
1986	5,523	0.9%
1987	5,045	0.9%
1988	5,425	0.9%
1989	5,384	0.9%
1990	5,769	1.0%
1991	6,313	1.0%
1992	6,951	1.2%
1993	7,385	1.2%
1994	7,369	1.2%
1995	7,763	1.3%
1996	7,895	1.3%
1997	8,316	1.3%
1998	8,655	1.4%
1999	8,845	1.4%
2000	9,566	1.5%
2001	9,843	1.5%
2002	10,199	1.5%
2003	10,394	1.6%
2004	10,976	1.6%

60. **Table 16** shows that between 1985 and 2004, the number of Indigenous students has increased in every state and territory, and the number of Indigenous students in Catholic schools is more than doubled their number of Indigenous students enrolled in 1985.

**Table 16:** Number and percentage of Indigenous students in Catholic schools by states and territories, 1985 and 2004

	1985		2004		Change from 1985 to 2004
	Number of Students	% of Students	Number of Students	% of Students	
NSW	1,029	0.5%	3,040	1.3%	+ 2,011
Victoria	93	0.1%	484	0.3%	+ 391
Queensland	1,400	1.6%	2,962	2.7%	+ 1,562
SA	83	0.3%	367	0.8%	+ 284
WA	1,617	3.8%	2,168	3.6%	+ 551
Tasmania	131	1.2%	462	3.5%	+ 331
NT	1,060	25.4%	1,310	28.4%	+ 250
ACT	10	0.1%	183	1.1%	+ 173
<b>Australia</b>	<b>5,423</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>10,976</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>+ 5,553</b>

61. **Table 17** shows that growth in Indigenous enrolments occurred in both primary and secondary in every state and territory. Forty-two percent of the increase in Indigenous primary enrolments between 1985 and 2004 occurred in NSW alone. For secondary enrolments, the increase in NSW and Queensland enrolments accounted for 62% of the growth in secondary Indigenous enrolments in Catholic schools over this time.

**Table 17:** Changes in the number of primary and secondary Indigenous students in Catholic schools, by states and territories, 1985 and 2004

	Primary			Secondary		
	Indigenous students 1985	Indigenous students 2004	Change from 1985 to 2004	Indigenous students 1985	Indigenous students 2004	Change from 1985 to 2004
NSW	653	1,949	+ 1,296	376	1,091	+ 715
Victoria	32	279	+ 247	61	205	+ 144
Queensland	921	1,518	+ 677	479	1,364	+ 885
SA	42	218	+ 176	41	149	+ 108
WA	1,215	1,426	+ 211	402	742	+ 340
Tasmania	65	270	+ 205	66	192	+ 126
NT	768	883	+ 115	292	427	+ 135
ACT	1	110	+ 109	9	73	+ 64
<b>Australia</b>	<b>3,697</b>	<b>6,733</b>	<b>+ 3,036</b>	<b>1,726</b>	<b>4,243</b>	<b>+ 2,517</b>

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## 6. “Our Fair Share?”

62. Indigenous enrolments in Catholic schools in Australia have more than doubled since 1985, but as the title of this section indicates, the question remains as to whether this increase is adequate or appropriate. In other words: Is Catholic education ‘taking its fair share’ of Indigenous students. With increasing public scrutiny of the commitment to Catholic schools to Indigenous education, this sections examines the publicly available data from the 2001 ABS Population Census (available to states and dioceses in the ACES database), to answer four questions that can summarise Catholic school commitment to Indigenous education. These questions are:
- 1) Is the proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools representative of the broader Indigenous community?
  - 2) What proportion of the Indigenous students are in Catholic and non-Catholic schools?
  - 3) What proportion of Catholic Indigenous students are in Catholic schools?
  - 4) How does the increase in Indigenous student enrolments compare to the increase in Students with Disabilities (the only other specific funding targeted student group) in Catholic schools?

### 1) Is the proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools representative of the broader Indigenous community?

63. As this report has shown, there is a great diversity between states and dioceses in the proportions of Indigenous students in Catholic schools. While Indigenous students represent 1.6% of Catholic students in Australia, Indigenous students in Catholic schools in Victoria comprise only 0.3% of the student population, while in Northern Territory, they represent 28% of the Territory’s Catholic students. The immediate question these statistics raise – given the relatively small Indigenous population in Victoria – is whether 0.3% is any less representative than the 28% for students in the Northern Territory.
64. To investigate this question, the proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools is compared to the broader Indigenous population. As **Table 18** shows, overall, the proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools is higher than the broader Indigenous communities in Western Australia and Northern Territory, and almost identical in Tasmania and the ACT. The proportions of Indigenous students in Catholic schools in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia are all lower than the total

Indigenous populations in these states. And nationally, the proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools is lower than the proportion of Indigenous people in the Australian population.

**Table 18:** The proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools (2004) and the proportion of Indigenous Australians (2001), by states and territories

	<b>Indigenous students as proportion of all students in Catholic schools (2004 school census)</b>	<b>Indigenous population as proportion of total population (2001 Census)</b>
NSW	1.3%	1.9%
Victoria	0.3%	0.5%
Queensland	2.7%	3.2%
South Australia	0.8%	1.6%
Western Australia	3.6%	3.2%
Tasmania	3.5%	3.5%
Northern Territory	28.4%	25.1%
ACT	1.1%	1.2%
<b>Australia</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>

65. The above table is intended as a preliminary analysis of whether Catholic education is 'taking a fair share', and differences between the student proportion and the state proportion may be explained by further analysis of the specific age profiles of the Indigenous populations within the state, and within regions of the state. Despite this, the above table provides an important reference point for State and Territory Commissions, and leads to the next question for analysis.

## 2) What proportion of the Indigenous students are in Catholic and non-Catholic schools?

66. While the previous question explored the relativity between Catholic education and the general population, this question targets the specifics of examining what proportion of all Indigenous students in the states and territories are in Catholic schools, Government schools, and non-Catholic, non-Government school (Other Non-Government, or ONG schools). Using data from the 2001 Census, **Table 19** shows that nationally, 9% of Indigenous students were enrolled in Catholic schools, and 5% of Indigenous students were enrolled in non-Catholic, non-government schools. The significant majority of Indigenous students were enrolled in government schools. The table shows that there was a significant difference between the states and territories in the proportion of Indigenous

students in Catholic schools. Nearly one in five Indigenous students in the ACT were in Catholic schools, while in South Australia, just over one in twenty Indigenous students were enrolled in Catholic schools. **Table 20** shows that the proportion of each state's Indigenous student enrolments in Catholic schools is less than the proportion of the state's non-Indigenous students enrolled in Catholic schools.

**Table 19:** Proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic, Government and Other Non-Government Schools, by states and territories, 2001 Census

	<b>Indigenous students in Catholic schools</b>	<b>Indigenous students in Government schools</b>	<b>Indigenous students in ONG schools</b>
ACT	19%	77%	4%
Western Australia	12%	82%	6%
Tasmania	11%	85%	4%
Northern Territory	10%	84%	6%
NSW	9%	88%	3%
Victoria	9%	87%	4%
Queensland	8%	87%	5%
South Australia	6%	88%	6%
<b>Australia</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>5%</b>

**Table 20:** Comparison of the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous students in Catholic schools, states and territories, 2001 Census

	<b>Proportion of Indigenous students in Catholic schools</b>	<b>Proportion of Non-Indigenous students in Catholic schools</b>
ACT	19%	27%
Western Australia	12%	19%
Tasmania	11%	17%
Northern Territory	10%	16%
NSW	9%	22%
Victoria	9%	22%
Queensland	8%	18%
South Australia	6%	17%
<b>Australia</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>21%</b>

### 3) What proportion of Catholic Indigenous students are in Catholic schools?

67. It is clear from the data above that Indigenous students are less represented in Catholic schools than non-Indigenous students. Perhaps this is because Indigenous students are predominately not from Catholic families, and would therefore be less likely to attend a Catholic school? **Table 21** examines the proportion of Indigenous students from Catholic families attending Catholic, Government and Other Non-Government schools.
68. The majority of Indigenous students are enrolled in government schools, and this is so for Indigenous students from Catholic families. While Indigenous students from Catholic families have a higher representation in Catholic schools than the overall Indigenous student population, **Table 21** shows that only one in every five (21%) Indigenous students from a Catholic family attend a Catholic school, while more than three in every four (77%) Indigenous students from a Catholic family are enrolled in government schools. The ACT has the highest proportion of Indigenous students from Catholic families in Catholic schools; but even here, less than half of all of these students attend a Catholic school.

**Table 21:** Proportion of Indigenous students from Catholic families in Catholic, Government and Other Non-Government Schools, by states and territories, 2001 Census

	Indigenous Catholic students in Catholic schools	Indigenous Catholic students in Government schools	Indigenous Catholic students in ONG schools
ACT	40%	59%	1%
Northern Territory	31%	66%	3%
Tasmania	26%	71%	3%
Western Australia	24%	74%	3%
Victoria	21%	76%	3%
South Australia	21%	76%	3%
New South Wales	18%	80%	2%
Queensland	17%	80%	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>2%</b>

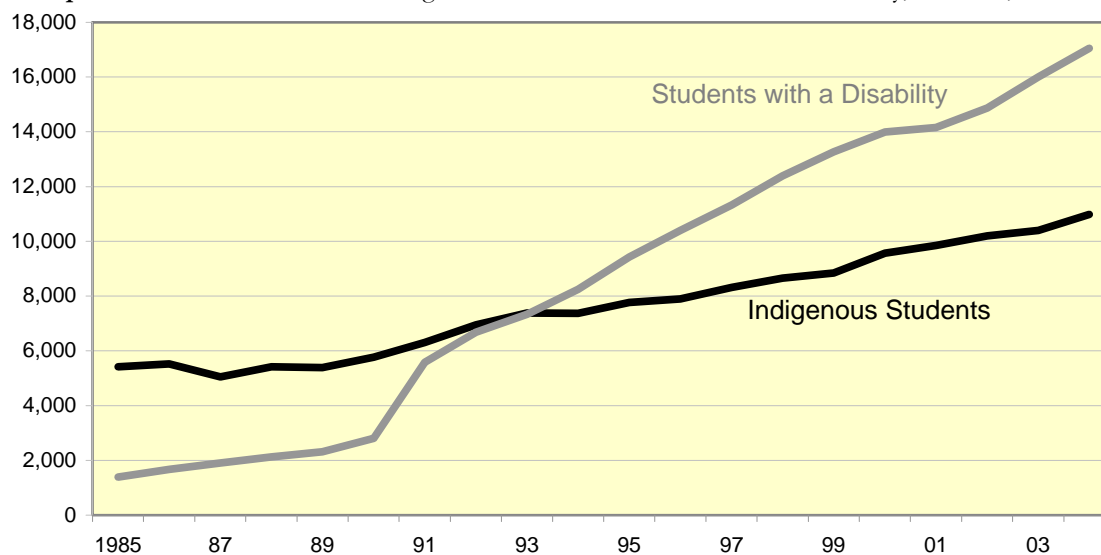
69. **Table 22** shows the proportion of Indigenous students from Catholic families, from non-Catholic families, and for Indigenous students not in families. The table shows that there is a significant diversity between the states for the proportion of 'Catholic' Indigenous students in Catholic schools. Nationally, two-thirds of Indigenous students in Catholic schools are from Catholic families, one-quarter of students are from non-Catholic families, and one in ten Indigenous students were not identified in a family relationship.

**Table 22:** Proportion of Indigenous students attending Catholic schools from Catholic families, non-Catholic families, and children not in families by states and territories, 2001 Census

	Indigenous students from Catholic family	Indigenous students from non-Catholic family	Indigenous students not in family
Northern Territory	76%	13%	11%
New South Wales	69%	26%	5%
Western Australia	68%	18%	14%
Victoria	64%	31%	5%
ACT	64%	32%	4%
Tasmania	61%	37%	2%
Queensland	51%	29%	20%
South Australia	51%	44%	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>11%</b>

#### 4) How does the increase in Indigenous student enrolments compare to the increase in Students with Disabilities in Catholic schools?

70. Indigenous students and Students with Disabilities are the two groups of students which receive specific target funding nationally. As with Indigenous students, there arose a greater awareness among Catholic educators in the early 1980s of the educational needs of Students with a Disability (SWD) and a preference for integrating them into regular schools wherever possible. The advent of the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act* in 1992 is clearly reflected in the data, which has both heightened awareness and created a real pressure point for enrolment. **Graph 6** illustrates that Catholic schools have responded more significantly (especially since 1992) to the particular challenge of SWD student enrolments than to the challenge of increasing Indigenous enrolments.

**Graph 6:** Enrolment trends for Indigenous students and Students with a Disability, Australia, 1985-2004



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## 7. Issues and Implications

71. Issues in Indigenous education are significant, and this report has only ‘scratched the surface’ of Indigenous enrolment trends in Catholic education. This section has been included, but deliberately not written to enable others with expertise in Catholic Indigenous education to contribute to this report.
72. Nevertheless, the report has highlighted some issues. These include:
- There are regional differences in Indigenous enrolments within and between the states and territories.
  - City and country enrolments vary for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
  - Catholic schools take a minority proportion of Indigenous students in comparison with government schools.
  - Catholic schools are taking a lower proportion of Indigenous Catholic students. The majority of Catholic Indigenous students are in Government schools.
  - Catholic education has responded to the challenge of SWD enrolments more than that of Indigenous enrolments.
  - The majority of Indigenous enrolments in primary schools.
  - Secondary retention for Indigenous students is unacceptably low.
  - The majority of Indigenous Catholic parents do not see Catholic schools as the first option. The reasons for this are the critical issues requiring further research.
73. The state and regional differences in Indigenous education offer Catholic education the opportunity to gain understanding of why some schools and regions are more successful in enrolling and retaining Indigenous students.

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## Appendix 1: Address by John Paul II, Alice Springs, 1986

Source: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf\\_ip-ii\\_spe\\_19861129\\_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1986/november/documents/hf_ip-ii_spe_19861129_aborigeni-alice-springs-australia_en.html)

### PILGRIMAGE IN AUSTRALIA

#### ***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ABORIGINES AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS IN "BLATHERSKITE PARK"***

*Alice Spring (Australia), 29 November 1986*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a great joy for me to be here today in Alice Springs and to meet so many of you, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia. I want to tell you right away how much the Church esteems and loves you, and how much she wishes to assist you in your spiritual and material needs.

1. At the beginning of time, as God's Spirit moved over the waters, he began to communicate something of his goodness and beauty to all creation. When God then created man and woman, he gave them the good things of the earth for their use and benefit; and he put into their hearts abilities and powers, which were his gifts. And to all human beings throughout the ages God has given a desire for himself, a desire which different cultures have tried to express in their own ways.

2. As the human family spread over the face of the earth, your people settled and lived in this big country that stood apart from all the others. Other people did not even know this land was here; they only knew that somewhere in the southern oceans of the world there was "The Great South Land of the Holy Spirit".

But for thousands of years you have lived in this land and fashioned a culture that endures to this day. And during all this time, the Spirit of God has been with you. Your "Dreaming", which influences your lives so strongly that, no matter what happens, you remain for ever people of

your culture, is your only way of touching the mystery of God's Spirit in you and in creation. You must keep your striving for God and hold on to it in your lives.

3. The rock paintings and the discovered evidence of your ancient tools and implements indicate the presence of your age-old culture and prove your ancient occupancy of this land.

Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost. Do you perhaps remember those words that Paul VI spoke to the aboriginal people during his visit to them in 1970? On that occasion he said: "We know that you have a life style proper to your own ethnic genius or culture – a culture which the Church respects and which she does not in any way ask you to renounce... Society itself is enriched by the presence of different cultural and ethnic elements. For us you and the values you represent are precious. We deeply respect your dignity and reiterate our deep affection for you".

4. For thousands of years this culture of yours was free to grow without interference by people from other places. You lived your lives in spiritual closeness to the land, with its animals, birds, fishes, waterholes, rivers, hills and mountains. Through your closeness to the land you touched the sacredness of man's relationship with God, for the land was the proof of a power in life greater than yourselves.

You did not spoil the land, use it up, exhaust it, and then walk away from it. You realized that your land was related to the source of life.

The silence of the Bush taught you a quietness of soul that put you in touch with another world, the world of God's Spirit. Your careful attention to the details of kinship spoke of your reverence for birth, life and human generation. You knew that children need to be loved, to be full of joy. They need a time to grow in laughter and to play, secure in the knowledge that they belong to their people.

You had a great respect for the need which people have for law, as a guide to living fairly with each other. So you created a legal system – very strict it is true – but closely adapted to the country in which you lived your lives. It made your society orderly. It was one of the reasons why you survived in this land.

You marked the growth of your young men and women with ceremonies of discipline that taught them responsibility as they came to maturity.

These achievements are indications of human strivings. And in these strivings you showed a dignity open to the message of God's revealed wisdom to all men and women, which is the great truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. Some of the stories from your Dreamtime legends speak powerfully of the great mysteries of human life, its frailty, its need for help, its closeness to spiritual powers and the value of the human person. They are not unlike some of the great inspired lessons from the people among whom Jesus himself was born. It is wonderful to see how people, as they accept the Gospel of Jesus, find points of agreement between their own traditions and those of Jesus and his people.

6. The culture which this long and careful growth produced was not prepared for the sudden meeting with another people, with different customs and traditions, who came to your country nearly 200 years ago. They were different from Aboriginal people. Their traditions, the organization of their lives, and their attitudes to the land were quite strange to you. Their law too was quite different. These people had knowledge, money and power; and they brought with them some patterns of behaviour from which the Aboriginal people were unable to protect themselves.

7. The effects of some of those forces are still active among you today. Many of you have been dispossessed of your traditional lands, and separated from your tribal ways, though some of you still have your traditional culture. Some of you are establishing Aboriginal communities in the towns and cities. For others there is still no real place for camp-fires and kinship observances except on the fringes of country towns. There, work is hard to find, and education in a different cultural background is difficult. The discrimination caused by racism is a daily experience.

You have learned how to survive, whether on your own lands, or scattered among the towns and cities. Though your difficulties are not yet over, you must learn to draw on the endurance which your ancient ceremonies have taught you. Endurance brings with it patience; patience helps you to find the way ahead, and gives you courage for your journey.

8. Take heart from the fact that many of your languages are still spoken and that you still possess your ancient culture. You have kept your sense of brotherhood. If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are

scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn. The time for this rebirth is now!

9. We know that during the last two hundred years certain people tried to understand you, to learn about you, to respect your ways and to honour you as persons. These men and women, as you soon realized, were different from others of their race. They loved and cared for the indigenous people. They began to share with you their stories of God, helped you cope with sickness, tried to protect you from ill-treatment. They were honest with you, and showed you by their lives how they tried to avoid the bad things in their own culture. These people were not always successful, and there were times when they did not fully understand you. But they showed you good will and friendship. They came from many different walks of life. Some were teachers and doctors and other professional people; some were simple folk. History will remember the good example of their charity and fraternal solidarity.

Among those who have loved and cared for the indigenous people, we especially recall with profound gratitude all the missionaries of the Christian faith. With immense generosity they gave their lives in service to you and to your forebears. They helped to educate the Aboriginal people and offered health and social services. Whatever their human frailty, and whatever mistakes they may have made, nothing can ever minimize the depth of their charity. Nothing can ever cancel out their greatest contribution, which was to proclaim to you Jesus Christ and to establish his Church in your midst.

10. From the earliest times men like Archbishop Polding of Sydney opposed the legal fiction adopted by European settlers that this land was terra nullius – nobody's country. He strongly pleaded for the rights of the Aboriginal inhabitants to keep the traditional lands on which their whole society depended. The Church still supports you today.

Let it not be said that the fair and equitable recognition of Aboriginal rights to land is discrimination. To call for the acknowledgment of the land rights of people who have never surrendered those rights is not discrimination. Certainly, what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off till tomorrow.

Christian people of good will are saddened to realize – many of them only recently – for how long a time Aboriginal people were transported from their homelands into small areas or

reserves where families were broken up, tribes split apart, children orphaned and people forced to live like exiles in a foreign country.

The reserves still exist today, and require a just and proper settlement that still lies unachieved. The urban problems resulting from the transportation and separation of people still have to be addressed, so that these people may make a new start in life with each other once again.

11. The establishment of a new society for Aboriginal people cannot go forward without just and mutually recognized agreements with regard to these human problems, even though their causes lie in the past. The greatest value to be achieved by such agreements, which must be implemented without causing new injustices, is respect for the dignity and growth of the human person. And you, the Aboriginal people of this country and its cities, must show that you are actively working for your own dignity of life. On your part, you must show that you too can walk tall and command the respect which every human being expects to receive from the rest of the human family.

12. The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human and, when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God.

That Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christians. It meets your deepest desires. You do not have to be people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them. Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.

The old ways can draw new life and strength from the Gospel. The message of Jesus Christ can lift up your lives to new heights, reinforce all your positive values and add many others, which only the Gospel in its originality proposes. Take this Gospel into your own language and way of speaking; let its spirit penetrate your communities and determine your behaviour towards each other, let it bring new strength to your stories and your ceremonies. Let the Gospel come into your hearts and renew your personal lives. The Church invites you to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to your Aboriginal minds and hearts. All over the world people worship God and read his word in their own language, and colour the great signs and symbols of religion with touches of their own traditions. Why should you be different from them in this regard, why

should you not be allowed the happiness of being with God and each other in Aboriginal fashion?

13. As you listen to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, seek out the best things of your traditional ways. If you do, you will come to realize more and more your great human and Christian dignity. Let your minds and hearts be strengthened to begin a new life now. Past hurts cannot be healed by violence, nor are present injustices removed by resentment. Your Christian faith calls you to become the best kind of Aboriginal people you can be. This is possible only if reconciliation and forgiveness are part of your lives. Only then will you find happiness. Only then will you make your best contribution to all your brothers and sisters in this great nation. You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.

In the new world that is emerging for you, you are being called to live fully human and Christian lives, not to die of shame and sorrow. But you know that to fulfil your role you need a new heart. You will already feel courage rise up inside you when you listen to God speaking to you in these words of the Prophets:

"Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine. Do not be afraid, for I am with you".

And again:

"I am going to... gather you together... and bring you home to your own land... I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you... You shall be my people and I will be your God".

14. With you I rejoice in the hope of God's gift of salvation, which has its beginnings here and now, and which also depends on how we behave towards each other, on what we put up with, on what we do, on how we honour God and love all people.

Dear Aboriginal people: the hour has come for you to take on new courage and new hope. You are called to remember the past, to be faithful to your worthy traditions, and to adapt your living culture whenever this is required by your own needs and those of your fellowman. Above all you are called to open your hearts ever more to the consoling, purifying and uplifting message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died so that we might all have life, and have it to the full.

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