

# Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Schools in the Northern Territory

## NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT ON EMPOWERING LOCAL SCHOOLS

### PRELIMINARIES

1. This Implementation Plan is created subject to the provisions of the **National Partnership Agreement on *Empowering Local Schools*** (the Agreement) and should be read in conjunction with that Agreement.
2. The objective of the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership is to empower participating schools to make decisions at a local level, supporting them to better respond to the needs of students and the local school community and provide services designed to assist their students to achieve their best educational outcomes. The *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership complements reforms being delivered through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships and aligns with, and builds on, the broader schools reform agenda.
3. The Agreement will contribute to delivering greater local decision-making in sixteen government schools in the Northern Territory participating in Phase One of the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership.
4. An independent evaluation of Phase One will collect evidence regarding the achievement of greater local decision-making in participating schools across the country. The Evaluation will consider the unique circumstances in each state and territory and provide an opportunity to learn and share what works effectively in different settings.

### TERMS OF THIS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

5. This Implementation Plan supports and complements the Agreement. Information provided within this plan will be critical to supporting the evaluation of activity under Phase One of the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership.
6. This Implementation Plan will commence as soon as it is signed by the Commonwealth of Australia (the Commonwealth), represented by the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, and the Northern Territory, represented by the Minister for Education and Training.
7. This Implementation Plan will cease on 30 June 2014 or on completion of the project, including the processing of final payments against the performance milestones, the acceptance of final performance reporting and completion of the project evaluation, unless terminated earlier or extended as agreed in writing by the Parties.
8. This Implementation Plan may be varied by written agreement between relevant Ministers.

9. Either Party may terminate this Agreement by providing 30 days notice in writing. Where this Implementation Plan is terminated, the Commonwealth's liability to make payments to the Northern Territory is limited to payments associated with Implementation Milestones achieved by the Northern Territory by the date of effect of termination of this Implementation Plan.
10. The Parties to this Implementation Plan do not intend any of the provisions to be legally enforceable. However, that does not lessen the Parties' commitment to this Implementation Plan.

## CURRENT LEVELS OF LOCAL DECISION-MAKING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

11. The Northern Territory currently has a number of initiatives, processes and strategies embodied in legislation, policy and operational arrangements at various levels to empower local decision-making in schools in areas of governance, funding, infrastructure and workforce. Within some aspects of the current system there is a substantial level of capacity for local decision-making. However, there is significant variability in the degree to which schools are able to exercise this autonomy across the focus areas of this National Partnership Agreement, depending largely on contextual factors.
12. All government schools in the Northern Territory are governed by an incorporated school council, established under the relevant provisions of the Northern Territory's *Education Act*. School councils are independent legal entities and assume relevant functions conferred under the legislation including responsibility for financial management, infrastructure management and maintenance, and to some extent school workforce matters as follows:
  - (a) The Northern Territory administers grants to schools for a range of purposes. Schools have a significant degree of flexibility to determine how those funds are used and principals have discretion to use savings from particular grant types for alternate purposes. Resource allocation at the school level is tied to school strategic planning processes and the achievement of outcomes and deliverables identified in schools' annual operational plans. Decision-making around resource allocation and expenditure is largely done through the school's council within broad policy parameters determined by the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training. As part of this process there is an expected level of consultation and engagement with the school community.
  - (b) A centralised planning system for the construction of school infrastructure incorporates various levels of consultation and engagement, allowing schools to have input to the design and development of school infrastructure and planning. Upon completion of works, school councils have autonomy over management and maintenance of the facilities.
  - (c) The Northern Territory resources schools based on student enrolment numbers. There is limited flexibility for local decision-making by schools with regard to the allocation and recruitment of centrally determined staffing allocations. Workforce planning and development and industrial relations matters are generally managed at the system level. As the Northern Territory Government operates under a single employer model, there are workforce considerations which limit schools' local decision-making capacity in this area.

Principals are responsible for managing human resource (HR) matters that arise within their school in accordance with relevant legislation, policy and procedures, in areas including performance management, staff professional development and application of conditions of service. Support and guidance in HR management for principals is provided from the system as required.

In addition to centrally determined staffing allocations, school councils are able to directly employ some staff (including, for example, non-teaching classroom support staff and

canteen staff) under relevant private sector industrial awards and conditions. School councils have absolute autonomy over the staff they employ.

- (d) A majority of schools have a school council comprising elected members of the school community including parents, teachers, students (in secondary schools) and invited members. Some small schools or groups of small schools have school council arrangements whereby the principal or a person appointed by the Minister is responsible for school governance (school management council or group school management council). Schools that sit under a school management council or group school management council will often establish a parent advisory group to assist them in the discharge of their duties and provide parents with the opportunity to have input into decisions that impact on their children's education.
13. The levels of local decision making outlined above are subject to the relevant legislative and policy requirement of the Northern Territory.
  14. Under the Smarter Schools National Partnership the Northern Territory has committed to building capacity of school leaders and school councils to enhance schools' empowerment, through activities including:
    - (a) Regional business support officers and mentor capacity building positions, established to provide ongoing and coaching support to school leaders.
    - (b) Culturally appropriate resources for school councils, and site based training, delivered to school councils.
    - (c) Establishment of five Strong Start, Bright Futures colleges, embedding strong community leadership in education from birth through to jobs.
    - (d) Inclusive leadership models, implemented in 20 large very remote schools to provide support for school leaders and enhance community engagement with education.

## FOCUS OF ACTIONS TO INCREASE LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

15. Activities pursued under this National Partnership will focus on increasing the local decision-making capacity of school communities to support increased operational effectiveness and responsiveness, providing services designed to assist students to achieve improved educational outcomes. Implementation of actions will occur in a way that meets the needs of participant schools. These may include:
  - (a) Provision of training, professional development and site-based mentoring to up-skill school staff and school councils in areas such as strategic planning, school operations, decision making structures and processes, financial literacy, budgeting and reporting. This will build local decision-making and capacity, enabling schools to assume greater levels of autonomy.
  - (b) Embedding improved human resources, financial management and leadership practices which increase decision-making capacity into existing structures to enhance schools' levels of local empowerment.
16. Under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (NATSIEAP), school community partnership agreements are negotiated between identified schools, parents and local communities; committing them to work together on local strategies to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Participating NATSIEAP focus schools may undertake actions identified in their school community partnership agreements that align to the objectives and outcomes of this National Partnership.

17. Schools may choose to expand or extend the scope of existing strategic activities and school level initiatives aligned to their local empowerment priorities, the outcomes and objectives provided in the Agreement. Schools will prioritise activities in consultation with their regional director and the school community.

## CHANGES TO ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

18. The Northern Territory will pursue a range of changes to centralised administrative arrangements to support increased local decision-making. Principals of participating schools and other key stakeholders will form a steering committee to identify, lead and direct the system changes that focus on both supporting increased autonomy across all government schools in the Northern Territory and are responsive to the needs of schools participating in the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership. Changes to centralised administrative arrangements pursued under this National Partnership may include:
  - (a) Improved financial systems to enable more strategic monitoring of schools' financial information and performance; as well as greater analysis of budget information against outputs and outcomes.
  - (b) Modernising guidance to schools around governance, operations and management, thereby increasing capacity for schools, school councils and school communities to implement greater and more consistent levels of local decision-making.
  - (c) Review of governance models in remote and very remote schools, to evaluate their effectiveness in supporting local decision-making and to inform ways in which these models can be better supported at the system level (e.g. through statutory reform). The outcomes of the review will be used to determine possible future implementation of reforms in this area in the context of the broader Northern Territory education reform agenda; and identify possible funding sources if implementation costs cannot be met under this Agreement.
  - (d) Scoping to determine feasibility of a flexible staffing model for secondary schools offering pathways with the potential to engage allied professionals and para-professionals to better respond to the learning needs of students through delivery of more relevant programs. The outcomes of the review will be used to determine possible future implementation of reforms in this area in the context of the broader Northern Territory education reform agenda; and identify possible funding sources if implementation costs cannot be met under this Agreement.
19. Other system changes identified by the steering group may be pursued to support the activities of schools participating in this National Partnership if required.

## PARTICIPATION OF SCHOOLS

20. Identification of sixteen schools in the Northern Territory suitable to commence participating in this National Partnership in 2012, will occur through regional support structures with endorsement from Regional Executive Directors based on the school selection criteria outlined in the Agreement, including:
  - (a) Schools' capacity to undertake greater responsibility for managing their own affairs.
  - (b) The degree to which participation in this National Partnership is supported by the school's community, including staff, parents and carers, including participation in the independent evaluation of the National Partnership.

- (c) Schools' capacity to use their participation for the benefit of students, parents and carers and the broader community over time.
- (d) The extent to which schools are engaged in other reform activity which either supports the objectives of the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership or limits schools' capacity to participate in it.

Identified schools will be invited to participate in the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership on a consultative basis.

- 21. Schools identified to participate in this National Partnership will be invited to outline the activities they wish to commence in 2012. Participating schools will be encouraged to identify innovative actions aligned with their strategic and operational priorities to increase local decision making capacity. Actions will be based on the individual needs of schools and be identified through annual school-based planning and review processes.
- 22. Once actions have been agreed, participating schools will include progress milestones towards their implementation in 2012 Annual Operational Plans via an amendment or addendum to their existing documents. Schools will report on actions undertaken through their Annual Performance Reports provided by 31 March of each year. Schools will be required to review actions periodically to ensure continued alignment with objectives identified in the Agreement.
- 23. While there are no areas in the Northern Territory classified as major cities under the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA), schools will be identified with reference to ensuring a reasonably proportionate distribution across relevant geographic locations, regions and school types.
- 24. Start-up funding to schools will be allocated using a model of base allocation (\$40 000) plus top up (up to an additional \$10 000 per school), calculated using loadings for cost drivers such as remoteness and student enrolment numbers. Weighting of factors will be determined based on the mix of participating schools to ensure funds are not over-committed.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

- 25. The Northern Territory will provide flexible professional development opportunities that are responsive to the capacity building needs to be identified by schools participating in this National Partnership. The focus of professional development opportunities will be determined in consultation with participating schools and the steering committee and may include provision of site-based coaching and mentoring to principals and school councils to build their skills and capacity in areas of governance, financial and infrastructure management and workforce relevant to their local context.
- 26. Where possible changes to system arrangements will also include professional development components to support implementation of changes at the school level.

## PERFORMANCE MILESTONES

27. The following performance milestones apply to the implementation of the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership in participating schools in the Northern Territory:

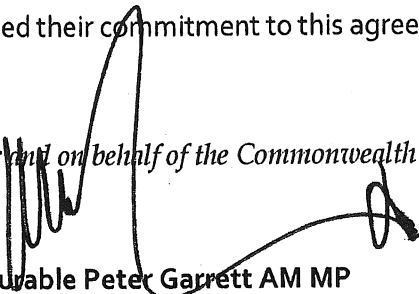
<i>National Partnership Agreement Performance indicator*</i>	<i>Performance Milestone</i>	<i>Milestone reporting due date**</i>
Schools are participating in this National Partnership	Identification of 16 NT schools to participate in this National Partnership	First week of May 2012
School and system reforms are defined and aligned with the reform areas of this NPA	Agreement on use of schools' start-up funds	First week of May 2012
	Formation of steering committee to identify, lead and direct system changes	First week of May 2012
School and system reforms being implemented and able to be measured in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• centralised administrative arrangements to support increased local decision-making responsibilities</li> <li>• increased school responsibility for finances and budgets</li> <li>• more effective school-based decision-making, particularly in relation to governance</li> <li>• training and professional development for principals and school communities</li> <li>• engagement of parents and carers and the school community</li> <li>• responsiveness to the needs of students and school communities including the needs of students experiencing disadvantage.</li> </ul>	Participating schools have included activities being pursued under this National Partnership in their Annual Operational Plans.	First week of December 2013
	Payment of funds to participating schools.	First week of December 2013
	Participating schools have engaged with parents, carers and the school community as appropriate regarding activities being pursued.	First week of December 2013
	System changes implemented in response to the needs of participating schools.	First week of December 2013
	Professional development opportunities relevant to the objectives of this National Partnership identified and delivered.	First week of December 2013

\* Indicators here align to the performance indicators in the National Partnership Agreement on Empowering Local Schools, and broadly reflect activities to be undertaken by the Northern Territory as part of the Empowering Local schools National Partnership.

\*\* Dates align to the reporting dates specified in the National Partnership Agreement on Empowering Local Schools.

Parties have confirmed their commitment to this agreement as follows:

Signed for and on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia by



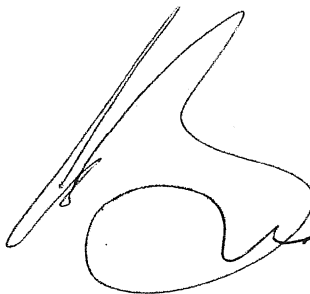
**The Honourable Peter Garrett AM MP**  
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth

[Day] [Month] [Year]

28.5.12

Signed for and on behalf of  
the Northern Territory by

**Dr Chris Burns MLA**  
Minister for Education and Training



[Day] [Month] [Year]

27/4/2012