SECRETARY’S FOREWORD

In 2015, the Department of Education continued to implement the most comprehensive educational reform agenda in NSW in a century, aimed at achieving a systematic change in outcomes for NSW students. We worked to advance the wellbeing of Aboriginal people through the implementation of OCHRE (opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility, empowerment), the NSW Government’s community-focused plan for Aboriginal affairs. Until machinery-of-government changes commenced on 1 July 2015, we were responsible for the vocational education and training system and also worked to make it easier for people to be involved in their communities.

NSW has almost 1.2 million students in approximately 2,200 public schools and 900 non-government schools. The Department of Education operates the public education system and is one of the largest organisations in Australia, with more than 86,000 staff. In 2014–15, the department’s expenses budget totalled $14.2 billion. Funding allocated for education in 2014–15 comprised approximately one-fifth of the NSW State Budget.

We have exceeded our target for access to universal early childhood education. We give children the best possible start to education and provide support to those who need it most. The funding model for community preschools, introduced in 2014, has had a particularly positive impact on the enrolment of Aboriginal children.

The department worked with other jurisdictions to review the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care and ensure that NSW priorities were accurately reflected in it. In consultation with sector representatives, we developed and implemented a new way of streamlining the assessment and rating of services, with more than 3,800 reports for services rated and published as at December 2015, including 73 of the department’s preschools.

Public education in NSW is being transformed, with reforms targeted at four key areas: quality teaching and school leadership, devolved school authority, needs-based school funding and bridging the achievement gap for rural and remote students. In 2015, the focus was on the implementation of these reforms, embedding them across every classroom and every school and evaluating the impact so that we are able to disseminate and share what works across all schools.

In September 2015, the NSW Premier announced a number of priorities for the state to grow the economy; deliver infrastructure; protect the vulnerable; and improve health, education and public services across NSW. Included in the Premier’s Priorities is an eight per cent increase in the proportion of students in the top two National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) bands by 2019. The State Priorities also include a 30 per cent increase in the proportion of Aboriginal students in the top two NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy by 2019.

There is no single action that will improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students in NSW schools. Overall NAPLAN achievement is expected to improve in the coming years as NSW continues to implement a comprehensive range of systemic and targeted actions across the sectors. This includes a strong focus on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

New reforms implemented in 2015 are focused on student wellbeing, increased community engagement and school excellence. From 2015, we have committed to:

- increase support for student wellbeing with additional school counsellors, student support teachers, and targeted support for refugee and Aboriginal students and families
- provide extra support for the mentoring and coaching of quality teaching in primary schools
- upgrade the quality of secondary school education with improved school facilities as well as better engagement with parents and the broader local school community
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- construct new state-of-the-art schools and transform existing classrooms so we provide more opportunities for teachers and students to collaborate in flexible, technology-rich learning spaces
- drive school improvement linked to new approaches to school planning, reporting and accountability.

In December 2015, Aboriginal Affairs published its Strategic Plan 2016–19, the core vision of which is Aboriginal people in NSW determining their own futures. The plan identifies key priority areas including culture and healing, leadership in government, growing NSW’s first economy, and strengthening governance and capacity.

Aboriginal Affairs and its government, industry, non-government and tertiary partners are implementing OCHRE initiatives with communities across the state. Achievements include the establishment of six Local Decision Making sites, the negotiation of three industry based agreements, and the establishment of four opportunity hubs and five Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.

Until machinery-of-government changes in June 2015, the department also had responsibility for the Office of Communities. The department led community engagement initiatives such as Timebanking, an innovative volunteering program; Tackling Violence, aimed at stopping domestic violence; and Youth Frontiers, a youth mentoring program – programs aimed at increasing opportunities for communities to be involved in planning, influencing and implementing local actions.

While we still have much to achieve, we can be proud of our progress so far and can celebrate our achievements. NSW is recognised nationally and internationally for our reforms and evidence base. I would like to thank our staff for their leadership and commitment and our students, parents and communities for their engagement and support in 2015.

Peter Riordan
ACTING SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION