The Hon. Dr Andrew Refshauge MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education and Training and
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
L/31, Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister,

It is with pleasure that we present on behalf of the Department of Education and Training and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (Inc.), the Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education.

The Review has confirmed that while many Aboriginal students achieve outstanding results, it is also clear that average measures of performance indicate a significant gap between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal peers.

The partnership between the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc was instrumental in establishing a review process that was comprehensive and was respected by all stakeholders.

The contributions of the Review Team, Regional AECGs, the Aboriginal Programs Unit and the members of the Review Reference Group were invaluable in ensuring the involvement and participation of many Aboriginal communities across NSW, and those with particular interest, expertise and commitment to Aboriginal Education.

The Executive of the NSW AECG (Inc) has affirmed that “the announcement of the Review of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales in challenging educational sectors to improve the learning outcomes of Aboriginal students was welcomed by the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated.

The members of the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated are fully aware of the existing gap in Literacy and Numeracy levels for Aboriginal students and see the review as a start of a continuing push to bridge that gap and move towards outcomes proportionate to that of the broader population.
In light of the review the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. is fully committed to ensuring that the Aboriginal community of New South Wales has a strong voice on the ground and in Parliament in relation to the implementation and delivery of recommendations, the establishment and support of the Task Force and of course the support of all Aboriginal children and students across the state.

We are looking forward to forging solid partnerships with all major stakeholders to develop key strategies to address pertinent recommendations of the report as well as making a major contribution to its implementation and delivery.

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved for the invaluable contributions in the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated and NSW Department of Education and Training Aboriginal Education Review process.

We are committed to moving forward together.”

We believe this review, built upon the united determination of the Aboriginal Community in NSW and the staff of the Department of Education and Training, provides unequivocal support for positive and constructive change and improvement.

Yours sincerely

Alan Laughlin
Deputy Director-General
NSW Department of Education and Training
30 November 2004

Dave Ella
President
NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
30 November 2004
Preface

How can it be that, in a country like Australia, there is a group of young people whose early years do not prepare them adequately with the skills and confidence to enjoy a meaningful role in society and a share in the country’s wealth?

This question points to the concerns about disadvantages and disappointments that are at the heart of the Review of Aboriginal Education and which were often recalled in suggestions offered by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in field trips, submissions, research and the literature.

While it is true in terms of total numbers that the majority of disadvantaged young people are not Aboriginal, this Report will demonstrate that there is something “not right” about the unacceptable number of Aboriginal students who are “doing it tough” or “not making it” in schooling and training.

One of the dangers of focusing on valid concerns about disadvantages and disappointments is that it may give the impression that all Aboriginal students are failing. Such an impression is false as it ignores the achievements of those Aboriginal students who succeed at school and in vocational education, who are among the high achievers, gifted and talented in academic, artistic or sporting pursuits, and those who “get through” the years of schooling and training successfully enough to achieve the aspirations they, their families and communities desire for them.

This caution acknowledged, tackling the causes of disproportionate disadvantage among Aboriginal families (for example, dispossession, racism, poverty, ill health, poor housing, disrupted families, long-term unemployment) is the critical focus of the whole-of-government approach established in Two Ways Together: the NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan 2003–2012.

Overcoming such underlying causes of disadvantage is the foundation of improvements for students in schools and TAFE campuses. The recommendations of this Report show the Department “gearing up” to better contribute to the target of eradicating the gaps between the participation and performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2010, as envisaged by Two Ways Together.

The material obtained during the Review of Aboriginal Education clearly shows, however, that should Two Ways Together fail to coordinate efforts to deliver fundamental improvements in the preconditions for learning that are developed in the years prior to starting preschool, the efforts of the partnership between the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated to overcome the symptoms of disadvantage among Aboriginal students in schools and TAFE campuses (for example, limited expectations, disrupted attendance, poor retention, non-compliant behaviour, inadequate literacy skills and under-achievement) will, as so often in the past, have only limited impact.

For this reason, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) is strongly committed to playing its part in the Two Ways Together enterprise and to work with other government agencies to achieve their complementary targets.