



Interim report of the Program Evaluation of

NORTA NORTA

INDIVIDUAL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Extended executive summary



Norta Norta
is the
Ngiyampaa
word for
'learning'.

Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program

Phase 1 evaluation - Extended executive summary

"I'd say it's [Norta Norta] like a best friend, but smarter" Student interview

The objective of the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program* is to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in Years 11 and 12, through the provision of tuition support. Intended outcomes include improved learning outcomes, more positive attitudes to schooling, strengthened engagement with school, improved attendance, increased retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent, and greater parent awareness of the program and engagement by the community.

Details of *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program* are provided *Norta Norta Program Guidelines 2011* (AETD, 2011).

Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program is one of two programs offered under the *Norta Norta* banner. The other provides assistance in literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal students performing below the national benchmarks of NAPLAN at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. This component is not part of this evaluation.

For the purposes of this report, *Norta Norta* will be understood to refer to the Year 11 and 12 *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program* only.

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation of the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program* involved an examination of the tuition program in terms of:

- an assessment of the extent to which the program has improved the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students
- an assessment of the impact of the program on student engagement
- an assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the program
- an investigation of the level of participation in the program by schools
- an assessment of the most effective ways for schools to inform parents about tuition support available through the program.

The purpose of the evaluation is to measure the extent to which *Norta Norta* has achieved its objectives.

The key findings from Phase 1 of the evaluation support the conclusion that *Norta Norta* is beginning to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Evaluation methodology

Online surveys for school staff, students and tutors were used to gather data around identified issues. Each of the surveys was open to participants in all schools taking part in the program. The number of respondents to each survey is shown in Table E1.

The evaluation team visited eighteen sample schools across eight regions, to conduct interviews with principals, teachers, Aboriginal staff, students, tutors and parents and community members.

The methodology was developed in consultation with, and approved by the *Norta Norta* Program Evaluation Reference Group (PERG).

Table E1: Numbers of survey respondents

Survey	No. of respondents	No. of schools
Students	650	124
School staff	231	111*
Tutors	289	137*

* Some respondents to both school staff and tutor surveys were able to complete the survey without indicating their school.

Summary of key findings

Evidence from all data sources indicates that student learning outcomes have been observed to improve for many students participating in *Norta Norta*. This is more strongly supported by teachers', parents' and students' impressions of effective learning than by broad-scale testing measures, such as Higher School Certificate results. The use of HSC results is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

In 2011, there was a total enrolment of 3,425¹ Aboriginal students in Years 11 and 12 in NSW government schools. Of these, 2,686² students took part in the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program*. This represents a participation rate of almost 80% of all eligible students. The sample of students involved in the evaluation included students demonstrating a wide range of achievement and engagement levels.

It is difficult to directly attribute improvements in learning outcomes and student engagement to *Norta Norta* alone. In most schools a range of programs or initiatives are being implemented to support both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Years 11 and 12.

Major findings relate to the implementation of the program, school participation in *Norta Norta* including issues of sustainability and parent awareness. These are detailed in the following sections.

Effects for students

The evaluation report presents two sections detailing effects for students: impacts on learning outcomes and impacts on student engagement.

Impacts on student learning outcomes

In addition to student satisfaction with the *Norta Norta* program, effects on students' learning include: improved learning outcomes in terms of both understanding subject content and development of skills; improved completion of assessments tasks and course completion; completion of the HSC and enhanced post-school intentions and aspirations.

Student satisfaction with *Norta Norta*

“Senior students have valued the program tremendously. In fact their siblings in the junior school have also wanted to participate in the program. I think this speaks volumes for its value and success with our [Aboriginal] students. Norta Norta is a winner.” Tutor comment

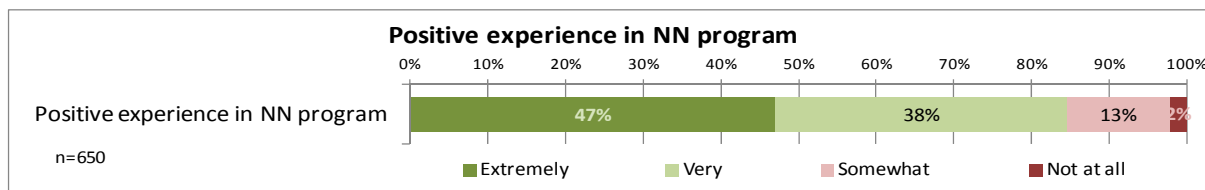
The majority of students described tuition in *Norta Norta* as a positive experience. As shown in Figure E.1., 85% of students described the program as extremely positive (47%) or very positive (38%). Only 2% of students reported that *Norta Norta* was not at all positive.

¹ Data provided by Data Analysis and Collection Unit, Planning and Innovation Directorate, 9 March 2012

² Data provided by Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate in November 2011.

98% of student survey respondents stated they would recommend *Norta Norta* to another student. Interviewed students described how the program was responsible for gains in their learning, and for their more-positive attitudes to school and improved self-concept; each of which links strongly to their pride in being Aboriginal.

Figure E1: Student experience in Norta Norta



In both the survey and interviews, students identified a range of factors that contributed to their satisfaction with *Norta Norta*. Survey responses indicate particular appreciation of:

- the individual attention provided through one-on-one tuition (more than 50 responses)
- the ability to access tutors when they needed help (more than 40 responses)
- the positive relationships that developed between students and tutors and the encouragement and support they received (more than 50 responses)
- assistance to complete assessment tasks (more than 70 responses)
- the opportunity to improve their learning e.g. increased understanding of subjects and achieve higher marks (more than 100 responses).

Irrespective of their academic ability, most students were appreciative of their tuition, and enthusiastic about the impact of *Norta Norta* on their learning. Almost all respondents (98%) to the student survey would recommend the program to another student.

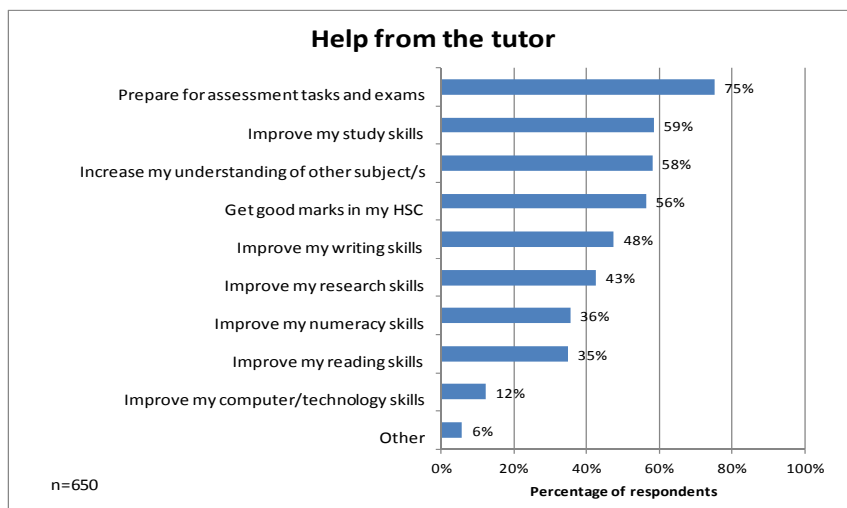
Improvement in learning outcomes

There was a great similarity between the survey comments from students, teachers and tutors about the types of tuition provided to Aboriginal students.

As shown in Figure E.2, students highlighted key areas of benefit, as follows:

- preparation for assessment tasks and exams, and understanding of subject content
- enhanced skills, especially study skills, writing, research, numeracy and reading
- motivation and assistance to meet their own goals, particularly related to completion of schooling and planning for future study.

Figure E.2: Types of tuition support identified by students



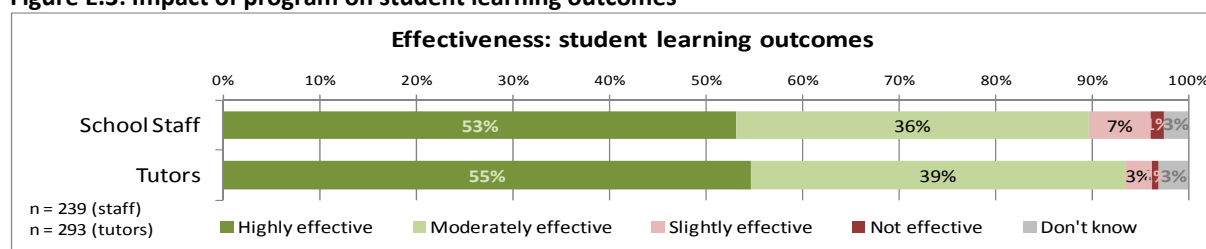
Students emphatically acknowledged the improvement in learning outcomes attributable to the support they received from the tutors.

Principals, school staff and tutors also maintained that *Norta Norta* tutoring was responsible for marked improvements in student performance. Many specific gains were identified, such as:

- general improvement in learning outcomes, across all subjects
- on-time completion of assessment tasks and reduced numbers of N-awards
- increased positive attitude to school, self-confidence and self-motivation
- improved engagement with study and with schooling in general
- improved attendance and increased rates of completion of Year 12.

Similar responses were received from tutors and school staff regarding the impact of the program on student learning outcomes. As shown in Figure E.3, 87% of school staff and 94% of tutors reported an improvement in student learning outcomes to a major or moderate extent. Only a small number of school staff and tutors indicated that *Norta Norta* was not effective in improving learning outcomes.

Figure E.3: Impact of program on student learning outcomes



Students spoke enthusiastically about the program and the support it offered them. They were particularly pleased to be able to comment favourably. One student reported that:

“It’s fantastic. I have learnt so much, I’ve gone from nearly failing grades to achieving above average in my classes.”

Understanding of subject specific content

Students indicated that tutoring assisted in their understanding of subject content. 45% of students indicated that they had a tutor for all their subjects. Students indicated they received tutoring in a range of subjects, as shown in Table E.2.

Table E.2: Tutoring provided in subject areas

Subject	No. of respondents
English, including reading	38%
Mathematics	31%
Science subjects	12%
Social science subjects	21.5%
Creative arts subjects	7.5%
Vocational education (VET) courses	9%
Other areas including Community and Family Studies (CAF), PDHPE	13%

When interviewed, most students spoke positively about improvement in subject-specific performance, and were pleased that tuition was making a difference.

One student reported that after initial problems in English, the tutoring helped gain a score of 87%. Another student commented on improvement in English, saying:

“I have better exam results; my English has improved; I’m in the top three or four in my class.”

Skills development

Most students believed that tutoring was responsible for considerable improvement in a range of general study skills as well as subject-specific skills, as shown in Table E.3.

Table E.3: Tutoring assisted in skills development

Subject	No. of respondents
Study skills	59%
Writing skills	48%
Research skills	43%
Numeracy skills	36%
Literacy skills, including reading	35%

Teachers and tutors were aware of the benefits of tuition in the area of skills development. One tutor’s comment reflected that:

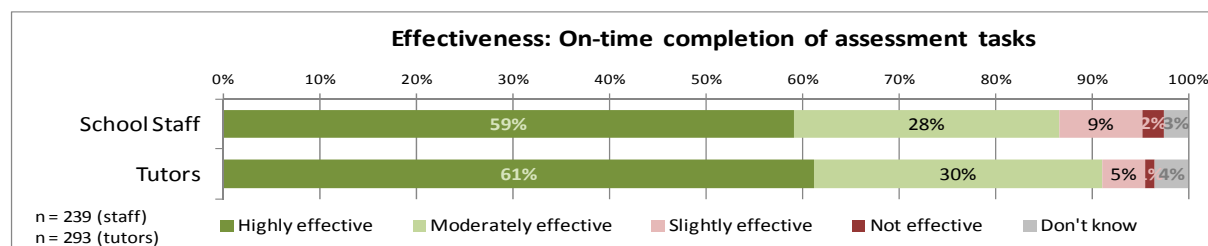
“...providing learning support for [Aboriginal] students in Years 11 and 12 ... supports them with literacy and numeracy in their senior studies; builds on research and comprehension skills, to help them advance in their studies.”

Completion of assessment tasks

Assistance to keep up with assessment tasks was the most frequently nominated area of support in student surveys. 75% of students identified that their tutors helped them to prepare for assessment tasks and exams. This was reinforced in the interviews, where many students commented that it was a particularly useful part of tuition support.

Around 90% of both school staff and tutors reported an improvement in students’ *“on-time completion of assessment tasks”* to a major or moderate extent, as shown in Figure E.4.

Figure E.4: Impact of program on on-time completion of assessment tasks

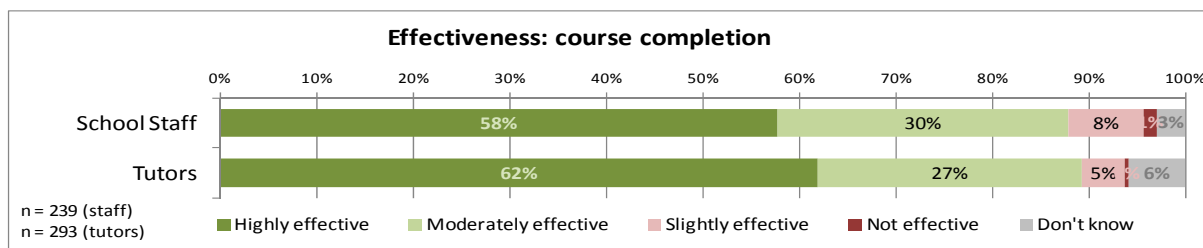


Impact on course completion, including N-awards

As shown in Figure E.5, most school staff and tutors described that *Norta Norta* was effective in improving course completion rates, with only a small percentage of staff and tutors indicating that *Norta Norta* was not effective in this area.

One factor that may be associated with improved course completion rates is the reduction in the number of N-awards issued to students. Teachers (57%) and tutors (52%) asserted that there was evidence that tutoring had contributed to a *“decrease in the number of N-Awards”*.

Figure E.5: Impact of program on course completion



Many students reported that tutoring was responsible for them not having any N-awards or reducing the number received. For example one student commented:

“I had 7 N-Awards, and I only have 2 now; I’m so excited because I’ve nearly finished my next one.”

Parents also observed that tutoring had a positive impact, reducing the number of N-awards for those students who identified that they were having difficulties in certain subjects.

The Higher School Certificate goal

The Higher School Certificate (HSC) was identified as the most significant motivating factor for student involvement in *Norta Norta*, with approximately 70% of student survey respondents indicating that they wanted to complete their HSC. Students appreciated the tuition support and readily acknowledged that it was helping them to achieve their “HSC goal.”

Many Year 12 students interviewed claimed that the “HSC goal” was a driving force for them, with one student commenting:

“[HSC] It’s a lot of stress and a lot of work and we should be doing [school] for a reason, to get qualifications (ATAR) and to go further.”

The HSC goal has greater significance for Aboriginal students, when considered against the backdrop of the educational achievements of students’ families. Two thirds of student survey respondents reported that none of their parents or carers had completed Year 12. One student highlighted the significance of completing her HSC, by stating:

“It would mean so much to get my HSC, cause my mum ... had to leave in Year 11, and my dad didn’t get through Year 12; I want to be a role model for my brothers and sisters, I want to be someone they can look up to...”

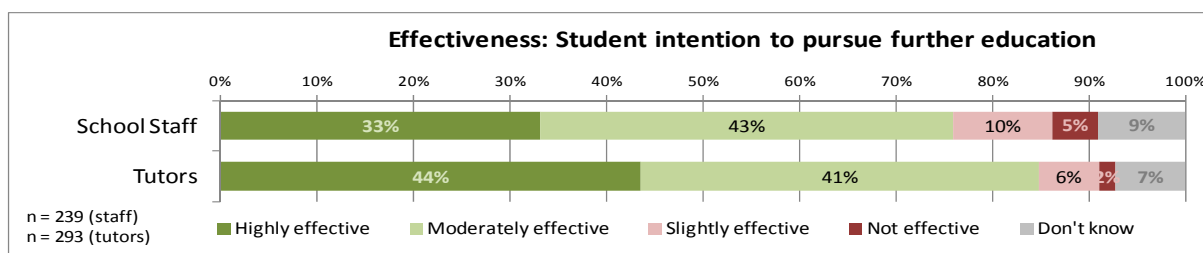
Post-school intentions: aspirations of students

For many high-achieving students, their intention to continue their education is determined early in their secondary school life, and the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program* may have less impact on their decisions.

However for those students who are experiencing difficulty, and are enrolled in Year 11 mainly as a result of the New School Leaving Age (NSLA), the support provided by *Norta Norta* may be the ‘glue’ that keeps them at school.

Feedback from tutors and teachers is consistent regarding students’ decisions to pursue further education. As shown in Figure E.6, more than 75% of school staff and 85% of tutors reported that *Norta Norta* was highly effective or moderately effective in encouraging students to pursue further education. Only 5% of staff indicated that the program was not effective in this regard.

Figure E.6: Impact of program on student intention to pursue further education



It was apparent in student interviews that for many students who ‘struggled’ in Years 9 and 10, and had disengaged from school, that tutoring provided a life-line. One student commented:

“I am the first in my family to go on to higher education and I hope they will see the good in that later. You need positive people around you when it’s hard.”

Participation in *Norta Norta*

Students’ knowledge of the *Norta Norta* came mainly from school staff, with the most common sources of information identified as teachers (60% of students) and Aboriginal members of staff (40% of students)..

Almost half of students (45%) reported that they became involved in tuition when asked by a teacher to participate. An additional 14% of students cited *“being timetabled for tutoring by the school”* as their reason for involvement. Both these circumstances may adversely affect students’ levels of commitment to the tutoring program. For example, one student who reported that he was timetabled for tutoring by the school, stated:

“I have not really taken advantage of the program because when the tutors arrange time for me I often don’t turn up.”

Irrespective of how students became involved in *Norta Norta*, once they experienced the tutoring program and found it beneficial, they often were keen to continue. The following tutor comment reflects this:

“[Students] taste the success and it is addictive. They want to continue to do well.”

Tutors suggested that perseverance by schools is required in the initial stages of encouraging students to participate in the tutoring program. School staff and tutors need to persist despite initial rejection. One tutor emphasised that:

“...once they experience tutoring it is rare for a student to opt out.”

The student survey asked why students wanted to continue with the program. Table E.4 identifies, in order of significance, the motivational factors identified by students.

Table E.4: Factors motivating students to continue with *Norta Norta* tutoring

Motivational factor	No. of respondents
Complete the HSC	72%
Do well at school	57%
Get a good job	40%
Get into university or TAFE or other further education	39%
Get better marks	36%

One Year 11 student's comment encapsulates the overall potential benefit of *Norta Norta*, and its ability to positively influence students' attitudes to school. She stated:

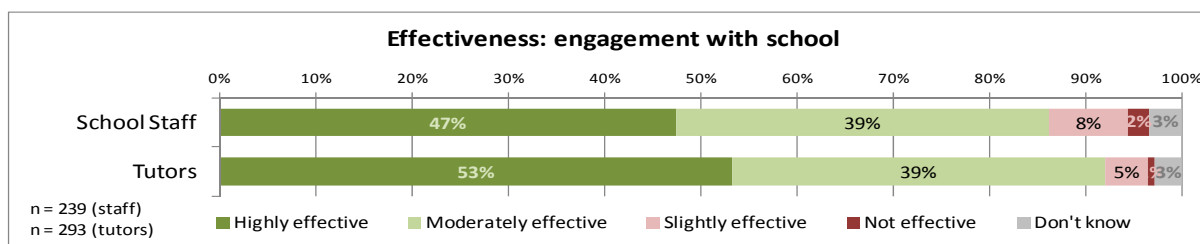
"I change my mind about what I want to be all the time ... in Year 9 I went through the popularity, friends phase ... I wasn't very focussed on school, I didn't worry about school because I did all right; in Year 10 it got really bad (hard) and I needed the extra help ... now I really want to finish school, 'cause you need the HSC to make something of yourself; it's a good contributor to getting on ... I'm a lot more mature about it (HSC) ... school is not real life, it's a safe boundary ... I realise that work (school) is more important than my social life ... it's so hard for Aboriginal people because of the stereotypes ... my dad dropped out in Year 7 and my mum only finished Year 10; it'll be a big achievement for me to get my HSC, and (I'm) the first in my mum's family."

Engagement with school

The second area of major change for students relates to their general engagement with school, with particular influence on student attendance and retention to Year 12.

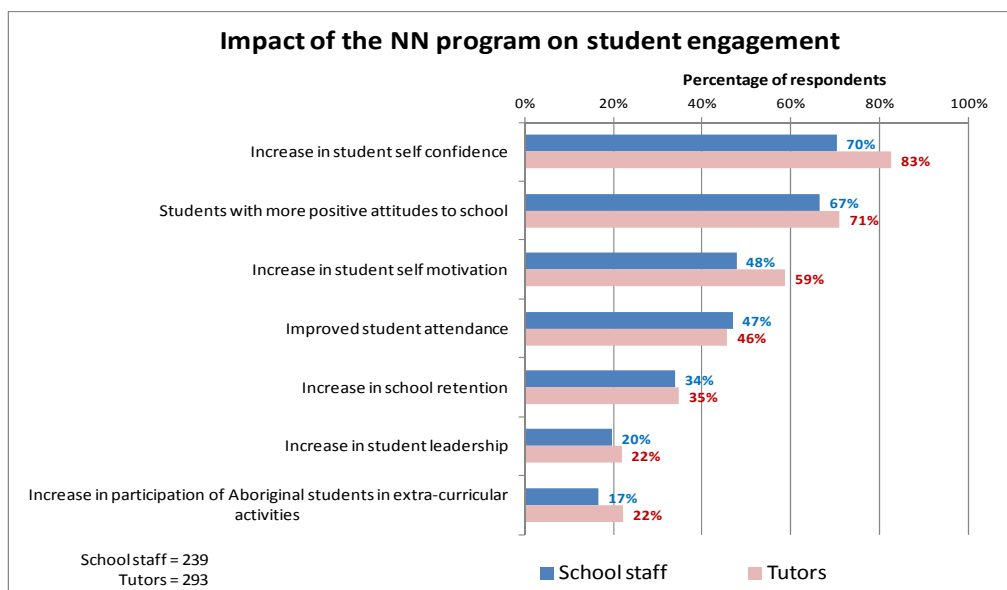
A large proportion of school staff and tutors indicated that *Norta Norta* was effective in increasing student engagement with school. As shown in Figure E.7, most staff and tutors rated it as either highly effective (46% and 53% respectively) or moderately effective (38% each).

Figure E.7: Impact of program on engagement with school



School staff and tutors identified aspects of student engagement where the program had the greatest impact. Figure E.8 shows their responses.

Figure E.8: Impact of the program on student engagement



It became apparent that the relationship between student and tutor was critical to the success of the program, and a key factor in students continuing to engage in the program, and with school. Only 40% of students had any choice of tutor. This became particularly significant for the 48% of students who indicated that they only worked one-to-one with their tutor. This relationship becomes a strong motivator for either continuing with tuition support or deciding not to be involved. A breakdown in this tutor-student relationship, or a failure to establish a “workable” relationship was identified in some cases as the reason for students refusing to continue in *Norta Norta*.

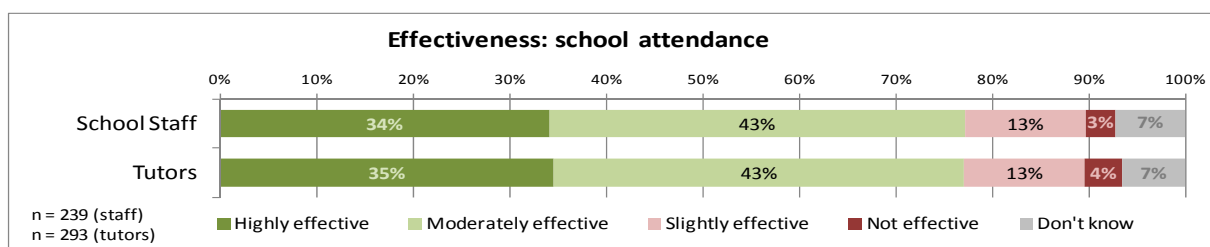
The breakdown of relationships between students and tutors became a significant issue in several schools visited. For example one Year 12 girl reported that:

“This year we’ve got a new tutor, but I don’t really see her much ... but when I need help and I’m not organised I go to get help or more information; Q: Any reason for not going this year? I found with [previous tutor] it was better; he could relate to me and understand me better; I’m now more independent, more organised and on-track.”

Student attendance at school

As shown in Figure E.9 a large proportion of teachers and tutors indicated that *Norta Norta* had a positive effect on student attendance, with 75% of teachers and 76% of tutors rating it as highly effective (33% and 34% respectively) or moderately effective (42% each).

Figure E.9: Impact of program on school attendance



One tutor who worked in two city schools affirmed that *Norta Norta* was making a difference to attendance of Aboriginal students, commenting:

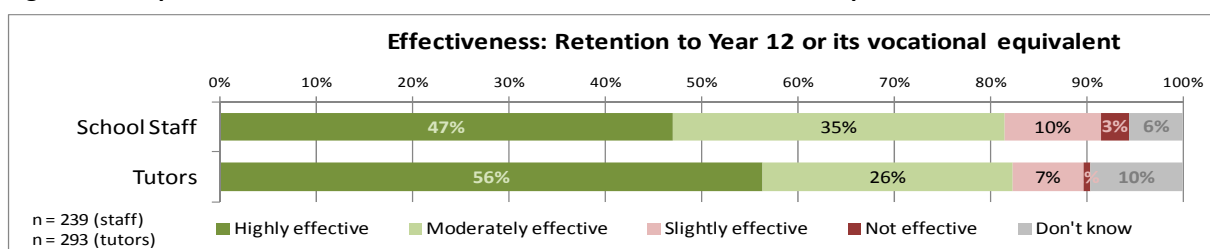
“...attendance figures for senior (Aboriginal) students in both schools are ranked between 89-95%, which is 10-15% above rates for Years 9-10 student.”

Principals also judged *Norta Norta* to be effective in promoting improved attendance. However, more evidence needs to be collected to confirm this suggestion.

Retention to Year 12

As shown in Figure 4.4, 82% of both school staff and tutors attributed improved student retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent to the program.

Figure 4.4: Impact of *Norta Norta* on retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent



One teacher commented on the difference that the program made, stating that one student:

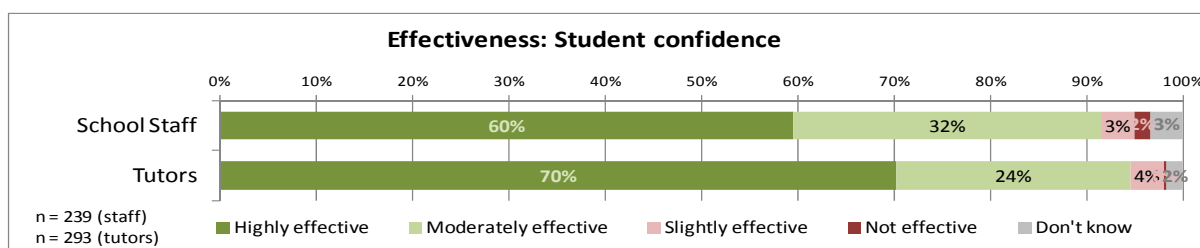
“...would not have graduated last year. He’s a great artist, we got him back to school when he disappeared; [tutor] worked with him on art projects and he got through. Without [tutor] he mightn’t have made it ... in the end two companies wanted him to work for them [as an artist].”

Principals, executive teachers and *Norta Norta* contacts also emphasised the importance of *Norta Norta* in contributing to increased retention rates of students. As for student attendance, greater clarification of the impact on retention rates may be provided through analysis of school data in Phase 2 of the evaluation.

Building student confidence

Over 90% of both teachers and tutors indicated that the *Norta Norta* was effective in building student confidence, as shown in Figure E.11.

Figure E.11: Impact of program on student confidence



When asked about the impact of tutoring, some students in focus group interviews claimed that tuition was instrumental in improving their level of confidence. One student responded:

“Before Norta Norta I wouldn’t be able to stand up in front of a class and do a speech. Now I can do that ... it’s given me a lot of confidence.”

Implementation of the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program*

Of the 111 schools represented in the school staff survey, over half commenced the *Norta Norta* in 2009, as shown in Table E.5.

Table E.5: Initial implementation of *Norta Norta* from 2009 to 2011

Year <i>Norta Norta</i> commenced	No. of schools	Percentage
2009	62	56%
2010	22	20%
2011	13	11.5%
Don’t know	14	12.5%

The following comments reflect the experiences of schools at different points in their implementation of the program.

Models for delivery

Models for delivery of tuition varied from school to school, with many local adaptations proving to be very successful. Schools elected to deliver tuition during school time, after school hours only or in combinations of the two. Each model revealed advantages and disadvantages.

Several factors influenced how tutoring was arranged, including:

- availability of tutors during school hours
- capacity to provide in-class support
- availability of students during school hours, especially for Year 11 students
- availability of students after school hours
- expertise of tutors and the need to employ specialist teachers.

In some cases eligibility of students to participate in *Norta Norta* tuition needed clarification. Teachers and students were sometimes unaware that the program is available to all Aboriginal students, irrespective of performance or ability.

Organisational issues

The following issues arose as school leaders sought to flexibly implement the program to fit their particular circumstances:

- Successful matching of tutors to students was viewed by all stakeholders as critical to the success of the program. In some schools the ability to match students with suitable tutors was limited. Effective matching was more likely to occur in schools with a larger pool of tutors, and in implementation models providing after-school tuition, when teachers at the school may provide tuition.
- There was limited use of timetables or tuition schedules to assist students to attend tutoring sessions.
- The availability of a designated facility for use in the tuition program contributed to the success of programs.

Role of tutors

The role of the tutor was pivotal to the successful implementation of *Norta Norta*. Several key findings relate to the role and performance of tutors:

- Tutors were generally found to be fulfilling the role as outlined in the program guidelines, providing focused support linked closely to the students' school experiences.
- Selection of tutors generally did not follow a formal process. Many were already employed as teachers in the school or at one nearby.
- Availability of tutors was a significant issue in several schools.
- Almost all tutors were qualified as teachers, although the support they gave was often not in their specific areas of expertise.
- Most tutors had access to, and participated in relevant professional learning.
- Tutors and teachers generally collaborate to support tutors, although there was a stronger perception of this amongst tutors than teachers.

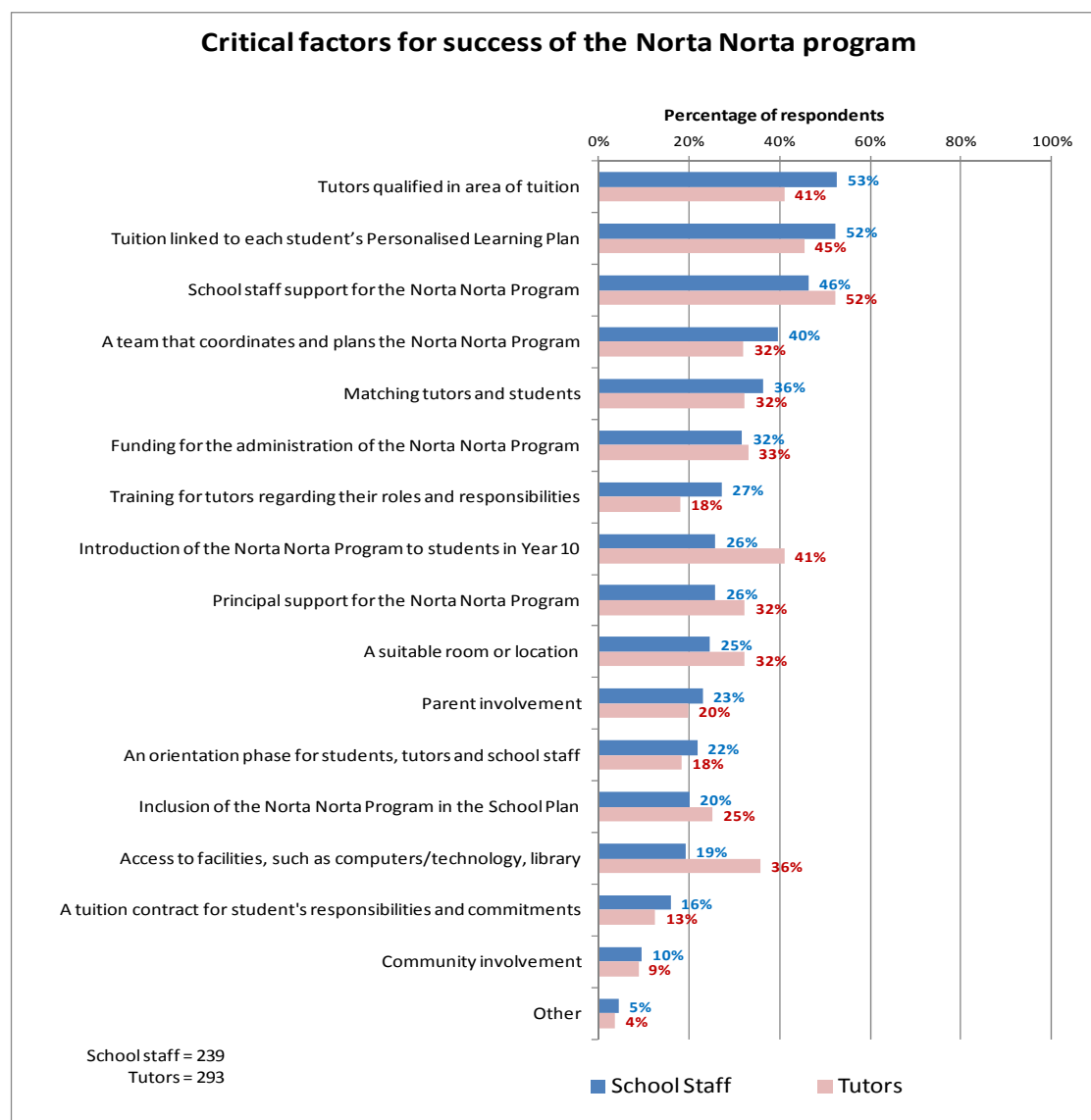
Factors contributing to the success of *Norta Norta*

Teachers and tutors identified a range of factors leading to success of the program. As shown in Figure E.13, there was great similarity in their ranking of the criteria.

The 'top' five factors identified by teachers as necessary for successful program implementation in schools were:

- tutors qualified in area of tuition
- tuition linked to each student's PLP
- school staff support for *Norta Norta*
- a team that co-ordinates and plans *Norta Norta*
- matching tutors and students

Figure E.13: Critical success factors for the *Norta Norta* Program



Tutors identified the same 'top three' factors, although with varied frequency. However two other criteria were identified in their 'top five': introduction of *Norta Norta* to Year 10 students, and access to facilities, such as computers, technology and library.

School participation in *Norta Norta* in 2011

A wide range of success factors was identified by teachers and tutors, as contributing to the successful implementation of the program, including:

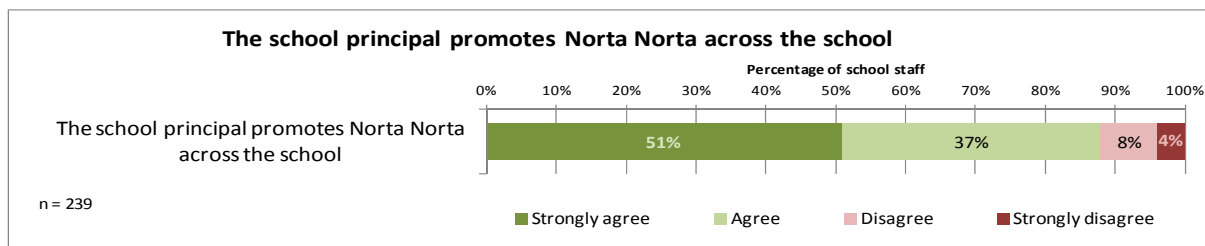
- school leadership
- staff awareness and support for students and tutors
- effective coordination and maintenance of the program, including the role of the Aboriginal Education team
- participation of tutors and teachers in Aboriginal cultural awareness training
- engagement of families and community, as well as the staff with explicit responsibilities for Aboriginal education, such as Aboriginal education workers

School leadership

Leadership and whole school support was considered to be an important factor for the success of *Norta Norta*.

In the school staff survey 88% of respondents reported that the school principal promoted *Norta Norta* across the school, as shown in Figure E.20.

Figure E.20: School principal support for *Norta Norta*



The perceptions of tutors about the level of promotion of the program by the school principal were also very high, with 84% of tutors indicating their agreement.

Support for students and tutors

Most school staff (87%) indicated that Stage 6 teachers support Aboriginal students individually in their learning wherever possible. Tutors thought that the level of support by Stage 6 teachers for Aboriginal students was high, with 89% of respondents indicating that Aboriginal students were individually supported by Stage 6 teachers.

In some schools where the school staff did not value the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program*, tutors perceived that they had a low status. One tutor commented:

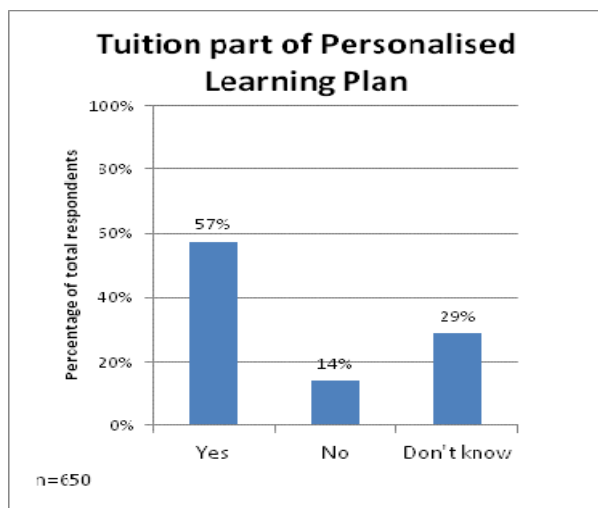
“...a major problem is that Norta Norta has no status, no designated room, some staff are very supportive, some not.”

Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs)

The role of Personalised Learning Plans to guide and monitor students’ tuition varied considerably as a part of the implementation of the program.

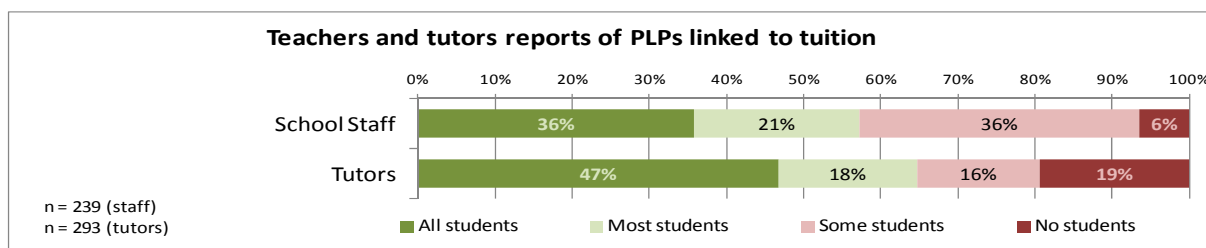
Students’ awareness of their PLPs is inconsistent, with only 61% of students reporting that they had a PLP. As shown in Figure E.16, 57% of student respondents claimed that their tuition was linked to their PLP. It is of concern that 14% of students claimed that their tuition was not part of their PLP and a further 29% didn’t know.

Figure E.16: Tuition linked to PLPs



The level of awareness by tutors of PLPs is more extensive than school staff, with almost half of tutors aware of the PLPs for all their students (see Figure E.17). It is of concern that 19% of tutors and 6% of Stage 6 teachers had no knowledge of their students' Personalised Learning Plans.

Figure E.17: Reports by teachers and tutors regarding students' PLPs linked to tuition



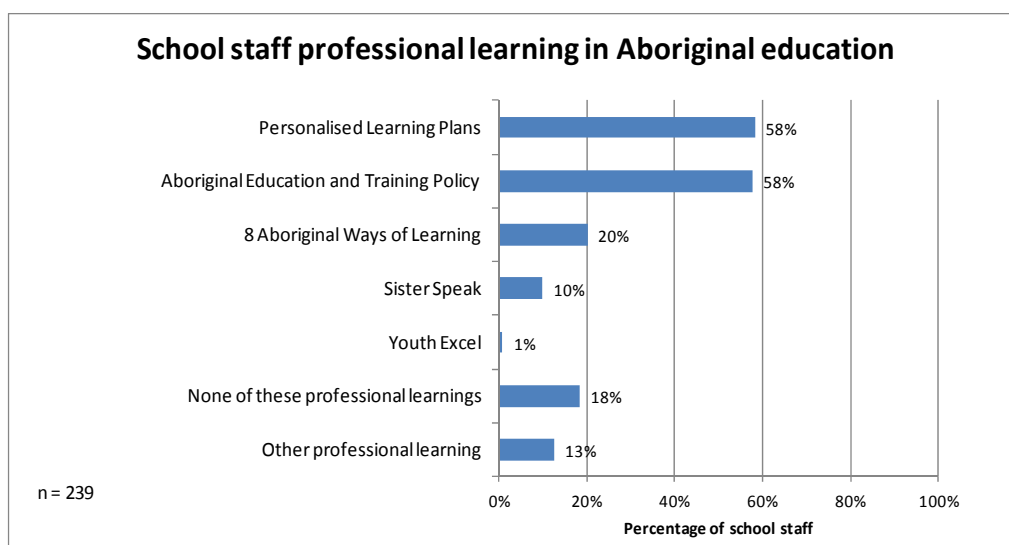
Coordination and maintenance of the program, and the Aboriginal Education team

During school visits it became apparent that an effective Aboriginal education team is critical to the smooth and successful implementation and maintenance of *Norta Norta*. A key member of the Aboriginal education team is the *Norta Norta* contact.

The function of Aboriginal education teams varied greatly across the sample schools, from those with highly visible and effective teams who operated with the full support of the wider Aboriginal community; to those where the team responsible for coordinating Aboriginal education did not function well and it was difficult to identify the roles and responsibilities of key personnel.

One indication of this team's effectiveness is illustrated by the participation of school staff in professional learning activities, particularly related to supporting Aboriginal students. Respondents to the school staff survey reported that they had participated in the professional learning activities, as shown in Figure E.18.

Figure E.18: Participation by teachers in professional learning activities



As indicated above, 18% of respondents, however, reported that they had participated in no professional learning in relation to Aboriginal education.

Aboriginal Cultural awareness

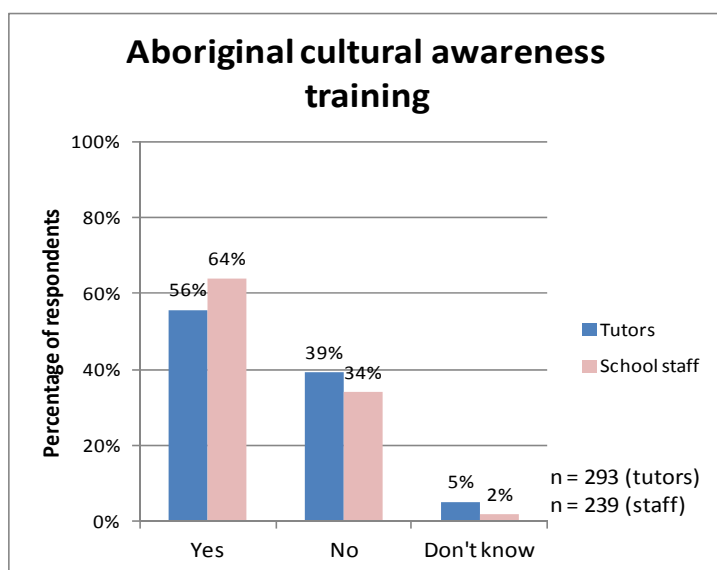
There were varied levels of Aboriginal cultural awareness in schools visited. In some schools principals, *Norta Norta* contacts and teachers confirmed that there was a lack of professional and

culturally appropriate behaviour by some members of staff. In the school staff survey one *Norta Norta* contact commented:

“The school as a whole needs Aboriginal cultural training, even though we fly flags and have acknowledgement of country, staff are middle class and carry old value systems. Aboriginal teachers within the school need a greater role other than just being handed the Aboriginal stuff. You know what I mean.”

School staff and tutors reported similar rates of participation in Aboriginal cultural awareness training, as shown in Figure E.14. Of concern are the 34% of teachers and 39% of tutors who indicated that they had received no training in Aboriginal cultural awareness.

Figure E.14: Participation by teachers and tutors in Aboriginal cultural awareness training



Communication and community involvement

Communication in schools was mixed, with some schools reporting high levels of awareness of the program and effective communication across stakeholders, to some schools where very few teachers, students, tutors or parents had knowledge of the Individual Sponsorship tuition.

For example in one school, a parent commented:

“It needs to be made clearer to parents; parents would like information about the qualified tutor and how the tutor was employed ... if school can send letters to follow up an absence, they must be able to send a letter about tutoring to parents; parents could be contacted by letter and a follow-up phone call.”

Similarly teachers reported that communication about *Norta Norta* could be improved. One teacher highlighted the need for agreement between stakeholders in schools about the purpose of the program and the way it is implemented, commenting that:

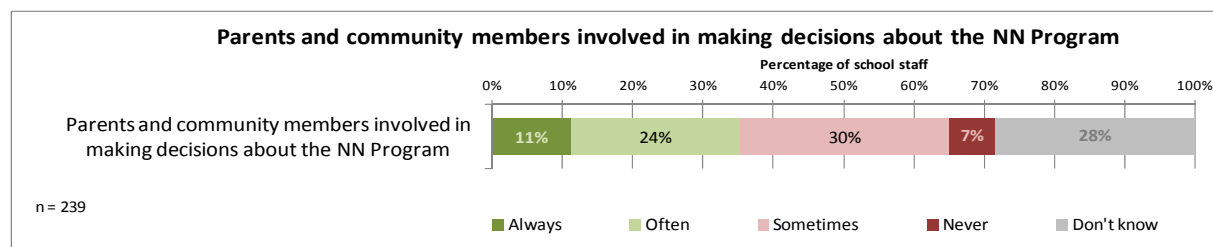
“... (need) clear guidelines for tutors, teachers and students about how the program will operate ... this will reduce tension between teachers and tutors ... (school) will not have a divided culture; this will be a challenge to work through (for staff)”

One of the essential elements of any educational program for Aboriginal students is collaboration with parents and the community. This is a two-way process, which involves not only the engagement

of the Aboriginal community in schools, but willingness of school leaders and staff to work beyond the classroom and school (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 12).

The *Norta Norta Program Guidelines* state that full collaboration with parents will best improve the learning outcomes of students (AETD, 2011, p.5). In practice, only one-third of school staff reported that the community is involved in decision-making always or often, as shown in Figure E.15.

Figure E.15: Involvement of parents and community members in decision-making



Parent awareness of *Norta Norta*

Communication between schools and parents, regarding the existence and purpose of *Norta Norta* was seen to be effective in some places and ineffective in others. There were some general areas in which the need for improvement was evident.

Parents expressed some confusion about the eligibility of senior students. In some cases it was assumed that the individual sponsorships operated like the NAPLAN component of the *Norta Norta* Program. These parents believed that *Norta Norta* tuition was only available for those students identified as needing high levels of support, and not available to their children.

A key element of *Norta Norta* is community engagement and parent involvement to support Aboriginal students. Survey data from school staff and tutors indicated that the involvement of parents and community was not considered to be a critical factor for the success of the program.

However, parents were highly appreciative of the support provided to senior students and the general success of the program led to improved staff and parent knowledge of its implementation.

Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations from Phase 1

The effectiveness of *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program* is supported by:

- strong school leadership, to drive planning, decision-making and review processes
- whole school support including:
 - collaboration between teaching staff, support personnel and tutors
 - cultural awareness amongst the school community i.e. staff members who are dedicated and culturally aware professionals
 - school culture that is welcoming to the Aboriginal community
- strong co-ordination, including clearly defined roles and responsibilities for teachers, tutors, the *Norta Norta* contact and members of the Aboriginal Education team
- effective matching of students to tutors, based on identification of students and some student choice from a range of qualified tutors
- tuition support provided by tutors with specific subject expertise
- community involvement in the program, including establishing meaningful partnerships with the community; involving the Aboriginal community in planning, making decisions and reviewing the program

- promotion of the program, including provision of ongoing information, communication within the school and community, and involvement of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)
- innovative strategies that encourage a sense of identity and pride for Aboriginal students, their families and the community, such as:
 - learning contracts to strengthen student commitment
 - Aboriginal roll call groups
 - mentoring program
 - a designated facility or “centre”.

Recommendations from Phase 1

The following issues have been commonly identified as potential improvements of the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program*:

- Consideration of ‘re-naming’ the program to avoid confusion with the NAPLAN component of the *Norta Norta Program*.
- Introduction of an orientation phase for students, tutors and school staff. This might increase opportunities for schools to match tutors with students, based on student choice.
- Ensuring tuition is linked to each student’s Personalised Learning Plan.
- Provision of funding for administration of the *Norta Norta Program*, with responsibilities of the *Norta Norta* school contact to be outlined in the *Norta Norta Program Guidelines*.
- Introduction of the *Norta Norta Individual Sponsorship Program* to students in Year 10 prior to the commencement of Year 11 courses, around the time when they are choosing courses for Year 11.
- Training for tutors regarding their roles and responsibilities, and in cultural awareness, as needed.
- Strengthening community and parent support for the program through increased awareness about the program and greater participation of the community e.g. local AECG in decisions made about the program.
- Clarification of procedures for schools in the *Norta Norta Program Guidelines* related to annual student registrations. There is a need to:
 - confirm student participation for each school, independent of current funding applications or unspent funds
 - strengthen student commitment to *Norta Norta*, as detailed in the Guidelines document, to “ensure that those Aboriginal students ... will undertake a personal commitment to tutorial support.” The introduction of a student contract may address this issue.

References

Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AEDT). (2011). *Norta Norta Program Guidelines 2011*. Sydney, NSW: NSW Department of Education and Training.

Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) (2010). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014*. Retrieved February, 2012 from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Pages/ATSIEAP.aspx>

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