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Working together to boost school attendance

A bold new school attendance action plan and strategy was released today to help boost education results across the Territory.

Minister for Education and Training, Chris Burns, said the Every Child, Every Day strategy delivers innovative and forward-thinking attendance measures.

“Going to school every day is vital to a child getting a good education and preparing them for a working life in the future,” Dr Burns said.

“Too many children across the Territory, especially in remote areas, are not going to school often enough and they miss out on literacy and numeracy skills essential to succeed in life.

“It is vital that we work with families, communities and students to promote the value of schooling and changing community attitudes towards the importance of going to school every day, which is at the centre of the strategy.

“Efforts by governments and schools alone won’t overcome poor attendance – we need the support of families and the community.

“Every Child, Every Day recognises that boosting attendance and enrolment and participation is everybody’s business.

“Education is a key priority of the Henderson Government and attendance is the most critical issue we must address,” Dr Burns said.

Every Child, Every Day includes five priority action areas that are supported by tailored strategies that include both incentives and consequences.

The strategy has set an ambitious target of achieving 90 per cent school attendance across the Territory. At present it is around 89 per cent for major urban schools 86 per cent for remote schools and 65 per cent for very remote schools.

The Every Child, Every Day strategy includes:

- Expansion of the Value of School campaign in remote communities – This will include media messages and advertising in local language delivered through local networks. It also includes the use of ‘community champions’ and text and voice messaging to parents promoting the importance of school.
• Expanded School Year for Very Remote Schools – The Territory is the only jurisdiction to implement this program. The strategy will extend the school year from the current 40 weeks to 50 weeks to ensure children can attend school at least 180 days in a year, while still continuing cultural practices and ceremonies. There is further flexibility in the strategy that will allow schools to operate on weekends or evenings. This will take place after consultation in selected communities.

• Beyond School Guarantee – This strategy will be rolled out in all remote schools. The first time a trial of this magnitude has been undertaken in Australia. For students who displayed good attendance and behaviour at school, DET will provide support for them after graduation to enter appropriate employment, training or study.

• Rewards for good school attendance – The Department of Education and Training (DET) is partnering with the private sector to implement a ‘Frequent Attenders’ program in selected remote communities. It aims to motivate and reward students who attend and participate regularly at school with items such as free SMS, phone credits, music and movie downloads.

• Establishment of a new Participation and Pathways division to better focus and align efforts around improving attendance, enrolment and youth participation.

• Adapting the existing Family Responsibility Agreements for non-attendance, non-enrolment or non-participation.

• Introduction of Attendance Infringement Notices – On-the-spot fines for persistent non-attenders and those whose attendance fails to improve after repeated warnings and intervention. This will be introduced from Term 1, 2011.

Dr Burns said the successful Clontarf and Sporting Chance Academies and the No School No Service initiative will continue.

He said an Interagency Reference Group will also be set up to ensure key government departments can move to implement the Every Child, Every Day strategy as quickly as possible.

The 34 non-government schools that cater for about 10,000 students will be encouraged to take up the Every Child, Every Day action plan and strategy.

A copy of the strategy can be found at www.det.nt.gov.au

Media contact: Nicole Manison 0448 693 279