



## **Community College Australia Statement Special Assistance Schools within Community Education Providers**

### **Preamble**

This policy describes the position of Community Colleges Australia (CCA) in relation to how Australian adult and community education (ACE) providers operate independent special assistance secondary schools.

### **Policy Statement**

Vulnerable and disengaged students are returning to learning with the support of a growing network of independent special assistance schools, including schools owned and operated by Australia's not-for-profit adult and community education (ACE) sector.

ACE providers have a long history in supporting disengaged youth, which has included providing various local programs and support strategies. Specific examples include the NSW Links to Learning Community Grants program and the Victorian Skills First Reconnect program. The ACE sector has long acknowledged the need for targeted support for vulnerable and disengaged students, and the growth of special assistance schools forms a natural progression within community-based education.

Community Colleges Australia recognises the opportunity to increase schooling options for young people through special assistance schools owned and operated by not-for-profit community-based education providers. Such schools generally have smaller student intakes and operate within an adult education philosophy to cater for young people dealing with a range of issues such as trauma, anxiety and/or mental health concerns, through to other necessitous circumstances, including family-related issues. These schools support a significant number of Indigenous students.

The numbers of Australian special assistance schools have risen rapidly in recent years, which is reflective of the need to support and re-engage young people who do not fit the traditional schooling system. A majority of ACE special assistance schools are located outside capital cities, in regional and rural areas. Given Australia's continuing population growth, and increasing demographic and social diversity, continued growth in special assistance secondary schools is likely.

CCA acknowledges and supports this growing phenomenon. The development of these schools constitutes a notable innovation for the ACE sector, which has already been transforming its business models to cope with changing social, economic and educational needs. These new schools are also beginning to redefine what ACE organisations actually do, adding to the scope of their activities and capabilities.



While ACE providers are identified as important players, particularly in relation to the provision of foundation skills, their role as school providers is not as well established, nor in some jurisdictions, well accepted.

These special assistance schools rest on sophisticated philosophies nested within adult learning theory, all based on mutual respect, the celebration of difference and the use of practical activities to engage with theory. The models are often delivering remarkable and measurable outcomes, with a number of major successes to show their worth.

CCA believes that the community education sector provides a valuable source of expertise and experience that can be utilised in development of future secondary school policies.

Adult and community education organisations specialise in promoting inclusiveness; increasingly this extends to Australia's young people, not just the adult population.

## **Date**

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