

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

(Reference: health of school-aged children)

Members:

**MS K TUCKER (The Chair)
MR B SMYTH
MS K MacDONALD**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 23 AUGUST 2002

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Leyne (Ph: 62050490)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

The committee met at 11.36 am.

ELIZABETH JOSEPHINE NEIST,

THOMAS LESLIE BODE,

PHILLIPPA MIKHAILA FINLAY,

EMILY KATHERINE SCOTT and

JULIAN STUART INGALL

were called.

THE CHAIR: One member of the committee is still to come but, as she should be on her way, we will start with the formalities.

I am Kerrie Tucker and this is Brendan Smyth, and Karin MacDonald will join us. Brendan is with the Liberal Party, I am with the Greens, and Karin is with the Labor Party. All committees of this Assembly do have cross-party representation. I will first read you a formal statement, as you are witnesses to a committee hearing of the Legislative Assembly.

You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections, but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. I understand that that was explained to you before, so that you are aware of its meaning.

Before we start, thank you for giving your time to the Assembly's committee today. It is very important for us, if we are looking at a subject such as the health of school-aged children, to talk to children and students, so that we understand what it feels like to be who you are.

As adults, obviously, we have a different understanding, even though we might be parents or know young people. It is very important that members of the Assembly can actually listen to the people who are most affected by the matter under examination. I want to thank you sincerely for taking the trouble of coming to talk to the committee this morning, and I want to thank your school for supporting you in this. Before we start, would each of you say your name?

Ms Neist: I am Elizabeth Josephine Neist.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR SMYTH: See the lights at the back on the wall there? They tell you that the tape recorder is on, and some very important people in there called the Hansard people write everything down. Your names are actually going to appear in the *Hansard* report, so we have to get you to speak up a little bit and lean into the microphones, because the recording is sometimes a bit unclear.

What you are doing is really important, because you are speaking out on behalf of all primary school kids and I reckon that is pretty exciting, don't you?

Ms Neist: Yes.

MR SMYTH: I am very happy to have you here today. It is great.

Mr Bode: I am Thomas Leslie Bode.

Ms Finlay: I am Phillippa Mikhaila Finlay.

Ms Scott: I am Emily Katherine Scott.

Mr Ingall: I am Julian Stuart Ingall.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I understand that you all have a particular topic to cover, so we welcome your comments. Who would like to start?

Ms Neist: Okay. Hi, I am Elizabeth, and I believe that lots of adults think kids are careless and free, but normally it is not so. More than 20 per cent of primary school students have been bullied at least twice. I know how it feels: demeaning, painful, humiliating and depressing. Girls often become depressed by boys and girls who say things such as, "You don't look anything like people on TV", or "You're too ugly to look like—", well, I cannot say that, or a lot of other insults, because I would be using bad language.

Guys who are bullied sometimes feel the need to bully to release anger and build self-esteem levels. Many movies and the macho man figure affect boys. They think, for example, that boys don't cry, only wimps go to the counsellor, and all disputes can be solved by a fight. It's not true, is it?

All young teens worry about how they look, and about how other people think about them and their friends. The thing is—and we have done a survey—is that most kids only do about one and a half hours of physical activity a day. However, they watch TV and play on the computer for an average of three and a half hours a day.

Kids with low self-esteem normally do not do as much sport as other kids because they think that they will get teased, or they won't do it properly, or they will have problems with it. That is not a very nice feeling, I know. Also, some teachers do not like sport so they do not teach their students as much sport as other teachers do. I am lucky because our teacher does a lot of sport, but last year I did not have a very sporty teacher.

Everyday problems like food and advertising, self-esteem and body image are pretty big for kids my age. I see eight-year-old kids trying to keep up with 15-year-old girls, and that is pretty sad. Because adults often misunderstand us, we have problems when they make rules and decisions for us that really don't help us. They don't know what we want and need because they don't ask us.

The thing that I would like to say the most is that I came here because I believe that you can help me, and my friends, and everybody else my age around Canberra. It would be really cool if you could. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Elizabeth. We might take submissions from each of you and then we might have some questions, if that's okay. Tom, would you like to speak next, or did you have an order sorted out?

Mr Bode: We have an order.

THE CHAIR: You use the order you have sorted out then.

Ms Finlay: Hi, I'm Pippa. Each person obviously eats, and each person needs to eat. That's just a fact of life and it's common sense as well. However, some people take food for granted: they either eat too little, or too much, or they have a very balanced diet. I think that most people either eat only junk food or they have a varied diet, but they eat mainly unhealthy foods, and you may find maybe one out of five people who would eat a balanced diet every day just to keep their energy and strength up.

People who diet eat a small portion of food, but the thing is the food is not healthy, it is junk food. They think that, if they eat junk food but they eat it in small portions, they will become skinnier and skinnier and skinnier. That's how they become anorexic, or bulimic, or just way-out-of-this-world skinny. I think it's wrong how people can starve their bodies of what they need to survive.

If you choose not to eat healthy foods that may be your choice, but you have to think of what your body feels as well. If your mind tells you that you have to eat less food just to fit in with the crowd, or to be popular, or to fit into a shirt that you grew out of six years ago, then why eat at all? You may as well starve yourself to death if you just want to be popular. You have to be yourself to be comfortable in this world and to be accepted.

Also, people who do eat too much have problems with their families. They really, really like food, but it might not necessarily be healthy food. If you eat a balanced diet of healthy foods then you'll be just the right weight for your size and for your age. But if 20 per cent of your meal is healthy food and then 80 per cent, the rest, is unhealthy—like McDonalds or KFC, or even lots and lots of chocolate and lollies—then your body isn't getting what it needs.

I think that most people who don't get what they need are crabbier, they don't seem as friendly, they are sourer, and they just do not want to participate in many things like sports or classroom activities. It might not just be that they really like their food: it might be pressure at home from their family and their friends, or they could be teased a lot around their neighbourhood or even at school. I have experienced being teased and bullied, and for a few weeks I was eating more than I should have. That is why I know

that people who do eat a lot are under a lot of stress from other people because they aren't accepted for who they are.

If people eat food, that's what they normally do, but from the first time you smell that, well, horrible but irresistible smell of takeaway you just can't get off it. You think, "Oh, this smells so nice, I have to try it." Even if you've had it before and hate it so much, the smell and the chemicals drag you in. If you eat a balanced diet but then you do eat junk food, you are still damaging your body. In small portions it is okay, but if you go overboard and you eat maybe three times a week or just under, it's still too much. It is not really nice to think, "I have just eaten a meal that I didn't really like, but because I couldn't resist the temptation I went ahead."

Then you have all this fat and oil in your body which your body can't handle at once, and so you get fatter or you get skinnier, depending on how much you eat. I did a survey a few days ago and found that most people eat a healthy meal, but one out of 10 children will not eat breakfast, and that is a large amount in our society. If you add up how many people are in Australia and then calculate one out of every ten, you will end up with the fact that quite a few people do not even eat breakfast.

For people who work, that is a large problem, because if they're running around all day doing jobs for their bosses, or if they are typing up a story, they'll get tired faster. Then, they will either fall asleep during their work or they'll go home drained of all their energy because they haven't eaten enough that day. Breakfast is what makes your body run during the day. It runs like clockwork if you eat a balanced diet of say two slices of toast, an apple or cereal. I know that a few of my friends and family will go into the kitchen, grab a tub of yoghurt and then just leave, but that isn't really enough to keep your body running for 24 hours.

You think about it: a five-minute meal and maybe even less, running for a whole 24 hours. How much time would it take that food to run through your body and how much energy will you use? It is not enough to sustain the needs of your body.

You need to eat, and that is your source of energy, but it is normally people who eat too little or eat too much who have real problems. They are either pressured by friends or pressured by family. I know that a few of my family members have actually dieted until they are down to the bare minimum of weight. Even my friends do it, and sometimes I think that maybe three or four of my friends—in the whole time that I've known them, my whole life—are actually anorexic. They eat, but they don't keep it in their bodies, because they think that, "If I'm not skinny enough, I won't fit into a group and I won't be accepted for who I am."

If you aren't accepted for who you are, it's not you who has the problem, it's the person who isn't accepting you, because they have a problem with you. Nobody should ever have a problem with you, because you are yourself and that's how you should stay.

THE CHAIR: What class are you in?

Ms Finlay: 5/6 R.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Who is speaking to us next?

Ms Scott: Hi. I am Emily. A lot of children have low self-esteem and poor body images. If you have low self-esteem or think that you are fat, it can be a problem that is sometimes caused by the media. People who see boys and girls on TV who are somewhat like Barbie dolls start to believe that they have to be thin and beautiful to have friends or be popular.

On the TV, radio, in books and magazines, the media is always portraying the image of “thin is beautiful”. Some people get so sucked in they stop eating. They say they are trying to change this, but popular shows still aren’t. If you have any problems talk to your family. Some kids’ minds become like this because of bullying. Some kids even say little things like, “You’re so fat and ugly.” Even stuff like that can affect how people, especially high-school aged girls, see themselves. They go out and buy fashionable tops that are way too small.

Girls are still going to great extremes with diet and exercise so that they can look good and be popular. The media must be stopped. We have to get the message across that it’s okay to be yourself. I think that all the things in life that suggest we have to be thin should be banned. There should definitely be laws to control the things that damage children’s lives. There are a lot of kids around with low self-esteem and it’s a big problem that has to be fixed.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Emily. Who would like to speak next?

Mr Bode: I will. My topic is what the school does towards exercise and health. It is my role today to tell you some things our school is already doing. Most teachers do a lot of sport with their children, but not all of them. The school does a lot of things like organising the school hockey teams and the netball teams, which both do really well in competitions. They also set up clinics during the day, such as netball clinics, hockey clinics and those kinds of things. They also set up afters, which is after-school care, where kids do a lot of sport and exercise games.

They also set up the PASS program, where you do different sports and games each week. You make your own way around until it is time to go home, but that costs quite a bit of money. The school is also introducing some healthy food into the canteen, and obese people can buy healthy food and try to lose weight, but they give you some junk food there so the canteen does not go out of business. Some classes do aerobics straight away in the morning to wake people up and help unfit people and obese people to get fit, to help them lose weight. Our teacher lets some kids plan and run the sports session.

This school also does well in swimming carnivals. In some classes, including kindy, we learnt what smoking does to your body and what happens when you do not exercise. Some classes have been having drug ed and learning about what drugs do to your body and your health.

Recently, our school became a health promoting school. We are doing lots of things to raise the profile of health among the children, teachers and parents. For example, there’s a parent room where parents can meet, chat and get resources, use the computer and access community agencies. They look at healthy canteen ideas; a youth worker coming

into school; working groups at lunchtime, which are about to start; the peer mediator program; and anti-bullying and anti-racism education.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Julian.

Mr Ingall: Yes, my name is Julian and the topic I am speaking about today is: is the government doing enough to help people be healthy? I think the government could do more to prevent bad health in children. They could probably give schools more money to hire experts on health and diseases and stuff, so that people know what is healthy and what is not, and how you get certain diseases, so they can be careful not to do the things that give them the diseases.

Also, if the government gave the schools more money, the schools could hire more people to come in and do sports clinics with us. The clinics might get people interested in doing sports every Saturday or something. Then they would get hooked, and then they would probably play every Saturday for a couple more years, and then they would be healthier.

The government could probably also set up a clinic for overweight people where lots of famous people come and do sport with them. Then the overweight people will think it's cool because all the famous people do it, and they will probably do it as well.

I think that not enough people are eating healthy food because they listen to ads on TV that get them to buy healthy food by twisting their minds around. The ads say things like, "This food has 25 per cent less fat than most spreads," when most spreads have lots of fat anyway, so it hasn't really reduced it by much. The government has some control over what goes on TV, so I think they should put restrictions on ads that target children about food. By not controlling the adverts, the government is directly contributing to the poor health of many children.

What we really need is some huge campaign using famous people to get kids up off their butts and motivated to be healthy. They are also going to have to get adults to set good examples so that children think it is really good to exercise, and then they will probably do it more. There are probably heaps of things the government could do, and I think children should be involved in what it is doing. After all, it is our future they are dealing with.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Julian. The way a committee hearing works is that I ask witnesses questions as chair, and then I will offer the opportunity to other members of the committee to ask questions as well. It is quite informal. We'll just see if we can tease out a little bit more of your evidence. Thank you very much. You have already raised some very important issues.

The first question I would like to ask you is about what you said about body image and food, and the bullying that can happen to young people who have a different body image or body weight than the one that is promoted by society generally. I had not realised that that would be an issue so much in primary school. You are class 5/6 now. When do you see this happening in the school? When do kids start talking about this—in what class—and also what helps?

You can all make a comment, but we will go around the circle. Elizabeth?

Ms Neist: On television, most clothing shops only sell certain sizes in children's clothing, so they always have a certain size of child on the television. So the kids who are that age think, "I'm meant to look like that." That is probably one of the reasons why it is a big problem, because it is on the television all the time and they get to see it every day.

THE CHAIR: You see children on television who look a particular age and are a particular size. Is it too stereotyped?

Ms Neist: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Tom.

Mr Bode: On the TV you see people like supermodels, and other people say, "How can they be that beautiful?" But they probably spent money on being that beautiful, so then people go and spend money to try to be beautiful, but it doesn't work.

THE CHAIR: Yes. They also use lots of good camera angles, and lots of makeup, and all sorts of things. Yes, is there another comment?

Ms Finlay: Most people see that the television actually makes a bigger impact on children than it does on adults. If they see that there's, just say, a 25 per cent off sale at Smarty Pants, they will go down to Smarty Pants and check out most of the things. Then they will realise that their size is totally different to the sizes in stock, because they account for people who have slim builds or are tall, but they don't account for many smaller children, and people who may like the style but who aren't so slim.

People either end up buying something that is way too small or something that isn't actually the style they want. If they see something that is designed for their build, it may not actually be the style that they like. Now, I don't normally buy girls clothes: I normally buy boys clothes, because most of the time there aren't girls clothes in my size. I think that clothes shops should account for all sizes and shapes.

Ms Scott: Sometimes I think that people start thinking that they are fat, or they do not have a good self-image, because of bullying at school. This can happen to boys and girls when they are going on to high-school age. They start thinking that they're way cool. If your friends are into fashion, but you start liking sport more than worrying about how you look, they can start treating you like you don't belong anywhere, and like an outcast.

THE CHAIR: Did you want to comment, Julian?

Mr Ingall: Yes. When a friend gets a new top or something then they will pressure people into thinking it's good. Then, those people will have to get one because their friend has one and they pressure their parents into getting them stuff.

THE CHAIR: So have any programs in the school helped you deal with these issues? What has helped you? You're all very clear on the pressures and the issues here. Are you like other kids, or are you an exceptional group? How do you know about what you are telling us, and what has the school done to help? What programs have helped?

Ms Neist: The school doesn't have many programs for kids like us who believe that there is stuff on the TV that is really bad for you.

THE CHAIR: Does the school help you understand it, though?

Ms Neist: Yes, a little bit. I think the thing that helps us the most is friends. There are some kids out there who don't have any friends so, when people tease them, they believe the stuff that they've been told when they've been teased. Of course, they think, "Nobody will like me anyway", and they don't even try to make friends. Then they are totally sucked into everything that they see, and they will do those things, and then they will be teased more for being a copycat, and stuff like that. It can make someone feel really bad. When they find that people do actually like them for who they are, it will make them feel a lot better.

MS MacDONALD: Do you have any ideas about how to get people not to tease others?

Ms Neist: I think it is impossible to do that, as the more somebody tells a teacher or an adult, the more they will be teased, because the teaser got into trouble and is angry.

MS MacDONALD: Have you ever heard about doing things such as having a discussion group within the school to talk about the issue of bullying, or has your school ever done that?

Ms Neist: I think it has happened before, but I don't know if it has happened when I have been old enough to understand that kind of thing.

THE CHAIR: Tom, do you want to comment?

Mr Bode: People do say stuff like that. I know what people say because I have been around when people have been bullying other people. Bullies are people who lose control when they lose something. If they lose a game at recess or lunch, then they might get really angry with the person who won, and just bash them up or something. Then that person gets really upset. From then on, everyone will deliberately lose when they play that the bully because, if they didn't, they would just get bashed up.

THE CHAIR: Yes, okay. Are there any other comments on that? Then I will hand over to Brendan and Karin. Yes, Emily.

Ms Scott: One thing that works to stop people bullying other people is definitely the bully seeing what they've done. If the two people meet in a conference with teachers then they know. They already know what they've done is wrong but, if they get a reaction out of the person they're bullying or teasing, then they will just keep doing it. It is important to let them know that what they are doing is wrong. There should be bigger punishments for the people who are ruining children's lives like that.

THE CHAIR: Does anybody want to make another comment? Pippa?

Ms Finlay: Most people who bully can't actually be stopped. They may stop for a while, but you can't actually stop them. It would be impossible, because everybody would have to be the same to stop bullying. If there's nothing different about people, there's nothing to bully them over. If they say something wrong, they would all say the same thing. They wouldn't change their minds because they would all be exactly the same. Everyone would have to be exactly the same in every single way for bullying to stop, because that way nobody has a problem with anybody.

MR SMYTH: But why does everybody have to be the same?

Ms Finlay: Well, because if you're the same as another person, you won't bully them because they're not different. Most bullying happens if someone is different: speaks a different language, looks different and has different coloured eyes, or dresses differently. So, if everyone was the same, nobody would have a problem with anyone. If everybody in this room was, say, the same as Julian, he wouldn't tease anybody. If he did, he'd basically be teasing himself.

MR SMYTH: How do we get people to like that we are different, rather than tease us because we are different?

Ms Finlay: Most people are bullied because they have problems at home as well, but you can't really stop people having problems at home so you have to work it out in the surroundings without making it seem as if they are different because they have a counsellor, or they talk to someone once a week. People do bully others who go to see counsellors or psychiatrists. It is not just that they have problems—they might need to work something out at home.

THE CHAIR: Tom?

Mr Bode: Sorry, there's something else that could help bullies, but it might not. Our school had this peer mediator program, but I don't think it would work that well, because kids go on the oval as well and so they can just get bashed up.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, how does the peer mediation work?

Mr Bode: Well, kids can help with problems on the oval. If someone's crying, they can just go and ask them what's wrong.

THE CHAIR: Does that work?

Mr Bode: It was working, but if there's bullying and you go over there to try to stop it, the bully could just bash you up because you're just a kid, the same age as them.

THE CHAIR: Right, so it doesn't really work. It is more useful if someone falls over and so on.

Mr Bode: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Elizabeth.

Ms Neist: I actually forgot that there is a program where some kids who are having problems in the classroom or with other people can make their own contract and talk through it with their teacher and Chris Pilgrim, our principal. You can also get people in the class to say what they think the problem is, so that you know what upsets the other people in your classroom. Then the people who tease you can tell you why they tease you, or tell somebody else and that person can tell you, and you can write it down so you know. Then you can try to work on that, and you have to try to be friendly to people who are mean to you, because otherwise it won't work. We have to make people realise that.

THE CHAIR: It would take a fair bit of courage, would it not, to start that process though, because you've said already that it's better to just keep your head down as much as possible. If you're going to initiate this contract arrangement, you've got to have a lot of guts to do that, don't you?

Ms Neist: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Does it happen very often that people do that, and would it be initiated, from your knowledge, by the child or by the teacher who has become aware of the bullying?

Ms Neist: Yes. If there is a kid who is having a problem, the teacher will pull them aside and say, "What's the matter?" Then, it's probably okay to tell your teacher what's happening, but some people are very intimidated by going to the counsellor, because the counsellor writes things down and asks questions and, because they're so interested in everything that's happening, you feel very strange. It is actually a bit freaky.

THE CHAIR: That is what we are doing here. You are handling it very well.

MS MacDONALD: So it would be better if they were bored by it?

THE CHAIR: Is it a bit too formal and confronting?

Ms Neist: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I understand. It is a bit medical, in a way.

MS MacDONALD: You have all talked about bullying happening. Do you think it is a big issue in your school?

Ms Neist: Definitely. It is a big issue in every school that I know of.

Ms Scott: I think everyone in this school, every student who's here, has been bullied at least four or five times in their whole time at primary school, and some more than others. The difference thing is definitely right. If you are not up with the fashions, or your family cannot afford to buy you the latest top or the latest hair accessory, then people will pick on you. I just don't think that is fair because it is okay to be different. It is okay to be an individual.

THE CHAIR: Certainly. Those individuals make the best people.

MS MacDONALD: That is right.

MR SMYTH: Elizabeth, you said earlier you thought we could help you. This might be a question for all of you. What is it that you think we, the people who make the laws for the territory, should be doing better?

Ms Neist: You should ask more kids what is happening. You should have a representative from each school and you should ask them what is happening to help you with campaigns, because that would help every school in a different way.

MS MacDONALD: We will have the Greens kids and the Libs kids, and then we will have the Labor kids.

MR SMYTH: Is there something else there?

Ms Scott: Bring the cane back, definitely.

MR SMYTH: Bring the cane back—who said that?

MS MacDONALD: That was Emily.

THE CHAIR: Is that a serious suggestion, Emily?

Ms Scott: No, definitely not. I just think that there should be harsher punishments for people who bully, so that they know that it is definitely wrong and if you do it this will happen to you, and you do not get a second chance.

MS MacDONALD: What sort of punishment, though?

Ms Scott: I don't know. Maybe the teachers should be allowed to keep us in after school or something again, as though we've been really bad.

MR SMYTH: What about we have Pippa first, and then we will come to Tom and then Elizabeth.

Ms Finlay: I do partially agree with Emily. We shouldn't bring the cane back, but there should be harsher punishments, because most teachers give one or two warnings and, after the third warning, you're out of the class and in another class. But, if you do misbehave, and you're on time-out for lunch, that really doesn't matter to most students, because they have close to 40 weeks more to play at lunchtimes. One time-out won't really matter to most people. If it happens then, it will most probably happen again considering that a time-out is a small punishment.

But if you are kept after school, for your free time when you plan to get away from school, you will think twice about it next time instead of just assuming that, if you spend your lunchtime here, it will be over the next week.

MR SMYTH: Okay, Tom.

Mr Bode: No. I don't have anything to say.

Ms Neist: Okay, I reckon that probably the harshest thing would be in-school suspension. I know that for a fact because I used to be really bad at school. In-school suspension is so boring. If you were just sitting at a table for an hour and a half, not allowed to have any paper, no pencils, nothing, then you would probably die of boredom and wouldn't do it again, not soon at least.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned that you have a contract to process. We talked about this briefly. This committee has been told generally by a couple of witnesses about what is called restorative justice. It is actually used with adults as well, and it sounds a bit like your contract. I would be interested to know whether you thought this would be useful. It does not necessarily even have to pick on particular children who are having problems: it can involve a discussion with the group generally.

It can be used where particular people are hurting other people. They are brought together to talk about what each person feels. If you are bullying me, say, then we would sit together with other people around us—maybe other students and maybe adults—and I would say how it felt. I can't remember if I said I was bullying you, or you were bullying me, but say you were bullying me. I would tell you what it feels like to be bullied, and you would tell me what it feels like to bully me, and why you bully me and so on.

The system tries to get people to think about their behaviour rather than just dealing with it by punishment. I realise that that is quite hard to do in some ways, because you do not know what is going to happen out in the playground afterwards. Maybe you would say, therefore, that it would just make the problem worse. If any of you have a comment on that sort of process, I would be interested to hear it.

Ms Neist: Some people who have to sit out on time-out get really angry at the person who told on them, and they say, "I'm going to bash you after school." The teachers have no control over what is going to happen after school, or before school. So it is probably irrelevant, because it could happen after school at any time, or on the weekends, because a lot of kids know other kids' phone numbers, where they live or where they like hanging out.

THE CHAIR: It is just unsafe to take those sort of options?

Ms Neist: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Do you think seeing films about this sort of behaviour would help? Lots of films are about the gang of bullies and the kid who was bullied, and the kid who is bullied is usually the hero in the end because he or she was better in lots of ways. Does that sort of film help in understanding what is going on?

Ms Scott: Last year in 5/6 R, some Dickson College students came in. They needed help with a project and we were the stars of the show, which was called *Nit Girl*. Some of us got main roles and the rest of us were just mean people in the class, and Pippa was the new girl at school and she got picked on really badly by me. I was the main bully, along

with my friend Isabel, who is not here today. Just doing that film, and seeing Pippa look as sad as she did when we were picking on her, makes you think that this actually happens in real life. This isn't always fake.

THE CHAIR: And do you think that helped? Was that shown to the whole school?

Ms Scott: Some people in the school still have not seen it, no.

THE CHAIR: Do you think it would have been helpful? Do you think it would have changed the feelings, even a little bit, of those who were currently bullying?

Ms Scott: Yes, I think so.

THE CHAIR: Is that a good example of trying to change attitudes?

Ms Scott: And in it, Pippa is the hero in the end. Someone falls in love with her, the only person who is nice to her, and the rest of the class gets beaten by the two people.

THE CHAIR: I notice the teacher is nodding at the back there, too, indicating that it was a useful exercise. For the record, the teacher has said it is a very powerful medium. Do you kids agree with that?

Ms Scott: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Thanks Pippa.

Ms Finlay: When we actually did the filming, a lot of the students at school actually knew that I was doing the main role, and a couple of times I was actually called "nit girl" in the courtyard.

THE CHAIR: So you were bullied for doing it?

Ms Finlay: Yes, for actually playing the main role in it.

THE CHAIR: Have those students who bullied you seen the film now?

Ms Finlay: I don't know.

Ms Scott: Some of us called her "nit girl" just for the fun of it, but she knew that her friends would do that.

THE CHAIR: Yes, and there was probably a little bit of jealousy, too, because you were a bit of a star.

Ms Finlay: Some people actually just called me "nit girl" because I was in the film, and I was portrayed as a person who actually had nits, as a little trick from other people. But, a few times, it wasn't just because of the film that I was being bullied. I have also been bullied before because of my haircut—I used to have really short hair. I have actually been bullied for the way I am, and it is not nice to know that you cannot actually be yourself at home or at school without being bullied in some way.

MS MacDONALD: What do you mean by “at home”?

Ms Finlay: Well, sometimes brothers and sisters can actually tease you, because you wear something different, or if you want to wear something that you like and it might be suitable, but your parents do not think it is. That is their point of view, not yours. Either way, you are still bullied.

THE CHAIR: Tom?

Mr Bode: I know what being bullied is like, too. I used to wear glasses and I used to get called “four eyes” and “mutant” and the like in junior school. But then, one day, I came to school without my glasses and the bully said, “Hey, Poindexter, where are your glasses?”, and I said, “I don’t need them any more”, and I haven’t been teased since.

THE CHAIR: You haven’t been teased since?

Mr Bode: No, not at school, not since I’ve stopped wearing glasses.

THE CHAIR: Yes, it is funny, isn’t it? You can buy glasses that you don’t even need so you can look cool, so that shows how silly it all is. Elizabeth?

Ms Neist: Last year, I was actually under a lot of pressure because I was bullied by pretty much everyone in the class. I told my friend everything, because she was my friend and I trusted her. Of course, somebody told her a rumour about me—that I told somebody else something about her, and I hadn’t. She got really mad and she started spreading rumours about me around the school, and making up rumours about my family. It was so horrible to think that I couldn’t even go to my friends and say, “Look, I am having this problem. What do you think I should do?”, because they are going to tell the whole school. It was a pretty bad feeling.

THE CHAIR: I am sure it was. That is a betrayal. It is very difficult for anybody, whatever age, to be betrayed. Karin?

MS MacDONALD: Julian, you were talking before about the government putting some restrictions on what is shown on TV, and you said that famous people should be doing advertisements talking about healthy eating and trying to reduce the amount of fast food that people eat. Because I am a lot older than you, the people I think are famous may be different to the people you think are famous. Because we want to talk about the sorts of people who would actually have an influence on you and people of your age group, who do you think would be good people to use in such a program?

Mr Ingall: Famous actors or singers, or something like that.

MS MACDONALD: You do not have anybody particular in mind?

Mr Ingall: No.

Ms Neist: I know that Kylie Minogue and some other people have done things for recycling and stuff, and that really made kids think, “Oh, this is made of paper. I should put it in the recycling bin, rather than that bin.” I think that she is someone young people would be influenced by, because she has been there for ever and ever.

MS MacDONALD: Not in our memories, but yes.

Ms Neist: In our memories, yes. I think that she should probably do it, because she has a big influence on a lot of things and she is really famous.

Ms Scott: I definitely think famous athletes should be doing more clinics. I think the football players who come in definitely have an influence on us, but only if they do really fun stuff with us. The hockey clinics we have are also fun, but we need athletes coming in from a wider range of sports. If Olympians came in and talked to us, or—

THE CHAIR: About what? About everything? About bullying too?

Ms Scott: About how sport can be fun.

THE CHAIR: About sport in particular.

Ms Scott: No, well, about how much fun it is to be healthy and to just be able to run round and have fun running round, and not just think, “My goodness, this is so boring.”

THE CHAIR: Would it be useful for them to also talk about these other things though, because sport is not fun if you get bullied for trying, because you are not up with it, or you are not the champion? Would it be useful if role models talked about that more?

Ms Scott: I know that, if Kylie Minogue or someone came in who was a really big influence on kids at that stage, then people would start to think, “Yes, that’s cool. Kylie Minogue obviously likes it.” They would do it. If Kylie Minogue said “don’t bully”, then people would probably stop bullying.

THE CHAIR: That is what I was wondering.

Ms Scott: We need the influence of someone who is well known and liked by kids of our own age.

THE CHAIR: I know that we are running out of time. I think you have to get back to school and you wanted to have a tour of the Assembly as well, so we will not go for much longer. Can I just ask another question, though? On the question of helping kids get fitter, some people like the idea of fitness testing. Have you had any fitness testing at primary school level? Do you know what fitness testing is?

Ms Scott: No.

THE CHAIR: Okay, we will not worry about that then. Any other questions?

MR SMYTH: Yes, I have one for Tom. Tom, you talked about the PASS program. Do you think that works?

Mr Bode: Yes, but—

MR SMYTH: Is it too expensive?

Mr Bode: It is pretty expensive, yes.

MR SMYTH: If the government could make it cheaper, do you think more kids would get involved in PASS?

Mr Bode: Yes.

MR SMYTH: If it was free, do you think a lot more kids would do it?

Mr Bode: They also get people from the Brumbies and the Raiders coming to do it.

MR SMYTH: Yes, that is good, isn't it?

Mr Bode: Yes.

THE CHAIR: In some of your suggestions, you said you would like to see something banned. I think it was advertising of junk food to children.

Ms Scott: It should just be monitored really carefully.

THE CHAIR: Yes, it is not within the capacity of government—we cannot ban what is shown by the media. We do have the capacity to influence health promotion ads and similar things. That is where we could use role models such as Kylie Minogue or whoever. They could go on the television and say certain things about junk food or about body image, although I don't know if she would be a great one for that. Ads such as those might be able to put across a different message from the message that is now so strong in the media. I just wanted you to understand that government cannot at this point stop things like that.

I was interested in your suggestion that we look at stopping advertising that targets children with junk food. We do have restrictions about, say, what children can watch on television. We have a classification system. We can influence the public and private media a little bit, but not by just stopping it, because we have a society that allows certain freedoms.

However, the committee could look at whether or not there are ways that we could look at the advertising that targets children. It wouldn't be a Canberra thing for this Assembly, though. That is more of a national issue, but we can follow that up as a committee.

MS MacDONALD: I have an addition to that. There is a conference going on in Melbourne about this issue at the moment, and there has been a suggestion that, as well as not having ads on at around children's television times for—I will not say names—junk food places, instead TV stations should do that at different times. The suggestion was that, as well as that, they should have warnings on junk food packaging so, when you go to your local junk food shop, food packaging might have warnings that say

something along the lines of “Warning. Eating too much junk food can make you unhealthy”, or “It is not good for your health”. Do you think that would help at all?

Ms Neist: It probably would. It would also help to have kids on television who are not like Tom, and probably more like Emily, me, Pippa and Julian, who are definitely not superskinny and definitely not just perfectly perfect. Having kids who are a little bit overweight, kids who are perfect, and kids who are a little bit too skinny would be probably a good thing, because some kids who are overweight believe that they are really overweight because the only thing they see on TV is kids who are this thin. It is definitely a big problem.

Having warnings on food would be good as well, because kids who are overweight eat that kind of thing because it tastes good, not because it smells good. It does smell good, but most of the time it tastes good, too, because of all the additives and preservatives and stuff.

THE CHAIR: Salt.

Ms Neist: Yes.

MS MacDONALD: It is also because fat carries taste.

Ms Scott: Good food can be nice. I have lots of meals that my mum cooks that I really love. I know there is some stuff that is not exactly good for me. Even having a barbecued sausage isn't bad for you, but it still tastes really nice and you know that you're not eating junk food, but you know you should not eat too much of it.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Pippa.

Ms Finlay: Children are basically the future, but that also applies to adults, because they are role models for us. I know that, when people eat less food, they have a big impact on their children, because their children think, “I want to grow up like my parents”, and so they will eat what their parents eat. With foods, and with cigarettes for adults, the warnings on some packets are actually very small and so they do not stand out. If people see more warnings on foods and read them more often, then they will know what they are actually eating, whether it tastes good or not.

THE CHAIR: I have one last question: do you think you are going to be teased because you came here today and you are going to be on television tonight?

Ms Neist: No.

Ms Scott: No, we are going to be famous.

THE CHAIR: That's good, because I think you should be proud of yourselves.

MR SMYTH: Hear, hear.

MS MacDONALD: Yes, you did very well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming to talk to the committee.

MR SMYTH: Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 12.30 pm.