



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE**

**(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2004-2005)**

**Members:**

**MS M PORTER (The Chair)  
MR M GENTLEMAN (The Deputy Chair)  
MRS V DUNNE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2005**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr D Abbott (Ph: 6205 0490)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry which have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

**The committee met at 9.33 am.**

Appearances:

Ms Katy Gallagher, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Children, Youth and Family Support, Minister for Women and Minister for Industrial Relations

Department of Education and Training

Dr Michele Bruniges, Chief Executive  
Ms Julie McKinnon, Deputy Chief Executive  
Mr Craig Curry, Executive Director, Education  
Ms Anne Thomas, Executive Director, Resource Management  
Ms Anne Houghton, Director, Training and Adult Education  
Ms Carol Harris, Director, Schools Southside  
Ms Joanne Howard, Director, Schools Central  
Mr Wayne Chandler, Director, Schools, Northern Canberra  
Ms Kathy Melsom, Director, Student Services and Equity  
Ms Helen Strauch, Director, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning  
Mr Rob Donnelly, Director, Budget and Facilities  
Mr Mick Kegel, Director, Information Management  
Mr Michael Bateman, Director, Human Resources  
Ms Beverley Forner, Director, Planning and Reporting

Canberra Institute of Technology

Dr Peter Veenker, Director  
Mr Peter Kowald, Acting General Manager  
Mr Vaughan Croucher, Dean, Learning Services Division

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, everybody. I begin by saying that 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 that 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 ask the people coming forward to the microphones to make sure that they identify themselves for Hansard. Minister, would you like to make some opening remarks?

**Ms Gallagher:** No, thank you, Madam Chair. I am happy just to proceed to the interrogation.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that how you feel about it?

**Ms Gallagher:** No, not at all.

**THE CHAIR:** We will start with general questions and then move on to the output classes, commencing at page 5, if that is all right with you.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, that is fine.

**THE CHAIR:** We will start, as I said, with some general policy questions.

**MRS DUNNE:** I noticed from a quick perusal of the table of contents that the agency performances, where we talk about the bread and butter issues, take up 14 pages and the management organisations take up another 37 pages. There seems to be an inordinate emphasis upon the management structure in this annual report and not nearly as much upon reporting on education outcomes, at least in terms of the sheer number of pages devoted to those matters. Is that symptomatic of something? Do we put a lot of our emphasis on the central office structure and not so much on looking after the schools, the teachers and the kids?

**Dr Bruniges:** My understanding is that the annual reporting directions require us to follow certain formats and so forth, and the weight and emphasis placed on agency performance pick up certainly a great deal of information about student learning outcomes in terms of literacy and numeracy in those key areas of schooling. So I did not necessarily see it as an overemphasis on the management of the organisation. I think that an integral part of the agency's performance is how you are, in fact, managing the organisation. If there are particular issues that you wish to take up, I am more than happy to respond to those issues.

**MRS DUNNE:** It may be something that is not necessarily a criticism of the department so much as perhaps a criticism of the Chief Minister's annual report instructions, in that one would think with the department of education that the sorts of things that we would be principally interested in would be the educational outcomes. Just by sheer weight of numbers of pages, a lot of the narrative is about the central office structure and what is done in the central office. Perhaps we should be looking in future at something in which there is much more narrative about the outputs and the achievements of teachers and children in schools, which is what we are all actually on about, and what happens in central office is supporting and facilitating what goes on inside the school gates.

The bulk of the money should be spent inside the school gates. I am just concerned that the bulk of the reporting in terms of the first part, the narrative part, of this report seems to be about what is going on in central office, and I think that you probably do yourself a disservice. It may be a function of the annual report directions, but it also may be just a function of the fact that people who create annual reports, and I have done so myself, tend to be people in the central office and therefore may think that the central office is more important than what is actually happening at the coalface.

**Dr Bruniges:** Certainly, we can look at that. I have to say, too, that each annual school report that comes up is another mechanism of reporting to the community. As to the scheme of reporting about individual student performance, about school annual board reports and in terms of the department's annual report, we need to look at the balance. We will certainly look at that in future years to see if we can put a different emphasis on outcomes.

**MRS DUNNE:** That would be good.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Just on outcomes, minister, can you tell us what achievements have occurred for the department over this reporting period?

**Ms Gallagher:** Are you talking about within the department or within schools?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Generally with schools.

**Ms Gallagher:** I think it follows on from Mrs Dunne's question about the annual report. The department of education reports in a number of ways about student outcomes and student performance each year. If you look at the results that we have seen this year—they do not necessarily go over a financial year; they are more in line with an academic year—you will see that our students are doing very well. In our ACTAP results, we are either the top or the second top performing jurisdiction in the country. In the annual report there are details of how we are performing internationally as well under a range of international tests.

That does not give us any grounds for complacency, of course. There are areas of improvement that need to be achieved. I think that year 5 writing is an area that we need to work on. Indigenous performance continues to be an area where we would like to see big improvements; we have seen some improvement, but some further improvement. We are looking to increase the number of senior students completing year 12 and going on to further training and study.

I think the ACT does very well. We do so for a number of reasons, one of which is the quality of the teaching in our schools and the support provided by the education department. There are also factors dealing with the kind of community we have here and the level of parental involvement in education and interest in education for our kids. Whilst that gives us plenty of reason to shout about how talented our kids are, and they are, there are certainly some areas where we would like to keep putting the pressure on.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** But there have been some awards given to students, I understand, for setting standards above benchmarks.

**Ms Gallagher:** I am not sure which awards you are talking about. We get awards nationally and locally all the time. There are annual award events. We have, for example, ones for performance at the end of year 12, where students who are achieving very highly get recognised. A range of awards covers the spectrum of student performance each year. A very important part of supporting kids who enjoy their education is rewarding them, not just on academic performance but also on a whole range of involvement in their education.

**Dr Bruniges:** An award that springs to mind is the national literacy award. The Miles Franklin school gained that wonderful award in terms of the national recognition of the performance and changes in student outcome data that they had achieved. One of the interesting parts for me is at the national level; the national benchmark is really at a minimum standard and we have to make sure, as the minister said, that we actually recognise and reward students for higher level achievement, as well as those who just get over the benchmark. As the national agenda unrolls in terms of setting up performance measures, I know that there is a conscious effort to look at other ways of recognising gifted and talented students.

But each school has its own recognition of student achievement, an incredibly important part of and positive reinforcement to student learning. That might be a whole range of things. Individual progress for students with special needs is, I think, another area where we have to be very cognisant that we actually look at where students have moved individually, as well as whole cohorts of students.

**THE CHAIR:** With regard to what has been happening nationally, how are your negotiations going? I am thinking about achievements and the way that we actually record achievements here. As to the push nationally by Dr Nelson and the negotiations you have been having with the commonwealth about those kinds of things, I was wondering if you could fill us in on that.

**Ms Gallagher:** Student reporting?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, and all of those kinds of things. I was wondering if you could fill us in on that.

**Ms Gallagher:** The legislation has been passed in the federal parliament in relation to the funding. I think it is called the Schools Assistance Act. It will provide around \$500 million to the ACT school system over the next four years. The majority of that will go to the non-government schools in recognition of that funding partnership. We will get around \$140 million for our schools. That money comes with strings under the legislation. Most of those strings are not causing anyone any bother at all, because the ACT reports pretty comprehensively on student performance, student performance within the system and student performance within the country. We do that primarily through ACTAP at years 3, 5, 7 and 9; we do test some at year 9 and report. The results of the ACTAP data go home to parents. That shows them where their child is, where the ACT average is and where the national average is, so you can get a pretty good gauge. School board annual reports provide quite a lot of data as well about the operations and what is going on at the school.

The areas of concern—I have met recently with Dr Nelson about them—primarily relate to the requirement to report in quartiles against every year and, essentially, every student in the system and giving children A to E as a measurement of their performance. The reason that that gives us some trouble is that it goes against how we have been reporting, particularly in primary school. In high school and college it is not an issue, because As to Es were used either across the board or, certainly, very consistently. But in primary schools there was an emphasis on the achieving, developing, gaining kind of reporting data. I know that the primary school sector is very concerned about the A to E reporting. This will require kindergarten students, after six months at school, to be given A to E on their school performance. The quartile reporting means that, under the scheme, every child has to be placed in the bottom 25, bottom 50, top 50 or top 25 in a class, in their cohort.

We met with Dr Nelson about the ACT situation and my views about A to E reporting, particularly at primary school, and about quartile reporting. We have until 31 December to provide a submission to the commonwealth on how we are going to meet the requirements of the act or the regulations. Basically, we went there to say, “These are some of the ideas we have had about complying, but we have some different ideas about

how to comply.”

At the moment, we are in discussions with the commonwealth on meeting those requirements. I do not think that there will be any shift on A to E. I think we will have to do that. He was pretty clear about that. But there may be some flexibility for us in how we report against the quartiles and also, due to the small jurisdiction we are in, how we report on a child’s performance within a school, within a system or within a region or cluster of schools.

We are continuing to work that out, because for some schools with very small cohorts some of the privacy requirements contained in the schools assistance regulations as well could be compromised. We have a number of small schools, particular primary schools, where it would be fairly easy to identify where children sat. We talked to him about all of that. I have to say that he was pretty receptive to some of the suggestions we had. I have written to him confirming those discussions and we are just waiting for him to respond to that and then we will provide the submission in time to get it all in place for next year. But that is essentially where it is at.

**MRS DUNNE:** If you will be making a submission to the commonwealth by the end of December, how are you going to be ready for, essentially, 1 February?

**Ms Gallagher:** In terms of some of the data that is being sought, one of the other issues that we talked about was that a lot of the data on school performance, teacher professional development and so on that is required under the new commonwealth legislation is reported on in the annual reports of the schools. I told him that those reports are done at the end of the academic year and that was when that information would be finalised. He was okay with that. He said, “Yes, I understand that that information comes at the end rather than at the beginning.” Also, I think the requirement is to report twice a year, or to make information available in two formats. Is that right?

**Dr Bruniges:** A number of formats.

**Ms Gallagher:** There is some choice there. That information certainly will not need to be available in February.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am thinking about the school reporting.

**Ms Gallagher:** The reporting needs to be done towards the middle of the academic year, the first report, so we have a bit of time there. We are consulting with the schools now. We have some templates out which have gone to parents and teachers around a new kind of report card and how that fits.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could the committee see them?

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, sure. One of the ideas that we put to Dr Nelson was that, instead of quartile reporting, we report the number of As, Bs, Cs, Ds and Es that have been awarded, which he was quite supportive of. I think that is probably the way we will go in terms of reporting that data. The regulations refer to reporting performance against quartiles or their equivalent. The wording of the regulations is not quite as explicit as that and we want to talk to him a bit more about whether this is enough to comply. In his

view, all students could get an A or a B; it does not have to be shared along the spectrum in any sort of bell curve.

That, in a way, would assist. If we are reporting individually A to E, you can get a pretty good picture of how your child is going if, in year 5, there are 40 As and 100 Bs or whatever and your child is getting an A. You can see where they are; you can place them. He was pretty supportive of that. Again, we will wait for him to respond in writing. We have got the templates out and we will certainly finetune them. They went out prior to my meeting with Dr Nelson. We will finetune them as correspondence between us goes backwards and forwards and have them in place for next year as the format.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think that you are saying, minister, that it does not have to be finalised by February; it probably has to be finalised towards the end of the first semester.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, we will have to be using those reports by the end of that time.

**MRS DUNNE:** A general summary would be that you can comply on the As to Es, but not necessarily on the quartiles; the issue is principally with years 7 to 12.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I notice that the president, director, head or whatever of the primary principals association has had things to say about that in the media.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** But what you are saying is that, whether you like it or not, you are going to be complying with A to E in primary school.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. I do not think you will find too much support for A to E in primary school across any of the people who provide views on these things. Parents are starting to write to me saying that they are concerned about what it means to them, and they are usually primary school parents. Parents are able to exempt their children from these requirements. Dr Nelson was telling me that, if parents exempt their kids from that reporting model, schools do not need to provide a report along those lines to the parents. In fact, if the parents of a whole school exempt in writing their kids from this regime, the school does not need to report in that way.

I cannot see how that would work. I cannot see how whole schools will get up and sign themselves out of this process. We will just see. That may have to happen. I do not like the idea of it and I have told Dr Nelson that. His view is that children need to know that they are E and D students when they are as young as five or six. His view is that, if those students have never heard by the time they are in years 4 and 5 that they are not achieving and therefore need to pick the game up, it is too late; that by telling them when they are much younger, starting in kindergarten, they have a better chance of dealing with those issues, and their parents, as they go through primary school. My view is that he is sold on A to E and, if we do not comply on A to E, we will not get the money, so we have to comply. The issue is how we comply in a way that is sensitive to our system, does not allow league tables to be published, and protects the privacy of the individuals

involved, and those are the discussions we are having at the moment.

I spoke to the AEU's teachers council. Teachers are not happy about it. I think that is reflected across the country in correspondence I have seen; letters to the editor in the *Herald*, for example. It is starting to get around. I spoke to a teacher who runs an autism class at a local primary school. They have children in there over a couple of years—from years 3, 4 and 5—and none of those kids is verbal. He was saying to me, "How on earth do I grade them from A to E? I don't actually know how to do it; I don't know how to comply." In those cases, we might need to look seriously at speaking to the parents and asking the parents to exempt their kids from that regime, as they are entitled to do. And again with ESL classes and things like that. We have to work out how it is going to apply but, essentially, next year there will be A to E reporting in primary schools.

**THE CHAIR:** Could you update us on where we are up to with the federal proposal to have a national year 12 certificate, an Australian certificate of education?

**Ms Gallagher:** Again, that is in the federal government's area. They have commissioned some research and I am sure we will hear about it in due course. The jurisdiction's view is that we have a very good system in place. There are differences in that system, but the assessment procedures in place allow us to have those certificates at the year 12 level recognised across jurisdictions and certainly by universities. I think it is fair to say that all of the state ministers are pretty protective of the systems they have. That is not to say that we would be reluctant to look at areas of greater consistency.

The work MCEETYA has been doing over the past two years has looked at areas where greater consistency can be found, consistency in outcomes particularly rather than consistency as in a set process, and we will continue to look at ways that we can improve, if there are areas to improve. I do not think any of us at this stage, based on what we have seen and heard, are thinking that there is a need for a national year 12 certificate. I think that we are seeing from the commonwealth an increased desire to nationalise the education system, and we have a federation here.

There are bigger things to untie. If they want to take over and have one country, one education system, there are bigger issues that they will have to deal with. I think there is commonsense at MCEETYA. Dr Nelson and all the states and territories really do meet at those meetings and look at ways to improve the education systems across Australia and look at ways to cooperate and collaborate, even more so than ever because of the introduction of information technology as a learning tool. More and more, education is going to be a global competition, in a sense, and we need to be positioning ourselves. I think everyone is very mindful of that. We will see the report when it is released and respond at that time, but I would have to be convinced that it would be a better system than the one we have now and I am not sure that that is possible.

**MRS DUNNE:** We have to be careful, minister, that we do not become parochial. Take the research that came out last week, or the week before, in relation to the maths curriculum. The ACT appears to do quite well in that in terms of the range of subjects studied. If you look at the matrix that comes with it, you will see that there are more yeses or ticks against subcategories of learning in there than there are in many other states.



**Ms Gallagher:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** As with many things, the ACT seems to perform much better, but there are still problems there in that there is a long list of subjects that could be done in the ACT in whatever advanced maths is called these days, but you may not do them all because you do only seven of the eight units, so there is no guarantee that you are going to cover the full gamut of things there. So, if you are going off from year 12 in the ACT to do pure maths, physics or something like that, there may be gaps in your learning. You said before that we needed consistency of outcomes rather than consistency of the process that you go through, but if you cannot do advanced calculus, as an example, and you are going off to do pure maths you are behind the eight ball.

Generally speaking, it is seen that the ACT does better than a lot of the states. For instance, 25 years ago, Queensland used to be very highly regarded for its maths teaching, but it seems to be falling behind in the outcomes at the end of year 12. While we are doing well, and you can say that you would have to be convinced that what was being offered was better than we already have, isn't it also part of your role as a member of MCEETYA to help the states bring their performance along? Using high level maths as an example, if kids in some states are not getting the learning that kids are getting in the ACT, isn't that a problem for entering university? That is a very elitist end of the subject spectrum, but it could be translated into a whole lot of other subjects as well.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. I agree completely. I have been saying that MCEETYA is about improving the education system and working together where we can. I think that is probably the way MCEETYA has always been run. That is where the focus has been on outcomes for students: setting common curriculum outcomes, what every jurisdiction expects their students to be able to achieve at this point in their learning, rather than specifying or setting one way of learning. It is what we expect them to be able to achieve at the end of that learning. That is pretty fine detail to be able to get, and we are still doing that work, but we have agreed to it in, I think, five learning areas to start with. It was a big step for the jurisdictions to acknowledge that we needed every child at this age to be able to do all of these things and then create a system that enables those outcomes to be achieved for those students.

**MRS DUNNE:** How do you measure that?

**Ms Gallagher:** How do you measure the outcomes?

**MRS DUNNE:** Whether you have achieved those outcomes.

**Ms Gallagher:** We engage in national testing and national assessment against those outcomes.

**MRS DUNNE:** So what would be wrong with a national year 12 assessment to see whether the kids who are doing advanced maths, for instance, are all achieving to a comparable standard so that universities, employers and everyone else can be confident that if you are doing advanced maths in Queensland or advanced maths in the ACT you are all coming out with essentially the same skill set? If we are achieving a high level already, why should we be afraid of that?

**Ms Gallagher:** That, in a sense, is already in place in that everyone needs to get there, particularly if they want to go on to university. I guess we can talk around other training options, but all of the national systems get standardised into what is your result at the end of year 12, and that is all recognised across jurisdictions. Again, if what Dr Nelson comes out with is a system that is about genuinely improving the year 12 outcomes and being able to improve the situation if there are areas of concern, I have not heard of that from employers and other training authorities or universities.

If there is a problem with understanding how students are performing at year 12 and the ACER report, I think it is, comes out and outlines ways to improve that, I don't want to bag something just for the sake of the fact that it is the federal government's idea, but I have my suspicions about the motivations for this. It seems to me that Dr Nelson has a way of wanting to talk down the education systems in the states and find a solution that is, basically, that the federal government wants to have one test for it.

The report is not out yet, but it does not seem to have educational outcomes-based principles underlying the work. We have seen it with the reporting that is being required. If you ask Dr Nelson to say what will be the educational outcome of giving a six-year-old in year 1 an E in reading, what that will be achieving, he will say, "There will be none. This is just about giving information to parents." Maybe I have been around a bit too long, but I am a little bit suspicious.

**MRS DUNNE:** Just using the maths example that came out last week: there is evidence, and it is not just anecdotal, that employers who are taking in people to do maths 101 are having to do remedial maths for people who have done tertiary maths at year 12, or advanced maths or advanced maths extended, whatever it is called these days. There are still people who have to do remedial maths. There are gaps in the learning. We are also seeing some of the big sandstone universities having to run remedial mathematics and remedial English. Even when I was at university there were courses where they had to run remedial English and grammar for entrants.

Do you think that it is a desirable outcome of a school system if the best and brightest, the people who are getting the TER scores, the UAI scores, to go to university then have to undertake, as their teachers are finding, remedial work when they get there? Does that indicate a failing of the education system? I am not necessarily saying of the ACT education system, because I do not know whether that is particularly the case with kids coming out of the ACT system and going into the ANU or UCan, but generally across universities there is a range of teachers who have to run remedial courses in English and maths for their first year entrants. Do you think that that is reasonable?

**Dr Bruniges:** If I can respond to that as an old maths teacher having a look at the mathematics curriculum in the senior years of schooling: the diversity of national mapping exercises about what topics or subjects are studied at level 1 maths courses vary, from my knowledge, from things like vector geometry in South Australia to inferential calculus in New South Wales across to complex numbers.

**MRS DUNNE:** Some of that I do not even know what it is.

**Dr Bruniges:** So there is a diversity of topics. The reason why I believe that diversity is important is that students who go on to university, into different streams of engineering,

to pure mathematics, to applied mathematics, in fact will use different elements of those courses that they have defined, and the requirement of each of those will be slightly different. So, while certainly mathematics has traditionally been played out in a way that there is a hierarchical progression of topics and subjects—and no one would debate that there are core essentials, knowledge, in mathematics that all students should have access to—having the diversity I think is a big question for us across the nation in terms of flexibility to increase students' pathways into a whole range of courses.

The other comment that I would like to make around the notion of picking up an Australian certificate of education is that we have to be very clear on what the purpose of such a certificate is. I know the Australian Council for Educational Research are looking at four possible options; things like the USA SAT test is one option, assessing aptitude. The other one is the International Baccalaureate model. We have to say to ourselves: at the end of 13 years of schooling, does a certificate constitute a record of achievement and acknowledgement of student achievement at the end of year 12, or does it in fact act as the discrimination device to go on to further and different pathways? If you are going to have one certificate and one measurement event which carries that task, it is a very difficult call in terms of educational measurement to construct an instrument that both acknowledges the range of student achievement after 13 years of schooling and also acts as a tool for discrimination to get into university or different pathways in education. They are some of the challenges that will be confronted by the Australian Council for Educational Research in looking at the four options they have.

**MS DUNNE:** But what I am hearing from you, minister, is that, although you are perhaps sceptical, you are not dismissing it out of hand as—

**Ms Gallagher:** We will wait and see what ACER come up with.

**MS DUNNE:** And then you will dismiss it out of hand?

**Ms Gallagher:** They have been given a brief.

**MS DUNNE:** Are you comfortable with the brief?

**Ms Gallagher:** No, I am not. It did not come through MCEETYA. It was specifically generated by Dr Nelson's view that there should be a national test for year 12.

**MS DUNNE:** And what things would you say are in the brief that should not be there or that you would desire?

**Ms Gallagher:** I do not know. I suspect that ACER—

**MS DUNNE:** So have you seen the brief?

**Ms Gallagher:** No.

**MS DUNNE:** So how can you say you are happy with the brief or not happy with the brief?

**Ms Gallagher:** Dr Nelson has commissioned research around a particular view—and he

has spoken about that publicly—which is that he believes there should be a national year 12 test for students at that level. That is the brief: “I think there should be. Go and do your research about what model it should be.” I do not necessarily agree with that position that he has put. But we will see; they are a good research organisation and we will see what they come up with. If there are areas to improve the year 12 system here, we will look at that when the research is out. But will I say that we would be happy to move to a national year 12 system at this point based on the limited information I have had from Dr Nelson about what his views are on this? No.

**MS DUNNE:** My question was: were you happy with the brief of the information that went to ACER? You said; “No,” but actually—

**Ms Gallagher:** Well, I do not know what the brief was, Vicki. I presume—

**MS DUNNE:** In that case you say; “I’d really like to see the brief,” rather than; “No, I wasn’t happy with it.” If you haven’t seen it, you can’t make a judgment.

**Ms Gallagher:** It may not have been written down. It might have been, “Hey, ACER, we’d like a national year 12 test.”

**MS DUNNE:** All of those things are valid criticisms. My question was to elicit whether you had seen the brief.

**Ms Gallagher:** How I was using the word “brief” was around what I believe and what Dr Nelson has said he wants to see. That is what I think the brief was.

**MS DUNNE:** We are getting different use of the words.

**Ms Gallagher:** I think we did get a paper circulated at MCEETYA, or just after, saying; “This is what I—

**Dr Bruniges:** To investigate options.

**MS DUNNE:** Would that paper be available to the committee?

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, when you were talking before more generally, you mentioned the challenge of IT and that whole area of advanced communication that we are now faced with. I was wondering if you could talk about how we are coping with that challenge and the investment that we are putting in. Do you think we are reaping benefit from that? Are we able to keep up with that future challenge?

**Ms Gallagher:** We have put a fair bit of money into IT support in schools. In the budget before last, we had an IT focus around school infrastructure and technical support to schools. I have met a few members of the technical support teams and they are working very well. So for the first time we have got IT professionals on staff working with a group of schools, as a team, to support them. Previously, schools had to manage that work pretty much themselves and, where schools had very IT-savvy teachers on staff, those schools were very well placed, but where schools did not have that level of expertise, either through lack of interest or the teachers’ specialised areas, some of those schools were struggling to keep up. So the idea around the infrastructure fund and the

technical support teams was to create more of a central support focus, to make sure that, if a system was going down or needed improvements, there was some expertise on the staff to help schools with that work.

I have been to a few morning teas at schools where they have been showing off their new IT infrastructure. People might find that interesting. It is good in what it delivers, with the rewiring of schools and how the technical support teams are working. I think it is going very well. We hope we can keep pace with it. It is an expensive business, and it will require a lot of investment in years to come. Ministers to come will have to argue for a lot of support for IT.

We are moving to improve the access to whiteboard technology or smartboard technology—interactive whiteboards, I should say, because I think smartboard is the business—in schools. In schools now every class has at least one interactive whiteboard and they are moving to increase that. I think teachers are finding that very useful. Students love it; this is the generation that know computers very well, and they absolutely love learning on interactive whiteboards. But keeping up with the professional development of teachers, keeping up with the improvements in IT and access to IT, is going to be a constant challenge for us.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have any general questions, Mr Gentleman?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I was reading in the outlook for the coming year, on page 4, that you are developing a strategic plan for 2006-09. How is that going?

**Dr Bruniges:** At the commencement of my time here, we knew that this current strategic plan would finish at the end of this year, so we have had a process that has involved extensive consultation from, I think, about March-April, with a number of principal days, seeking their input about where the Department of Education and Training should position itself in terms of strategic direction statements for the coming four years. We have posted correspondence to key stakeholders, asking for input, which we have received. We have also hosted an evening at the Woden School, working with the P&C and parents, who have come along to share their views about what is important for them and their students in the coming years. So we are working through a process. We have gathered all of that input at the moment. We are preparing the first draft and within, I hope, the next week or so we will circulate the first draft of that strategic plan and seek further comment and feedback from all of those groups again, in order to have a new strategic plan at the commencement of next year. So that is the process involved.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thanks.

**Dr Bruniges:** I should say that some of the issues that are raised are quite interesting in terms of leadership and access. The ICT one that the minister just spoke about is certainly high on the agenda of a lot of those groups in terms of both teacher and student learning—what students are coming to school with. We have to ensure that we set strategic directions. The plan does not describe everything we are going to do; it is core business that we had to do, but what is actually strategic about that direction that we are working in.

**THE CHAIR:** What about the separation of the office, the office we were dealing with

yesterday? You had that separation; has that affected your department in any way in terms of resources?

**Ms Gallagher:** We had to unravel the areas from the departments. They were not separate, so the back-end functions—administration, finance, all of those areas—were all tied up together, and there was a process we had to go through to unravel that and make sure that both sides kept the finances that they needed to keep their departments ticking over, with the right level of support. I do not think we got it right in the first instance but we went back and did some more work and transferred some money around and I think we got it right in the end. But it is not easy; you would not want to have AAOs changing all the time. It is not easy to unravel those things, particularly when there has been an entrenched relationship and things are not separate. There was one area dealing with certain parts of the service delivery. I guess the face-to-face service delivery was easier to go: you are a child protection worker; therefore, you move over. But it was all those people who supported that work where the issues lay. But we are through that now.

**THE CHAIR:** You would be very disappointed if I did not ask a question about volunteering, I know, so—

**Ms Gallagher:** We are prepared on the volunteering front.

**THE CHAIR:** We did talk about it last year.

**Ms Gallagher:** It is going well, Mary.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS DUNNE:** Can I say that there is nothing in the index on volunteering.

**THE CHAIR:** I cannot find anything in the index. I do note a lovely photograph on page 25 with some discussion about volunteering at Charnwood primary school, which is very nice. I could not find the “v” word in the list of staff and stuff, but I do know you have done some great things with the volunteer programs in schools, so I was wondering if you could enlarge on that a little bit for me.

**Dr Bruniges:** It is an incredibly important issue, and—

**MS DUNNE:** But it is not in the index.

**Dr Bruniges:** It will be next year. What I can say is that we have got some information about that. I might ask Craig to walk you through what we have been able to do and what we are planning to do in the future, so that we capture that in a different way.

**MS DUNNE:** Did not we cover this last year?

**THE CHAIR:** That is why they have got some plans in place.

**MS DUNNE:** I see, but not in the annual report.

**Ms Gallagher:** It was only in February, I think, because we did annual reports late.

**Mr Curry:** One of the things that we have asked all our schools to do is to report on the number of volunteers and the activities they are involved with in each of their annual reports. So the annual school board report for every school will outline the number of volunteers and the sorts of activities they get involved in in schools and the sort of assistance they provide. The data coming in to this point suggests that bigger primary schools tend to have about 40 people who are volunteering, across a range of things from, I guess, supporting classrooms in reading, maths and those sort of programs—the tutoring sort of programs—right through to the gardening programs and the canteen type activities. There is a whole range of activities and I guess what we notice is that there is much more involvement from volunteers in primary schools than there is in colleges, for instance, where parents tend not to be quite so involved.

**MS DUNNE:** It is not cool then.

**THE CHAIR:** The students would probably be a bit unhappy.

**Mr Curry:** We will have a whole range of data about that. There is a lot more recognition of volunteers and the great contribution they make in our schools and I think it is important that we recognise that in our board reports and that is what we will be doing in the reports that come out in February for the 2005 school year.

**MS DUNNE:** I see; there is that lag.

**THE CHAIR:** The new policies that you put in place on volunteers, protections and those kinds of things: are they all working?

**Mr Curry:** I might get Anne to talk about the policy about visitors and people working with schools.

**Ms Thomas:** Ms Porter, as you know, the policy on volunteering has been in place for a couple of years. I am aware now that schools keep a register of volunteers at their front desk, and have in place systems whereby if volunteers require screening that occurs. That is being facilitated through the department's central office. At some time in the next couple of years we will need to review that policy once it has been in place for a few years. The other thing that we are working on, which is not really quite related to volunteering, is a new policy or set of procedures around other kinds of people that come into schools for a whole range of reasons. We are calling it visitors, but that might be people such as tradespeople, people coming in to do a performance, to perhaps teach music or something like that. They do not strictly always fall into the category of volunteers. So we are looking at a whole range of issues around those sorts of people and hope we will have something in place quite shortly to deal with those visitors to our schools, too.

**THE CHAIR:** And parents are happy to participate?

**Ms Thomas:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Volunteers are happy to participate?

**Ms Thomas:** Yes. I have not heard any negative feedback around the implementation of the new policy.

**MRS DUNNE:** I want to ask some questions about curriculum renewal and, I suppose, because it goes across all of the output classes, it is probably better to ask in the general area. I will go back to the recurrent theme that I started before about maths. There is a general agreement that the ACT does well in maths, and I want to preface this range of questions with my general belief that the ACT education system does well by comparison with other states and territories and that we generally, for the most part, with a few exceptions, outperform them. I suppose my concern about the curriculum renewal process is that we may be adopting what has proved to be less good practice elsewhere. We have a system that is good and we should be building on it. Some of the curriculum renewal processes that I see being adopted have come in for criticism elsewhere to the extent that, for instance, in Queensland the past minister and the present minister have gone down the path of requiring a substantial reworking of the curriculum process. For instance, in your executive report there is reference throughout to rolling out the new curriculum, or trialing the new curriculum, next year. Minister, has anything that has been said in the literature and in the wide-scale commentary over the past number of months given you any reason to pause about whether the current curriculum renewal process is the right way to go—seeing as I am not the only person in the country who is critical of the curriculum renewal process, despite what you say?

**Ms Gallagher:** I think you are the only person in the ACT that is critical of the ACT's curriculum renewal. If you are talking about Donnelly—

**MRS DUNNE:** No, I am not.

**Ms Gallagher:** Well, I would be interested to hear all the other people who are critical of the ACT's curriculum renewal.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am not talking about the curriculum renewal process. You have said; “Mrs Dunne is the only person in the country who is critical of the school curriculum process,” but we have actually seen the Queensland minister roll back and we have seen significant changes in approach in Western Australia, which has really come from the teachers themselves, who are sick of teaching it. I spent the weekend with someone who teaches in Victoria who is exceedingly critical of their English curriculum process. There are a whole lot of educationists and people on committees who are feeling very comfortable with this. But at the same time there is a body of evidence, and a larger number of people sort of signalling alarm bells. Why would we go down the path of emulating what other states have done when we are trying to maintain our status as probably the best education system in the country?

**Ms Gallagher:** I guess my comments concern the ACT's curriculum renewal. I do not necessarily need to form a view about what is happening in WA or Victoria or Queensland. I am not a teacher, but my advice is that the curriculum renewal we have undergone, and the work that has been done, is placing us in an excellent position to deal with providing, maintaining and improving our position in education outcomes across the country. Again, I am not certain who has been critical of the ACT's curriculum renewal process. Outside of some comments you have made and Donnelly has made, I have not heard people saying that what we are doing is the wrong thing.



If you look at the task force and you look at the expertise that is on the task force, we have pulled in—certainly under Di Kerr’s leadership—some of the best curriculum development process that we could offer the ACT. I know people have views. I have heard Donnelly and you make comments around the curriculum documents, the essential learning achievements and what they actually mean and how do people know. I think we have to be a bit better about how we explain what those documents are and ensure that the position we are placing ourselves in and the role out of this will be beneficial to the education system.

**MS DUNNE:** So how will it be beneficial? You said at the outset that your advice is that this will set us up to achieve more—that is a paraphrase—to achieve better than we currently are. How will it do it?

**Ms Gallagher:** What it is doing is providing a framework and flexibility for learning to occur over the next few years and ensuring that we have a set of outcomes and expectations that we have around students at every stage of learning, about what they should be achieving. So it is measuring what is going on—

**MS DUNNE:** How are you going to measure it?

**Ms Gallagher:** Against the documents—*Every chance to learn*—against the essential learning achievements.

**MS DUNNE:** But how are you going to measure those things? How are you going to measure, for instance, that a student recognises and identifies patterns in the natural and built world and in society; that students describe patterns and make general statements about whether they are repeating, growing or changing? How do you measure that?

**Dr Bruniges:** I will just take up some of the conversation around essential learnings. I have the privilege of leading the task force in my role, and we are meeting quite regularly to look at the way in which we have got a set of 36 essential learnings at the moment. The next part of the phase is to say how those essential learnings will in fact be operationalised through key learning. When you read some of the essential learnings, some naturally cluster as mathematics, clearly, some cluster as science, and some are cross-discipline. So part of the process in setting up a curriculum framework is to be able to articulate at that high level of generality what in fact everyone expects students to know and to be able to do as a result of spending time in school, and then to be able to articulate at a final level of detail in the stages of schooling—early stage, later stage, early adolescence and later adolescence—through the key learning area structures, what in fact we expect students to know. That is where the essential content has got to come in, so the rigour of being able to specify what is appropriate for the early years and what is different for the latter years.

**MS DUNNE:** Where is that coming?

**Dr Bruniges:** That is being developed now.

**MS DUNNE:** I take your point. You have got a high-level exposition and then you work down to sort of fine detail: this will be translated by doing this in year 5 and this in year

7 et cetera. I suppose in a sense it is not a fair cop to read that out and say, “How are you going to do that in kindergarten,” because you do not do that in kindergarten; you do it through the process. But a lot of the high-level stuff is so high level as to be content free, and one of the problems that has occurred in other states is that, when real live parents sit down and read this, they say, “I don’t have the faintest idea what it is that you are talking about. Where is it that it says that you are going to teach my kids to read and write and add up?” The thing is that you have to have trust in the community as well, and I do not think that this is a document that necessarily engenders trust; it actually engenders a sort of alienation. It is fine for educationists, and everyone may feel warm and fuzzy about it, but if actual real live parents ever read this document. I do not think that they would feel confident that there was anything in there that said, “We’re going to teach your kids to read and write and achieve—

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, just in regard to the curriculum, what sort of process do you go through to set it up; what sort of consultation process?

**MRS DUNNE:** This is the whole thing: how do you articulate; how do you translate this into an effective and understandable thing so that in year 7 the child will be expected to learn and achieve these things, and how do they build?

**Dr Bruniges:** Two ways: one through the development of markers of progress, which will be an explicit and systematic development continuum, which says what students can do. The other great support that we have got is in the five national areas that we have at 3, 5, 7 and 9, where in fact the national statements in English, which are already published, articulate what opportunities are expected to learn at 3, 5, 7 and 9. We have got mathematics, science, ICT and civics and citizenship due off the deck next March, and part of our challenge as a task force is to take that national work and to be able to integrate it into our framework within the context of markers of progress that have already been delineated at the national level.

**MRS DUNNE:** So where are the markers of progress now?

**Dr Bruniges:** The markers of progress are in development now. We have seen the first cut. They have been with experts in community, and the other form that we are using is professional associations in the discipline areas to articulate in each of the discipline areas how in fact that would look in science, in maths, at the early years of schooling and later at adolescence. So that work needs to come together towards the end of this year and we have to look at a trialing and validation exercise next year that empirically underpins the fact that we have got that sequence right.

**MRS DUNNE:** And how will you empirically measure? You said it empirically underpins; what are the empirical criteria that you are going to use?

**Dr Bruniges:** We have to be able to show that the markers of progress—the same way the national work has been done—that what you specify at year 3 is in fact easier than what it is at year 5 and easier again than what it is at year 7, so that you have a growth continuum. The way in which they do it through the Australian Council for Educational Research—and we will have to tender this psychometric work to be done—is, one, they look at research, two, they look at teacher professional judgment, where they ask a series of questions, and, three, they take research data from existing state and territory testing

programs which show what things are easier or more difficult for students, to make sure we have got that sequence right. So that will be done, I guess, by an external and objective body once we articulate that and integrate the national work, and that will be a very important part of our process in terms of the curriculum framework here.

**MR GENTLEMEN:** I have got a question while we are all talking about curriculum. It is, minister: could you explain to the committee the consultation process that was gone through to get the curriculum position?

**Ms Gallagher:** We have a task force that has representatives from key education stakeholder groups. I am trying to think of the size of it. There must be about 12 people on the task force, with Di Kerr, I guess, leading the way. Michele chairs it. Geoff Joy is the deputy chair—or the Catholic Education Office has the deputy role. Then there is a committee—I am trying to think of the name of it.

**Dr Bruniges:** The consultative committee.

**Ms Gallagher:** The consultative committee has another range of stakeholder groups on it that have been involved since the beginning. This has been a long period of work, as it should be. It must have been my first budget as minister; so it would have been the 2002-03 budget. It provided the funding for the curriculum renewal to commence.

We have got to the stage where now, I guess, it is about implementing and looking at how that will roll out into schools next year and how that is managed. But the task force still meets. I don't know if you want to add anything.

**Dr Bruniges:** At the moment we are meeting monthly, because we have got that high volume of advice coming in from each of the discipline areas and how those essential learnings will look like in each discipline in each of the stages of schooling. We have certain bodies of work to do; so at the moment we are meeting monthly and working through those issues—about exactly how we are going to assess and report and how the assessment reporting agenda comes in, some of those things.

We can't think about just the framework; we have got to think about the implementation; we have got to think about the communication strategy; we have got to think in terms of teacher professional learning—and we have the luxury of two years before mandatory implementation in 2008 to get that right; and, I guess, the rigor, the process and the psychometrics that I want to see underpinning those developmental styles of achievement. We want the highest rigor and the highest standard so that the ACT remains at the forefront of what we are doing in that area. That will be slightly Different from what other jurisdictions have done.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey wants to ask her question before she needs to leave; so I suggest we let Dr Foskey ask it.

**DR FOSKEY:** Thanks very much for letting me jump in. I should say that, while I have something at 11.00, I may be able to come back. I am jumping to the next section. I am also prioritising questions. I am going to jump in with a controversial one, if you don't mind, minister.

**MRS DUNNE:** We haven't been very controversial yet this morning.

**Ms Gallagher:** No, not yet.

**DR FOSKEY:** It is on the issue of community engagement, which is referred to on page 10. I guess the burning question in people's minds is the community engagement strategy, which you may or may not have had, to deal with the proposed new school in west Belconnen. I have got a number of questions on that. First of all, I would like to know whether you had a strategy to deal with the proposed new school in west Belconnen.

**Ms Gallagher:** A community strategy?

**DR FOSKEY:** A community engagement strategy.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. We are in the middle of it right now.

**DR FOSKEY:** Did you seek advice from the government's community engagement unit, which currently is in DHCS?

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, we did.

**DR FOSKEY:** When did you seek advice from the community engagement unit?

**Ms Gallagher:** We can get the date for you. But it was early in the process.

**MRS DUNNE:** Was it before the announcement?

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Does the department have to seek advice from the unit when it makes major decisions with an impact on communities?

**Dr Bruniges:** I would hope that we always would, to make sure that we have a strategy right.

**DR FOSKEY:** I don't suppose that it is possible to get a copy of the advice that you were given by the community engagement unit. I should put that more positively.

**MRS DUNNE:** It wasn't in the FOI request; so it may not be in the paper.

**Dr Bruniges:** My understanding was that there was a series of meetings rather than written advice from them.

**DR FOSKEY:** I see that you have got a peak community consultative committee of your own, the Government School Education Council. On page 164 there is a report from the interim council that doesn't include any reference to the proposal to close Ginninderra high school and replace it. I also note that the permanent council was appointed in January 2005 but hadn't met at the end of the financial year. I am wondering, first of all, whether there surely is a role for the council to participate in discussions about initiatives

on this scale and, secondly, whether the 35 recommendations that the interim council report refers to are publicly available.

**Ms Gallagher:** Can you tell me the page number?

**DR FOSKEY:** That reference to the 35 recommendations is on page 166. It is right up at the top.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is that in relation to the budget?

**DR FOSKEY:** I am not sure. That is what I am seeking.

**MRS DUNNE:** I read that as being in relation to the budget.

**Ms Gallagher:** It is just a budget submission.

**DR FOSKEY:** It is not clear.

**Ms Gallagher:** They provided me with a budget submission. I think that is what that refers to. That certainly seems to be—

**MRS DUNNE:** So you did consult the Government School Education Council about the budget?

**Ms Gallagher:** They were in the same position as the Non-government School Education Council; they provided me with a submission, in the sense that they were in a transitional stage. That probably came to me last year before they were formally—

**DR FOSKEY:** Given that the interim council hasn't met—

**Ms Gallagher:** They have met. I went to their last meeting. They have certainly met. And they would have met within this reporting timetable.

**MRS DUNNE:** But the non-government school education council, if I recall the discussion about it, wasn't consulted about the last budget.

**Ms Gallagher:** We went through this at the last annual report hearings.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think it was during estimates.

**Ms Gallagher:** We have been through it. It was a timing difficulty and it won't be happening again.

**MRS DUNNE:** They were appointed at about the same time as the Government School Education Council?

**Ms Gallagher:** NGSEC were appointed before the government school one.

**MRS DUNNE:** So the government school council had time to make a budget submission but the non-government school council didn't, even though they were appointed first?

**Ms Gallagher:** The interim one, the one that was in place under the old regime, did this work. The old ministerial advisory council on non-government schooling didn't.

**DR FOSKEY:** I go back to the original question, which was whether that council has a role in decision making, in giving advice on decisions like this, and whether it played a role.

**Ms Gallagher:** GSEC can have a role in terms of what I refer to them or what they care to advise me on. As to whether they were involved in the proposal that cabinet considered, they weren't. And the difficulty with that was that, until the government had made a decision about the proposal, it was difficult to go and consult a range of people prior to the government forming a view and having a decision taken on a proposal. But GSEC are a very hard-working council and have done some excellent work in providing advice to me.

**DR FOSKEY:** Have they given any feedback after the announcement was made?

**Ms Gallagher:** No.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I inquire: at that first meeting at Ginninderra district high school, the first one a week or so after the announcement, wasn't the head of the government school council present on the panel?

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Was he there as an individual in his own right or was he there representing the government school council?

**Ms Gallagher:** He probably was invited as the chair of the government council. The people who were sitting up there were basically people who were there to answer questions if they arose, if people had them. I know people have a different view, that we had sold them on the idea or that they were there to sell the government's line, but they were there for their expertise in certain areas.

**MRS DUNNE:** But doesn't it rather give the impression that the government school council had signed off on this proposal by having the chairman of the council there?

**Ms Gallagher:** That may have been the impression that was given. It wasn't the intention in having the range of people up there that were up there. For example, the Ginninderra school board chair was sitting right next to me. She wasn't supportive of the proposal at that stage, and hasn't been at any part of it. We wanted to provide a range of people, if questions were generated, who would be in a position to answer them.

When we got feedback that it looked as if people, as you put it, were there to help me sell it, at the next meeting we decided not to have that arrangement. Michele and I were the panel.

You would be criticised if you didn't have people sitting next to you to answer questions and you are criticised if you do. So we provided a choice. The first meeting there were

people to answer questions; the second meeting Michele and I were there. We will be criticised regardless. We got the criticism for having people up on the stage; so we changed and at the next meeting we didn't bother.

**DR FOSKEY:** Generally speaking—I will complete my series of questions here; really I haven't had an answer to them all yet—it is the peak community consultative committee and it would seem that it should have a role in bridging the gap, for instance, between the school communities and the department and the government. Normally I would expect there to be a role for the council in the decisions.

**Ms Gallagher:** The way GSEC runs is that—and this is the way I run a lot of my advisory councils—there is independence in their determination of the work that they consider. There is nothing to stop GSEC providing a submission to government on the Ginninderra proposal. I have attended their meetings. Since the announcement—or certainly the last one—one of their major reports is on reporting to parents. But as to their submissions to government about areas where they would like to see further work done, they have been on middle schooling, curriculum, pastoral care of students, the provision of good-quality school infrastructure and how to provide quality education into the future.

As to advice, they have been providing that to me for some time. All of that advice was looked at in consideration of a model for west Belconnen; so I don't think we can sit here and say they haven't provided the government with any advice because in the last two years of their work they have provided an enormous amount of advice to government.

As to whether they provide a submission through this phase of the consultation, that is entirely a matter for GSEC. In the past, they have determined their work and their work plan and their priorities within that work.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, is it not the case that the interim board did not meet after November 2004 and GSEC did not meet at all, although it was constituted in January, throughout the reporting period so it didn't have an opportunity? It says here that there were no meetings of the Government School Education Council held before 30 June 2005. In the reporting period, the government school council and the interim board did not meet after November 2004. When were they going to give you advice about Ginninderra district high school? Were they going to, together, come up with something and send it to you telepathically?

**Ms Gallagher:** No. I have said we did not go to GSEC prior to government making a decision on the proposal, and the reason we didn't was that, until the government had a proposal to go to the community with, it would have been very difficult to go to GSEC. This is the disagreement that we are having on this. People wanted to know and be involved in it prior to government making a decision on a proposal for a new school. The government formed a view on that. It was that we would do the work that needed to be done; cabinet would take a decision on the investment of \$43 million in a new school in west Belconnen; and go out to talk to the community on that. That is the disagreement that exists out there now.

If there is criticism of this, it is not so much about whether the \$43 million should be invested in west Belconnen; it is about at what stage should we have gone to the

community. Those who are critical think we should have gone to the community and said, “These are the issues. We don’t know what the answer is. The government doesn’t have a position on this. Let’s talk about it.”

That is not the path the government decided to take. The government decided to take a view that we would make a commitment to \$43 million, put out a proposal for a new school and about what we would like to see there—and that is still the government’s position on what we would like to see there—and enter into six months of consultation on that proposal.

**DR FOSKEY:** My point is that there were devices around the community consultation. I am not aware of what the advice of the community engagement unit was; apparently it is not in writing. It may have been contrary to the process that you followed.

I would have assumed also, as you can tell from my questions, that the peak consultative committee would have perhaps been asked for advice at a somewhat earlier stage. Yes, there is a fundamental disagreement on how one consults—whether one goes out to the community with a formed proposal or whether one trusts students, teachers and others involved in education and know the area to perhaps give some more complex understanding of the issues.

Just to finish: I did ask—and I would like to know—whether those 35 recommendations in the interim council reports that it made apparently in relation to the budget are publicly available.

**Ms Gallagher:** I can’t see why you can’t have the council’s last year’s budget submission. That is essentially what that is.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could I follow up with one question that follows from Dr Foskey’s point, and that is that I had this discussion with your office, minister, before the new Education Act came into place. I subsequently learnt that an almost identical discussion was had with the P & C council under the old Education Act; under the regs there was established a consultation protocol that was necessary to be followed and that was agreed to be followed in relation to the closing of the school.

Either late last year or early this year I had a discussion with your office and officials about the regulations underpinning the Education Act and was told yes, there were some that needed to be introduced but there was no particular hurry. I have subsequently been told that their P & C association specifically asked about the regulations that covered the consultation process for closing schools and, again, were told yes, we would do something about it but there was no particular hurry because we had no desire or need to close the school and there were no school closures in the offing.

That, essentially, left the door open for you, minister, to make up your mind and tell the community what you wanted to do. By your own words, you said, “This is what the government wants to do.” We are now having a consultation process about what the government wants to do; it isn’t about what the community wants to do.

We might all agree that \$43 million being spent in west Belconnen will be a great thing—and there is no doubt about that—but the real nub of the problem is the arrogance



of the government to say, “We will tell you what we want to do and then we will consult on that,” rather than take the community into its confidence and say, “Houston, we have a problem. Let us, as a community, work out how we are going to come through with it, and there may be some money available to do that.”

Being wise, with hindsight, you might think, “Gee, I wish I’d done that,” but you are probably not going to tell me that here today. That is the real problem. You created a situation where you have broken down the trust in west Belconnen because you didn’t take people into your confidence earlier. When the school community was asking questions: “Is my school under threat?” they were being told by a variety of means, “No, it’s not,” down to the point where the P & C association was told by members of your staff that we had no intention of closing the school and therefore we didn’t need the consultation regulations.

**Ms Gallagher:** You have talked about a lot of discussions and a lot of things that have been said to a lot of different people, and I can’t answer that. I can only answer it from where I sit, which is: we went through probably a year of consultation about that clause in the Education Act in order to get agreement with the P&C about the clause that covered that aspect of the Education Act. It is probably the most contentious one from their point of view. I would say, honestly, it was around a year of discussion with them on that, which they agreed to in the end as being a suitable way forward; that is, if a decision is taken for a closure or an amalgamation of a school, we must do certain things. I know that the timetable was the source of much discussion—in the end, with agreement from the P&C.

At the time we were discussing those clauses, there was absolutely no intention to close the school. This is where people think there is probably a larger agenda or a darker agenda by the government. I visited the school in November last year, where I had a chat with the principal about some of the issues facing the school. I left that meeting and asked the department to do some further work on some of the issues at Ginninderra and some options for government to consider. That work was being done in the first part of this year. It went to cabinet in June; it went back in July; and an announcement was made the next day. That is the timetable we were working on. There was nothing dark and sinister about it.

You talk about the arrogance of the government. We have a situation here where we had a school that was dying and had been in a declining situation for a number of years and, for the first time, instead of just walking away from that school, which was what had been done in the past, I went in and argued, outside of a budget round, for \$43 million to build the best school in Canberra, to say, “You kids in west Belconnen deserve what the kids at Radford have. You deserve the best from your government.”

I don’t walk away from this at all. I think it is the best thing for the kids in west Belconnen. It will mean that there is a turbulent period where we have to, unfortunately, close the school in order to build a new school, a better school and a school that is going to last the population for a long time. We are currently working through how that is managed before the government makes a final decision.

But I will sit here and say that, based on the consultation, based on the feedback we have had, there is community support for the new school and there is support for the closure of

Ginninderra district high school. For people to say that there is community outrage and disaffection about this is simply not correct. There is a group, a small group of people, who have views about how the government has gone around this consultation phase but it is not widespread. If you talk across the west Belconnen community, there is enormous support for this new school to go ahead. That provides us with some strength as we go through what will be a very difficult final few months of this consultation period.

I accept that the P&C and save our school group are unhappy with the process. It is fair to say that we will look back on how this has been managed and look at ways to improve it if it is to occur in the future. But I can't see a situation like this occurring in the future, because we don't have money to build a school like this anywhere else. Of course, in terms of some of the criticism that has come out, it is part of our job to look at that criticism and address it where we can and improve the process if there is to be a next time.

But I don't accept that there is widespread criticism and disaffection around this proposal. I simply don't accept it. It is not what has come into my office or in discussions I am having with the community, outside of a small group who are opposed to it.

**Meeting adjourned from 11.05 to 11.25 am.**

**THE CHAIR:** We will go onto the output classes now, starting with primary school education. Output 1.1 on page 128 mentions, within the reference to national benchmarks, that we've met or exceeded the targets in all areas. Is that right?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, it is right.

**THE CHAIR:** That's fantastic—congratulations. I don't know whether you want to talk about that at all.

**Ms Gallagher:** No; we'll just accept your thanks.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The only question I had has probably been answered. It was to do with the whiteboards and whether the minister could give us a progress report.

**Ms Gallagher:** Anne Thomas is just advising me that we've currently got 185 interactive whiteboards in schools, which is great. I met with the AEU's state secretaries the other day. They were all saying that the ACT is leading the nation in this regard, and that everyone in other jurisdictions is lobbying to have a similar type program. In the budget an initiative was funded whereby the department would buy one and the school would get one. That seems to be working quite well. I think you're always going to have oversubscription to an initiative like this. We put in just over a million dollars for this initiative. It's interesting that, whilst the teachers have been lobbying for interactive whiteboards, now that the initiative has been rolled out as part of their log of claims for the EBA, training and support for interactive whiteboards is one of the areas. I feel like I've walked into a bit of a trap there, but we'll deal with that through the negotiations.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** What about report-backs from parents?

**Ms Gallagher:** Parents in the ACT are very supportive. They want their kids to have access to the best facilities—like any parent, I imagine. What can be done on these interactive whiteboards is quite amazing. I've sat in a class where I have seen and taken part in the process whiteboard use in their learning across a range of subjects. It's amazing how they can be used, not just for class-teacher interaction but also for peer interaction. Homework can be put up there and students can self-correct each other's work.

The results in the special learning units, or learning support units, are amazing. I have watched kids—particularly those who have communication problems—go up and touch a cat. The cat meows back at them. Watching that interaction and the improvements it is having in engaging their learning is really impressive. Gone are the old chalkboards and wipers. I have no doubt that this is the way all schools will go in the end; it's just about getting that infrastructure in place. The challenge for us is making sure all kids across all of our schools have access to it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, I notice that, under school excellence, improvement and achievement in the ACT government schools, in 2004, 23 teachers undertook courses in smartboards and e-learning, or smartboards and e-teaching. Most of them went for smartboards and e-teaching. There don't seem to be many people training for that. What other training is involved in the rollout of smartboards?

**Mr Curry:** The figure is a little bit low for 2004 because it was during a very early phase. A lot of schools were taking electronic whiteboards on board of their own volition. We're stepping up the professional learning this year. That is actually a 2004 report.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is 2004, admittedly.

**Mr Curry:** There are more courses being offered on effective use of those this year, through our centre for teaching and learning. We believe the pedagogy around those is extremely important because they're really only another resource or another tool. We have to make sure they're being used effectively in classrooms, so we have focused on that.

**MRS DUNNE:** At Amaroo, for instance, where they were rolled out as part of the infrastructure, were all the teachers given training?

**Mr Curry:** It's my understanding that Amaroo has done a lot of work on effective use of whiteboards as part of the introduction for staff there. Anne Huard, the principal, has been very keen to focus on best practice in that school. Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** The training for Amaroo's teachers, for instance, is not reflected here with the 23 students.

**Mr Curry:** It wouldn't be. In some ways that's really a snapshot of the professional learning done in 2004. It might not be totally cognisant of what every school is doing.

**MRS DUNNE:** This is only what's done at the centre for teaching and learning.

**Mr Curry:** That's right.

**MRS DUNNE:** Where else would people do professional development?

**Mr Curry:** In their schools during stand-down time, or on professional learning days there could be a staff meeting. There are a lot of professional learning activities organised by the schools themselves that might not be captured there.

**MRS DUNNE:** Where would that be reported on?

**Mr Curry:** It's not reported on in that document. It's information collected centrally that the schools provide on how they use their professional learning stand-down days. Anne might have a stronger view on where that is reported. It's one of the things we looked at this year. We are required to report on it as from 2006 in our annual board reports around the reporting requirements for school performance that are coming out from the Australian government. We will be reporting on it more fully from that time on in respect of the professional learning all teachers and staff are involved in.

**THE CHAIR:** The Amaroo community has been very involved with that school. When we went out to have a look at it one day, it appeared to me that the school is built on the perception of community involvement—bringing the community in. I was wondering if

you are getting any feedback from the community about having that school there.

**Dr Bruniges:** Anecdotally, I've heard wonderful things about how that's working and how they're integrating a whole lot of things. I think we will need to have a look at what issues and challenges come up as that school grows. That is anecdotal, from what I've heard. Maybe Craig, who looks after the schools area, would be able to provide more detailed comment on that.

**Mr Curry:** Parent satisfaction with the school is extremely high. They've undertaken the school review process this year. The feedback from parents about Amaroo has been extremely high. I think 100 per cent of the staff said they were highly satisfied working at that school, which is quite phenomenal. I don't think we've had that return for any other school for some time. It shows the sort of culture being built in that school and reflects the sorts of practices happening there. I think about 93 per cent of parents were highly satisfied with what's happening in that school. That data is really a great return. It has come in mainly from that school's surveys this year as part of that process.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Could you give us a brief outline of the progress of Amaroo, as far as enrolments and academic achievement are concerned?

**Mr Curry:** I might have to get back to you on that, I am sorry. I don't have the current enrolment figures on the top of my head. Mr Donnelly is the statistics man.

**MRS DUNNE:** On academic achievement we might have a problem with league tables, so you might be careful about how you answer that. Just to correct the record, I missed out one of the categories of smartboard courses, which holds the majority of people. I thought it was a very low number. There are another 62, on top of the 23 I talked about, in one other course.

**Mr Curry:** I recall that, in the satisfaction surveys at Amaroo, the students and parents were very satisfied with what was being delivered in the school. It's probably the most appropriate answer, rather than going into other sorts of data for one school.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** It is now just under 12 months on from the middle school operation.

**Mr Curry:** Yes.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** There are middle schools operating, though, at some other schools—I think Gold Creek, Telopea and Wanniasa.

**Mr Curry:** Yes.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** How do they compare with Amaroo?

**Mr Curry:** The models are all slightly different. The models for Gold Creek and Amaroo are probably closer, in that in year six the students go into the year six middle school program from surrounding schools like Ngunnawal and Palmerston. It operates as quite a discrete program. There is a small cluster of teachers in those schools delivering the program, and there is much more stability.

The easiest way to describe it, I guess, would be that it is a bit of a compromise between a primary school and a high school, with a smaller number of teachers delivering a number of key subjects to the same group. They have the opportunity to access more specialist subjects. It's that sort of compromise, and it seems to work particularly well for adolescents during that period of change in their lives. There's a much stronger welfare approach and much greater consistency; relationships are formed more strongly with teachers because they're not dealing with quite so many teachers, and there's a smoother introduction into the traditional high school as we know it.

Our belief from the feedback we're getting is that it works very successfully at Gold Creek and Amaroo. There is a slightly different model in some of our other schools like Caroline Chisholm, where the cohort tends to move together through the school and have the same teachers providing a level of pastoral care. The models are different, but the philosophy is the same because we are looking at the needs of adolescents during that time. We know that, historically, students go through a period of disengagement at that time. It's trying to address all the issues young people go through, keep them engaged and keep them active and learning in school. That's really the basic philosophy behind middle schooling and middle schooling approaches. We don't have middle schools as such in the ACT but we have middle school approaches. I think that is a little different.

**Dr Bruniges:** I have with me at the moment a report around the middle years. We'll write a briefing about our project and the research we've been doing and get that to the minister. Craig, there was a committee doing that.

**Mr Curry:** Our high school development team has produced a report on middle schooling, which will be launched this month. The report is quite comprehensive and looks at a whole range of research nationally and internationally on what's happening around middle schooling and middle schooling approaches. We've had quite a bit of interest in it. That was quite an extensive piece of work by the people in that area of our department.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I look forward to it.

**Mr Donnelly:** I've just looked at the August census for government schools, which includes figures for Amaroo. At that time there were 74 students in the high school and 430 in the primary school—just over 500 students all up. I am also advised that forward projections for next year will see that number go up to around 700 for the whole school. So it is growing very rapidly.

**MRS DUNNE:** Indeed. Madam chair, with your indulgence, now that I've remembered the other curriculum question I was going to ask, can I ask that before I forget it, please.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; as long as we don't get into a debate about it.

**MRS DUNNE:** No. We've got 36 learning areas. This is one of the things people raise with me—and you would see this a lot, Dr Bruniges. Every time something new comes up they say, "We ought to do it in the school. We ought to teach the kids this in the school." How do you simplify and unclutter the curriculum? How do you meet all those competing community expectations? It may be fire safety, a drug or something the

community thinks is important. How do you unclutter the curriculum at the same time as having your 36 key learning areas.? How is that being managed through this process?

**Dr Bruniges:** I think it's even been heightened. Conversations about crowded curriculum aren't new. If we look back through history, people have always said there are different things and different emphases; ICT has brought a new dimension, and so forth. I think part of the solution and strategy is about setting a curriculum framework at one level and saying, "These 36 might cluster into five or six groups", or whatever. Allowing what the ACT has here, we have the innovation and capacity to do school-based curriculum development at the local level.

I think you have a responsibility to set a systemic framework. This jurisdiction has that local responsiveness, where individual schools and communities have a look at the needs of students and are able to adapt and adjust to meet some of those things. There's always going to be tension. I don't think it's an easy thing. If you look back over the years, what's expected to be around the role of schools has increased dramatically. It really comes down to the argument about the purpose of schooling in an educative sense; the things we as a community want our students to know and do; and what is essential, from the discipline areas, to ensure success through all of those things.

**MRS DUNNE:** How do you keep it uncluttered so there's room to move?

**Dr Bruniges:** You've got to have the essential learnings with a notion of trying to unpack what is truly essential, rather than trying to fit everything in. For individual students today, not only is there a need to have subject knowledge but there is also a need to have more than that. You've got to operate in the 21st century; you've got to be able to transform knowledge; you've got to apply knowledge in a different way to new fields that we haven't even thought of today. For the children who are in kindergarten today, while there's an essence of mathematics, science, English and all of those key learning areas, they need to be able to do something more. I think the essential learnings, as we go through and validate those, try and tap what is essential. Ultimately, it comes down to every classroom teacher and every school community looking at what's doable and achievable in a teaching and learning environment, and how they scope and sequence that out within the curriculum framework.

**Ms Gallagher:** Perhaps I could add something that I think is important. The essential learning achievements don't replace the key learning areas. That's part of the confusion, I think. The key learning areas remain the same: English, science, maths, studies of the environment, and arts. There are a couple more that I am thinking of. There is technology—and I imagine health would be another area. They remain the same. For something to come in over the top, it would have to fit within those key learning areas as well.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I go back to the professional development? It is something that when I am going around schools people talk to me a lot about. At this stage I am relying on anecdotal evidence, but it has been said to me by principals that they often have a lot of money for professional development—well, sufficient money for professional development—that is not necessarily matched by relief, if that is the right word, so that, if somebody needs to not be in their class, they do not necessarily have relief money to cover that. Sometimes it is being said to me that there is no point having professional

development money if there is not commensurate relief money. Is that something that is being reported, and how are you addressing that? When you put together the professional development money, do you think about what else needs to go with that to make it happen?

**Dr Bruniges:** That is a very interesting question, because we know from the research that our quality teachers make the difference, of all of the variables there. So the investment you make in teacher professional learning is incredibly important in terms of manifesting in student outcomes. My understanding of the research and what has happened here, nationally, and internationally in teacher professional development is that the model of professional learning has changed from basically an in-service model, where you always go out of your school, you go to the quick-fix course, you get the information and you are supposed to come back in and apply it.

I think what we are seeing around the whole teacher professionalism and leadership development is a variety of models, some of which do require release relief and casual support teachers to come in and take the teacher's class where there are particular courses that they're accessing. Teachers are attending network meetings outside school time in terms of colleagues and we are having a lot more in-school development; teachers learning from other teachers seems to be a whole new way of looking at teacher professional learning.

So, while some of the discipline areas and occupational health and safety, some of those expertise, have the in-service model of going to a teaching and learning centre and hearing the expert, much more within the profession is being done between teachers, between networks of teachers. Of course that has been facilitated with ICT as well. So you have online communities of practice that occur, where networks of teachers are able to talk and discuss what is best practice and to apply ideas differently. So I think we have had a bit of a shift from the traditional, what people see as professional learning—going out to the course—to a more dynamic model of professional learning that has all of those different aspects.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, but from time to time the need will arise for someone to go off and do an in-service course. It might be to determine that somebody needs to upgrade their skills in a particular area, which you cannot do in those other scenarios that you've described. Is there a conscious process of planning for relief for those sorts of things?

**Mr Curry:** Having thought about your question, I am just wondering whether what you are hearing anecdotally is a slightly different issue. The majority of the money that goes through the professional learning fund to schools is actually for CRS or relief days. I have not heard the comment that you have made, but what I have heard from schools is they cannot find relief teachers to employ to release their staff.

**MRS DUNNE:** That certainly wasn't the message I was getting. The message was that they had money to send people on courses but not to provide the relief teacher in the classroom.

**Mr Curry:** We can look into that, but that is not the feedback I have had. Certainly casual relief is a difficulty for them.



**MRS DUNNE:** You mentioned before, Dr Bruniges, the networking facilities that are available to teachers. The annual report, on page 36, talks about the executive leadership development program. That seems to be related to the executive of the department, the central office people. I was wondering whether you could tell me, on notice—or you might be able to tell me now—how much money was spent on the executive leadership development program.

**Dr Bruniges:** I can't tell you off the top of my head.

**MRS DUNNE:** Right. If you are taking this on notice, can you break it down into how much was spent on coaching networking functions and the sort of formal induction process?

**Dr Bruniges:** Into those three categories.

**MRS DUNNE:** What is involved in the formal induction process, and how much of that is spent. I would really like, I suppose, an exposition of the program and where the professional development is done. Do you involve yourself in some of the sort of mentoring functions that might require you to go interstate and things like that? And how much money is spent on it?

**Dr Bruniges:** We can find that out. There would be a range of things issued. In terms of leadership development, just the week before last I had one of our principals come in and be CEO for the day, in terms of coaching and trying to get an understanding. We can certainly have a look at what data we have got in that area, in dollars.

**MS DUNNE:** And also who benefits from the executive leadership development program?

**THE CHAIR:** I suppose it is a general question, but it is based on schools, which we are talking about now. I wanted to ask about the capital works management program. Page 73 refers to new works projects valued at \$2.5 million to refurbish old schools and a work in progress valued at \$2.8 million for the same purpose. Minister, can you tell us which schools are targeted within this program?

**Mr Donnelly:** Each year the department identifies, depending on the scope of works available, either one or two schools to participate in the older schools upgrade program. The school for 2005-06, which is one of the older schools in Canberra and therefore requires a fair bit more work than some others, is Ainslie primary school. So we are doing one school in 2005-06. The schools for 2004-05 were Majura primary and Lyneham primary, and the schools for the year before that were Red Hill primary and Turner primary. So every year we start, depending on the work required and the funds available, on either one or two new schools, and each project in each school usually takes about two years to complete. So the projects at Red Hill and Turner were started in the 2003-04 financial year and were recently completed. In fact, I attended openings of both those refurbishments in the last couple of months.

The program actually looks right through the infrastructure of the schools, at renewing everything from potentially electrical cabling, plumbing, right through to the more cosmetic aspects such as painting and carpets. So it really is a comprehensive program of

bringing the schools that participate in the program right up to a high-quality standard.

**THE CHAIR:** And does that include the sort of surroundings of the school as well? You said painting, but I was just thinking about the grounds.

**Mr Donelly:** Each school will depend very much on the individual program of works and the prioritisation. It is fair to say we could always spend more money if more money was available. So there is always a process of prioritisation. I would probably generalise that the internal learning environments are often prioritised more highly than some of the grounds issues, although in the Lyneham project, which kicked off in 2004-05, there were certainly some significant drainage issues in the oval, which were fixed as part of that program.

**MS DUNNE:** I suppose this goes back to my opening foray in relation to the emphasis in the department as compared to out at the coalface in the schools. I suppose you have a modest structure in the department, but one of the things that I am interested in is that on page 37 it talks about AWAs. Don't be too shocked, Mr Gentleman. It talks about the range of salaries that are subject to AWAs. What proportion of staff are on AWAs? I presume they're only central office staff who are on AWAs?

**Ms Gallagher:** On the reporting period it says there are nine. Are you asking around outside of that?

**MS DUNNE:** Is that extended? So there are nine people in central office who are on AWAs; is that expanding or contracting?

**Ms Thomas:** The number is contracting, if anything, because the government has a clear policy about not offering AWAs. These AWAs were all offered in the period of the last government and they have continued over—

**MS DUNNE:** And so they're just running out their three years.

**Ms Thomas:** Yes.

**MS DUNNE:** Okay. I am interested here in the salary levels, because those are salary levels that are generally considered much higher than those that teachers would earn. This is something to take on notice: what is the salary range in the department in the central office part, and also the salary range for teachers at all levels, and what would be the average in both cases? I am quite happy for you to take that on notice if it is too difficult to extract now.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. We can provide that. It is interesting that a principal in a school is earning in excess of \$100,000, so it is not extraordinary. Teacher level 1s, after a period of service of around eight years, are earning \$58,000. That is the rough range. Those figures aren't extraordinarily above that.

**MS DUNNE:** The trouble is that somebody in a government department could be earning that after a lot less than eight years service; that's all.

**Ms Gallagher:** I doubt it very much; I absolutely doubt it. I have to say that the

department of education lost 20 per cent of their budget under Carnell, the central office. They have had a cut this year of around \$2.8 million. We have a very finely-tuned, thin central office administration in the Department of Education and Training. The priority within the budget of education is within the school and I do not think you can take the annual report directions that are set for a department—the emphasis on the operations of the department as a whole—and say that the emphasis is central office focused and not within the schools. I do not think that is a fair—

**MS DUNNE:** On the subject of budget cuts, on page 3 under chief executive review, at the bottom of the page it says:

Like other agencies, the department will be required to make a budget saving in the 2005-06 year. To achieve greater efficiency, and to better align the department's structure with its key deliverables, I have proposed an organisational review to be implemented early in the new financial year.

So what cuts are we going to continue to see in the organisation of the department of education? And, seeing that more cuts are mooted in 2006-07, how are you going to manage those?

**Dr Bruniges:** I might talk to the process that we have been through to achieve the \$2.8 million. In that process there have been 38 central office positions deemed potentially surplus to the operations of the organisation. Out of those, 22 were nominally vacant and we had 16 nominally occupied. Of those that were occupied, we have looked at nine officers receiving voluntary redundancies. We have got five officers potentially excess, requiring redeployment, and two officers have already been deployed.

In terms of what I've asked people to do to achieve those savings, we have also looked at an administration cut, where we have looked at efficiencies and duplication across different areas and come out with a revised structure, which is in place from about the beginning of September, so it is about eight weeks old. As part of that process, I've asked each of the directorates and units to produce a key deliverables document to make sure that we have a functional statement of each of those areas of responsibility and we have a clear specification of those key deliverables and a way of monitoring our progress in that new structure.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could the committee have a copy of the new structure?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thanks.

**Ms Gallagher:** It is on the web site.

**MRS DUNNE:** The other thing is that there has been a little discussion in the last while about a publicity campaign to encourage people to stay in the government sector or to perhaps encourage people back into the government sector.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry; for clarification, are you talking about students or teachers?

**MRS DUNNE:** Students was the idea, was it not, minister? You were looking at a publicity campaign because of falling enrolments?

**Ms Gallagher:** We are constantly looking at promoting government education. I have to say the story was a little exaggerated, to say the least—one of those moments where you open the *Canberra Times* and your heart jumps a little bit when you see the headline, because you had no idea it was coming.

**MRS DUNNE:** So there is no publicity campaign?

**Ms Gallagher:** The question I was asked, by an ABC journalist, Ken Wilson, was: did I think that we needed to look at marketing government schools in light of the competition in the education sector? I said, yes, I thought we did need to look at that. Then another journalist rings up and goes: “What’s your marketing plan? Where is it? When will the ads be on TV?” and all this sort of stuff. It is an area that I think we need to be better about. I am having discussions with the department about how we do that in terms of the material we already provide out to the community about schools; there are a number of brochures, and schools do things themselves.

As a parent going to a school every day, and from going to different schools in my job, I see the range of material that is provided and it is diverse. It can go from the blue photocopied sheet with all the black shading on it, because the photocopier doesn’t work quite well, to the glossy brochure, to a CD-ROM. Part of what I would like to see is how we bring that together and promote the system, whether we do that in clusters—in north side, south side, in high school, primary school. That is something that we are doing some work around. There is already material that goes out.

I guess for me, rather than looking for additional money or resources or spending additional money in this area, it is about what we already do and how we can do it better and compete within a very aggressive campaign that is always waged by the non-government sector, because I think we have reached almost a plateau in terms of the number of schools on offer. There will be a few more here and there in the ACT. The non-government system have half the number of schools we have, so they’re a big player and they market very aggressively for their customers. Because they operate as businesses, they need the enrolments. Where are they going to get the enrolments from? There is only one place they can get them from, and that is pretty much from the government system. So we have to acknowledge that that competition is out there more than ever, that it is fierce and that, in order to provide a really good quality government system, we need to be publicising that and marketing that. But in terms of providing extra resources and money into a marketing campaign, that wasn’t the context that I made those comments in.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have some kind of analysis of what is actually happening between the government schools and the private schools, why it is all happening and the direction it is going?

**Ms Gallagher:** According to the ABS data that was put out recently, our demographic information shows that we can expect a decline of just over one per cent in government enrolments every year from now. It has been bigger in some years previously. Last year, we had a decline of just over one per cent. We talk about a range of factors every time

we meet. The cohort is getting smaller and the choice is getting bigger, parental choice within the system. It is certainly all there. We know the points at which parents make decisions about schooling, particularly about high school. We know that we lose students from the government system to non-government high schools and we know that some of them come back to college. There is a range of reasons.

As I said, I am not overly concerned about it. I want to maintain a strong public education system, but I accept that the reality of the world we live in is that parents will choose non-government schools for their children and I think that for me to be overly concerned and to be wanting to take numbers back from the non-government system, rather than just maintaining a quality public education system, would be resisted by the non-government sector.

I have an interest in keeping the non-government sector viable as well; so, in a way, we are learning to coexist. But I have to make sure that we can coexist and keep a quality public education system that is ready to meet the needs of any student who turns up at the door on any day that they choose, and that is the challenge. But I think it works pretty well in the ACT. I think the non-government system is doing very well and we know that the government system is doing very well, but we would not want to see big jumps in those numbers. What we see is what we expect. It is what we have planned for. I think that the government's response to that should be just to talk about the quality of the choices on offer in the government system, to make sure that that is known to parents and to support those enrolments as they arrive, and the students we have in the system already.

**THE CHAIR:** So the Amaroo school has given the parents a choice.

**Ms Gallagher:** That is part of it. One of the biggest comments parents make to me when I meet them is about the quality of school infrastructure. It is one of the first decisions for them when they are shopping around for a school, and we know they do. Fifty per cent of government students do not attend their local school; they go to other schools within the government system. So we know that parents are prepared to take the time to look outside the neighbourhood school. One of the biggest criticisms you get from parents is that a building looked terrible and they do not want their children going there, that the facilities did not look to be up to scratch.

A part of promoting the government system, and I do not know that we will ever be able to do so to the point that we should be able to or that we can compete on a level playing field with the non-government system, is maintaining, improving and fixing up the ageing infrastructure that we have. That is a constant challenge and it is about providing options, investing in infrastructure. In the last budget we put another \$8 million into fixing up schools, the school renewal fund, in recognition of those escalating costs. That \$8 million will not mean that we will be able to address all of the areas in which we would like to improve the quality of our school buildings. Certainly, that is a massive challenge for us.

**MRS DUNNE:** It seems that the general questions are petering out. Should we go to systematically working through?

**Ms Gallagher:** Before we do, I table the options paper about the Australian certificate of

education so we do not have to take a question on it on notice. I note your media release, Mrs Dunne, where you say that I admitted that I had not read a brief from the minister. For the record, the brief I was alluding to was the secret brief.

**MRS DUNNE:** The one on which you said that he probably rang up ACER and said, “Come up with a model.”

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. I have certainly read that paper.

**MRS DUNNE:** I was asking you about a formal brief.

**Ms Gallagher:** I don’t imagine that the brief between Dr Nelson and ACER is a public document. So, even if it did exist in writing, I am not sure that I would be one of the people that he would be keen to have read it anyway.

**MRS DUNNE:** Perhaps I could get you a copy, then.

**Ms Gallagher:** I have heard that you have good links up there.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, what were you about to say, Mrs Dunne?

**MRS DUNNE:** I was going to suggest, seeing the general questions have petered out, that we go to particular output classes.

**THE CHAIR:** That is what I suggested some time ago. Do you have one on output class 1?

**MRS DUNNE:** On the subject of LOTE in primary schools, there is an Italian school, a Spanish school and a Chinese school—I am not sure whether it is Mandarin—and there is the Telopea school. Are there any more schools like that in the pipeline? How do they come about? Is it a community desire or is it at the initiative of a forward-thinking principal? For instance, the Italian school at Lyons, which is fairly new, how did it come about and what are the options for future expansion of those sorts of programs?

**Ms Gallagher:** My understanding—I can be corrected—is that it was community driven, with very enthusiastic parents at the school wanting a program offered. It is now supported by the Italian consulate in some capacity.

**Mr Curry:** That is correct. That program was actually driven by the school board at Lyons, who were very keen to establish a strong relationship with the Italian cultural centre for which the acronym is CIAC.

**MRS DUNNE:** Lyons is where the Italian school of a Saturday is as well.

**Mr Curry:** Yes. A very close link was formed there and it has been quite successful. The Italian community has been very supportive of the program, and they are moving towards a fifty-fifty delivery, 50 per cent of the key learning areas in Italian and 50 per cent in English. That is the sort of way it is operating.

**MRS DUNNE:** That has really grown out of the initiative of the school board. Is there a

predisposition to facilitate this sort of development? It is a very exciting development and, no matter where you are, language teaching is done very poorly in Australia. Is there a predisposition in the department to facilitate these sorts of immersion programs?

**Mr Curry:** I guess the answer to that is that we look at them on a case-by-case basis. Of course, we support LOTE programs and we have funding from the Australian government to support particularly the Asian studies and Asian language programs, but the school board worked collaboratively with the department around that initiative. We worked with them to see how we could support it and how it could best work in that particular setting, and with that other organisation. I think the answer to your question is that we really promote initiative from our schools and we are always happy to talk with principals—that is really the role of the school director—about such issues where they are in keeping with our policies, our goals and our directions in our strategic plan and so on. But we would not inhibit that sort of initiative if the school community was coming forward and thought it was going to work really well in that school. We would look at how we could assist, support and promote it.

**MRS DUNNE:** But you do not actually promote it as a model. You are waiting for the schools to come forward to you and speak about having an immersion program rather than the other way round.

**Mr Curry:** The whole issue of bilingual-type programs is that they really have to be community driven in many ways because not everyone seeks that sort of educational program. So our predisposition would be to support it when it came forward, but not necessarily to initiate it unless we were getting requests coming to us, to central office, that there was a particular need out there.

**MRS DUNNE:** But all of those schools, correct me if I am wrong, are on the south side.

**Mr Curry:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** In the same way that we introduced the international baccalaureate program in Copland to expand those opportunities there, would you perhaps go out and seek discussion with school communities on the north side? The four or five programs are all on the south side; am I right?

**Mr Curry:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I cannot remember where the Spanish one is, but I think it is on the south side. Would you look at expanding those on the north side and providing some opportunities for people on the north side, or are you just going to wait for the communities to act?

**Mr Curry:** I really believe that we would look at what the community was telling us about an issue like that because it is actually a big move for a school to take on that sort of program where they are saying they are going to deliver a certain amount of their content fully in another language. You really need strong community support for such a move. We would not want to impose it. We would want to make sure that it would be a school for everyone and that people were there for the right reasons and were making the right decisions. We would not impose it. We would talk with the community about it. At

the same time, we would certainly support it if we felt it was a strong enough initiative and it was going to work well for that community.

**MRS DUNNE:** Did Lyons get additional funding to kick off the Italian immersion program?

**Mr Curry:** Lyons did have some additional support, and I would have to get back to you on what that was, but certainly they also had strong support from CIAC in terms of teacher support. The director of schools might be able to support me and give you that advice while we are here today.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thanks.

**DR FOSKEY:** I would like to focus on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander section of the report, pages 14 and 15, and, if I may, refer to the report that was recently circulated in the Assembly about performance in indigenous education because it does fill out the rather brief section in the annual report. Was the action plan that indigenous education is part of developed in collaboration with indigenous communities?

**Mr Curry:** The programs that are delivered and the initiatives in terms of supporting our indigenous students are discussed with our IECB, the indigenous education consultative body, so I guess the short answer to your question is yes, there is consultation through that body, and that body also provides advice to us about the strategies and the support needs of our indigenous students.

**DR FOSKEY:** The report mentions at page 4—you probably do not have this one—that Dr Robert Morgan, a Kamilaroi man from Walgett, has held some seminars on indigenous education for teaching staff. I was wondering whether he had any recommendations on particular pedagogical methods that were found to be more successful with indigenous students and whether, and where, those are applied.

**Mr Curry:** I might ask the director of student services to respond to that question, if I could. She is quite closely involved with that program.

**Ms Melsom:** The invitation that was extended to Dr Bob Morgan to speak to us about how we might better meet the needs of indigenous students in the ACT was in the context of all of the research that we have that comes from many sources. Whilst he did not specifically make particular recommendations, he certainly reinforced the research that we have and he did assist teachers to rethink the way in which they might engage indigenous students in learning programs.

At the moment, the ACT and other states and territories are engaged in a process of looking at ways by which we might better meet the needs of indigenous students. We have a wealth of research around the issues faced by indigenous people generally and we are trying to translate that back into effective classroom practice. Dr Paul Hughes from the University of South Australia is a leading light in research around pedagogy and has recently published information that does not give us any particular aspects; so what is effective for all students is effective for indigenous students.

We do know that indigenous students do not necessarily commence school with the same



level of readiness for schooling as non-indigenous students. That is a particular issue for us and therefore we need to look at what is happening in our preschools, particularly our Koori preschools. You would be aware that they have been expanded this year to attract more indigenous students to those early years and to be there to meet their needs so that they are prepared for schooling.

**DR FOSKEY:** One of the ways that the department creates links between the homes of indigenous students and the schools is through liaison officers. I understand that that is generally very successful. How many students does each of these liaison officers have generally to deal with?

**Ms Melsom:** A significant number. It varies slightly, but it would average out at about 80 students. That means that the home school liaison officers visit schools over a two-week period. However, they are also available to respond to schools when there is a particular need or requirement to attend meetings that involve parents. In addition to that, they visit families after school hours; that is part of their liaison role. It is something that we are trying to focus on now and think about better ways by which we might be able to provide a more targeted service. Those discussions are occurring between the IECB and the department to rethink that support service.

**DR FOSKEY:** It does seem from anecdotal evidence that I have heard about in recent days that that role could be expanded into the child and young people protection role as well just in terms of helping families understand how things work. There seems to be a really big gap between the community and schools, everything.

**Ms Gallagher:** Dr Foskey, I do not know if you were here yesterday when we talked about the indigenous unit that has been created in the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support. It is headed by an SES officer for the first time in the ACT public service. It also has dedicated staff. We have set up the indigenous foster care service. For the first time ever, there is a unit dedicated to dealing with the issues of indigenous children and young people who are coming into contact with the care and protection system.

Enormous resources are going into this area. You could find gaps in any of these areas, I think. If you had more money, you would love to pour it in, but we have prioritised that within the office as well. Some of the work that Neil Harwood, who is the head of that unit, will be doing will be creating those links with education, because we know that if these kids stay in school, or go to school in the first place, they do a lot better in life, and we have a lot better in terms of being able to intervene and support families.

**DR FOSKEY:** Absolutely. I do plan, minister, to talk to you a little bit more about that unit, but not here, because I have just had some representations made. I will explore that outside this meeting. Why were the Aboriginal student support and parent awareness committees disbanded in favour of the parents and schools partnership program?

**Ms Melsom:** The ASSPA committees were Australian government funded and they have changed that initiative and introduced a new model. That is the one that we now have as part of our quadrennium agreement; so for 2005-08 it is the parents and schools partnership program.

**DR FOSKEY:** The report indicates that it has not had a very successful take-up in terms of submissions and so on. It is a federal government program, but is it administered through the territory department?

**Ms Melsom:** No, the federal government chose to administer it directly. However, we are now working very closely with them because of the issue of poor take-up. In fact, our home school liaison officers and other member of the indigenous education section are working directly to support schools and indigenous communities to make application for those moneys. So we have stepped into that breach to ensure that our schools do have access to those funds. The take-up across Australia has been particularly poor.

**DR FOSKEY:** I am wondering whether there is an issue with the guidelines and whether you believe that the program as it now stands is actually going to meet the needs of indigenous students and schools.

**Ms Melsom:** Part of the issue is the process. It is very difficult to know what the outcomes will be in terms of the guidelines that are structured around the use of these moneys, but we know that there was considerable difficulty with indigenous communities and schools accessing funds. For a start, they had to put up a concept brief and then, if the concept brief was accepted, they had to put up a full-blown proposal. That creates barriers for people when making a submission for funding. What we were seeking from the Australian government was some sort of definition around what concepts would be acceptable. That work has progressed and those conversations have advanced and a couple of our schools have engaged with their communities and accessed some funding, but it is still very limited.

**DR FOSKEY:** That is very disappointing. Has the department or the government commissioned any studies to try to discern why Aboriginal children's results compare unfavourably with national benchmarks? Apparently, from reading your report, at the third year level they are comparable with the national benchmarks and then they appear to fall off as they go up to grade 5 and year 7. God knows what happens at year 9. I am just wondering whether the reasons have been investigated as to why this might be and whether a relatively high degree of absenteeism might be part of that. Obviously, I will have a supplementary question after I hear your answer.

**Ms Gallagher:** We will be breaking for lunch at 12.30 because I have an appointment. So if we could just wrap this up. I think there is a wealth of research. You can look anywhere and find research about indigenous performance. MCEETYA prioritised indigenous education as a key strategic focus at our meeting in May because of the concerns every jurisdiction, including the commonwealth, have around indigenous education. I am not sure that there is anything to be gained by us sitting here and commissioning more research into what is going on in the ACT in this area because we have got it all.

**DR FOSKEY:** That is all right; I just asked.

**Ms Gallagher:** It is around early intervention and it is around expanding preschool options, getting those kids into preschool, which we have had some good success with. We have had good success with some of our indigenous performance results, but I am reluctant to say that that means we have solved those issues and, because our cohorts are

so small, that will change and next year potentially we will not be achieving the national benchmark, or we might be exceeding it by far. Absenteeism in the senior end of schooling is an issue as well that we have to be accommodating. That is why we have some programs around indigenous leadership for students, some camps that senior indigenous students have gone on, some focus on the indigenous boys. It is about a range of programs and I do not think that there is a simple solution. But in terms of why, I think the research is there nationally to indicate those reasons.

**Meeting adjourned from 12.31 to 1.37 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome back.

**Ms Gallagher:** We've got those sample report cards here if you want to table those.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Mrs Dunne has a couple more questions on the primary school area and then we are going on to high school.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, a little while ago this committee, in the course of another inquiry, visited Charnwood primary school and in the course of a conversation I became aware that Charnwood primary school does not run reading recovery. I was fairly alarmed at that, and it seemed to be a matter of funding. I understand that you get a certain number of resources and schools have the capacity to put those resources where they do and they are doing quite good things with that. But, given the essential disadvantage of many of the children at Charnwood primary school, and the low language age of many of the children entering, could some consideration be given to perhaps augmenting the resources for Charnwood primary school that would allow them to run reading recovery? It is something that they would like to do but they just do not seem to have the resources to do it.

**Ms Gallagher:** I hadn't heard that they didn't have a reading recovery program. As you quite rightly say, those decisions are taken at a school level and in order to meet the needs of the students. I'd be surprised if there was no reading recovery going on at that school for the students. Charnwood also receives school equity funding money, additional resources to support the school. I'm happy to have a discussion with the school about whether there's a need for reading recovery, and look at what the school has to say about it, because essentially the school makes those decisions. In terms of resources, we already provide additional resources to that school. But, as I said, this is the first time it has been raised with me, so I'll investigate it further.

**MRS DUNNE:** It would be nice if you could follow that up. I was surprised, and I realise that the school community has made some decisions, but I also got the impression from the principal that, if there were more resources, they would welcome the opportunity for reading recovery. It is a valuable program, and I would have thought that it would be almost axiomatic that a school like that would have it.

The other area I would like to touch on is perhaps one of my hobbyhorses, I admit, and it is one of the eight key learning areas—music education. I know that the schools have a very fine band program in years 5 and 6. But that is in a sense selective; not everyone participates in the band program. What is the overall level of music learning in the average primary school? Some schools select for music and emphasise music, but a lot of that is extracurriculum as well. What is the level of music learning in the primary schools, and, given the increased body of evidence that indicates that children who have exposure to music have better educational outcomes in a whole lot of other areas, what role does music play in the curriculum in primary schools?

**Ms Gallagher:** Again, music education is available for all primary schools as part of the curriculum—singing, performance. Certainly, my own experience is that it is taught to all students. The level of music education, I guess, is the question and also involvement in the band program, which I think are different subjects. I do not know if we have the

figures of the schools taking part in the band program.

**Mr Curry:** We do have those figures and I am sure we could get the number of schools involved in that program.

**MRS DUNNE:** Take that on notice then. The band program is a sort of add-on, and that is available to children at lunch times. In the actual curriculum, what is taught, I suppose one of the problems is that, classically, in the old days when we were at school especially, lots of primary school teachers played an instrument. It was part of the selection process when they went to teachers college. How much music expertise is there amongst the people who are teaching in the primary grades? Is that something that you select for? When you have an intake of teachers, is it expected that a certain portion of them will have a specialty in music, and do you try to distribute them across the schools?

**Dr Bruniges:** The primary area is a little bit different to the high school area. Primary training in terms of graduate studies is across all key learning areas. From my knowledge of most of the education programs that are offered in tertiary institutions, music is certainly an integral part, as it was for my training. Going back to teacher training in primary schools, I am sure that most components have a music element for primary schools, and subject disciplinaries in the high school would be particularly trained in vocal, instrumental—

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, but I am really interested in the primary school. What I want to know is: does the ACT department just assume that people who have been primary trained at a tertiary institution have subject expertise in all of the eight areas?

**Dr Bruniges:** For generalist primary, that would be part of the assumption that we would make. Some are going to be more highly qualified in particular areas of interest than others, and I would think that principals will make decisions about the type of recruitment of staff in areas of expertise. Do you have some examples, Craig?

**Mr Curry:** The School of Music at the ANU is linked up with quite a few of our schools in terms of singing programs, but that school also offers professional learning, which a lot of our teachers participate in, to, I guess, strengthen their skill level in delivering music programs. My strong sense of it is that, when we have had concerts where we have invited primary schools to come in, there has been so much music that people can deliver and show, in terms of their choirs and the work that they do, that there is really a lot of music happening in our schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** I would like some sort of feedback on the level of training in music that you would expect to find in your primary school teachers.

**Ms Gallagher:** Mrs Dunne, we recruit primary school qualified teachers. We don't recruit specialised maths teachers to primary schools or specialised music teachers.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, I understand that.

**Ms Gallagher:** So I'm not sure what information you're trying to get. They're qualified primary school teachers, and some of them might have more of a music background than others. I don't know how we can answer that for you.

**MRS DUNNE:** What I would like to know, minister, is: what is the basic accepted prerequisite in music for someone who is a qualified primary teacher?

**Ms Gallagher:** So you would like what the course—

**MRS DUNNE:** What you accept as the basic prerequisite.

**Ms Gallagher:** In music?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes.

**Ms Gallagher:** But the basic core requirement is a four-year trained bachelor of education degree. So your question is probably best placed to the universities who deliver—

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, but you are the people who are recruiting people to teach. Amongst other things, music is part of one of the key learning areas. There are a lot of people coming to me saying that music is not being particularly well taught in primary schools simpliciter, not just ACT Government primary schools. I think there are some good things that are happening, like the band program, but that is selective. There are other people who do not get into the band program and who are not in years 5 and 6 who would benefit from good music teaching. I am just wondering—

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. I guess I'm trying to explain to you from the point of view of the recruitment process and the numbers that go through that—a thousand teachers apply for several hundred positions—that it is difficult to answer the question without going to each of those and looking at what expertise they bring in music that we can add to the question of the component that they studied at the University of Canberra or wherever—

**MRS DUNNE:** No, actually what I'm asking you is not what each of the teachers have, but what you accept as the minimum standard.

**Ms Gallagher:** We're going around. We accept a bachelor of education, and then they're rated through an interview process and through discussions with referees. Potential teachers are given a rating of meritorious, suitable, highly suitable—I can't think of the exact words—or outstanding, and usually our offers end at outstanding, or might go into that second round because of the level of interest in teaching here. I'm not trying to get out of it, but it's a difficult question for us to answer on notice. What gives you a suitable or an outstanding rating is based on your academic record, your practical component in the schools where you've done some prac. We get feedback from teachers, referees reports and overall rating from the recruitment experts around what makes a good teacher. The difficulty with your question is that you're asking at what level of music education do you take—

**MRS DUNNE:** No, I'm not asking that question. I'm asking: when you are recruiting people, or when you're talking to the people who educate the educators, what do you require in the curriculum for the music educators?

**Ms Gallagher:** We require a bachelor of education degree. That's what we require, in

terms of what is studied.

**THE CHAIR:** I think the minister has answered the question.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, the minister is refusing to answer the question.

**Ms Gallagher:** I'm not refusing to answer. I'm just saying—

**MRS DUNNE:** It's really simple, and Dr Bruniges went part of the way to answer the question by saying that people who are primary trained have training in all of the subject specialties. What I'm asking you is: what do you accept as acceptable as music training in those subject specialties? It's not rocket science.

**Ms Gallagher:** It's not rocket science, back at you, Mrs Dunne. What is required is a bachelor of education degree, a four-year degree from a university, of which the curriculum that they study there is suitable to give you a qualification to go and teach primary school. I have answered your question.

**MRS DUNNE:** Effectively what you're saying is we leave it up to the education institutions to tell us what these teachers should be taught.

**THE CHAIR:** I think you've answered the question, minister. We're going to move on. Have you got some questions now on high schools, Mr Gentleman?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I have. I refer the minister to page 6, where it says there are seven high schools in the school improvement cycle. Can you tell me what's involved in this program?

**Mr Curry:** It's quite an extensive program for the schools that undertake the school improvement process. Each school is participating in the process in some form or another. The seven that are listed there undertook a much more formal process. So, while every school is required to self-assess in terms of our school improvement framework on an annual basis in a number of key areas, the formal process requires the school to also look at its curriculum, how relevant and effective the curriculum documents are, look at all their policies, send out the surveys to the community, to parents and to staff, and develop their own plan for the coming year. So, out of that whole review and self-assessment process, they determine what are going to be their key focus areas for improvement for the following year.

The school directors are heavily involved with the schools undertaking that process and spend quite a lot of time during that particular year with those schools, talking through the issues, talking through, I guess, the key areas that are coming through the surveys and through the self-assessment process and trying to support the school to make good decisions about what will be the areas for improvement and growth in the following years. So the focus for the one-third of schools is much more intensive in the off years, if I could call it; then it's the self-assessment process, using the school improvement framework. Out of it comes a plan for the school and so the school sets its directions, and out of it come indicators for the director to follow up with the principal through the principal appraisal process. And out of it will come goals for teachers as well, through their level 2 or their supervisors within the school. So it's quite an intensive progress and

the process gives us a lot of system data.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** What percentage return do you get of the surveys that are sent out to parents?

**Mr Curry:** It's always 100 per cent from staff. But that is Mr Chandler's program area.

**Mr Chandler:** It was about 92 per cent, I think.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thanks for that, and from the return of those surveys have you been able to implement ideas that the parents have put forward?

**Mr Curry:** Absolutely. All that information goes into the melting pot, and schools develop an issues paper. It's the issues paper that the school board looks at to then proceed to develop the plan. So the feedback from the parents, the feedback from the students, the feedback from the staff and the input from the self-assessment process all goes into an issues paper to show what are the key areas the school needs to focus on to continue to grow as a school.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thanks.

**MRS DUNNE:** This is really about the benchmarking and testing of year 7 and it's also reflected in the primary school years. Our targets for the number of year 7 students who meet the national benchmark in reading and writing are at 88 per cent, but for numeracy they are 85 per cent. I notice we have much higher benchmarks for literacy and for reading in a primary school than we do for numeracy and writing. Could somebody tell me why we set ourselves lower targets and how do we see ourselves improving that?

**Dr Bruniges:** Mrs Dunne, at the national level in each of those benchmarks, in 3, 5, 7, and 9, they're actually not on the same scale, so they're independent of each other.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, I understand that.

**Dr Bruniges:** Therefore, year 7 isn't directly comparable with year 5 or year 3.

**MRS DUNNE:** I understand that, but generally speaking our targets are lower in numeracy than they are in others.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes. There has been quite a lot of work and discussion around all jurisdictions about the difficulty of the year 7 numeracy benchmark, saying it is much more harder than the year 7 reading and writing benchmarks. So part of the response is about the comparison that can be made across the benchmarks, and part of it, I guess, is us setting some realistic targets from where our students are at now and where we'd like to be in the future, considering those areas.

**MRS DUNNE:** Earlier today, Dr Bruniges, you said something about benchmarks are a minimum standard, and I think you were talking about these tests. I don't want to misquote you. You were saying that the national benchmark that we should be aiming for is a minimum standard but you were also saying at the same time that there is an anticipation that the year 7 numeracy benchmark is quite difficult. What is the cause of



that?

**Dr Bruniges:** I think, nationally, when the year 7 benchmarks were first written, part of the national team's work was to describe in curriculum terms what students were expected to know and to be able to do at year 3, year 5, year 7 and year 9. The aberrant one has happened after there have been several rounds of data collection. It appears that the year 7 one is more difficult for students to achieve now that we've got some state and territory data to look at.

**MRS DUNNE:** How long is the data set now?

**Dr Bruniges:** I think it's only in its second year in numeracy, but some of them, the year 3 ones, could be much longer than that—maybe four or five years, I think.

**MRS DUNNE:** Harking back to the primary schools, our target for meeting national benchmarks is lower in all of the year groups. It's 90 per cent for numeracy as compared to 93 for reading. I know that they're not directly comparable, but I'm just wondering why we set ourselves a lower target?

**Dr Bruniges:** Again, all I can say is that I think we need to look at where students' actual achievement is and set aspirational targets from there. So target setting methodology, whether you go a 93 or a 92, given the standard errors around that, is problematic. But certainly we can look at how we establish that. The important thing is, from a teaching and learning point of view, that we know where students are at, and we put in aspirational targets—not so far that they can't reach them but to act as a motivation.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move on now to college education. Have you got any questions, Mr Gentleman?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** The first question I have is just about percentages finishing year 12 and how you've been addressing the percentage of students that start year 11 but don't complete year 12; it's a fairly generic question.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, it sounds a simple question. We've seen non-completions, and I understand that the ACT has one of the highest completion rates around the nation, and I think that's very pleasing. But we should not be complacent; we should always try to do better than that. When we've got a range of pathways, where it's year 12 or equivalent, year 12 gives us part of the story about what students are achieving. Others are taking up vocational education and training pathways and completing a range of avenues through vocational education and training, which isn't captured in the year 12 certificate data. So we have to look at that a bit broader. Some students do both; some students complete a certificate and so forth. On top of that is the university entrance. What we're seeing from the data, I think not only in this jurisdiction but in other states and territories, is that fewer students are selecting to go on to university in this data set. Anecdotally, some of the reasons for that include things like HECS or wanting to take a year off after finishing school, to travel and then return to study after. Some of them have part-time jobs and choose to work part time and do study part time. So there's quite a complexity, I guess, from year 12 to university to the VET sector that comes into play with individual choices about what they do, what pathway they take during school and at the end of year 12.

**THE CHAIR:** I want to ask a question around the school-based new apprenticeships scheme that you made mention of just now. How is that going and what is the uptake?

**Dr Bruniges:** From what I've heard it has been a very successful program and well received. I might ask Anne Houghton to give you more details on that.

**Ms Houghton:** The school-based new apprenticeships area is growing very well in the ACT. In 2005 we had 300 commencements—we have to do this on an annual basis—and it's looking like it's going to track above the 383 commencements that we had last year, so that's very pleasing. There are other vocational areas that support school-based new apprenticeships—SNAPS as we call them—very good uptake of work experience for the year 10s so that they get to know that vocational education is what they want. We also run some courses at CIT to introduce them to the trade areas, so there is a range of things that lead into this successful SNAP program.

**THE CHAIR:** So would some of those young people be the ones that you were talking about that are choosing other options?

**Dr Bruniges:** They may well be. One of the interesting things is that, again nationally, there are discussions about post-school destination data and the importance of being able to track pathways of students; that it's not just from school to work any more. There is a whole combination of things happening. There may well be students who choose a new apprenticeship thing, and then they might return to higher ed, or a whole lot of different pathways.

**MRS DUNNE:** On the subject of pathways, and going back to the government school output class, there is a measure on page 130, which I meant to ask about before—the percentage of year 10 students who proceed to government secondary college education, and the target is 85 per cent and the result is 87. What happens to the other 15 per cent and where are they measured? How many people in year 10 don't go on to training or education somewhere else? That sort of links in with Mr Gentleman's question.

**Dr Bruniges:** There are a whole number of factors. I can't answer that question directly, Mrs Dunne, but what I can say is that a number of those students would move interstate, so you've got a mobility issue happening as well. Some go on to new apprenticeships and some will go into the world of work, so there will be a combination of things happening at the end of year 10; hence the importance of us looking at post-school destination data to get a true picture of those pathways that different students choose to take.

**MRS DUNNE:** So do we actually have that sort of data on post-compulsory school?

**Dr Bruniges:** We don't have, currently, post-school destination data after year 10 or year 12. I have spoken to a number of principals and know that individual schools are starting to collect it. Also, nationally, through the MCEETYA forum, there is a feasibility study and a look into what a national instrument might look like, so that we get comparability across the jurisdictions in post-school destination data.

**MRS DUNNE:** That's very important, it would seem, because of some of the stuff that

Mr Gentleman is picking up. Sometimes we appear to have a retention rate in years 11 and 12 which is more than 100 per cent and that has possibly got to do with mobility and things like that as well. It would be nice to have—

**Ms Gallagher:** And New South Wales students coming in, people coming back from non-government schools into colleges.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think the answer is we don't have it; we don't measure where children are progressing after year 10, so we can't actually account for the whole 100 per cent.

**Dr Bruniges:** We've tracked some particular target groups of students—students at risk, I think it was—in terms of making sure we follow up to see where they are. But there is no systematic way of us telling that at this point in time.

**Ms Gallagher:** We did have the initiative, the training pathway guarantee, which was focusing on post year 12 who were not going into training or further education or jobs.

**MRS DUNNE:** The ones who were doing video studies, I think.

**Ms Gallagher:** I don't think that program has been as successful as we'd hoped in that we rely on the young people to involve themselves in the program, which has created some challenges, but we have set ourselves a fairly high target under the social plan of those who complete year 12 or equivalent; I think it's 95 per cent. So some of that destination work we were doing after year 12 I've just started, through discussions at MCEETYA and some of the national debates we've been having, is whether that mapping should happen between years 10 and 12 rather than post year 12.

**MRS DUNNE:** It probably needs to happen in both places.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, but in terms of maybe redirecting some of that effort that's going in, because of the difficulty in uptake of that program.

**MRS DUNNE:** When you look at that figure on page 130, you could speculate. Some people might go to private colleges et cetera, but you don't know how many are falling through the cracks.

**Ms Gallagher:** Not on a systematic basis, I think, at the school level.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have one more series of questions on colleges. As you know, minister, I visited the Stirling and Canberra College campuses where the "ECLIPSE" and "STAY" programs are being run. We had some correspondence about that. I was particularly interested in the "STAY" program, which is for young mothers. When I visited the colleges I noted that the program has a social worker, who is provided not by the department but through a grant from the Community Inclusion Board.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** This is a practical question. This is a group of young women who are finding things quite difficult. Why would the department not provide that sort of thing, rather than them having to go, cap in hand, through a grants process?

**Ms Gallagher:** In the past, young women—considering the numbers we are talking about—have been accommodated within their own school environments. I have had discussions with people around that. From memory, that started at the Phillip College campus. A group of teachers put together a program whereby they wanted to specifically look at educating, or offering an option, in a group situation. I was very supportive of that. They applied for a community inclusion grant and were successful. That program is called “Canberra College Cares”. It is not that it was not previously on offer, because young women with babies were being accommodated within their own school environments. This is a new way of doing it. We will keep an eye on it.

I was very interested in this program. I asked several questions, especially when a segment was aired around the success of an interstate program on *Four Corners*, or one of those programs, and how we were managing this locally. When this idea came up from the Canberra College I thought it was a good one to support. We will see how it goes. I do not see a problem with it. That is what the community inclusion fund is about. It has been set up to facilitate partnerships between the community and government in providing funds for this sort of thing.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is the government providing the program, is it? It is a government school program.

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes, but partnership is a requirement. I do not know why it was not established 10, 15 or 20 years ago but the fact is that it was not. This is a good beginning for it. If needed, we will look at ways to continue it.

**MS DUNNE:** Can the department provide, on notice to the committee, the number of young women with babies who would be either in the Stirling College program or in school generally? I know, because of my involvement in community organisations, that there are young women with babies in high schools and places like that. Roughly how many would be in school? Is that something you can tell me?

**Ms Gallagher:** I imagine we can find out, from going across the numbers. It fluctuates year by year, as you can imagine.

**MS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Moving to the next output, special education and early intervention, my question is about the level of parent satisfaction. I note that it says it is 98 per cent, while the 2004-05 target was 85 per cent. It’s obviously a much higher level than expected. Can you explain what is happening there?

**Mr Curry:** I have looked into that one, and there are a couple of issues. One is that the wording of the question that goes out to parents changed slightly; it was made more consistent. We made it the same question we asked schools so we could have more consistent data. There was a 55 per cent return around that. I guess that’s telling me that the people who are feeling very positive about this program took the time to reply. That’s probably one of the indicators around there. But I would still have to say that, with that sort of positive response, people clearly feel the benefit of having early intervention programs. When they turn four, many of the young children who participate in the early

intervention programs also participate in preschool programs. So people are accessing both. We know how important early intervention is. The feedback we are getting is that people think highly of these programs.

**MS DUNNE:** This is just a general question. Perhaps Mr Curry can answer it. What is the return rate for parent satisfaction surveys across each of the sectors? Fifty-five per cent seems very high.

**Mr Curry:** It does. I should correct my earlier response. For the primary sector it's about 40 per cent, not 92 per cent. That was probably the student or staff return. It's generally around 35 or 40 per cent for parents. That is quite good for a survey that goes home. Schools encourage students to bring back the forms, of course. Sometimes they have little incentive programs going.

**MS DUNNE:** Sometimes they need to encourage them to take the form home and take it out of the bag before it gets squashed under the dead sandwiches!

**MR GENTLEMAN:** On 1.4, on page 6, there are 1,667 students in the SCAN program. How many of those would have been diagnosed with autism?

**Ms Gallagher:** From memory, there are 300-odd in our autism-specific units. There's a range on the spectrum as well, so you would not say they are all in that.

**Mr Curry:** There are 346 school-age students with a diagnosis of autism and another 26 of preschool age. As the minister correctly says, it is a spectrum. With that sort of diagnosis, you get a range of people operating in a range of ways—from very bright, high-functioning sorts of students, who might have language delays or whatever, through to students with associated disabilities. It's a significant range. The range of settings we offer to parents reflects that, because parents choose from special schools right through to regular classes, generic learning support units and autism-specific learning support units. There's a whole range of things we offer, depending on the needs of the student and on the wishes of the parents.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** What particular efforts have been made to accommodate students with autism? You could probably go for ages here.

**Ms Gallagher:** There's been a big increase over the past three years or so—from around 180 students to where we are today. We usually have an idea, from early intervention programs, where the children are coming from and what their needs might be. That assists us in some way to plan for the next school year. But it's really demand-driven. As much as we can plan, we do so. For example, another unit will be opening in Amaroo next year, based on the numbers we are seeing out there. They already have one unit, I think. We try to provide some options of geographic choice for parents within an area, looking at the cohorts, where they are going and the needs. It's a very difficult area to plan for.

The other day at community cabinet, I was talking to a parent who is interested in a high school option for his child. We talked about some of the varying factors that go into making decisions as to where units go—what type of unit it is; whether it is a learning and support or autism-specific unit; whether there is support in mainstream classes;

whether there is an SDA support; whether there is some time in a unit and some time in a mainstream class—a withdrawal and integration model—and whether there’s an increase in numbers wanting to attend a special school. It really fluctuates and is determined, as much as possible, through the year before. Fine-tuning is done in the lead-up to the academic year. It’s a very flexible process.

At the end of the day, wherever the student turns up, when their parents choose a school, the department needs to respond to that by providing support. I am not saying that parents just turn up with their child on day one and say, “Here’s my child; educate them.” There’s a long process that goes into placements and there are discussions with parents around what they want and, particularly if they are not happy with the option they are given, how we can accommodate that to the best degree possible. Many different factors go into that final decision and placement. It’s a very difficult area to plan, but I give a lot of credit to the department for the work done in meeting the needs. It is based on the student’s academic or educational needs, the parents’ needs, where we have cohorts of students, where there’s capacity within a school to open up a unit—down to whether there’s enough space in a school. It all comes into consideration.

**MS DUNNE:** This is not the place that I ask questions about the assessment process.

**Ms Gallagher:** SCAN?

**MS DUNNE:** No, not SCAN—the autism assessment process and the waiting list. Is that here or is that in Therapy ACT?

**Ms Gallagher:** You asked a question on notice around autism and I have answered it.

**MS DUNNE:** Was it me? I do not think it was me.

**Ms Gallagher:** It might not have been asked by you. We will have that discussion outside. It was about how we open up units and whether there’s a waiting list.

**MRS DUNNE:** No. It was about the waiting list for the assessment of somebody who they think may have autism. Is that Therapy ACT?

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. We just follow their assessment.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Referring to 1.5 on page 7, I am interested in the take-up of enrolments in preschools in older suburbs. Reid was my original preschool. As younger families seem to be in the newer suburbs, I am just wondering if these schools are still well used.

**Ms Gallagher:** Preschool education enrolments are fluctuating year by year, as you can imagine. Reid has gone down to a 20-place centre for next year. It was a 25-place centre but just the size of the building means that, with 25, it is pretty jammed in there. That is what I have been told.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** There were about eight in my class.

**MRS DUNNE:** Luxury!

**Ms Gallagher:** They had their 60th birthday party last weekend or the weekend before. Again, we meet the needs where the enrolments are. We are working through a number of small preschools at the moment. Some of you may have noticed that we advertise for enrolments. We have advertised again around a number of preschools which have very low enrolments. They start at one to three enrolments and head up from there, which is a challenge for us in planning.

In the inner areas of Canberra there are a lot of four-year-olds. Like other cohorts, the four-year-old population is declining but there are 4,000-odd—3,800—four-year-olds eligible to come to preschool. About 80 per cent of eligible four-year-olds engage in the preschool program. We will have the 12 hours fully operational for next year. That is currently working across 35 preschools. Part of that strategy—although we are yet to see whether it is delivered—is to see if we can increase the rate of participation. We know that kids who engage in preschool education go to school well prepared for kindy. We are trying to increase enrolments from that eligible population.

**MRS DUNNE:** With the roll out of the 12 hours, there's been a small trickle of concern raised by child care centres that do not provide preschool services, and by others. I also recall that a couple of schools expressed concern. The Montessori school had some problems because they were not getting 12 hours for the three-year-olds and there were 12 hours for the four-year-olds.

**Ms Gallagher:** That was fixed.

**MRS DUNNE:** With a program like this there are always teething problems. What were the principal teething problems? Do you think they will all be ironed out for the full roll out next year?

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes. I have met with some of the providers from the childcare sector. Essentially, their concern is that it will detract business from them. All the babies rooms are full, and toddlers are in high demand. There is the capacity within some centres to take three and four-year-olds and there is concern around losing some of that work, but I am not convinced. They had seen declines in the four-year-old area well before this initiative came in. We talked through the concerns. Essentially, there was concern from them around enrolments in their sector moving into the government preschool sector. I was not in a position to apologise for offering free preschool education to four-year-olds.

From those meetings I have asked both the Office for Children, Youth, and Family Support and the department of education to provide me with advice about how to better work with the early childhood sector in the lead-up to school and in our relationships with primary schools. Some of those were around the licensing requirements and the fact that we demand a higher standard for childcare centres than for preschools; and that the childcare centres think we should have the same standards if we are dealing with this young population. For example, for safety reasons, you'd never be able to have a cup of tea out in the playground of a childcare centre. That's a requirement of accreditation and licensing, whereas in the preschool sector it is more relaxed.

Having been involved in the preschool sector—it has been a few years now, but I will be going through it again—there is scrutiny of the signing in and signing out of children.

That sector has not necessarily had the strict regulations that the childcare sector has had. I think it's fair, where we can, to create a level playing field where there are the same expectations of our early childhood providers. We also need to look at the whole issue of educating a specific group in the early years from virtually nought to eight in a coordinated fashion. We are going to kick off all that work. That has come out of the preschool discussions, which I think is good.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We will move to output class 2, the non-government school education area.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I have a budgetary question on that. I may be a bit naive on this. On page 86 under "revenue" there is a dramatic difference between user charges for ACT government and non-ACT government provisions. Can you explain that difference?

**Mr Donelly:** Those two classifications do not actually relate to government schools and non-government schools, they relate to user charges to clients of the department for services we provide either within the ACT government or externally. The user charges for the ACT government would relate to the payroll services we provide to other ACT government agencies, for example. The non-government user charges are things like fees for international students, the fees and charges we levy to users of the Active Leisure Centre and other fees which are levied on the community as opposed to other ACT government agencies.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move on to vocational education and training.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Firstly, I want to congratulate the department and the minister on the number of apprentices and trainees, which I think is above 5,000, since March 2003. How does the department intend to maintain these results?

**Ms Gallagher:** We had a discussion earlier this year as to whether we can maintain them at this level, whether they have peaked and whether this is the level of training activity we can support. We have provided some injections in this area in order to support the number of commencements. We will keep an eye on those numbers and see how they go. It seems to be coming off that sharp peak we saw and levelling out a bit. I think we will have to look at how the training is going and where the training options are being sought. That's part of the flexibility required in the training sector in order to pay for the training taking place.

Again, training is demand-driven and is a little out of our control. We like to see these sorts of commencements and we would like to see completions of this order. That's some of the work that needs to be done. I think it's a matter of constant monitoring, being flexible and making decisions around how we provide those courses when there's a lot of demand versus a weakening in demand. Importantly, we also need to meet the needs that industries in the ACT are saying they need.

**THE CHAIR:** We know we have skills shortages in certain areas. Are we now



responding to that? Are we picking up students in those particular areas?

**Ms Gallagher:** We know the areas where there are shortages. We can target as best we can, but at the end of the day it's around student choice. The building and construction industry offers some incentives, through the building and construction industry training fund, around particular areas of skills shortages to see if they can entice young people in. There's some work being done nationally by COAG around the requirements to get an apprenticeship in certain areas. They are looking at ways to entice particularly young people, and others to retrain, into certain areas where there is demand for skills.

**Ms McKinnon:** The commencement of apprentices is a very important part of addressing skills shortages but it's by no means the only one. The department has been working very closely with the chamber of commerce and the tourism areas of government to ensure that we are not only looking at apprentices but also attracting new workers to Canberra. We are looking at how we can up-skill the ageing work force. There's a whole raft of measures by which we are trying to increase the numbers available to fill the skills shortages or gaps, as well as maintaining an emphasis on traineeships and apprenticeships.

**THE CHAIR:** Which of those strategies has been most successful? Is there any clear indication of that?

**Ms McKinnon:** The recent half-yearly report put out by technical and adult education emphasised a number of different priority areas in the ACT. We have increased the payments to those in the higher priority skills shortages areas, over and above some of the less high priority ones. We have also worked very closely with particular industry groups, to encourage them to take on apprentices. The minister mentioned the building and construction industry, which has done a lot of work in this area. We have done a series of partnerships with particular industries. We have regular discussions across the whole sector to encourage people to take on apprentices and trainees. The work that's been done over the last few years in the school area is also focusing the attention of young people on a career in this area. So SNAPS and vocational education and training in the school sector have been fairly important in keeping our numbers up.

**MRS DUNNE:** The figures on people in apprenticeships and training on page 220 are interesting. I do not know whether these figures are statistically significant, but there are a couple of areas where the ACT seems to lag behind the national average in relation to traditional apprenticeships and also in trades and related works in the ASCO classifications. It's a very difficult area. We have seen a lot more people going into retail traineeships and things like that, where they get certificates I and II. We see that that boosts our training figures, but we may not be boosting them in the areas where we need them. There still seems to be a lag behind the national averages in traditional trades at a time when, nationally, we are not performing well in the traditional trades. Does that mean we are performing even less well than the nation as a whole?

**Ms Gallagher:** I think it's largely a reflection of our demographics and our industry base. We do not have the large employers and big industry such as BHP, mining and manufacturing that other jurisdictions have and it is a reflection of that. It comes down to choice at the end of the day as to whether you want to be a scaffolder, a plasterer or a tiler. Those are all areas where there are big shortages.

**MRS DUNNE:** There have been changes in the commonwealth, with extra sign-on bonuses. The building and construction industry is looking at incentives there. Are there incentives generally in the ACT, such as sign-on bonuses and continuing bonuses, or are there only those which are funded by the commonwealth?

**Ms Gallagher:** The commonwealth provides the employer incentives; it is the ACT government's responsibility to pay for the training. The building and construction training industry fund has provided additional employer incentives for commencements in certain areas of skills shortage in the construction industry but, to my knowledge, we do not pay incentives on top of that.

**MRS DUNNE:** That may be the case in the construction industry and those may come in here. But there are some incentives for young people who sign on and keep going—at the end of year two, at year three, or something like that.

**Ms McKinnon:** They are not paid by the government.

**MRS DUNNE:** Maybe it's commonwealth money. On the subject of commonwealth money, minister, have we signed up to the training agreement?

**Ms Gallagher:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** When?

**Ms Gallagher:** I think the Chief Minister signed on my behalf at the end of September, when I was on leave, once we had confirmation from the commonwealth on the finances around that. They set a deadline but we did not have all the information from their financial people to sign by that deadline. We managed to get that information and sign up. I am not so happy about it but, with the practicalities of working day by day in the training sector and the money provided, we needed to sign.

**MRS DUNNE:** Were there financial incentives to sign up by a deadline?

**Ms Gallagher:** No. The legislation that passed said that the payments under the agreement could be made within this calendar year. So whilst there were certainly threats around withholding money, the legislation provided the commonwealth with the ability to pay that money, should we sign. We have argued for about two years over this agreement. There was an acceptance that we were not going to reach agreement on certain areas. Through that process, though, in the last ministerial council meeting we got some concessions from the commonwealth, particularly around the structure and operation of the new training framework that's in operation because of the old ANTA collapse. So some sort of common ground was found. We continue to disagree over the money being provided but, at the end of the day, once the information came from their finance people clearly explaining what the offer meant to the ACT, we were able to sign and we did so.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, page 63 of the report mentions lower than anticipated levels of commonwealth grants. Does that have anything to do with what you have been talking about or is that a different amount of money that you have not been able to get from the

commonwealth?

**Mr Donnelly:** No, that is government schools revenue there.

**THE CHAIR:** Are we ready to go onto the CIT now?

**MRS DUNNE:** I think so, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome the CIT officers. I remind you of the rules about parliamentary privilege, et cetera. We will move straight into questions.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** On page 9 of the report there is some discussion on strategic and operational planning. It mentions that a major component of the institute is a business plan that identifies key projects and educational outcomes for the year. Could you let me know some of the key projects that you were working on in 2004-05.

**Dr Veenker:** We work to a strategic plan that has key areas that we ask our business plan to respond to. That also takes into account the statement of intent and the partnership, which is really the funding agreement. Throughout the year on which we are reporting, I was quite happy with CIT's performance against the business plan as well as the overall strategic direction. In more detail, of course, in the annual report are our achievements against particular targets from the statement of intent. Overall, I think that we have probably set the right direction for the institute. Our measures are showing that we are achieving what we set out to do, but there are still lots of challenges before us in this sector of education, as you would appreciate.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I have an easier question now. I am happy to advise that my son Logan is just finishing his apprenticeship at CIT. Today, he is the head chef at the campus restaurant at Reid. I tried to get a booking at lunchtime and it is booked out until Christmas. Will you be increasing the seating arrangements there in the near future?

**Dr Veenker:** There are two parts to that. There is the cafe downstairs and there are the restaurants upstairs. We work the calendar pretty much in consultation with employers when apprentices and trainees are available. There is a lot of pressure on at the moment because we do take on a number of Christmas functions, so there has been a reasonably heavy booking load. If I could just boast for a moment: last week that faculty won an award for being the number one culinary institute in Australia; so the cooking is good.

**MRS DUNNE:** Congratulations. I did not see you boasting anywhere publicly, or have I missed it?

**Dr Veenker:** It is in the food guide today. That is probably where people need to read it.

**THE CHAIR:** Page 60 of the report mentions ongoing equity and diversity initiatives around indigenous students. Could you give us some more information about various equity and diversity initiatives within the CIT with regard to both students and staff? There is a brief reference to that on page 60 under "Workplace diversity".

**Dr Veenker:** We are referring to, in particular, good work that is occurring in the Orana centre. If you look at the indigenous enrolments, you will notice they are very healthy.

We have had an increase in enrolments of people with a disability and we have been able to cater for those. Overall, we have also been able to help people where English is a second language. In particular, with our programs at Reid, there are a number of people who have been displaced in the world and who are coming to us for English language support. On many occasions, they then go on and do further work with us. Overall, in that equity and diversity area, we are reasonably happy. We would like to see more young apprentices employed at CIT. I have asked the senior managers to pursue that further. We would like to see even further participation in our programs of some of the disadvantaged groups. But I think overall we have been reasonably happy with how things are going. The options program for women returning to work has been a very good one, too, and that has been largely at the southside campus.

**THE CHAIR:** Are the online studies providing better access? Are you going into that area very much?

**Dr Veenker:** Twenty-five per cent of our programs now have significant online components in them. The client groups that you refer to here are not always in a position to access those. However, I think that the flexible learning centre in Tuggeranong has been a very good initiative in terms of, in particular, picking up people who want to return to the work force after home duties. They have been able to access the online capacity that is there. So, overall, I think the support has been good, recognising that some of our people, especially displaced people who are settling in the ACT, are not all that literate in their basic language and then we have to help them with English. So computers are still a long way away from what they can access. But overall there is considerable diversity in terms of the groups that we satisfy. I am happy with what is being reported by the various faculties on progress there, and certainly the stats back that up.

**THE CHAIR:** I want to ask about the partnerships with business you have in the various campuses. You are able to offer certain experiences because you have partnerships with business with regard to equipment and things like that, I have observed.

**Dr Veenker:** That is correct, yes. The faculties are required to have either a faculty advisory board or a very active network of industry people that they work to, and that is in addition to the other government structure that operates within CIT through its advisory council. We deal very actively with employers in particular. That often revolves around joint training of the persons, if they are apprentices or trainees, but also employers advise us on course development and curriculum and, from time to time, they are keen to donate equipment so that our students can experience some of the latest equipment available.

That has been fairly traditional in the automotive trade and we frequently receive cars for students to work on as well as the cars that we rescue from the wreckers for reconstruction. But now also in the building and construction area, in particular plumbing, you will find that the large pieces of equipment, such as heating systems and airconditioning systems, are given to CIT for training purposes. I think that the industry interest in what we are doing is good. However, when I do talk to industry, they do say to me, "Peter, we are pleased to help you but we don't want to sit on committees." In terms of actually working with us, we are pretty pleased with what they are doing.

**MRS DUNNE:** Isn't it the case, Dr Veenker, that it is in the interests of industry to ensure that the people you are training are as up to date as possible because they are going to employ them somewhere along the line?

**Dr Veenker:** That is correct. It is in their interests to make sure that they really are job ready and that, when there is workplace assessment, that assessment is of a high standard, as well as the assessments at CIT. So the partnership is much more than just advisory. It is growing in terms of a relationship with employers. There are different groups—for example, the chamber of commerce is a group that we deal with—but we are finding in terms of our students that the main interaction tends to be with employers.

**MRS DUNNE:** I go to pages 58 to 60 in relation to workplace health and safety. Do the targets and the figures there relate to your employees or do they relate to the whole body? Do they relate to the people in training as well?

**Dr Veenker:** They relate to the employees.

**MRS DUNNE:** What sorts of targets are set and where would I find the targets set for minimising injuries? Often, there are lots of young people learning to use difficult and dangerous machinery. Where are the targets for minimising those sorts of injuries? Are they set out anywhere or do you have them?

**Dr Veenker:** We do not actually set targets but we report every incident and we monitor that. There is a detailed process within the institute whereby that is reported and investigated, if necessary. The numbers are very low.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could you provide the committee with the numbers for, say, the calendar year that currently corresponds with this report?

**Dr Veenker:** Yes, we could that. We have a record of it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Good. I understand that there are lots of financial imperatives here in relation to Comcare and workers compensation, but are there not the same sorts of imperatives for the student body as well? They are insured, presumably, if they are injured in a workshop or something like that.

**Dr Veenker:** That is correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** The insurer does not seem to require you to set targets or to reduce the claims.

**Dr Veenker:** They have not asked us to set targets. Nevertheless, we do report to them. Peter Kowald might like to add to that.

**Mr Kowald:** I can add to that. They would be insured under public liability arrangements, unless they are employees who are doing sanctioned training at CIT, and then the call would be on their employers, as are apprentices, and the insurance coverage would be from their employer's workers compensation coverage. So it is not a clean arrangement where there are targets which apply to the whole lot. We have a natural wish to minimise accidents as much as we can, of course, but there are no formal

targeted arrangements as there are with the workers compensation that applies to our own employees.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I imagine that, as well as a moral incentive to keep injuries down, there would be a financial incentive with the cost of insurance.

**Mr Kowald:** Yes, that is correct, because public liability claims move through to your premiums.

**MRS DUNNE:** It would be good to see what those figures are. The pie graph on page 60 has nine different colours and the legend has 11 different colours, so something has not been reported on. Also, the colours do not seem to match; I just don't get it. Could I have that graph described in some other way, please?

**Mr Kowald:** Yes. Obviously, there has been some sort of oversight, so we will do that. Perhaps some of the categories are not there because they are so small, there were no incidents.

**MRS DUNNE:** If we could have those categories broken down by the number of incidents or things it would be handy.

**THE CHAIR:** Page 62 mentions learning and development and talks about the professional development of the staff. Could you fill us in on any new initiatives there or how that is going? Is there anything you would like to tell us about the professional development of the staff?

**Dr Veenker:** We run a number of in-house activities within CIT which staff are encouraged to attend as part of their professional development. We also encourage industrial release and, as part of our performance management arrangements within the institute, there is often discussion and dialogue about how you maintain your currency and how you can become a better teacher. So we very actively pursue a policy of wanting staff to continue their professional development. The staff can bank some hours and contribute to some of their professional development out of a guaranteed fund. They can also access funds that are within their department or within their faculty to make sure that is done. We have a number of, I suppose, arrangements that we can put in place to suit the individual needs of some of our staff.

Often staff are very interested in further professional qualifications and we have our share doing higher qualifications in places like the University of Canberra and Charles Sturt University. We are also keen for people to continue their e-learning and we manage a number of national projects. One of those is flexible leaders, which is about encouraging our staff to acquire the skills that are necessary to develop programs using modern technology. It is multifaceted. It is very actively managed and reported on. This year we have included another initiative, that is, we have created a centre for leadership, but leadership in its broadest terms, whether that be leadership in the classroom or leadership as a head of department, faculty head or working in the directorate. We are tapping into the latest developments around Australia and the person in that particular new area reports directly to me and taps in what we have already been doing in human resources as well as education development to make sure that we are providing genuine career options for teachers. It is also linked to succession planning because, if you look at

our profile, we need to be very active in succession planning.

**THE CHAIR:** It sounds like these initiatives are very popular.

**Dr Veenker:** Yes and no. Sometimes going to industry is a bit of a threat. We try to encourage it.

**THE CHAIR:** Does it mean that there is less turnover of staff and that you are maintaining your staff over a greater number of years? Is that your experience?

**Dr Veenker:** Yes. Our turnover in the teaching ranks is very low. Our turnover in the non-teaching area is low overall but in the younger cohort the turnover is higher. I think that is partly to do with our employment arrangements. Often we recruit to CIT younger people who have finished qualifications at CIT and we usually lose them either to a university or to the federal public service, where sometimes they think they have a better career option; not always but sometimes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do they come back?

**Dr Veenker:** Yes, some do.

**MRS DUNNE:** I cannot remember exactly when it was, Dr Veenker, but at either an annual reports hearing last year or in estimates there was a discussion about some equipment in the trades area which had been, essentially, mothballed because it did not meet occupational health and safety issues. Is that still a problem? Is there equipment that is not being used because it does not meet the recruitments?

**Dr Veenker:** I think you are referring to some equipment at Fyshwick campus. We have had extensive audits about our equipment and all of it passes occupational health and safety requirements. I am very confident that the standard of our equipment is as good as, and in some instances better than, that of some of the small employers. For example, for spray painting it is very good. Certainly, the larger operators in the panel beating and spray painting area would have that equipment; some of the smaller ones might. Overall, I think that student experience in terms of the equipment that they access at CIT is good. Anything that did require modification or upgrading has been done and we continue to monitor it.

**MRS DUNNE:** I had a report—it was only an isolated report, and it was probably a Fyshwick-based course as well—that there were some plant operating courses where some of the modules were not available because the cherry picker, the mobile platform or something else was out of service.

**Dr Veenker:** That is right.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is that being rectified?

**Dr Veenker:** Yes. As a matter of fact, I think that came through as a letter of concern to me. We investigated that and there was a scheduled delay in the implementation of that particular module so that we could get the right equipment together to make sure that it was appropriate. That has all been done; that is going, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** I want to go back to the discussion that we had a little while ago about upgrading people's qualifications, people going to university and whatnot. I gathered that that was essentially to improve their skills as teachers. What has been done to ensure that people who are training people for industry are up to date with what is happening in the industry? For instance, something I am more tuned into, you are going off and doing a carpentry apprenticeship and being taught by people who used to be carpenters and who are now teaching people to be carpenters. Are those people, and this is not to pick on carpenters, up to date with the latest building technologies and how do you keep those skills refreshed?

**Dr Veenker:** There is a mixed strategy on that in that our longest serving staff members, who perhaps really refine their teaching to a high order and can manage younger people very well in the initial years of their apprenticeship and who may have had some industry return but not for a long time, are blended with staff that we recruit from industry, often on a casual basis. The latest group of, in particular, trade teachers in their thirties do have the latest skills. So, working with industry, I think the mix of the staff is okay in terms of making sure that both the nurturing and the looking after of the students is there, as well as the latest industry inputs. But we do have to work on that constantly, and we do welcome it when staff volunteer or suggest that they might do an industry placement as part of their ongoing professional development. We bend over backwards to try to make that happen. It does not always happen, but we certainly encourage it. Of course, to teach you also need a certificate IV and there's a new certificate IV coming out in training and assessment. Again, that is another opportunity to make sure that they are up to speed on the competencies they teach.

**MRS DUNNE:** What you are saying—correct me if I am wrong—is that you are also testing the teachers, through the new certificate process, to ensure, if it is in the building trades, that they are up with the latest building technologies, et cetera.

**Dr Veenker:** Up to speed on that.

**THE CHAIR:** We have used up the time available to us. Thank you very much for attending today, minister and officers.

**The committee adjourned at 3.06 pm.**