



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2006-2007)

Members:

**MS M PORTER (The Chair)
MR M GENTLEMAN (The Deputy Chair)
MR S PRATT**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2008

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr S Lilburn (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 that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the committee office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

APPEARANCES

Canberra Institute of Technology	1
Department of Education and Training	1

The committee met at 9.04 am.

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Planning,
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Minister for Industrial Relations

Department of Education and Training
Bruniges, Dr Michele, Chief Executive
Davy, Ms Janet, Deputy Chief Executive
Curry, Mr Craig, Executive Director
Donelly, Mr Rob, Director, Finance and Facilities

Canberra Institute of Technology
Adrian, Dr Colin, Chief Executive
Kowald, Mr Peter, Deputy Chief Executive, Operations
Cover, Ms Leanne, Executive Director, Corporate Governance, Organisational
Capability

THE CHAIR: Good morning. I move:

That the privilege statement be incorporated in *Hansard*.

That is accepted.

The statement read as follows—

Privilege statement

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the Resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it.

Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

I also have a few housekeeping matters which I need everyone in the room to observe:

All mobile phones are to be switched off or put in silent mode;
Witnesses need to speak directly into the microphones for Hansard to be able to hear and transcribe them accurately
Only one person is to speak at a time
When witnesses come to the table they each need to state their name and the capacity in which they appear.

I understand that everyone has read the privilege statement and understands the implications of the statement. Minister, do you have an opening statement?

Mr Barr: I have a very brief opening statement. I just want to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear. I understand that these hearings were originally scheduled for the second half of last year.

THE CHAIR: I do apologise.

Mr Barr: Unavoidably, they have made their way into 2008. We are talking about a very significant year for education in the ACT—a period of considerable renewal within our public education system, with what was the single largest investment in public education and a real emphasis on quality in our schools. Also, I particularly draw to the committee's attention the investment in information and communication technology in our schools, which commenced in this financial year. It is the first year of a four-year program to ensure that ACT public schools continue to lead the nation and the world in the provision of information and communication technology. It has worked out very nicely, given the election of the new federal government and having regard to their particular emphasis on information and communication technology in schools.

The ACT is very well placed to take advantage of the new commonwealth interest and investment in the public education system, and most particularly in information and communication technology, as outlined in the various policies that formed part of the 2007 federal election campaign. We are beginning to see the implementation of those within schools across Australia. The ACT is very well placed to work collaboratively with the commonwealth on the roll-out of those particular initiatives.

Of course, the major and largest feature of the 2006-07 year was the rationalisation of the number of schools in the ACT. It was a difficult process, and one that was 17 years overdue. If previous Assemblies and previous governments had undertaken such a difficult reform process on a more gradual basis, perhaps it would have been possible to undertake it over an extended period. Nevertheless, I think the policy rationale behind those changes has stood the test of time and will continue to do so. It shows that, in the face of the range of factors that the education system is needing to respond to—changing demographics in our city, declining enrolments in the public system, and a need to concentrate resources on improving quality in our education system—whilst it was a very difficult process, it was important for the renewal of our public education system. Backed by \$350 million worth of additional investment in our public schools, we are seeing across our system an improvement in not only the quality of teaching, learning and school facilities but also a renewal of interest in public education in the ACT.

The other data that has come forward around school results, not just from the annual

report but from subsequent information from various other sources, shows again that the ACT education system continues to lead the nation and, in many instances, the world. There are areas in which we need to improve, and the government has sought, through last year's budget and the second appropriation bill in the second half of last year, to target additional programs in areas where we need to improve our outcomes.

Overall, I believe the ACT education system is in very good health. It has emerged from what was a difficult year in 2006-07 and is going from strength to strength. We have new facilities opening in areas where there is clear demand for additional schools, and we have sought to consolidate and provide additional resources to all other schools in the territory.

In the non-government school sector, we undertook a range of reforms in conjunction with Catholic systemic and independent schools. We have provided additional resources and have sought to work with those systems as part of the introduction of national testing, which will take place for the first time this year. A lot of the work to achieve such an outcome occurred during the annual reporting period. We continue to have a strong collaborative relationship with the non-government school sector. I think that is best illustrated by the work that was undertaken on the new curriculum framework that will be in place in this school year for all schools, public and private, in the ACT. The strong collaboration that occurred across all sectors through the annual reporting period is a very welcome sign of the level of collaboration that there is within the ACT education system. I will wrap up, Madam Chair, and I am happy to take questions from the committee.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned the pleasing results. I notice that page 4 of the report talks about school excellence. It says that, for the first time, external validation was undertaken for those schools in the third year of their review cycle. Could you expand on the findings of that external review.

Mr Barr: Certainly. Schools periodically undertake this process, and it is an important aspect of being able to assure the community, particularly individual school communities, that schools are continually striving for excellence. The fact that it is an external process adds weight to the outcomes that are achieved. It provides a work plan for schools so that areas in which they can improve are identified and they can then move through, as a result of the work that is identified, into the next performance cycle. I will ask Dr Bruniges to outline the results for schools during the reporting period. It would be fair to say that schools are embracing this as a very productive way for them to achieve their overall goals of improving the quality of education and the quality of teaching and learning across the entire education system.

Dr Bruniges: Each year we have an external validation process which continues to happen with a particular group of schools. We always make available a public report on the external validation findings, and for last year there are a series of recommendations for those schools that were engaged in the process. One of them was to have a stronger focus on the use of data to inform teaching and learning—an incredibly important thing that we are finding as we are working with a number of schools, to ensure that they understand the nature of the teaching and learning material that they have, that they are able to understand the data coming from a number of sources, such as parent satisfaction, student performance, student

participation data, and so that they are able to use an evidence-based approach to future planning. That was a very important finding. In fact, we have already moved on that to ensure that we have professional learning programs for teachers and school leaders around the use of evidence-based practice.

Other findings related to the responsibilities of school boards. The ACT has a very fine system of school boards, having regard to their responsibilities and interaction with school communities in each school. We look at the responsibilities of those in setting the strategic direction for each school. I am happy to make that report available to you, Ms Porter. It outlines the set of schools that were involved in that external validation process and what the findings were.

MR GENTLEMAN: Good morning, minister and officials. I draw your attention to page 16 of the report, which talks about some of the operational requirements of schools. On page 16, under “challenges”, it refers to the strategic challenges. On page 17, under “operational challenges”, the report identified the preschool amalgamation as one of those challenges. It mentions the plans for the new P-2 early childhood schools. How are the plans going in both of those areas?

Mr Barr: This has been an important and significant reform in the primary sector. A series of working groups have been established. There is one on the preschool and primary school amalgamation. That is one separate process. There is another separate working group on the establishment of the early childhood schools. I believe that, historically, these reforms will be seen as being as significant for the ACT education system as the establishment of the college system. These early childhood schools will be not only leading Australia but leading the world in their practice. Again, the ACT is taking a lead here and other jurisdictions will follow. Clearly, there is now a national agenda for early childhood education.

I will ask Dr Bruniges to run through the processes, most particularly for the early childhood schools, because the amalgamation of preschools and primary schools has occurred, and they are now all in operation in the 2008 year. That has brought a range of benefits, most particularly for preschool teachers, who now have access to a much greater level of peer support and educational continuity, in being able to work with kindergarten, year 1 and year 2 teachers in those early childhood years, and in being able to be much more involved in professional development and in team teaching, in a way that they were not able to be previously, due to what was an effective isolation of preschools from those early years.

The early childhood schools are the next key feature of the development of the ACT’s public education system, and will offer for the first time a one-stop shop of services, effectively from birth to eight-year-olds, incorporating a range of community services, childcare—a range of things that parents say they need in those early years. The working group that has been established includes representatives of the department of education, the Department of Health and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, as well as a range of parents, teachers and other stakeholders. I will ask Dr Bruniges to outline the process. They have been meeting regularly and have already produced a body of work.

Dr Bruniges: I am fortunate enough to chair the interagency group on the early

childhood schools, and I would have to say from the outset that, as we have moved through that process in terms of working around each of the sites having their own plan, there has been a great deal of collaboration on the nature of services that might come from each of those agencies.

Just going back a little bit, we have worked together in reference groups to look at an early childhood framework which really sets the basis where we have involved academics, both renowned here in Australia and internationally, in helping us develop that framework that gives us an overarching statement about early childhood provision. The next step is really us looking at each of those individual sites and determining the major services that we need to provide and, indeed, what modifications may need to be done to each of those sites to achieve what we need to achieve. That has been very positive. Principals from our four schools will move through a process this year.

One of the other big issues for us is to ensure that at those sites we have specialist early childhood training in terms of the teachers that are there and the correct mix of paraprofessionals to be able to deliver those support services. We will continue to do that throughout this year, working with the community at each one of those sites to ensure that that service provision is provided in each of those settings.

It is an exciting initiative. It is wonderful to work through and see the response. It is not about one size fits all in each of those four locations. We need to look carefully at the needs of those communities and make sure that we put in place the best possible service provision to meet the community's needs.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you. One of the concerns that has been raised with me, most recently as last Saturday, was some of the funding arrangements for the new P-10 school, and where previously funding was available for preschools it is now going, of course, to the new schools, and they operate under school-based management. So there are concerns raised that perhaps that funding may be directed away from the early part of the school, the preschool area. Can you comment on that?

Dr Bruniges: In terms of the integration of preschools into our P-6 settings, I too had a meeting with the principals association last week. They are carefully monitoring what expenditure is going in what direction to ensure that we make sure that the dollars that were there for the early years remain there.

The other thing that I would like to draw the committee's attention to is that I have a very close working relationship with the Canberra Preschool Society and, indeed, will meet with them again this week. Associated with that is an enormous amount of goodwill in terms of parent associations that have traditionally volunteered a lot of support in the preschool areas and how we actually bring that in. We will continue to monitor that over this year so, if there are areas of concern, I have a way of monitoring and taking action accordingly.

MR GENTLEMAN: I guess off the back of that, too, one of the concerns from those preschool groups towards amalgamations earlier on was that some of their assets might be caught up in the government system. What has happened now with those assets that were originally with the preschools that were provided by the preschools

association or the parents?

Dr Bruniges: Some of those assets have indeed gone where the preschool has been linked into the primary school. We have worked very closely with those parent associations to ensure that we follow their wishes. Others of them assigned them to different schools, and we ensured that those assets were appropriately transferred in accordance with the parent associations, who were constituted in their own right as a body. In each of those instances, I am not aware of any issues crossing their schools where there has been an issue that has not been resolved in relation to that.

MR GENTLEMAN: Good.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pratt, do you have a question?

MR PRATT: Yes. Good morning, minister and officials. It is good to see you back here again on the old education circuit again after many years.

Mr Barr: Welcome back.

MR PRATT: Thank you very much. It is good to be back, actually. Page 12, if I could just go to the question of safe school environments, please, could I ask you to expand, minister, on the comment halfway down through that paragraph:

The Suspension, Exclusion or Transfer of Students in ACT Public Schools policy was also revised.

Can you tell us a little bit more about what that revision has meant and what you are currently doing about children at risk who clearly present a risk to themselves and, in turn, to their classrooms?

Mr Barr: Thank you, Mr Pratt. You would be aware, I am sure, that throughout last year we undertook an extensive review of policies in relation to bullying and to providing safe schools. We established a safe schools task force last year that had representatives from the Australian Education Union, the Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, the ACT principals association and senior officers from the Department of Education and Training. This group met throughout 2007 with ACT Policing, with Therapy ACT and with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. They provided a range of recommendations to government, including strengthening links with ACT Policing, school safety audits, reviewing policies and providing guidance and direction to schools and the promotion of safe school environments.

Members may or may not be aware—I have provided additional copies so that committee members can have a copy of each of these—that we released a range of new policies, most particularly, I will circulate two: *Providing safe schools P-12* and *Countering bullying, harassment and violence in ACT public schools*. They are referred to in the annual report, but the detail of the policies is there.

As part of this process, Mr Pratt, we are also going to be launching, and I will be launching, a code of conduct early this term, so in the next week or so. That will be a

code of conduct for persons on ACT Department of Education and Training premises. This code of conduct will apply to all people who are on our school grounds and will be an important step in following the collaborative work that was undertaken last year with all of the key stakeholders, but particularly looking at the advice of parents, teachers and the police and also, as I say, the work that we have done with Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Therapy ACT around innovative solutions to the problems that we do face from time to time.

Overall, Mr Pratt, it would be fair to say that any incident that occurs at a school is a bad thing. But we have responded and particularly sought to ensure that there is better data and better reporting. There is now a mandatory reporting regime in place when incidents occur at school. I am pleased to say that since the establishment of the safe schools task force and the new guidelines the number of incidents at schools has been reducing and that schools are responding to the protocols that are in place. Where it is appropriate and necessary to call police, such as in an incident that has occurred in your electorate in recent times, that has occurred.

The negotiations that individual schools have had, particularly in Tuggeranong, with police have been around some of these incidents that clearly occur where people from outside the school community are coming on to school grounds to seek retribution. I refer particularly to an incident around a relationship breakdown. I think you could characterise an overall lack of emotional maturity around dealing with relationship breakdowns as being an issue that students of that age experience.

So what we need to ensure is that we have the correct policies and protocols in place at a school level, that the government has a role to play in providing additional resources to schools. I would highlight the funding of a dedicated pastoral care and student welfare coordinator in each of our public schools this year. That is a promotional position, a senior position within a school. That is backed by a team of professionals, non-teaching professionals, specialising in a range of disciplines, a multidisciplinary team to work with schools. I think these are important initiatives.

I would love to see the day when we could eliminate any violence and bullying within our schools. I think we will achieve that the day we eliminate that within our society, but, nonetheless, schools can take a leadership role here, and they are. I am very pleased with the level of engagement through the safe schools task force of all of the key stakeholders, and I particularly want to pay tribute to ACT Policing for their engagement on these issues. They have worked very collaboratively with the task force over the last year.

I might get Dr Bruniges, who chairs this task force, to give a little bit more detail around the work that we are doing.

Dr Bruniges: Mr Pratt, in response to your question about suspension and how that has changed, the Education Act 2004 required us to outline procedural fairness issues around suspensions of five and 20 days, and the policy now reflects the changes in the act. It also picks up the notion of exclusion, and it also puts a capacity vested in myself as chief executive on the issue of transfer of students. So the changes to that particular policy are threefold.

In terms of the safe schools task force, the set of five policies that the minister has referred to have complete endorsement of that safe schools task force. The members of that task force include the parents and citizens association, the principals association, the Australian Education Union and me. It has been operable now for just under 12 months. In that time we have had a look at a number of issues that are confronting schools and have had input from the AFP and input from ACT Health in terms of mental health issues that we thought were important for us to have a look at as to both support for students and parents in dealing with some of those issues. The minister has referred to the code of conduct that we work through as a safe schools task force. The other one we looked at was ICT safety, internet safety for students.

There has been a series or a rolling program that the safe schools task force has been engaged in. We meet on a monthly basis to ensure that we are having input from outside services to ensure that we are making adjustment to policies, that we are capturing the information coming from interagencies, and we are putting in appropriate approaches and resource material for schools on those very important issues.

MR PRATT: While it is true that the problem and responsibility initially lay with families and parents to discipline kids and to sort out their own children who have problems, schools clearly have to do whatever they can. Are you satisfied that, given the changing dynamics we are seeing with behaviour, particularly around, the 15, 16, 17 year age group—I think reports indicate that the dynamics are changing a lot—are you keeping pace with meeting those types of challenges, particularly when you talk about the external threats that come from outside the school ground? Are you pleased that you have got enough resources?

Dr Bruniges: I think schools do play an incredibly important leadership role in communities. Students come together in a school setting every day, five days a week, so many weeks a year. In terms of teachers in classrooms and principals in schools, I think they do an extraordinary job each and every day with the issues both in terms of teaching and learning and in terms of their support for students who present with challenging behaviours.

In terms of the department's response, we ensure that our teachers have professional learning on issues of managing students with challenging behaviour and that our staff are well equipped with the latest methods and research. I think that we do do a good job at doing that. As you say, Mr Pratt, we are in a changing environment. Every term brings something new, and we need to be vigilant to ensure that we are monitoring those changes and making sure that we have got appropriate policies in place. That means that we have to have a very good working relationship with other sectors in the community sector. We have to ensure that our workforce is appropriately equipped, and that things like the restorative justice programs and initiatives that we put in place to ensure that those relationships between students are dealt with and how to resolve conflict are part and parcel of our teaching profession.

MR PRATT: There have been a number of claims in relation to a couple of schools in the Tuggeranong Valley, a number of bullying incidents have occurred, and there are a couple of cases involving female students which come to mind where parents alleged that perhaps those matters had not been reported to the police. What have you

done now in terms of the mandatory requirements that you are now talking about? What is the way of reporting in terms of either a student or a teacher reacting quickly when a violent incident has occurred which does require a police investigation?

Dr Bruniges: That is outlined in our policy and procedures, Mr Pratt. I think we have circulated a copy of that. Just to run through very briefly on that, when a school or student feels as though an incident of that type has happened, there needs to be an immediate response of teachers to principals and, indeed, a judgement call by the principal to notify the police if they think that it is of a serious enough nature. Following that, there is an immediate report to our directors of schools. That must occur within a 24-hour period. I am unaware of anything that has not happened on the day. It is reported to our directors of schools, who then work with the principal to make sure that things are put in place. There might be a need for counselling services for students. There may be a need for the directors of schools to actually make a visit to the school. Indeed, once police are stepped in, then police carry out their normal protocols and procedures, and we work closely with them once they have got some advice for us.

One of the issues for us is to make sure the students do come forward if indeed they are bullied. Parents should make contact with the principal of the school immediately if they feel as though something has been overlooked. That is an important step in our process.

The other one that we are learning from research regarding bullying is about bystanders and students engaging to make sure they come forward and not just remain silent if they actually see behaviour of students that is inappropriate. One of the programs we are very interested in pursuing is to look at bystander behaviour to ensure that students are not accepting when they see, hear or observe students who are bullied and that they, too, report that incident and it is not just left up to an individual student to come forward, that the whole school community works together and will focus on bystander behaviour.

MR PRATT: In relation to the Calwell high school matter of last week, minister, you say that the threat in this particular incident came from an external source. Are you saying that that violence was only perpetrated by a group from outside the school or were there links inside the school. Can you categorically state that there are no gang activities within that high school?

Mr Barr: My understanding of Friday's incident was that it stemmed from a relationship breakdown—if, you like, an old boyfriend and a new boyfriend—and what you would have to say and could only surmise was a distinct lack of emotional maturity in being able to deal with the ending of the relationship. I understand that the jilted party, if you like, also sought to bring in others—friends, possibly, who did not attend the school—in order to seek some sort of retribution.

That is why I made the comment that I did yesterday—and I repeat it again today—that the school just happens to be the location for the particular incident. It stems, though, from a relationship breakdown and a very poor emotional response to that from the student and from some other people who do not attend the school. The point of the comments I made yesterday was simply to reinforce the fact that this is not

something that the school is breeding, if you like; that the school just happens to be the venue where that incident occurred; that it is not as a result of a school culture.

In fact, Calwell has a very, very strong pastoral care and student welfare program. Members would be aware that it was only a matter of months ago that we were all lauding the school's outstanding achievement in winning the Rock Eisteddfod. This school has an outstanding reputation, like the community.

There are from time to time, and there will always be, unfortunately, students who have some difficulty and whose response to that is not appropriate. I think the question for the education department and for the government is: do we have in place the correct protocols and procedures in individual schools and across our education system to ensure that we are able to respond adequately when these sorts of issues arise?

I cannot comment because I am not in a position to—I do not have the information; you would have to raise it with police—on the issue you have raised about gangs operating in that area. That may or may not be the case—I am not in a position to comment on that—but it is certainly not something that Calwell high school has a role in. It may well be that there are some individuals who operate within the suburb of Calwell, but that really is a matter you would have to pursue with the police.

The point I want to make and stress again is that the school is not encouraging this sort of behaviour; that the school has in place the right responses to assist the victims of this particular incident and has provided additional counselling support; and that we have in place the right protocols and a very strong relationship with ACT Policing. We undertook throughout last year a series of consultations and individual meetings with schools in the Tuggeranong area and the local police in order to have a whole-of-government response to these sorts of incidents. I think the important thing is that we have the framework in place to respond effectively if and when an incident arises.

MR PRATT: It is disappointing that, as you say, we have to talk to the police to get more information. Surely you should have by now gone and had a good look at the environment around this particular incident.

Mr Barr: I have not had time to do the police's investigative work, nor do I expect them to be sharing their investigative work with me. That is not appropriate either.

MR PRATT: I disagree. Surely, when we have had baseball bats involved, the invasion of a classroom in this particular case and a couple of teachers threatened, you would have thought you would have taken more detailed action. Surely you can get some in-depth advice from police as they investigate?

Mr Barr: Yes, absolutely. That is occurring but, again, I make this point: it is not appropriate for the minister for education to be intervening or interfering in a police investigation, and I do not intend to.

MR PRATT: That was not the question. The question was not: have you interfered in the police investigation? The question was: have you been able to carry out your own

parallel investigation?

Mr Barr: I am not carrying out a parallel investigation.

MR PRATT: Have you sought ongoing advice from the police? If not, why not?

THE CHAIR: Mr Pratt, if you want the minister to answer your question, you need to let him answer.

MR PRATT: I am directing the question to him.

Mr Barr: In simple terms for Mr Pratt, the police have the power and authority to undertake the investigations they are undertaking. I am not going to undertake parallel investigations to the police, through the department of education and through the director of schools for the southern area or working with the school principal. We are responding according to the protocols that we have in place.

I have been provided with information in relation to the incident which I have provided to the media and to the public in response and to you again today. But I am not going to be undertaking my own investigations parallel to the police. That is their job. They will then report back, lay charges where appropriate and complete their job. That is the job of the police. It is not the job of the education minister to shadow the police on this matter.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister and Mr Pratt. We have got other people who are waiting to ask supplementary questions.

MR PRATT: I have not quite finished that line of questioning. Can I come back to it later?

THE CHAIR: You may ask one more question and then we need to go to supplementaries, I think.

MR PRATT: Mr Barr, you have said in a recent statement that school safety is not a problem.

Mr Barr: No, I do not believe that I have seen that. Comments attributed to me by the *Canberra Times* that I never in fact made.

MR PRATT: By *ABC Online*. Do you categorically deny that statement?

Mr Barr: What I said yesterday, Mr Pratt, was that it is important, when incidents like these occur, to look at the appropriate responses, that this incident had in its origins a relationship breakdown and that it was not associated with the school. I indicated, as I have on a number of occasions, in response to a variety of concerns, that last year we established the safe schools task force and that we put in place new guidelines, protocols and mandatory reporting and sought to work with police, with parents, with teachers and with a range of key stakeholders to implement these new policies.

Since the implementation of these policies, the number of incidents at schools has reduced, which I am pleased to be able to advise the committee. We will continue to work with stakeholders to address these issues.

The point I made was that we will resolve these issues in schools when we resolve these issues in society. That would be fantastic. No-one would be more pleased than I would be and, I am sure, you if we had no incidents at all in our schools. We will not achieve that until we get a societal response. It is not the schools that are breeding this culture; it is our society, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: The point is taken that schools are not breeding this, but the question is always there: have you taken all measures and do schools have in place all measures to address the fact that these matters are changing in society?

Mr Barr: Indeed, and I note your point there. You have heard from the chief executive of the department—

MR PRATT: Of course schools do not breed this. Do not say that.

Mr Barr: I am pleased because, from comments from time to time over the last 18 months, you would think that some in the opposition had that view.

THE CHAIR: I want to reflect on the types of things which either you or Dr Bruniges said—I am not sure who—with regard to research. I wonder whether or not there is some research which is coming out and which is helping you, particularly with bystander behaviour and with mobile phone technology. I wonder whether there is some news about that.

Additionally, you did mention restorative justice. I notice that on page 47 it talks about the external validation again and mentions some feedback about the programs in the schools. I wonder whether you could let us know about any feedback that is coming out of that external validation. I would be interested to know about that as well.

There was some interesting research mentioned on the radio this morning on *AM* about the maturity of young people's brains; some of them cannot handle anger, I think it was, at a certain stage of their life. I thought it was very interesting new research.

MR PRATT: This has been known about for decades.

THE CHAIR: No. This is quite new research, I think you will find, Mr Pratt.

Dr Bruniges: First of all, in response to the external validation report on restorative justice practices in our schools, we are finding that they are working extraordinarily well right from the early years. We have had an increasing number of schools participating in that program. Indeed, it was the subject of a committee inquiry here.

The external validation has looked at that and looked at the outcomes. Indeed, part of that restorative justice program is about how you deal with relationship, anger

management, challenging behaviours, and is very strong in its attitudinal approach to the attitudes that we take about the way we respond to certain situations. That is something that we are continuing to build on in our schools. We are seeing very good reports both internally and from the external validation process.

In terms of the bystander behaviour, there is a body of research that we have called upon to look at that. It is relatively new. People have talked about bullying and what that means, cyber bullying and a whole range of strategies. Part of the shift in the literature is a move away from describing what bullying is to looking at bystander behaviour and really engaging whole school communities to say that it is not acceptable, it is not appropriate, to stand by and watch something happen; we all have to take an active role in making sure that we take on our own personal responsibility. It is not deep in nature; it is just starting to be the next wave of research to look at how we may tackle bullying by looking at a strategy of bystander behaviour.

DR FOSKEY: On safe schools, the annual report indicates that there was an audit of schools being conducted at the end of 2007. I am not sure whether this policy is the only outcome of that audit, but I would be interested to know whether it was a school-to-school audit and, if so, whether the committee might be interested—I certainly would be—in any documentation.

Secondly, I am interested in the role of suspension and expulsion in dealing with these issues—I notice it is not actually referred to here—and whether there is a tendency to create safe school environments by just pushing the problem person out of the school which, by definition, hopefully makes the school safer but which might create some of those incidents with outsiders come in.

Thirdly, how closely do the department and schools work with family services in terms of identifying problem children and working together as a team to attempt to overcome the problems that they might face at school and at home?

Mr Barr: On the second part of your question, I did not print it out and bring it down for everyone, but there is a policy on suspension, exclusion or transfer of students.

DR FOSKEY: I would love to see that.

Mr Barr: If your office is listening, it is available on the department's website. I have a copy in front of me, but I do not have seven copies. I am sure we can provide that to you.

Dr Bruniges: If I could return to your first question about the notion of school safety audits, we have conducted a school-by-school school safety audit which looked at some of the physical aspects of schools so that we could inform an improvement plan about what we needed to have in place in terms of school safety. That included things about electrical equipment and leads, OH&S issues and so forth. The nature of that audit was mainly about a physical audit of schools.

We are putting in place and making sure the checks and balances are done by principals in terms of that aspect of school safety. Indeed, that again came out of the safe schools task force as a result of work conducted in that audit and looking at

making sure principals addressed any issue that was identified in those audits.

In terms of policy, the minister has mentioned the separate policy on suspension, exclusion and transfer of students. I take your point about the procedural fairness aspect of making sure that those mechanisms are not used to exclude students from education. That is incredibly important. This particular policy outlines in length the processes, practices and procedures when we work through a suspension, in terms of procedural fairness for the student, the parent or the carer and indeed for both five and 20 days. It also picks up re-entry in the expectation of re-entry into schooling and the provision report that students need on re-entry to schooling.

I am happy to take up further questions with you once you have had a look at the detail of that policy. It is important that we do not see suspensions across education. We find suspension is often a time out for students to reflect and think about the actions. In fact, when they come back into school, they go onto those re-entry programs to ensure that we do not get repeat offenders.

DR FOSKEY: I have had comment from people who are looking at perhaps fostering or who have other relationships with students who are often the subject of suspension because they are very difficult and have some very difficult behaviours that the suspension assists not at all. For a start, often the carers or the parents are unable to deal with that child. It just relocates the problem. It seems to me that it needs a much more holistic response. That is, I guess, one of the reasons why I asked the third question about how you work with family services. It is about children and child protection orders.

Dr Bruniges: We do work very closely with family services for students in territory care and with Ms Lambert as the territory parent. We work closely in identifying those students and making sure they are in programs. They, as the lead agency, will often contact us if they are aware of an issue and make sure our schools put in place programs around those.

Our principals are not encouraged to use suspension, but there are times where suspension is invoked for five days and, on very few occasions, 20 days where there are a particular set of circumstances that need to be assessed. We need to work through that carefully.

I do take your point about making sure that for some students that further disengagement from schooling is not helpful. Indeed, some schools will often provide a program of work for students on suspension but not have them back on the school site.

THE CHAIR: Minister, do we have any data on the reduction in the number of suspensions? I think you said there had been a reduction—

Mr Barr: Incidents within schools.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Do you still have a supplementary on this subject, Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: Yes, just a quick one, and I did want to ask a couple of questions in

another area, with your indulgence, and then I am going to have to go.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR SESELJA: I missed the last part of that in terms of the stats that you keep. Do you keep stats on reported incidents of violence or bullying in schools?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MR SESELJA: And those numbers are available in the annual report, or where would we access those?

Mr Barr: As part of the new reporting requirements that came into place last year, we are now keeping even more detail and we break that down by school term. We have noticed since the introduction of that that there was a decline from term 2 to term 3 and then from term 3 to term 4. We do not have the data, of course, on this term yet, as we are only a few weeks in, but we will then have a look, after the first year of operation of the new guidelines and procedures, based on the evidence that we have, and will of course refer that to the safe schools task force for further consideration and advice.

MR SESELJA: You spoke about the school closures in your opening remarks and I think they are referred to in a number of areas, in the highlights and other places. Are you now able to give us an update on the projected savings as a result of the school closures program?

Mr Barr: Indeed. I am very pleased to advise the committee that the savings that the government outlined as part of this process for the 2006-07 year were achieved: \$2.2 million in the first year, that being a very small amount because it was only a part-year effect in this financial year. Those savings are of course recurrent and have enabled the government to reinvest in the quality of our public education system. Some examples where we have reinvested are in pastoral care, student welfare officers; that was a \$14.6 million investment over four years. You would also be aware of our investment in languages within our schools, physical education, the arts, music and Indigenous education.

So all of the savings that we have achieved through school closures have been reinvested back into the public education system, to improve the quality of the 260 schools that we have. We made a decision to invest in quality. We had 183 preschools, primary schools, high schools and colleges. We now have around 160 and those schools offer enhanced quality as a result of the rationalisation of school sites. So we made a very simple choice, Mr Seselja, that we would invest in quality teaching and learning and quality programs rather than empty school buildings.

MR SESELJA: Do you have a breakdown of the savings on a per school basis?

Mr Barr: We achieved \$2.2 million in savings from the closure of seven primary schools and a number of preschools in the 2006-07 year.

MR SESELJA: But you are not able to tell us on an individual basis if by closing X

school you saved X number of dollars?

Mr Barr: That information was provided through the 2020 documentation that is available.

MR SESELJA: In terms of an updated figure—do those figures still hold true?

Mr Barr: My advice is that there is a small variance site by site of between one and two per cent—sorry, a bit larger than that; there is a variance of between 10 and 20 per cent—on particular sites but that the total across all sites was the \$2.2 million. The reason for that is that we had to make some assumptions about where students would move following the school closures and the pattern of movement was not exactly as we anticipated school by school. However, the total package and the total savings were exactly as we expected.

MR SESELJA: So which schools were much less? Which schools were in that 20 per cent category of variance on the estimates?

Mr Barr: On some, obviously, greater savings were achieved and on others fewer savings were achieved.

MR SESELJA: Sure, but which are those?

Mr Barr: I would have to get that detail to you; I do not have it in front of me.

MR SESELJA: You referred in your opening comments to the fact that this is 17 years overdue. When did the department first advise the government that school closures were necessary?

Mr Barr: I understand the government was first advised in 1989 that school closures—

MR SESELJA: I mean your government.

Mr Barr: and again in 1990 and 1991. Through a process of consideration of the education system, that you would be aware of, in the preparation of the 2006-07 budget—

MR SESELJA: So that was the first time that your government was advised that school closures would be necessary, in the preparation for the 2006-07 budget?

Mr Barr: It is not so much a question of when first advised, because these issues came up from time to time for each government since 1989.

MR SESELJA: I know, but I am interested in your government. When was your government first advised?

Mr Barr: I can only advise from the time that I became education minister and you would be aware, if you—

MR SESELJA: You are not aware of anything that went before that time?

Mr Barr: read my inaugural speech—I know you were present in the chamber, if you were listening—

MR SESELJA: I listened to bits.

Mr Barr: you would be aware that I signalled from my inaugural speech in the Assembly that this would be an issue that I would have to face as education minister.

MR SESELJA: So you had already been told by then?

Mr Barr: You would be aware, Mr Seselja, that this was on the agenda in August of 2004 when the bloke sitting next to you issued a press release agreeing with the government that school closures might be necessary.

MR SESELJA: And your minister denied that you were going to close them in the next term.

Mr Barr: I think you will find that that was not the case—

MR SESELJA: Absolutely the case.

Mr Barr: and that the minister at the time explicitly indicated to the Assembly—

THE CHAIR: Excuse me.

MR SESELJA: He is inviting debate here.

Mr Barr: The minister at the time explicitly said to the Assembly that this would be something that future assemblies would have to look at, and future assemblies did.

MR SESELJA: If he is going to make incorrect assertions, I think we should be able to respond.

THE CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Seselja. If the minister is answering a question, let him answer the question. You said you had—

MR SESELJA: He is throwing questions at us.

THE CHAIR: Excuse me, Mr Seselja. Don't interrupt me. You only have limited time—you said you have to go upstairs—so pay some respect to the minister and listen to his answer—

MR SESELJA: He is inviting debate, but please go on.

THE CHAIR: This is your last question, isn't it?

MR PRATT: Point of order, chair: the minister did encourage debate in his answers.

THE CHAIR: No, I think he answered every single question and also retorts—

MR PRATT: The Leader of the Opposition was doing the right thing.

MR SESELJA: He has made incorrect assertions; put that on the record.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pratt and Mr Seselja, I am not going to have a debate with you about a debate.

Mr Barr: These issues have been canvassed extensively in the Assembly, as you are aware, and it is in *Hansard*, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Could we just finish my question then, given that you would prefer to debate that. I am happy to have that debate, but we are not allowed I am told. The question was: when did your government first receive advice that it would be necessary for school closures? Do you have an answer for that or is that just something you do not know?

Mr Barr: As I have responded, from the moment I became education minister and was elected to the Assembly, and as I outlined in my inaugural speech to the Assembly and in a range of newspaper articles upon taking the education portfolio, reform was needed. Successive ACT governments have recognised that this was a problem; it goes all the way back to 1989. In fact, you might well want to direct that question to Senator Humphries as to when he first received it.

MR PRATT: He's not here.

MR SESELJA: I am directing it to you and you clearly can't answer it for us.

Mr Barr: And I am responding that from day one when I became a member of this place I have been aware of the need to close schools.

MR SESELJA: I am interested in your government. When did your government first receive advice that it would need to close schools? You don't know the answer to that or you just—

Mr Barr: From the first moment I was elected to this place—

MR SESELJA: Okay, so you can't tell us.

Mr Barr: and the first moment that I was education minister, from my inaugural speech in this Assembly, I indicated that there was a need to close schools. This issue went through extensive debate in the very first Assembly. It was the subject of questions prior to the 2004 election and a clear statement from the minister of education at the time that this issue would have to be addressed. Your colleague sitting next to you, when he was shadow education minister, issued a press release on 11 or 14 August, I believe—

MR PRATT: That is about right.

Mr Barr: indicating agreement with a statement from the government that school closures would need to be considered. So this issue has been around for some time, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: Can I ask one final question on that, minister, given that you have raised 11 August. What happened on 12 August? What did the government say in relation to school closures? You have referred to Mr Pratt's statement on the 11th.

Mr Barr: Minister Gallagher gave an interview to the *Canberra Times*, I understand, where she indicated that this issue would have to be debated in the future and that it would be a matter for future Assemblies.

MR SESELJA: Where she also ruled out any school closures in the next term of government—

Mr Barr: I do not believe she did.

MR SESELJA: on 12 August, the day after that statement.

Mr Barr: The minister, in making her statement to the Assembly and her interview to the *Canberra Times* explicitly stated that this issue would have to be addressed by future Assemblies—

MR SESELJA: Did she explicitly rule out any closures in the next term of government?

Mr Barr: and it was addressed by a subsequent Assembly, this Assembly.

MR SESELJA: While there is clarification on it, did she on 12 August explicitly rule out any school closures in the next term of government?

Mr Barr: Minister Gallagher did not, no.

MR SESELJA: Through a spokesman.

Mr Barr: All of Minister Gallagher's public statements are on the public record and I refer you to them.

MR SESELJA: You are talking about the 12 August interview. Did she in that—

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Thank you, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: rule them out in the next term of government?

Mr Barr: I refer you to Minister Gallagher's public statements, made to the *Canberra Times* and in the Assembly *Hansard*, and understood by your colleague next to you, who issued a press release and the opening line was, "The opposition agrees with the government that some schools—

MR SESELJA: That was on the 11th. On the 12th you ruled out school closures in

the next term

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. My next question goes to page 45 of the report. I have a particular interest, as you know, in Indigenous education, having spent many years in the Northern Territory, and I obviously understand that that is a different environment. Pages 45 and 46 mention that the results indicate that the strategies implemented at school level are working. Would you please tell the committee what these successful strategies are and what other improvements in this area could be expected? I understand this is a difficult challenge for us.

Mr Barr: There are a number of strategies in place in the early childhood sector: Koori preschools have proved to be very successful; the strategic placement of Indigenous education officers to assist schools with the development of partnership agreements and personalised learning plans for Indigenous students; the provision of professional learning for school leaders, focusing on Indigenous issues. You may be aware that the dare to lead program is one that is in extensive operation within ACT schools and it is a leadership program whereby school principals and school leaders take on—sign up to, effectively—a very strong program to improve Indigenous education outcomes.

Through the second appropriation last year we were able to provide additional resources in this area, most particularly to target students who at the end of year 3 are not achieving national benchmarks and to provide them with additional intensive support through year 4. Another area and aspect of the second appropriation was to look at the other end of the spectrum, at how we can encourage high-achieving Indigenous students to continue their studies and particularly to provide support around those transition points from primary school to high school and from high school into college and beyond. They were important investments to make.

We do report of course to the Assembly biannually on Indigenous education outcomes in addition to the variety of other reporting mechanisms. That provides us with an evidence base and individual results for individual students, so we are then able to provide personalised learning plans. Indigenous home school liaison officers are another important aspect of our complete response to provide support to Indigenous students. Whilst the Indigenous students within the ACT perform clearly better than their national counterparts, and we have had some very pleasing results at year 3 level in terms of Indigenous and non-Indigenous student outcomes—they are nearly indistinguishable at the year 3 level—we do recognise that through year 5 and year 7 there is still a gap.

We particularly look forward to working with the new commonwealth government in this area and of course it will be the subject of ministerial consideration at the ministerial council for all education ministers which will be held in Melbourne in April. But of course we need to bring our own local solutions, recognising the diversity of needs across Australia and that the ACT's Indigenous population has very different needs from those in rural and remote communities in the Northern Territory, for example. We believe we have a very good suite of policies in place, enhanced by the additional funding that was made available through the second appropriation last year. Dr Bruniges may want to expand on what I have said there.

It is clearly an area where governments at all levels need to continue to work to bridge the gap, but I am encouraged by the fact that we have nearly achieved that at year 3 level. It shows the value of early intervention and we will of course track the results of these students as they move through years 5, 7, 9 and beyond. Having in place support for those students who are not achieving national benchmarks but also encouragement for those high achievers I believe is a holistic response to support for Indigenous students.

Dr Bruniges: The minister mentioned Dare to Lead. At the school leaders' level, we have over 71 principals participating in that. That is a national program, and it is really good to see such great involvement by a sector. With respect to the strategy of personalised learning, we have learnt from the past regarding the "bitsy" program approach and how we need to have a much more systemic approach that looks at explicit strategies on an individual basis. So we have really pushed that personalised learning strategy, with teachers using data to identify particular strengths and weaknesses and then coming up with the most appropriate teaching strategy. We are quite explicit in identifying and then addressing those strategies.

There are a number of successful programs. You may be aware of the on track program. That has been based around student engagement as well. So it is something on which further work needs to be done, and there needs to be constant monitoring around those students. Indeed, once the first national assessment comes into place this May, we will have the mechanism to chart student progress over time on a common scale. That is something we have not had nationally before, and that will also give us a great sense of both a description and quantifiable data to know how growth changes over time.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, I want to bring you back to something that Mr Seselja touched on in his questions earlier—complaints reporting. Page 302 contains a table showing the complaints database for the period that we are looking at. The table shows there were 11 complaints about bullying and violence, seven about personal conduct and 13 about school-based policies. This note appears at the bottom of the table:

Three complaints, received late in the reporting year, were not resolved as at 30 June 2007.

What category did those complaints fall into and how long did it take to resolve them?

Mr Barr: Dr Bruniges can help you with that level of detail.

Dr Bruniges: The three complaints identified were not resolved as at 30 June, but they were received very late in the reporting period and have subsequently been resolved. So that was a timing issue with the report. All of the 35 complaints, including the 11 on bullying and violence, have been resolved.

DR FOSKEY: The minister and officials are probably aware of this report, *In the balance: the future of Australia's primary schools*. It was commissioned by a group which would be considered to be fairly well qualified to speak about primary education—principals.

Mr Barr: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: While I would love to refer to all of the recommendations, the comment is made that the schools with the greatest needs were not being recognised adequately in resource allocation and policies. This is, of course, federal, state and territory. Minister, could you please tell me what you are doing to address issues that are related to students with low socioeconomic profiles who arguably have the greatest needs? What is being done to address those in our schools?

Mr Barr: Dr Foskey, you would be aware, from the previous questioning, that the government has put in place the schools equity fund, the student support fund and the secondary bursary scheme. We have also discussed the additional funding for Indigenous education in recent budgets. You would be aware of the learning assistance program, the English as a second language program, and the provision of early literacy and numeracy officers to support students who have low literacy and numeracy standards. You would be aware of the reading recovery program as well. There are a range of initiatives that the government has put in place to assist students. I do not want to categorise all students who are not achieving the national and territory benchmarks as being from a low socioeconomic background because that is clearly not the case. There is a diversity of achievement levels and it is not strictly tied to socioeconomic background.

The government does provide additional resources to schools. We have a schools resources committee as well, which provides advice to the department and to the government on where additional resources should be channelled. This, in large part, is student centred rather than to individual schools. However, through the schools equity fund, we do provide additional funds to schools where we can identify a concentration of disadvantaged students. That fund is in the order of about \$300,000—\$292,000 a year. A dozen schools are in receipt of funding from that program this year. The student support fund is at the discretion of principals and is there to provide individual assistance across the entire school system. The 2007-08 budget expanded the secondary bursary scheme to include all high school years, an important initiative that was called for by the Parents and Citizens Council, amongst others. That was another important step to expand the level of support for students.

The most obvious thing that governments—state, territory and federal—can do is to use the data that we have available to us. The whole point of undertaking things like ACTAP or national testing, rather than to create league tables of schools, is to ensure that we have data on individual student performance and that we use that data at an individual level, with individual teachers working with individual students to achieve better outcomes. I think that is an important evidence base that we need, going forward, to make sure we are targeting our assistance to students who most need it, and that will be an important feature of future resourcing within our schools, in terms of commonwealth assistance to the state and territory systems and also in terms of where we target scarce ACT resources in education.

I would argue—and we have had this conversation on numerous occasions—that the ability to concentrate resources and to get better outcomes across the entire system meant that we had to make difficult decisions during this annual reporting period

around where we wanted to spend our scarce education dollars. You would be aware, from the Productivity Commission's report on government services, that the ACT government expends more than any other jurisdiction except the Northern Territory per student on education. The reasons for that are many and varied. Some relate to conscious policy decisions. I would highlight, for example, our maximum class size of 21 in the early years of schooling as a conscious policy decision that we took to invest in that part of our education system, and which costs us more than other jurisdictions.

The other major factor contributing to our above-average expenditure was inefficiencies in our system. If we are serious about tackling disadvantage, we have to look at how we share our resources across the system. In 2006-07, some schools and some students were attracting 2½ times the amount of government funding without any recognition of socioeconomic disadvantage. It was a locational decision. If you happened to go to school X, you received 2½ times the amount of government funding than if you went to school Y. I can't accept that as a fair and equitable distribution of funds across an education system, and I don't think it is possible to achieve the sorts of equity outcomes that we want to achieve if we were funneling resources in that way—not based on socioeconomic status, not based on educational need, but based on attendance at a particular school. That, Dr Foskey, was the major reform that we needed to undertake, and we did so during this reporting period.

That has enabled us to reinvest back into the quality of the education system. That, fundamentally, is the most significant change that has occurred in the ACT education system during this reporting period. It is something that I know you and I disagree on, but I don't think you would disagree that it is important for government to invest more money and more resources in improving outcomes across our system. We just seem to disagree on where we should draw that funding from.

DR FOSKEY: Also, in relation to a couple of studies that have come out in recent times, the PISA study—participation in international studies of student achievement—found that there was a very wide differential, in the ACT in particular, between high achievement and high equity. We have some students who are doing very well but we have a number of students who are not. This is a two-part question. Firstly, does the government have an understanding of what percentage of our ACT government school students shifted across to the non-government system over the last reporting period as compared to the period before? Secondly, is that shift to non-government schools having an impact on ACT government schools in that government schools are more likely to be left with the students at the lower achieving end? I don't think we can stop the flow, but what can we do to stop the inequities and make sure that our kids keep doing well?

Mr Barr: I will take the second part of your question first, in relation to the drift from public to private schools. We have data going back to the 1970s. In the most recent reporting periods, the percentage shift from public to private in 2003 was 1.1 per cent; in 2004 it was 2.3 per cent; in 2005 it was 1.7 per cent; in 2006 it was 0.7 of one per cent; and in 2007 it was 1.2 per cent.

In relation to the PISA data, it is worth advising the committee that when PISA undertakes its assessment, they assess 14,170 students across 356 schools in Australia, and over 400,000 students across 57 countries. In the ACT, a random stratified sample

of 26 schools and almost 1,000 students were selected across public, Catholic and independent schools. Members would note from the PISA report that the average socioeconomic background for the ACT is higher than for other states. All students undertaking PISA tests are asked a range of questions about their family, and their responses are aggregated to provide factor scores that derive a measure of socioeconomic status. This status is measured within each country based on a number of factors. Those include the parents' occupational status, the highest level of education, an index of family wealth, an index of home education resources and an index of cultural possession within the home. I think we need to be careful in defining or seeking to use the PISA data when using the term "low income", since PISA is measuring a broader socioeconomic status.

However, it is worth noting that the proportion of ACT students within PISA's lowest SES quartile who achieve level 3 or better is higher than the Australian average in both reading and mathematical literacy. Within the ACT, 54 per cent of students are achieving proficiency level 3 compared to 48 per cent in the rest of the country. In mathematical literacy, 56 per cent in the ACT in that lower quartile are achieving proficiency compared to 50 per cent in the rest of Australia. So we need to take some care in looking at this data. I believe it is important that the ACT's outcomes be independently assessed. The department has recently contracted the Australian Council for Educational Research, which I am sure members would be aware is an organisation that is an expert in independent research, to provide an additional analysis of the ACT's PISA results across the 2000, 2003 and 2006 assessments. ACER will analyse the performance of ACT students across other jurisdictions in Australia and will look specifically at the impact of socioeconomic status on results. So I would like to have some further data on this over a longer time frame. We believe that we have put in place a range of measures across the public education system—

DR FOSKEY: Just the end of that report, though, Mr Barr—

Mr Barr: I intend to get some further data, which will then inform government decision making around future investment, and we will be able to provide more advice to the commonwealth government in terms of specific ACT needs when we go into our negotiations for the quadrennial funding agreement 2009-13. But again I stress from my opening remarks on this topic, the PISA data includes data from students in Catholic and independent schools as well. We need to look at and work with the non-government schools in addition to what we do in the public system to improve equity outcomes. We have provided additional funding to the non-government sector through the second appropriation with a particular view on them spending that money on equity programs within the non-government system.

You would have to say that, for some non-government schools, their student population is drawn from the higher end, but that is not the case across all non-government schools. We need to ensure that we are also working with the non-government sector, because those students are picked up in this PISA data as well. We should have concern across our education system. That is why we are doing the further research, because it will inform government policy in relation to future funding, and, most particularly, what will be the most significant funding issue for the territory moving forward—that is, the next quadrennial funding agreement with the

commonwealth government. That is critical.

DR FOSKEY: What are the dates here? What are the dates you expect ACER to report the consideration of the next round of funding federally and the federal budget?

Mr Barr: ACER will be reporting to the government in March. The negotiations for the next quadrennial funding agreement will commence with the commonwealth in the second half of this year with a view to its introduction for the 2009 school year.

DR FOSKEY: Will that be before or after the election?

Mr Barr: The quadrennial funding agreement will be, I imagine, near completion before the ACT election. If we needed legislation, we would need to introduce that in the August sitting. But, it would not surprise you, Dr Foskey, that it would be my intention to be able to secure an agreement with the commonwealth in this term of government.

MR PRATT: Mr Barr, just going back to the question about the PISA results, the length of the tail, if I can call it that, between the high achievers and the low achievers has been subject to a lot of debate for some time, and there have been some observations that that tail might be a little too long in the ACT. While the jury is out, short of you getting that evidence back on the research that you have now commissioned, is it your gut feeling that our so-called tail relates quite well to other jurisdictions and the OECD average?

Mr Barr: Certainly the data and the analysis that the ACT education department has done indicate that we do need to improve our performance across all areas of education. There is always room for improvement. But the sensationalist headlines that appeared and a particular article that was written by a particular advocate may not necessarily tell the full picture for the ACT. That is why I have commissioned some independent analysis. The analysis that was put forward in the *Canberra Times* is partisan in nature, so I requested some independent analysis, and I think that will provide an important evidence base for the ACT. But, indeed, the reason that we have put in place the range of policy solutions from the schools equity fund, the student support fund, the secondary bursary scheme and the additional support for Indigenous students is that, yes, we recognise that we always need to do more to lift academic achievement across our entire education system.

There is no doubt that we need to do more for those who are not achieving national benchmarks, but, equally important and another determinant of the overall performance of the system is how well our students at the top end are performing. This needs to be a jewel. We cannot just isolate ourselves and say that our only focus is going to be getting everyone above the national benchmark. We have to have a view across the entire system and also look at how we can help and assist students to achieve even greater results.

MR PRATT: Is it your intention to be able to separate out the performances of government schools versus Catholic schools, or are you just looking at a universal picture for all ACT schools?

Dr Bruniges: We are looking in the first instance at a universal picture on that. We have to be very careful in disaggregating a small sample of 1,000 to ensure we have statistical robustness about that. We will be looking at what is statistically significant—

MR PRATT: It is a bit like political polling, is it not—small case loads?

Dr Bruniges: That is right.

Mr Barr: Yes, and that perhaps is the criticism that I would make initially of the *Canberra Times* coverage. It took no account of the small sample size and a margin of error. Any statistician worth their salt would argue very passionately about the need to look at the margin of error.

MR PRATT: Is that report going to be in by the time we compile this report, Chair? Are we going to be able to benefit from that report in the compilation of this inquiry?

THE CHAIR: It is close. Did you have something else you wanted to say, Dr Bruniges?

Dr Bruniges: I did have one other comment, Mr Pratt. There has been a lot of discussion about that tail, but I note also in recent commentary that Prof Barry McGaw talks a bit about the Australian average falling. He puts forward the case that, in fact, it is a decrease in the top end of the scale that has caused the Australian average to fall rather than a slippage at the bottom end of the scale. So, as Minister Barr has just described that range of achievement, we have to work not only on one part of the scale but on all of it. The first-phase findings of the Australian analysis tend to indicate that it has been a slip for the students at the top of the scale that has caused the Australian mean to drop.

THE CHAIR: Did you have a question about the data, Dr Foskey?

DR FOSKEY: I believe I got an answer.

Meeting adjourned from 10.29am to 10.47 am.

THE CHAIR: We will continue now until 11.30 with the Department of Education and Training report. I have a question. It comes from all this discussion that we have been having, minister, about the fact that we are moving into a new environment and there are lots more challenges now for us. I was reflecting on the information in the report. I am no good with numbers—how did I ever become a politician?

MR PRATT: How would you go in PISA performance?

THE CHAIR: I know I would fail.

Mr Barr: I hate to think how Assembly members would go in a PISA test.

THE CHAIR: I have got it right now. It is pages 14 and 48. It is talking about curriculum renewal, a very important area. This has taken quite a while, obviously

because it is a very important thing. How is this going to keep up with all of the challenges of the 21st century? Do you think that what we have got now is going to be able to cope with the challenges of the 21st century? Also, how is it fitting in with our discussions nationally about national curriculum? I would be interested to know about that.

Mr Barr: I will talk for about 30 seconds and then throw to the ACT's nominee on the National Curriculum Board, Janet Davy. As I indicated in my opening statement, the collaborative exercise across all school sectors that led to the every chance to learn curriculum framework for ACT schools was a wonderful exercise in demonstrating how the school sectors can work together. I was very pleased with the level of support that was provided to the new framework from across all sectors. We are the first jurisdiction to incorporate the national statements of learning into our P-10 curriculum framework, and that will stand us in very good stead for the national discussions that the National Curriculum Board will have. On that note I will throw to the ACT nominee.

Ms Davy: Yes, I think we can be very confident that the new curriculum framework will meet the challenges of the 21st century. I think you mentioned that we spent a reasonable amount of time developing it, so we did take our time to develop it, which allowed us to consult widely with the ACT community about what they believed were the capacities and capabilities that students needed for life and work in the 21st century. It also allowed us to look at national and international developments in curriculum in relation to that.

What we have in the curriculum framework are some very explicit requirements for teaching what are commonly known as the sorts of skills that are needed for the 21st century. We have got essential content in there about teaching students explicitly about thinking and learning skills, about applying the inquiry process, about making decisions, about group effectiveness, certainly about operating ICT effectively and also, I guess, about the values and attitudes area—acting with integrity and regard for others. They are essential learnings in the framework which all schools must teach students about, as well as the traditional subject areas.

In terms of national curriculum developments, the National Curriculum Board is just in its early stages of being formed. It is our understanding that there is a commitment to have the first set of national curriculum documents by 2010, and they will be in English, maths, science and history. We would expect that with the new national curriculum there will be probably some requirement for us to update or revise or the curriculum framework, but that should not be a problem to us. As the minister has indicated, we have already got the five national statements of learning in English, maths, science, civics and citizenship and ICT in this curriculum framework. So if by 2010 across the country we decide that in English and mathematics that needs to change, we will just update our framework at that time.

DR FOSKEY: Mr Barr did not finish answering my question earlier on. I just wondered if we could go back there. He answered the second part very adequately, but he did not answer the bit in regard to the PISA data—the impact on government schools, the idea of the tail being left behind growing and how we can turn this around and make sure we keep an adequate number of students in our government schools

achieving at the top end of the spectrum.

Mr Barr: As I indicated, I think, in my answer previously, the initial analysis of the PISA data—

DR FOSKEY: I knew that. I do not want to hear that again. I just want to hear the strategies for keeping the students who are leaving because their families can afford it et cetera in our public school system.

Mr Barr: Within public education? You are talking about the drift from public to private?

DR FOSKEY: I am.

Mr Barr: Certainly. We have undertaken a major campaign to promote public education. The school movement survey data that we got last year has gone to reinforce what we already understood to be the major factors that are driving the move from public to private. There are a range of factors. Half of those surveyed, 52 per cent of those surveyed, indicated that the quality of education is the major determining factor in their move away from the public system. Forty-six per cent identified peer relationships and 46 per cent also identified professional standards of staff. Some of the other factors that came up were school culture and the quality of school facilities. Slightly more than one in five, 22 per cent, of students who left the public system to move into the private system did so and identified lack of quality facilities at public schools.

DR FOSKEY: Could you give the percentages for both of those: school culture and school facilities?

Mr Barr: School culture 21 per cent; school facilities 22 per cent; reputation of the school 49 per cent. People gave multiple answers, of course, but what came through clearly was the quality of education, peer relationships, school facilities—

DR FOSKEY: That was 22 per cent?

Mr Barr: Yes—school culture and professional standards of staff.

DR FOSKEY: The significant ones I would say are the ones that are over 45 per cent. I guess they are the ones that would probably need addressing.

Mr Barr: Indeed, and that is why, Dr Foskey, the emphasis since 2006 has been on raising the quality of our education system. There has been a range of initiatives that have been aimed at raising the quality of our education system, not least of which has been the significant investment across the board in facilities, quality teaching and learning, information and communication technology and pastoral care and student welfare. There has been a range of initiatives put in place.

Part of our challenge also is simply public relations. I do not believe that we are adequately spreading the word of all the good work that occurs in our public schools. I think it is clear that non-government schools have a better PR machine at this point

than government schools, and we have taken steps to address that, most particularly since 2006-07. You would be aware that we undertook a \$100,000 marketing campaign for public education. You would be aware that we have stepped up our activities through events like Public Education Week in collaboration with the Australian Education Union. In August last year we instituted a new program, through Step into the Limelight, to highlight performing arts within the public school system. We continue to work with schools and with the local media to promote all the wonderful things that are occurring in our public education system.

I believe that the next quadrennial funding agreement will provide an opportunity also to strengthen the quality of our schools and that we will continue to build on the successes that are already in the system and invest strategically in areas where we know there is clear demand, and that can be through programs but also through enhanced facilities. I would highlight, Dr Foskey, the performing arts centre at Lyneham high school as an example of an enhanced facility that will no doubt enhance the reputation of what is already a fantastic program at that school.

DR FOSKEY: I have observed that Lyneham high school is often the location for government announcements, both federal and territory.

Mr Barr: I think I have made announcements at a variety of schools.

DR FOSKEY: I think Murray-Darling was the latest.

Mr Barr: No, that was at Ainslie primary school.

DR FOSKEY: I am sorry. Ainslie is the other one. I am interested in the budget that you are putting into the raising awareness program that you were just detailing.

Mr Barr: That was a \$100,000 campaign. It was during the annual report hearings. That was for a direct and specific campaign. We, of course, through the department of education's media unit and through individual schools, do a range of promotional work around the work of schools. We take advantage of particular significant days in the national and international calendar to promote schools' activities. So there is a huge amount of in-kind work that is done.

I believe—and I would welcome the support of Assembly members—that we perhaps need to do more in terms of the promotion of public education. I have certainly had conversations with the P&C council along those lines and they have put forward some ideas of where they believe additional promotion would be worth while. You could identify a range of areas where can and should do more, and we will.

An example, though, of a very successful campaign was around the opening of the new Harrison school. We did provide an information brochure around the new school and made that available. We letterboxed it to all households within the school's catchment area and I am very pleased that the school started with more than 300 enrolments, indicating very clear demand for a public education facility in the suburb of Harrison and to serve that part of Gungahlin. That level of demand does stand in marked contrast to other areas of the city.

THE CHAIR: Mr Gentleman has a supplementary and then Mr Pratt has a supplementary.

MR GENTLEMAN: Thank you, Chair. It is off the back of the beginning of Dr Foskey's question. If you go to output class 1 on page 124 there is a graph which shows the proportion of ACT students in government school education that are above the benchmark for 2005-06. It is quite high. In fact, it goes up to 97 per cent in the 2006 reading column. Are you able to make any comparisons with students in the non-government sector in the proportion above benchmarks?

Mr Barr: I believe we are. Just looking at those figures, it is pleasing to note the low one per cent increases in a number of categories across the board, but most particularly in the writing area for year 5 from 93 to 96. That would be outside a statistical margin of error increase. There are improvements across the system, but how it compares with non-government schools I do not have in front of me. I understand that Dr Bruniges might.

Dr Bruniges: In respect of the reporting of non-government school data, traditionally what we have done is report it by jurisdictional level for the national benchmarks that include both sectors. Indeed, as we move towards the first national test this year in May, an opportunity arises to look at how we might disaggregate that data, both at a national level and a jurisdictional level, to look at the performance in relation to sectors and so that we can drill down even further.

With things like the current ACTAP testing, one of the advantages we have with it over the PISA testing is the fact that ACTAP actually provides us with individual parent reports and a really strong diagnostic capacity for teachers to look at students' strengths and weaknesses. The PISA data is a bit like a litmus test that is based on a nation. We do not actually get the individual student results coming out of PISA and the diagnostic capacity because of the sample size. The instrument was not designed for the purpose of teaching and learning.

As we move down our first national test we need to look at how we may disaggregate the data into government and non-government sectors, how we look at the performance across sectors and what are the commonality things that we can do in the ACT that are either a strength or, indeed, a weakness across both sectors. I think that should come in time. At the moment there is a high accountability in terms of the government sector through this process, but not a similar process currently for non-government sectors.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pratt, a supplementary question.

MR PRATT: Following up on that question—in fact, it is a sup to a sup to a sup—did not those rather encouraging indications on performance, our own, nationally and PISA, give you a better insight into where there may be weaknesses in teaching or whatever? You would think, therefore, you would be able to start arresting this drift to non-government schools. On the back of the schools renewal program and school closures, would you not think that that significant investment is going to start making inroads into arresting the drift?

Mr Barr: We had indicated that we believed, given that the drift has been occurring for the best part of 20 years and picking up pace in the last seven—

MR PRATT: How far do your stats go back on that question?

Mr Barr: I think we go back to the 1970s on public/private. It might not come as a surprise to you that, when you look across the nation, the drift seems to occur more quickly when there is a federal Liberal government and slows when there is a federal Labor government. When you look at the long-run analysis—

MR PRATT: You are just being creative.

Mr Barr: No. If you look at the long-run analysis over that period, my expectation is that we can start to see some impact, firstly, in terms of slowing the drift. I think we saw that when I read out the table.

MR PRATT: The numbers start to clutter up our heads.

Mr Barr: We have made an impact in terms of slowing the rate of the movement. I would like to think that, as part of the four-year program, by year 4 we could have arrested that completely and started to turn into the positive so that we are actually bringing people back into the public system.

Some aspects of the challenges for us there are beyond our control in that, when you drill down into why people are going to non-government schools, in some instances it is a question of preference for a religious education. There are some areas where we are not, if you like, competing with the private system. We do not offer a Catholic or an Anglican education in that sense. We will see that area of the market, if you like, go to schools that specialise in religious education. I would identify—and you can see it from the data—that we do get a clear return and we have strength in early childhood as well.

Looking forward, we need to address high schools. There is no doubting that. The key issue that came up outside of quality of education—and we can have a separate discussion, I think, about raising educational standards, and I would certainly welcome comments on the proposal for a schools standard authority; that is something that we have put out for consultation this year—is the major factor around student welfare, peer relationships and school culture.

The work that was undertaken through the safe schools task force, the addition of a senior teacher to lead pastoral care and student welfare in our high schools, targeted particularly that area. In the end, we need to market our entire system and the diversity that is within it, recognising that students and parents will make individual choices. As we have heard ad nauseam in the Assembly, that can mean, within families, some students in government schools and some students in private schools.

There are a range of things we can do, but each individual school also has a responsibility, through our program of continual improvement, to offer quality education. The government can support and resource that, and we will.

MR PRATT: In the research as to the reasons for the drift, are you getting any pattern of activity which would indicate that some families, as they improve their own economy so to speak, are simply making the choice; it is not for any reason at all except that they might have moved into another affordability bracket—before interest rates went up, of course? Have you any feeling on that?

Mr Barr: The data on the school movements that I have taken close note of is a publicly available document. While I am here, I should take the opportunity to correct something.

MR PRATT: I am remiss; I have not read it.

Mr Barr: I misquoted a figure on school facilities. It was not 22 per cent; it was actually 24 per cent. It is nearly one in four that indicated that. A category that people noted was “employment related”. This is why they moved. That could simply mean the location of their job but it could also mean careers. That was only 10 per cent of respondents. The biggest one was quality of education.

MR PRATT: Again going back to that question of culture and quality of education, you could imagine from my attitudes of 2004 that I wholeheartedly support the pastoral care initiatives. How far have you got into that? What sorts of ratios do you now have in terms of pastoral care officers? Do not worry about high schools now. What are the numbers? What do you intend to do to continue developing that capacity?

Mr Barr: Through the second appropriation last year, each government high school, each public high school, was given a dedicated school leaver C position to be the pastoral care coordinator for each high school. They are supported by a range—it varies from school to school—of youth workers. There are other school counselling services available. It varies from school to school. In some instances it is contingent on the size of the school, the number of people. Obviously in a larger high school you will have more staff in that area.

The student welfare support areas within each school have been strengthened by the second appropriation and by the multidisciplinary team that sits behind those pastoral care coordinators. That is a shared resource across the public education system. Someone will need to remind me how many positions there are in that. There are 16 pastoral care coordinators.

MR PRATT: Sixteen full, budgeted positions?

Mr Barr: Sixteen, one per high school, and another team of 16, making a total of 32.

MR PRATT: The other 16—the rear echelon, if you like—are in the department?

Mr Barr: They work in the schools.

MR PRATT: School districts?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MR PRATT: Are the pastoral care officers people from a teacher background or are they welfare officers from other backgrounds transferred from other departments?

Mr Barr: They are position-based within each school. There is a teacher position and then the other 16 positions are people who are not necessarily teachers. They might be. They have other skills.

MR PRATT: The first point of contact is with somebody who has a school culture?

Mr Barr: Who is perceived to have a school culture.

THE CHAIR: I have another supplementary to this whole discussion.

Mr Barr: It has been the topic of the day.

THE CHAIR: It is not so much about the culture, it is about information to parents about what is on offer. One of the difficulties we are having, I hear you say, is trying to get the message out. On page 15 of the report, it says that the department held a number of educational seminars for parents and other community members. It is not just parents, it is the community in general. I wonder how well they were received. I note they have continued in 2007. I wonder whether we have plans to roll out any more in 2008.

Mr Barr: I think they were very well received. Attendance varied between, I think, about 50 and 150 or thereabouts, depending on who the speaker was and the topic of the seminar. We did continue them through 2007. It would be my intention to continue those as an important way of bringing keynote speakers to the territory and to be able to discuss important education issues with stakeholders and students. Some of these seminars were particularly targeted at areas that senior students particularly would be interested in. There were student representatives at these seminars as well.

THE CHAIR: It is a way of engaging the school population plus the parents and the community in ACT public education.

Mr Barr: Indeed, and key initiatives or key areas or seeking some stakeholder feedback on particular proposals that were put forward. We have a number of projects that are ongoing at the moment. We are still in the consultation round. The proposed schools standard authority is one, partly incorporating the values of teacher registration. There are a number of national issues around ICT and national curricula where we seek stakeholder and community feedback. We will continue to do so.

MR GENTLEMAN: I have a question on a different area. I refer to page 164, capital works. There is discussion there regarding ESD or environmentally sustainable development for the new P-10 school at West Belconnen. Could you expand on some of the measures and let us know also what ESD measures will be in place for the new Kambah high site?

Mr Barr: In a minute I will get someone from the department to answer. Who is going to talk a little about the detail within each site? I can say that the policy across

the ACT government for environmentally sustainable design is now mandatory and that the construction of all new schools must meet the benchmarks that have been set out in both the Chief Minister's climate change strategy and our desire to get all schools in the ACT carbon neutral by 2070. That has been backed by a \$20 million investment to enable that to occur.

A key focus of the \$90 million capital investment through the school renewal program has been to improve and update a range of school infrastructure that could be best described as relics of the 1950s and the 1960s—school boilers and a range of things like that that are not, shall I say, sexy in terms of their being flashy—but it is important behind-the-scenes work that occurs within each school to ensure that they are more environmentally sensitive and more efficient.

It is common sense in terms of school-based management that the less money that schools are spending on electricity and water bills, the more they can spend on education resources within their school. That is an important economic driver, let alone all the environmental issues that are in place. Harrison has set the benchmark now for environmental sustainability within schools, and we look to build on that through West Belconnen and Tuggeranong.

I throw it over to Mr Donnelly to give you a bit of an outline on each individual project.

Mr Donnelly: We have been working quite heavily in the ESD area on all our new capital works. It really started with Amaroo school which, I think, ratcheted up our ESD credentials. We have continued to try to build on that with each of the new schools that we have built since then. All of the new schools from Harrison onwards have a large number of fairly basic ESD functions built in.

Again, as we have moved down the design path, we have been able to get a bit more ambitious and get further ESD initiatives into the design as we incorporate them earlier and earlier in the design phase. All the schools built recently have concrete slabs for thermals, which helps with cooling in summer and heating in winter.

Obviously, site orientation is another. Most of the buildings, being north facing, avoid the windows on the eastern and western sides wherever possible. Incorporating natural lighting is another so that, as far as possible, particularly with schools which tend to be used more in the day than at night, if you can have natural light in most of the rooms, then you really are decreasing the amount of artificial light and electricity that you need to use.

There is thermal insulation in both the roof and the walls and on selected windows to block out the heat from the sun. There is also landscaping. The planting of deciduous trees over a window can mean that there is extra light coming in in winter and less heat coming in in summer. There is natural ventilation wherever possible. Amaroo is an excellent example of that. Most of the school, apart from the library, is fully naturally ventilated.

Obviously, we are moving forward using technology with things like high-efficiency lighting systems. We are using air locks to make sure we are keeping the heat or the cool in. Rainwater tanks and irrigation control systems are others. Obviously, all our

toilets going into new schools are dual-flush now, which means we can save water. Solar hot water heating is another.

In Harrison in particular, we have done things like roof runoff into garden beds and water tanks for drip irrigation to the garden beds, and we are trialling an area of artificial grass which seems to be going well with the students at Harrison at the moment. That might allow us, once we have evaluated the success of that, to move into artificial grass in other school environments as well.

As we move towards West Belconnen, Tuggeranong and the Gungahlin college, we will obviously be able to look, in the design phase, at including additional ESD features over and above those that we have just discussed.

MR GENTLEMAN: On the back of that, can I ask about the sustainable schools program. What sort of feedback are you getting from students and parents?

Mr Barr: Very positive, Mr Gentleman, as you and I are aware, having attended the ACT launch of that initiative. I can advise that 66 schools have now signed up. We are looking to work with the remainder to get them on board. These schools range from preschools all the way through to the college levels; so it is across the education system that there is engagement. The launch of the new kit, effectively a show bag for each school, outlining a range of things they can do, how they can join the program, is something that we will continue to promote. I think our target should be that all schools are participating in the program. We will continue to encourage that through the course of this school year.

DR FOSKEY: I have a sup to Mr Gentleman's first question and his second. The first is: in paying attention to the sustainability of schools, which is really excellent, is attention also being given to the impact on the air quality of various materials such as cleaning materials on certain surfaces, on the understanding that some students and some staff are susceptible to these? Is this taken into consideration in equipping and furnishing the new schools and when classrooms are refurbished?

Mr Donnelly: We have been working with the Green Building Council and their green star guidelines in looking at all of the new schools from Gungahlin college forward and have been conscious particularly of indoor air quality, which is one of the sets of standards which the Green Building Council guidelines monitor. We do have these low volatile, organic compound emitting products for things like carpet glues and carpet fibres. In fact, the actual carpet material is all low-voc emitting material. Certainly in the new schools, that is occurring as a matter of course. We have been looking at our program of refurbishment. Where possible, we are moving to those low-voc emitting products as well.

Mr Barr: I have just been passed a note, Mr Gentleman, which indicates that since the start of the school year, in fact, another nine schools have joined the sustainable schools program, so we are now up to 75.

DR FOSKEY: Just in relation to that, are schools being given a staffing formula that allows them to give enthusiastic and motivated teachers some time to do the tremendous amount of work that is involved in creating sustainable schools? Is that

one of the measures that you have in mind to advance the progress of sustainability across the system?

Mr Barr: The short answer is yes, Dr Foskey. Under the school-based management system, schools do have a degree of discretion themselves about where they place their additional resources that are provided. But we certainly are encouraging them, and the money is there and available for them to do that. They would have to make an explicit decision not to and to direct funding to some other area.

DR FOSKEY: Such as literacy and numeracy?

Mr Barr: Possibly, or a range of other—

DR FOSKEY: That would be a pity.

Mr Barr: It would. We have provided additional support to schools through both the Department of Territory and Municipal Services and through the education department to implement these programs, including the resource kits that are available.

DR FOSKEY: There is plenty of information out there, but, understanding how much work teachers do apart from teaching, I know that to take this one indicates a motivation beyond the norm.

Mr Barr: It certainly does, and we are encouraging that motivation.

Dr Bruniges: The other source of funding is our teacher professional learning fund which receives about half a million dollars a year. Teachers often tap that, Dr Foskey, in order to have some time for professional learning around sustainable schools initiatives. That is another source.

MR GENTLEMAN: I have just one very low-cost question.

Mr Barr: I love a low-cost question, particularly if I can provide a low-cost answer.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, it is just in regard to the government support of Earth Hour on 29 March. It would be good to see all the lights of ACT schools turned off.

Mr Barr: Absolutely; we will very happily participate, yes.

MR PRATT: I will try and make this as inexpensive as possible.

Mr Barr: Efficient, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: Just going back to my question on the pastoral care, what plans do you have to further develop the pastoral care network?

Mr Barr: We will shortly be releasing the code of conduct within ACT public schools. That will provide a further basis for the pastoral care coordinators and other associated staff within the schools to work to implement that code within the schools. That will provide an ongoing basis of work for the schools, together with the other

analysis and feedback that the safe schools task force provides through the monthly meetings.

The next monthly meeting is in March. We will also be able to evaluate the first year of the program. That will then feed into the pastoral care. The pastoral care coordinators themselves have been taken off line for a number of days of professional development, and appropriate relief staff have been provided for the schools. There will be further professional development for the pastoral care coordinators throughout this term and through the rest of the school year. We particularly, of course, want to use the periods of the school holidays where we can undertake even more intense work with those pastoral care coordinators when there are not students in the schools so the impact on the schools is minimised. That is a rolling program of professional development for those pastoral care coordinators.

MR PRATT: Rather than adding additional coordinators to schools, you are working on development capacity and capability with other teachers in a secondary role, in a sense, coordinated by the coordinator? Is that where it is going?

Mr Barr: The feedback that we have got from schools so far has been very positive around how pastoral care coordinators have been able to effectively work with the other support workers within the schools to get a much better outcome for each school. There is a much greater sense of direction and leadership coming through this new role. Given that we have funded this program to the tune of \$14.7 million over the four years, it is a significant increase in resources in this area. I want to evaluate the success before committing to any further funding for additional positions. If you were to provide additional funds, you would need to have an assessment of where you would provide them to get maximum outcomes. You would want an evidence base before proceeding. But we have locked in the additional positions into the recurrent base funding for each school.

MR PRATT: I will just ask a question about strategic goal 2, shape and lead education training, at page 48. The measure of success is the strengthening capacity of teachers and leaders to develop professional knowledge, skill and practice. Just going to the bottom of the second paragraph, you mention mentoring programs, amongst other activities. Can you tell us how the mentoring capabilities have expanded? What have you done to further develop that? Have you actually added additional teacher spots in high schools to increase the mentoring capacity, or have you just given that task to existing teachers within the existing strengths of the schools?

Dr Bruniges: There is probably a range of use of coaching and mentoring across our schools. Some of it includes peer mentoring, where you have more experienced teachers linked to first-year-out teachers to support their capacity in terms of classroom practice. We are looking at aspiring leaders—our next generation of school leaders—and using the expertise of more experienced principals to support aspiring leaders and mentoring them through a range of strategies. Mentoring, as such, is just one strategy to help build capacity of the workforce. Depending on the particular issue that beginning teachers actually face, sometimes they want to look at mentoring around particular classroom practices, for example, how do they use certain technology, or can they be shown certain things. It might be as simple as that or it might be something more complex about school management once we get into our

aspiring leaders program.

If we look around both nationally and internationally, the use of a mentoring strategy is one of those things that has developed with the feeling that people who have done the job have a lot of knowledge to share with those who may be more inexperienced in the job. So that will happen at all levels. The head of faculty, the head teacher of science, for example, the first time you have a go at that brings in another skill set. It is not something that we can say we do in a particular way, but it needs to be particular to what people are seeking in terms of their professional learning.

MR PRATT: I do not recall now, because I have not been around to observe where you have gone budget wise in the last two years or so, but have you actually been able to add additional teacher positions in the lead teacher roles, both in terms of the leadership role and the mentoring role, to increase those sorts of capacities?

Mr Barr: Certainly the second appropriation last year provided an additional executive teacher for each school.

MR PRATT: One additional teacher?

Mr Barr: One additional, yes. But, of course, schools have flexibility within their staffing point allocation, which is a currency in and of itself, to be able to make decisions about particular levels. Of course, it is also related to the size of the school. Particular schools, depending on their size, will attract particular levels of executive positions. There are five categories of principal, for example, depending on the size of the school that the principal is leading. That leads to a certain number of deputies and then a range of other school leader positions. That is contingent; a range of factors influence that, and the size of the school is one of those factors.

Of course, we provide a minimum executive staffing structure for all schools. We have just enhanced that by the provision of the pastoral care coordinate offer, and the schools have flexibility themselves. We have a recent example that I was talking about last week with our initiative around language education in schools. We are providing for schools that do not currently offer a language program and that want to start that up an additional staffing point allocation to enable them to start those sorts of programs. That will, of course, be done by a senior teacher who will have additional resources made available when starting a new program. They are some very practical examples. Sometimes it is in the currency of staffing points, which have a dollar value attached to them, obviously, but they also have another value of their own within the whole school structure.

MR PRATT: What is the benchmark you are trying to achieve in terms of ratio of lead teachers to, shall we say, newer teachers, younger teachers, teachers with five years experience?

Dr Bruniges: Part of that, Mr Pratt, is tied up with our enterprise agreement in terms of the executive structure and our work as we go through enterprise agreements. At the moment, there is a minimum executive structure that is articulated through the enterprise agreement that we deal with. As Minister Barr said, that has been topped up through a number of government initiatives through points or dollars to expand on

that minimum base. That is really the linchpin of how we determine the executive structure. There has been a great deal of supplementation with government initiatives coming into that.

Mr Donnelly: I might just point out for the committee's benefit that that minimum executive structure was actually enhanced in the 2003 certified agreement, so three or four years ago there was a significant amount of additional positions injected into the ACT school system at the executive teacher level—the school leader level, as we now call it—to assist with that role.

MR PRATT: Just on that last question, in practical terms, is there something like a benchmark you are trying to achieve, say, a ratio of 1:3, 1:4, 1:5, 1:6 or whatever, of experienced lead teachers to new teachers? Can you quantify it at all?

Dr Bruniges: No.

MR PRATT: What is the standard?

Dr Bruniges: Only in our executive structure. In fact, each school will have a variety of first-year-out teachers, for example. So it is not something you can apply a formula to, Mr Pratt. You have different staffing mixes. Minister Barr has spoken about the use of paraprofessionals in schools, so there is teaching staff and youth workers. Getting that mix, I think, is the most significant thing that we can do in terms of school culture and climate to ensure that we have the right balance between the use of teaching services staff, whose core business is to focus on teaching and learning, and the use of paraprofessionals, who are experts in particular fields to support student needs.

THE CHAIR: I have a question around staffing. Page 21 mentions the potential risk to the department in managing the age profile of the work force. We are putting all this energy into having skilled personnel on staff, and that is tremendous. I wondered what strategies you have considered with regard to this particular challenge.

Mr Barr: This is an important question. I have a copy of a profile. I have, unfortunately, only one copy in front of me, but I will seek to have additional copies made available for the committee. I will hold it up and you may be able to get something out of that. It is a profile looking over 10 years at the age structure and percentage of our total teaching workforce. What is pleasing to see is that for 2007 we are, in fact, up to our equal highest number of younger teachers in the age group under 30 than we have had in the last decade. There was a big spike in the number of our older teachers who were moving into retirement, and we are now down to—

THE CHAIR: When was that?

Mr Barr: That is 1997, and then 10 years on the profile you will see is that we have more younger teachers. It would be helpful if I had more copies of the profile, and I will get that to the committee. But we are seeing 10 years of work here to address what we recognised a decade ago was going to be a bubble of baby boomers who were going to retire. We have been able to work with some of our older and more experienced teachers in terms of their transition out. That can sometimes mean

engaging in part-time work, so not just turning 54/11 and disappearing, never to be seen again. We are trying to keep the engagement of staff up to the age of 70 in the system. We are certainly bringing on more younger teachers.

In our focus on recruitment, we are very lucky in the ACT that each year we have between 200 and 300 positions to offer or thereabouts. We certainly have in the last four or five years had somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 applicants for those 200 to 300 positions. Our emphasis is always on quality teaching, regardless of the age of the applicant. But I think we have been very lucky—and this is as a result of the quality of the University of Canberra system—that we have quality young graduates coming through who are wanting to teach in the ACT.

Of course, we have a nationwide search for quality teachers, but, unlike jurisdictions like Western Australia for example and Queensland who are really struggling to fill teaching positions full stop, we have had nearly five or six applicants for every one job available. That has enabled us to get the cream of the crop, if you like, in terms of the country's teachers. That is reflective of the desirability of teaching in the ACT system. I will table the profile for the committee.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

DR FOSKEY: This is a quick supplementary and you will probably have to get back to me with the answer: could you provide data that indicates, first of all, how many ACT education department staff moved on in 2006-07 as opposed to 2005-06, and how many ACT government teachers moved on in 2006-07 as opposed to 2005-06? Could you also provide the statistical differences between 2006-07 and 2005-06 for teachers and for departmental staff on the taking of sick leave and long service leave?

THE CHAIR: Can we take that on notice?

Mr Barr: Yes, I am sure that can be provided.

MR GENTLEMAN: I want to go to a finance question now. There is a pie chart on page 26 that shows that the liabilities over the year ended 30 June 2007 were \$2.2 million lower than the original 2006-07 budget, explaining “employee benefits and finance leases being lower than anticipated”. Can you expand on these finance leases that were lower than anticipated?

Mr Donnelly: There are two main items which we purchase on finance lease. One of them is government fleet vehicles and as of, I think, the financial year at issue, 2006-07, the accounting policy regarding those vehicles changed from an operating lease to a finance lease, so any new lease entered into from 1 July 2006 has been a finance lease. The second lot of items that we purchase under a finance lease tend to be computers for teaching, and the timing of the contract was such that not all of those computers were leased during this financial year as they would have expected to have been when we put the budget together.

MR GENTLEMAN: So they will simply come up at another period?

Mr Donnelly: Yes, in a future reporting period.

MR PRATT: Minister, given the billion-dollar boom that the Stanhope government has enjoyed these last few years, do you regret that perhaps the number of schools closed was a bit over the top? Do you think that the government's revenue could have covered some of the areas that I know you were trying to address, which we respect that you were trying to address? Do you think on the balance of the economic improvements in the ACT that perhaps you went too far?

Mr Barr: No. Regardless of any financial considerations around the territory's budget situation as a whole, the efficient use of resources within the education system would dictate a response; also just the demographic changes in our city, such that the school age population is declining. Certainly we are the fastest ageing population in Australia and over the last 10 years we have seen a 45 per cent increase in the number of people over 65 and an eight per cent decrease in the school age population. Then you have to factor in the market share split between public and private. We had 18,000 empty desks across our education system, so a system that was built to accommodate 55,000 students or thereabouts was accommodating 36,000. So there are purely educational grounds—we have debated this ad nauseam over the last two years—around the fair distribution of resources between schools; the ability of very small schools to offer the full curriculum that we expect across our system.

Going to the nub of the question, though, if the government had undertaken none of the reforms in the 2006-07 budget across all agencies—education, health, across the board—then at the peak of what would have to be one of the biggest economic booms in Australian history the ACT budget would not be in surplus; it would still be in deficit.

MR PRATT: That's debatable.

Mr Barr: But \$383 million worth of savings were achieved across all ACT government agencies as a result of the reforms that were undertaken. Undoubtedly, the strength of the property market, the increased GST revenue, the fact that the ACT's population was undercounted by the Bureau of Statistics between the 2001 and 2006 censuses, and on census day they indicated that there were 10,000 more Canberrans than was previously understood by the ABS, meant an adjustment to the amount of GST money that the territory received. I think the Treasurer on budget day indicated that that would be about an extra \$13 million a year into the ACT budget.

What the difficult reform process in 2006 has meant, though, is a capacity to invest back into the quality of the system. As has come through all of the survey data and clearly the most important issue is that if we are not offering quality education across all of our schools we will lose children and lose the confidence of parents in our public education system. So it becomes a question of what your priorities are in education and in a more holistic sense responding to the demographic changes in our city, in that there is no doubt that from a whole of government perspective resources are going to have to flow into health because of our ageing population.

If you want to look at a growth area, and this is not just in the ACT but across the country, you can expect in the bigger, grander scheme of things that there is going to be a shift of resources, just on the basis of pure population and pure demographics,

from education into health as we have fewer kids and more older people. There is a range of automatic provisions within state and territory budgets that would institute that flow of funds.

So fundamentally you have to go back and ask, “Could we have just let the system continue to drift?” What sort of questioning would we be having in this committee if the government had said, “No, we will just sit back.” How small would we let a school get? How far would we let education standards slip? Would we just continue to ignore all of the breadth of curriculum quality education issues that are clearly apparent? How would we provide additional resources for Indigenous education, for pastoral care—in all of those areas—if we had not acted? They are the questions that the community would rightly ask. If it was all too hard and we had not been prepared to go through a difficult process for the benefit of the education system as a whole, this committee would rightly sit here and say, “Minister, why aren’t you acting?” We know this has been an issue since the very first Assembly.

MR PRATT: The question was not so much about whether to close; the question was yes, close. But the question really is now, around the dynamics of the budget and the boom, how far to close. I have just one more question on an entirely new subject—

THE CHAIR: Yes, and I do too and I am sure all of us do.

Mr Barr: Make this the last question and I will happily take it, and I will keep my answer brief.

THE CHAIR: I am afraid we cannot; we just have to stop because we agreed—

MR PRATT: Can I just—

THE CHAIR: Very, very quickly; the minister may not have time to answer this.

MR PRATT: Going back to the question on the safe school environment—I didn’t get a chance to ask this earlier—with the suspension, exclusion or transfer of students policy for those kids at risk who are causing risk to other kids, what is the policy now on time-out classes, or even special sections within a couple of regional schools where you might transfer these kids? Where are you going with that?

Mr Barr: Thank you very much for raising that issue, Mr Pratt. You have provided me the opportunity to say that as part of the pastoral care initiative we are establishing three such centres on a regional basis—south, central and north—

MR PRATT: You are establishing or you have?

Mr Barr: They will be in place for term 2—

Dr Bruniges: Term 2, maybe semester 2.

Mr Barr: Yes, so in place this year, funded in the second appropriation; maximum number of students 18 in each centre; minimum teaching staff at least three, so a ratio of one teacher to each six students; time out can be days, weeks but perhaps no more

than 10 weeks is what is anticipated and that is another key initiative that was funded through the second appropriation—and thank you very much for raising it.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you, minister. We do need to move on.

MR PRATT: I presume those are located at existing schools—

Mr Barr: Yes.

MR PRATT: but separated from?

Mr Barr: Within existing schools but in discrete areas within, yes.

THE CHAIR: Any more questions on this report will need to be placed on notice. I just remind people that only members of committees can place questions on notice; previously everyone was—

DR FOSKEY: That is not true of every committee but anyway.

THE CHAIR: It is true of this one.

MR PRATT: You can see me, Dr Foskey. I will put them on for you.

THE CHAIR: Other members can use other ways of asking questions.

Mr Barr: They can put questions on notice at any time anyway.

THE CHAIR: Exactly. They have plenty of opportunity to do that.

Mr Barr: And you do, Dr Foskey, and I am always happy to answer them for you.

THE CHAIR: I thank Dr Bruniges and the officials.

We will now move on to the Canberra Institute of Technology and I welcome Dr Adrian and Mr Kowald. Minister, would you like to make any opening remarks?

Mr Barr: No. In the interests of time, let us move straight into questioning.

THE CHAIR: I need to remind people about the card. We have dispensed with reading the card, you will be very glad to know. We just need to ask you: have you read the privileges card lying on the table before you? I am sure you have seen it a number of times before. Do you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Dr Adrian: Yes.

Mr Kowald: Yes.

THE CHAIR: For the record I move that the statement be incorporated in *Hansard* for this session.

The statement read as follows—

Privilege statement

The committee has authorised the recording, broadcasting and rebroadcasting of these proceedings in accordance with the rules contained in the Resolution agreed by the Assembly on 7 March 2002 concerning the broadcasting of Assembly and committee proceedings. Before the committee commences taking evidence, let me place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee in evidence given before it.

Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attach to parliament, its members and others, necessary to the discharge of functions of the Assembly without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, if the committee accedes to such a request, the committee will take evidence in camera and record that evidence. Should the committee take evidence in this manner, I remind the committee and those present that it is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly. I should add that any decision regarding publication of in camera evidence or confidential submissions will not be taken by the committee without prior reference to the person whose evidence the committee may consider publishing.

I also have a few housekeeping matters which I need everyone in the room to observe: all mobile phones are to be switched off or put in silent mode; witnesses need to speak directly into the microphones for Hansard to be able to hear and transcribe them accurately; only one person is to speak at a time. When witnesses come to the table they each need to state their name and the capacity in which they appear.

MR GENTLEMAN: On page 22 of the report there is a section on educational effectiveness and it has some quite strong satisfaction rate percentages. Can you expand on the method of attaining these figures?

Mr Barr: I will defer to my officials on this one; it is a level of detail I do not have in my head.

Dr Adrian: We do a variety of surveys—surveys that we undertake ourselves but also we are part of the NCVER, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, that surveys all TAFEs and in many cases also private RTOs across the country on graduate satisfaction, student satisfaction, staff satisfaction and employer satisfaction. So it is an important part not only of our annual reporting process but also looking at our performance against other institutions on a regular basis. I might ask Leanne Cover to go through the details of these specific surveys.

Ms Cover: The graduate satisfaction surveys derive from that NCVER survey as Dr Adrian just mentioned. The territory results for that are around the TAFE sector for the territory and, given that we are the only TAFE in the sector, those results reflect the CIT graduate performance. The reference to the employer satisfaction rate: this survey is conducted with recent employers of over 400 graduates from CIT so it is

looking at the overall satisfaction rates of our students. It is statistically significant given that we would look at around 280 to be compliant there, so with around 400 we are very pleased with the take-up of that survey, and the results are very positive.

Dr Adrian: I have just one comment. As the figures show, we have been very happy with our performance on our satisfaction surveys. They have been getting better in recent years across all those satisfaction surveys, so in terms of our internal monitoring, if you like, of how we are travelling, we are very happy with the outcomes of those surveys.

THE CHAIR: Minister, can we go back to page 19, please? You will be aware that this committee has a particular interest in the issue of skill shortages and the response to that challenge. I notice that that page mentions significant achievements in 2006. Could you enlarge on this for the committee? I am particularly, but not exclusively, interested in skill transitional arrangements in the allied health area and also in upskilling nurses, which is mentioned on page 20. I think it is the first dot point on page 20. The second last dot point on page 20 mentions those particular ones, but I am not exclusively interested in those. I would be happy if you could fill us in on that.

Mr Barr: Certainly. There is a range of new initiatives. The one that I know the most about, because I attended the launch, is the accelerated chefs program. That is one of many examples on page 20 of the report. I think what it does show across the board is the capacity of the CIT to respond quickly to identified needs and skill shortages within our local community, a capacity to work with all of the stakeholders, because pulling together these sorts of responses is not something that is easily done and in some instances it requires a real change of mindset in terms of how programs are delivered, and also engagement with a number of the key stakeholders in each industry sector to ensure that there is not only acceptance of a changed delivery but also strong support and encouragement for a new delivery mechanism for a program. Particularly in some of these areas that are competency based there must be an assurance, and it must be accepted across all of the stakeholders, that, say, by accelerating a program, you are not compromising on the quality of skills that will be obtained by graduates.

There is a range of other examples. Unfortunately the reporting period covers an annual year and does not move into 2007, but I want to talk about them today because it could be a long time before we get to the 2007 annual report given the length of time between. The CIT vocational college is another example of where we are seeking to engage with segments of our education community whose needs were not being particularly well met by mainstream education and training providers. We are particularly looking at students who are not engaged with the high school or college sector and helping them to complete year 10 and year 12 and providing training assistance along the way. From my experience of visiting the program at Reid and engaging with students who have English as a second language, that is another example of where the CIT is leading education and training providers not only within the ACT but within the country. My colleagues may wish to expand a little more on some particular aspects in relation to nursing—

THE CHAIR: And the allied health area as well.

Mr Barr: and the allied health professionals. I think that across the board the CIT is proving its flexibility and its ability to be innovative to work with the key stakeholders within the ACT to get really good training outcomes. Dr Adrian, do you wish to elaborate any further?

Dr Adrian: I would be happy to. With regard to allied health, that was identified—and it was prior to my starting at the institute—as a key skill shortage area in the territory. I remember that when I was in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services that was identified in both the disability area and Therapy ACT as a skill shortage issue. The institute negotiated with Health as a partner in developing a certificate IV in allied health. As part of that there are specific programs or components of that certificate IV that meet the needs of ACT and also the community sector in Canberra. In the recent meetings with Health we will be further expanding the options under that program. As indicated in the annual report, the take-up rate in those courses has been very positive.

With regard to nursing, the critical issue there was providing opportunities for enrolled nurses. You can undertake nursing training at CIT and become an enrolled nurse. Many of those nurses are already in the workforce and do the studies part time. We negotiated with the Australian Catholic University an arrangement whereby they could undertake a short bridging course—I think it is an eight-week course—and that would enable them then to get credit for both the on-the-job training they had done and the certificate work they had done at CIT to go into full nurses qualifications at the Catholic University. So that pathway meant that we could increase the capacity of the nursing workforce and it shortened the time frames in which they could undertake that training.

The final thing that I would say is that the whole issue around accelerated programs is growing nationally. We have won two contracts through the federal government recently, one in relation to hairdressing and the other one in relation to panel beating, where we will be looking at developing this year two more accelerated programs.

I heard Chris Peters talk on the subject of hairdressing. It is a four-year apprenticeship. To be honest, there have not been a lot of incentives to shorten that apprenticeship time and we are looking now at the possibility of shortening those for some apprentices down to two and a half to three years. They would do on-the-job or intensive training in skill development at CIT for, say, six months and then go into a hairdressing salon and be employed as an apprentice and then do the rest of their training as both on-the-job training and some further training at CIT.

It is an important area. As the minister indicates, one has to be cautious, though, because one does not want to compromise the quality and standing of the training. It is particularly true in areas where licensed training is involved and in professional areas where—

THE CHAIR: Like health, for instance?

Dr Adrian: Health would be an example, as well as some of the licensed trades. For example, in the electrical trades there has been quite a bit of discussion about accelerated programs in those areas. There is a degree of nervousness, I would have to

say, from some of the authorities, naturally enough. So whilst there are a lot of examples now that we are involved in accelerated programs, I would have that note of caution.

THE CHAIR: Dr Adrian mentioned a couple of partnerships there, the health one and the Catholic University. I was wondering, minister, if, through you, I could ask a question about other partnerships that are mentioned on page 23 of the report. The report refers to increased learning opportunities and progressing relationships with other institutions, both in Australia and overseas. This sounds a very exciting initiative. It particularly mentions a partnership between CIT and the University of Florida in the area of science. I know that this is an area that we are trying to encourage more and more young people to get involved in.

Mr Barr: Yes, and I can thoroughly recommend to the committee a tour of the forensic science facilities at CIT.

MR GENTLEMAN: The ones here, not in Florida?

Mr Barr: Yes. You could just go to Belconnen, though, and see what is on offer there. I have had the opportunity and the benefit of seeing these facilities and the enthusiastic support for them from organisations like the AFP, for example. There is a list in the report. We also have an engagement committee with CIT and the University of Canberra, a collaborative committee looking at closer working relationships. That is at a very local level.

There are also, as we see, other national and international relationships that we are seeking to form, and that is, I think, to the benefit of the CIT but then also to the partnering institution. There is a lot that other educational institutions can learn from the quality of education that we are providing at the CIT. Dr Adrian, do you want to add to that?

Dr Adrian: I am happy to talk. Just on the one with the University of Florida, that is reflective of the relationship, as the minister indicated, between us, the AFP and the University of Canberra through the National Centre for Forensic Studies. What we look at there is the complementarity between the field work, if you like, investigative work in forensics that is done at CIT. We have leading experts nationally involved in that teaching.

The complementary side at UC is the laboratory work that Chris Lennard and his staff do at UC. We have a variety of programs where we jointly deliver on both campuses. We might deliver certain components to a student doing a degree course at UC. They are involved in some of the work for some of our certificate and diploma students at CIT.

The arrangement with the University of Florida—they were out meeting with us late last year—is to look at the possibilities for quite an amount of course work to be put online. There is a forensic sciences centre as part of the University of Florida and so we are looking at the possibility of sharing on a commercial basis some of our material and UC's material that would be available and would be part of the package delivered at the University of Florida.

We have had similar discussions in a UK context. There is a strong centre for forensic studies at Edinburgh university that Stephen Parker visited last year. That is the area where we are looking at whether some of those collaborative arrangements can be reflected in course material available online.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, could I take you to part C, sustainability and environment. The report quotes the quantities of fuel used and the CO2 output equivalent for the 2006 period by the CIT vehicle fleet. What strategies do you have in place to bring these figures in even lower for the years to come?

Mr Barr: CIT, like all government agencies, has adopted the new policy around four-cylinder vehicles, except for where there is an obvious working exception and they need a different type of vehicle. Standard fleet is to move to four-cylinder. Mr Kowald may be able to provide some more recent data on the institute's performance since this reporting period, but there has been a change since this report.

Mr Kowald: We have a number of measures in play. Yes, I confirm that we are converting our six-cylinder to four-cylinder vehicles as they run out. We are also acquiring hybrid vehicles. We are reducing the size of our fleet, where possible. So a combination of those three measures is reasonably significant.

MR GENTLEMAN: I will ask this question, too, of CIT. I know you will have classes on Saturday evenings, but on the 29th, earth hour, will you be able to support the earth hour program?

Mr Barr: I am advised that it is indeed.

DR FOSKEY: I have a question that is supplementary to the previous one on ESD. Have you investigated the hot rock system at ANU with regard to using what must be a fairly large amount of food and other green waste from CIT? Do you have any courses that would encourage the development of sustainability technology, such as waste disposal and other industry potential based on the waste chain?

Mr Kowald: I can advise that CIT is introducing a similar system to ANU for waste disposal arrangements in the next two months.

DR FOSKEY: A hot rock sort of system?

Mr Kowald: I am not particularly aware of that. We are introducing new collection arrangements which subdivide the waste into different types, to a much greater extent than we have done in the past, in collaboration with the student association. We have not particularly investigated the ANU arrangement that you have referred to.

DR FOSKEY: Is it a possibility?

Dr Adrian: Yes. I might comment on the general question about ESD courses. As part of the review that we did late last year on our structures and also looking at our programs, one of the new centres that we have established is a building and environment centre. A working group was established and looked across the institute

to see whether we could get some better synergies between an array of environmental courses that are taught at CIT. In a number of the centres that exist—for example, design, the business area, science and building—there are particular aspects of environmental management that are taught as components of individual courses. Gary Scott and others in the institute are looking at the possibility of bringing some of those subjects together into new courses that would probably be managed through the centre for building and environment. So it is a direction in which we are headed.

It is also a direction in which we are headed in terms of our horticulture operations. With respect to our horticulture training, we had a decline in numbers for a number of years. Interestingly, the numbers have increased in this last year. There are new forms of training being required in relation to what horticulturists do, including water management, different sorts of plantings, planting management and so on. So it is a direction in which we are headed. At the moment we deliver a large number of programs but they are spread across different areas of the institute.

DR FOSKEY: It sounds like a good idea. Regarding horticulture, it is announced here that a review was being conducted in 2007 of the Weston campus. Has that been completed? What are the outcomes?

Dr Adrian: We have not fully completed that work. We will be providing a report to the minister late this month or early next month. As you would be aware, the government provided funding for us—

DR FOSKEY: Do you mean late next month?

Dr Adrian: Later this month or early next month. So it needs to be provided to government in March, the reason being that it is part of the documentation to be provided to government for the upcoming budget. In last year's budget, we received funding to conduct feasibility work on the possibility of moving horticulture from Weston to Bruce. We have done an extensive program of work, including community consultation around that. We have conducted initial design work around what potentially could be built on the Bruce campus. So we have to provide that to the minister, and it is input for this year's budget process.

DR FOSKEY: Did the planned Molonglo development have any influence on the idea of moving it from where it is currently situated? I am very interested in the retention of those gardens because so much work has gone into them.

Dr Adrian: The consultation that we undertook was in two parts. A number of people—individuals and organisations—were interested in questions about the future of Weston, not just in terms of its horticulture operations but in terms of, for example, the buildings or the plantings at Weston. We gave a commitment that any information or views that the community expressed regarding Weston would be provided to government, which we will do. The community raised issues around those plantings that are there and that we use, as do the community, for identification purposes and training. We are continuing to use those facilities in that way. If we did move to Bruce, we would still potentially, given the history of some of those plantings, use them for plant identification purposes.

With regard to the question about Molonglo, that was not the issue for us. The key issue for us was the viability of the stand-alone operations at Weston and the desirability of linking students in horticulture into other environmental programs that are delivered at Bruce, and the full array of student services and student life that exists at the Bruce campus. That was really our primary consideration.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pratt, you had a supplementary question a while back. Do you still wish to ask it?

MR PRATT: Yes. In fact, I will ask a question that is supplementary to the last one, and then I will ask the other supplementary question. Good afternoon, officials. It is nice to see you again. Dr Adrian, the Weston campus: can you tell me where that is? Is it inside suburbia or is it on the urban edge? I should know where it is, and I do apologise.

Mr Barr: You would know the AFP facility on—

MR PRATT: Yes.

Mr Barr: It's a little bit further up the hill. It is on the other side of the road from the old AME school which is now the Orana school. It is in that part of Weston. So it is not really in suburbia; it is more on the—

DR FOSKEY: The urban edge.

Mr Barr: Yes.

MR PRATT: This is an odd but a pertinent question: do you have any other campuses outside the urban edge?

Dr Adrian: I will just run through the campuses. We have the Reid campus, which is clearly not on the urban edge; we have the Bruce campus, which is part of the urban area but in a garden or bush setting, if you like; we have the Weston campus, which we have just discussed; we have the Woden campus, which is on the Woden Valley high school site; and we also have a small operation, a flexible learning centre, as part of the arts centre in Tuggeranong; and then—

Mr Barr: Don't forget Fyshwick!

Dr Adrian: Yes, Fyshwick. We are also looking at Gungahlin, as part of the new Gungahlin college. We have our operations at Fyshwick, which is our Fyshwick trade skills centre. We also have responsibility for land at Watson, and the Academy for Interactive Entertainment use and manage part of that.

MR PRATT: I am generally familiar with most of those, but, with respect to the Weston campus, are you required to do a bushfire operational plan for that particular campus?

Dr Adrian: We are required, as I think is indicated in the management plan, on all our lands to do bushfire fuel management plans. So the short answer is yes. If you

want the details, I am happy for Mr Kowald to respond.

MR PRATT: Are those BOPs for every single campus or do you just do the one institutionalised BOP?

Mr Kowald: It would be for every single campus.

MR PRATT: Do you submit those to TAMS or to the Emergency Services Agency?

Mr Kowald: To the department.

MR PRATT: So TAMS would check those BOPs and sign them off, and generally ensure that whatever management tasks needed to be carried out are carried out?

Mr Kowald: Yes.

MR PRATT: Going back to the fleet management issues, for how long have you been changing over from six-cylinder to four-cylinder and the hybrid phase?

Mr Kowald: Only since the ACT government made the decision to do that conversion.

MR PRATT: About 18 months?

Mr Kowald: Yes.

MR PRATT: Are you able to quantify savings in operational costs, keeping in mind that, as you say, you are also shrinking the fleet?

Mr Kowald: We would have to take that question on notice.

MR PRATT: Could you do that?

Mr Kowald: Yes.

MR PRATT: While maybe you are seeing savings in capital costs, as well as operating costs, are there any observations that your operations have been restricted by the fact that you have changed from slightly larger vehicles down to smaller vehicles?

Mr Kowald: No.

THE CHAIR: We were talking before about the ageing population. Page 47 mentions how the CIT is meeting the vocational education and training needs of this ageing population. Could you enlarge a little on the strategy involving the proportion of students aged 40 and over—24 per cent, apparently, if I am reading these figures right, in 2006. I believe that was a significant increase over previous years. Do you have strategies in train to deal with this trend?

Mr Barr: Clearly, it is picking up a trend and a desire for career change or retraining

opportunities for what I will politely describe as mature age workers. It does recognise that not all training is provided to students directly out of the school system; that in fact people will seek to engage with the CIT at various stages in their life and employment cycle. If you look at the interim report of the Skills Commission, you will see there are a number of groupings within our community where there is perhaps increased capacity to provide training and to assist people into either new careers or back into the workforce, if they have had time out of the workforce.

CIT has a crucial role to play in providing that training and in recognising that that may mean delivery in a different way—recognition of prior learning. There are a range of ways that the CIT can assist mature age workers to undertake a career change or perhaps just to enhance their skills. It may have been 10, 15 or 20 years since they have worked in an area and they can come back and undertake a very quick refresher course and update their skills to meet changing work requirements. I expect that growth in terms of total CIT student intake will continue. The demographics will lead to that, anyway, as we look at the changing nature of the city in the years ahead. With respect to our population growth, there is a bit of a spurt from those who come here for university but it is largely in the upper echelons of the age brackets rather than at the younger levels, as our birthrate is less than replacement, and our population is growing through interstate and international migration rather than through births.

Dr Adrian: As the minister has indicated, it is reflective of a trend that has been happening for a number of years but which seems to be accelerating. It is reflected in other statistics that we have; for example, more of our students now are studying part time rather than full time. More of our students are in the workforce and also studying on a continuous basis. That means for us that we must look at what their training needs are. As the minister indicated, we are getting increased demand for students coming back for short courses and specific skill sets, either sponsored by their employers or off their own bat as part of a career change or wanting to move up the ladder or whatever else it is.

Mr Barr: Or pure educational interest. There are a number of CIT courses which, just for the sheer pleasure of learning, people will want to engage in.

Dr Adrian: You are right. The other thing that is very noticeable as part of that is changing demand in the way in which people are expecting the courses to be delivered. Whilst there is still a lot of face-to-face delivery, many of the courses have online components, blended delivery, those sorts of things. There is increasing demand for on-the-job training, and components of our courses—for example, a project component, might have an involvement with the workplace that somebody is currently in.

The maturing of our students in a percentage sense is reflected in a variety of other statistics as well as across the institute. It is something that has been discussed amongst TAFE's nationally as well. It is a national trend, but it seems to be stronger in the ACT. I think, as the minister indicated, it is reflective of the particular demographics. There are fewer younger people both in absolute numbers and percentage wise in the Canberra population than there were 15 or 20 years ago.

THE CHAIR: So what about in the workforce? On page 62 it shows 42.5 per cent

starting at 50 years and over. I take your point about what you were saying before that just because a person is older does not mean to say they are not suitable to be in the workforce.

Mr Barr: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I believe there is a workforce planning tool—I have no idea what that is.

Mr Barr: I will throw to Dr Adrian in a minute, but I will just say that—and we have discussed this at estimates and, I am sure, with this committee—if there is any one education provider that has the most acute difficulty in terms of a much larger proportion of its workforce approaching retirement age it is the CIT. The age profile is even more heavily skewed towards the baby boomer generation in the CIT than it is even in our secondary colleges within the public education system. The institute has been aware of this for some time and has a range of strategies that Dr Adrian will outline in a minute, I am sure. This is a real challenge.

The other factor that we are finding—it depends a little bit on the particular area of the institute—is that the skills shortages are so great in some areas that some of the people who you might look to to teach are, in fact, so busy and so heavily engaged in the industry itself that finding qualified teachers of a particular age is very difficult. That is why we are asking and certainly seeking some people who have been with the institute for a long time to stay just a little bit longer and even being very flexible with the working arrangements to ensure that we are still able to provide the training. In some of these areas the skill shortages are acute, and it is across the country. We do have difficulty, but Dr Adrian will tell you all about the strategies that are in place.

Dr Adrian: It is a critical issue for us, there is no doubt. When we did some work looking at all the strategic issues affecting us, this was right up there in the top five or six of the issues that we have to deal with. On one level, it is an issue because of the age of our workforce. In another sense, though, it does present an opportunity because of the nature of our workforce.

We have got a large proportion, particularly on the teaching side, where we have full-time, part-time and casual teachers. Most of the casual teachers tend to be younger, whereas, naturally enough, more of the permanent staff tend to be in the older workforce. So what we are hoping for over time is a shift where a number of those older workers might, in fact, stay under a variety of options that might involve part-time work or casual work where they want to keep their hand in but they do not want to necessarily earn the same income as they did before.

We are also looking at opportunities where they might be involved in some cases on a voluntary basis with our peer support programs and mentoring younger teachers. So what we would be looking for is a gradual shift where there is a turnaround and more of the younger staff are taken on the part-time or full-time staff and a number of those that are currently employed full time might be happy to move into the casual workforce.

The second thing that I think is so critical is the middle level of management, both in

relation to the teachers and the non-teaching staff. Last year we established a program—it was targeted at about 18 staff—that we called an emerging leaders program. We wanted to lift the capacity of people at that level. Most of them were relatively young compared with our age profile across the institute, but we wanted to give them training not only in their professional discipline areas but also in relation to management training. We wanted to give them broader responsibilities across the institute. We also had some examples of outsiders coming in talking to some of the staff.

We intend running that program again this year so that gradually we will increase the capacity of that middle management level, particularly creating some opportunities for younger people who are in the organisation at the moment but also attracting some people from outside the organisation into the institution. Ms Cover might talk a little about the specific workforce planning tool which is used in all the teaching and operational centres within the institute.

Ms Cover: The institute has, through the centre of organisational capability, developed a workforce planning tool, which is really a practical set of resources that centre directors or managers can use to forecast future staffing needs and requirements. That tool helps managers forecast things such as resignations or other terminations and transfers in and out of the institute. It helps predict a net supply for a particular centre for teaching and non-teaching staff.

The centre for organisational capability staff work directly with the centre directors and managers to implement that tool and provide feedback to a central area, which then informs professional development activities, such as Dr Adrian mentioned, to do with mentoring and coaching programs, formal programs like the emerging leaders programs and then the informal networks throughout the institute, such as what we call communities of practice. That is a monthly meeting where all managers across the institute come together, teaching and non-teaching. We have internal and external presenters for that and we are able to gain intelligence around future directions for staffing requirements.

Mr Barr: I just very quickly draw the committee's attention to table 6 on page 63 that does indicate service with the CIT. Those who have had less than three years service account for more than a third of the staff. So there has been a real effort to bring new staff into the organisation. This, of course, is the 2006 report, and you will see that flow through in 2007 and 2008.

DR FOSKEY: It does not mean they are young, though.

Mr Barr: No, but you would not seek to discriminate on that basis.

DR FOSKEY: No, of course not. I have been a TAFE teacher of both old and young.

Dr Adrian: The statistics reflect that, yes, in some cases, there are younger people, but, as you alluded to, we are also making sure that there is a currency in industry skills of the people who are doing the teaching. We do endeavour to get a turnover of staff. It is particularly true in the casual area where staff are currently working in the particular industry area that they are teaching in.

DR FOSKEY: It would be terrible to leave and not hear what is happening to the CIT vocational education options in Tuggeranong Valley. There is mention in the report that there are investigations, and it has been mentioned for the three or four years I have been here. So I would be interested to know what is happening.

Mr Barr: There is some work being done in association with the new school in Kambah to look at possible CIT involvement there as part of an education precinct. We have, of course, the flexible learning centre that does operate out of Tuggeranong, and we have very strong partnerships with all of the government schools and some non-government ones in the Tuggeranong area. The government is not in a position to make announcements yet around the Kambah site; that is still a matter of further consultation.

As I have indicated to you before, there was strong interest from parents at Kambah, from Kambah high in particular, for improved vocational education and training opportunities to be part of the new school. We are working with the commonwealth government around their \$46.5 million commitment to trades training centres in ACT schools and are looking at the possibility of locating one of the commonwealth trades training centres as part of the new Kambah school. Those negotiations are ongoing with the commonwealth. They have put their money on the table, so we will just need to work with them around a regional provision of such an opportunity, and we will look to work with the CIT in partnership to deliver on that commonwealth initiative as well as our own particular desire to improve vocational education and training opportunities in Tuggeranong.

DR FOSKEY: Two things: is the federal government going to drop that sort of competitor to the TAFE education scheme which was going to see a facility developed in Queanbeyan?

Mr Barr: I understand that facility has opened.

DR FOSKEY: It has opened?

Mr Barr: It was opened under the previous federal government. I will not speak for Minister Gillard other than to say that my understanding is that existing Australian technical colleges will continue to operate. But it may be better to raise this with the federal minister around what their longer term futures are. My understanding is that it is a very small operation: less than 50 students, compared with 25,000 at the CIT. So we are not particularly worried that it is a major competitor with the CIT. But I think we have discussed before what a monumental waste of money the Australian technical colleges were.

DR FOSKEY: Yes.

Mr Barr: I think it is a question of ensuring that the students who enrolled are able to complete their courses. But the longer term future is something that the commonwealth government will obviously make a decision on. We are aware of their desire to fund trades training centres within the ACT education system. They have put \$46.5 million on the table, and we are working with them to implement that policy

within the ACT.

DR FOSKEY: Will there be an opportunity for the CIT to again tender for the English as a second language? I believe a substantial proportion was lost a couple of years ago to another provider.

Mr Kowald: No, we have retained the English contract with the commonwealth. It will shortly come up for a new tender, and we will be actively pursuing it. The contract that we did not achieve was the literacy and numeracy contract, which was of much lower value.

THE CHAIR: Questions on notice will be from committee members only and will come to you by Monday. We expect a turnaround of questions within five days.

Mr Barr: We will endeavour to answer all questions within five days. I cannot, of course, commit to absolutely every one, given that I do not know what the questions will be.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 12.34 pm.