



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2006-2007**

**(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2006-2007)**

**Members:**

**MS M PORTER (The Chair)**  
**DR D FOSKEY (The Deputy Chair)**  
**MR M GENTLEMAN**  
**MS K MacDONALD**  
**MR S PRATT**  
**MR B SMYTH**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 28 JUNE 2006**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Ms 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

<b>Canberra Institute of Technology</b> .....	<b>750</b>
<b>Department of Education and Training</b> .....	<b>750</b>

## **The committee met at 9.32 am.**

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

### Department of Education and Training

Bruniges, Dr Michele, Chief Executive  
Adrian, Dr Colin, Deputy Chief Executive  
Curry, Mr Craig, Executive Director, Resource Management  
Strauch, Ms Helen, Executive Director, Education  
Harris, Ms Carol, Director, Schools—Southern Canberra  
Howard, Ms Joanne, Director, Schools—Central Canberra  
Chandler, Mr Wayne, Director, Schools—Northern Canberra  
Hare, Mr John, Director, Planning and Reporting  
Forner, Ms Beverley, Director, Information Management  
Melson, Ms Kathy, Director, Student Services and Equity  
Houghton, Ms Anne, Director, Training and Adult Education  
Davy, Ms Janet, Director, Curriculum and Assessment  
Donnelly, Mr Robert, Director, Budget and Facilities Branch  
Bateman, Mr Michael, Director, Human Resources  
Edwards, Mr Bob, Manager, Office of the Board of Senior Secondary Studies

### Canberra Institute of Technology

Korsch, Ms Kathy, Chief Executive  
Kowald, Mr Peter, Dean, Corporate Services Division  
Kane, Mr Shane, Manager, Finance Unit

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, minister and officers. You should understand that these hearings are legal proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means that you are protected from certain legal action, such as being sued for defamation, for what you say at this public hearing. It also means that you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Do you all understand that? Thank you very much. Minister, would you like to make some opening remarks?

**Mr Barr:** I have a brief opening statement to make, thank you, madam chair. The 2006-07 budget seeks to confront some very difficult issues facing the territory's public education system. It looks beyond the next year—indeed, the current budget cycle—to put in place a framework for a sustainable public education system.

This budget continues the Stanhope government's investment in education. Overall funding for education has been increased in this budget, spending on education now accounting for 24 per cent of total government expenditure, almost \$1 in every \$4. The government believes that money spent on education is an investment in the future of our community. However, our public education system is facing major challenges as a result of changing demographics, changing community expectations and increasing costs. The challenge for government is to respond to these changes.

Currently, the ACT has over 170 government schools and we have limited resources to

spread across all of them. Enrolments in public schools have fallen seven per cent since 2000-01 and are continuing to decline at the rate of around one per cent each year. Our population is ageing and we are also seeing an increasing number of students, now at about 41 per cent, choosing to attend non-government schools.

Across the territory, public schools are under capacity by more than 30 per cent and, at the same time as these enrolments have fallen, education costs and expenditure have risen. While some schools have seen massive drops in enrolments, others are experiencing high demand as parents exercise greater choice in where to send their children. Many of our schools have ageing infrastructure and, when combined with declining student numbers, they simply cannot be sustained. So, without reform, our public education system will continue to struggle. If current trends persist, government schools will cater for fewer than half of our school-age population within a decade.

The education of our students is worth government investment and it is also worth some short-term political pain in order to ensure the sustainability and relevance of our system into the future. This budget presents a real opportunity to respond to the challenges and to secure the future of quality public education in the ACT. With this in mind, the Stanhope government has put forward a proposal for consideration by the community, *Towards 2020: renewing our schools*. It is designed to maintain our world-class educational outcomes and meet the needs of students in the 21st century.

As part of the proposal, we have looked at the changing nature of our community and the educational choices that people are making, and we have sought to change our system to better cater for students now and into the future. The government's *Towards 2020* proposal sees savings coming over four years from streamlining the number of schools in the ACT, but it also sees significant new investment in public education, including the largest ever injection of capital funding into schools since self-government. Overall, there is \$193 million in this budget for capital projects for education, including \$90 million for upgrading and renewing our schools over the coming four years. This proposal also looks at expanding the range of education models across the ACT to provide families with greater choice. It proposes a system that meets the changing needs of our city and our society.

I accept that any major change is difficult, particularly a change involving something as fundamental as school education, but I believe that this proposal addresses many of the challenges that have arisen in our public education system. This budget is about renewing and reinvigorating our public education system and meeting the challenges that it faces. Successive governments since self-government have been unwilling or unable to address this issue, despite the fact that they recognised the need for change.

The current opposition knows it needs to be done, and in 2004 agreed that schools would need to close and amalgamate in response to declining enrolments. The Stanhope government are now facing this challenge and in this budget we have taken tough decisions that will secure the sustainability of our public education system into the future. Thank you, madam chair. We are now happy to take questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, notwithstanding everything that you have just said, the government is proposing to inject \$90 million of new funding into this project for capital works to upgrade schools. Wouldn't it have been easier just to leave the infrastructure as

it was and not to close any schools?

**Mr Barr:** In political terms, yes, that would be the easy option, but it would not address the issues and the challenges that the government system faces. I have said at many of the public meetings that the standards that we seem prepared to accept in school buildings we would not accept in any other public buildings. My view is that we need to concentrate our investment in a reduced number of schools to ensure that those schools are of the highest possible quality. Many of the schools were built in the 1960s and 1970s and are frankly showing their age.

You need only look at the comparison between schools that were built more recently that have much higher building infrastructure, much better environmental efficiency, that are more suited to the needs of students in the 21st century, and contrast that with some of the older buildings that are badly in need of refurbishment. So what we are seeking to do in this proposal is to inject that money where it is needed to bring the schools up to a much higher standard and then increase the maintenance on those school buildings by 25 per cent from 2008-9 to ensure, once we have brought the schools up to a higher standard, that we are maintaining them at that standard.

**DR FOSKEY:** Minister, who put this proposal together? Was it a group made up of educational experts, economists, social or cultural planners? Could the committee please see the terms of reference or the project brief for the preparation of the proposal?

**Mr Barr:** The proposal came forward as part of the budget round. It was prepared by officers within the department of education in consultation, obviously, with other agencies as part of a normal budget process that involved the seeking of advice from a wide range of sources across the territory government.

**DR FOSKEY:** Could you please make the terms of reference available to the committee?

**Mr Barr:** The proposal was put together as part of a budget round. As I have indicated, all of the issues were considered in relation to our responsibilities under the Education Act and our responsibilities in putting together a budget that seeks to meet the educational needs of the territory, but also to ensure that we are living within our means.

**DR FOSKEY:** Does that mean that the terms of reference in fact were made up of the amount of money that the functional review or something deriving from the functional review said must be saved by the department?

**Mr Barr:** We looked at a variety of issues in putting together a proposal. There were educational, demographic, geographic and financial issues, a whole range of issues, that went into the production as part of the budget process of this proposal.

**DR FOSKEY:** Was a risk analysis conducted of this broadscale strategy—for instance, the impact it might have on government schools in terms of its shock and awe approach, leading to panic amongst parents about where and how they should enrol their children next year?

**Mr Barr:** We are engaging in a six-month consultation process around the proposals.

**DR FOSKEY:** No risk analysis was conducted.

**Mr Barr:** There is money as part of this process for transitional arrangements to assist students. We have in recent years had experience in how to manage transition when a school closes. All of those issues are part and parcel of any change process.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** While you are on that, minister, what is the transitional funding going to be spent on?

**Mr Barr:** It will be spent on a variety of things, ranging from assistance for families to purchase new school uniforms through to assistance in transport and individual case management. There will be plans for individual students to make a transition should transition be necessary. There will be a whole variety of options available and individual assistance. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline how the process worked in relation to the changes that occurred in west Belconnen last year.

**Dr Bruniges:** In terms of the process last year, which was very successful, there were individual transition plans worked out for every individual student to ensure that we had program continuity, that we considered parents' choice in where they wanted to send their students. Issues of need in terms of uniform and travel were also considered as part of those individual transition plans that were worked through. So that meant that we had someone on the ground within the school speaking with parents, working with parents and making sure that those students' needs and relocation were managed successfully. If things were to come to fruition here, what we need to do at the moment is think long and hard about the transition plans that would need to go into place. That will mean working with communities again, with individual parents, with individual teachers. There is also a teacher component about transitioning teachers, but that is quite separate from the transition funding that is there for parents to ensure that students are transitioned well.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, you mentioned transport in that funding and there has been quite a bit of discussion in the press over the last few days especially about the northside schools, Dickson and students going to Campbell. How is the transport funding going to be allocated there?

**Mr Barr:** I think the issue around secondary schooling in north Canberra is indeed a vexed one. Obviously, the Dickson priority enrolment area takes in a large part of north Canberra and there are obviously students who travel already from Campbell and parts of Ainslie, Braddon and Reid across to the Dickson campus who would need to make transport arrangements to get to Dickson. Obviously, were the program to relocate to Campbell high, they would then be within walking distance. Campbell high is on a major public transport route, adjacent to the war memorial, that does see it particularly well served by public transport. But we also have the opportunity, as we own our bus company, to seek to alter bus routes and provide particular school bus services in order to assist in the transition. Obviously, if a school were to close, then you would no longer need to provide a bus service to that school and you could look at providing an alternative service to a different site.

**MR PRATT:** I have a supplementary question on Mr Gentleman's question. You say that you are going to be reviewing bus routes as part of the overall review. Of course

DTAMS or TAMS is also undertaking a review of its bus services. Are both of these reviews being coordinated?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, we will be working with ACTION buses as part of the process to ensure that we meet the transport needs of students in the territory.

**MR PRATT:** So ACTION is definitely taking into consideration the entire upheaval of schooling as part of its strategic review, is it?

**Mr Barr:** As part of this process, the education department will be working with ACTION buses, as they do on an ongoing basis for the provision of school bus services, to ensure that we meet the transport needs of students across the territory.

**DR FOSKEY:** I am wondering how the transition fund of \$4 million will be managed, because we are talking about 39 schools, not just one closing or changing in some way, and the issues are going to range from how a parent will get a child from Yarralumla to Forrest if the parent does not have a car to actually needing counselling. The situation is that bad. This is probably on a range of five to six as to major impacts on people's lives. Are you going to have a separate little bureaucracy in the department that people will access, because obviously the schools closed are not going to be able to provide a service and people will be unsure about what school to go to? In fact, is \$4 million enough? How on earth is this going to be managed?

**Mr Barr:** The transition fund will be managed within the department of education. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline how that process will work.

**Dr Bruniges:** In the first year, Dr Foskey, we have got about three per cent of students who could probably be affected if the proposal was to come to fruition. So that is about 1,000 students that we would need to work with on individual cases. In each of the school settings, we have principals and we have a support service of counsellors there, if they are required on any issue, and they are available all the time for a whole range of issues. From the department's point of view, we have—

**DR FOSKEY:** Sorry, the parents will need to counsel in some cases.

**Dr Bruniges:** In terms of support from the department, in terms of our three school directors working in each of their geographic areas with each of the schools, we have that and a dedicated resource to be able to work with school communities there. Our principals in schools in terms of support of students in schools and family are a key link in terms of educational leadership and in terms of the support that they give to students in classrooms every day. So for me it is about a strategy of working from the classroom up in terms of, in every classroom, identifying issues that may come to their concern, for school communities, for the P&C, for directors of schools and for the department to look at a range of strategies for support. We have to gauge that support as it comes to us and deal with the issues as they come.

**MRS DUNNE:** On those figures that you raise, Dr Bruniges, you said about three per cent or about 1,000 children. Isn't that figure of 1,000 children much less than three per cent of the 45,000-odd children in the ACT government system? So what is it? Is it three per cent of children who are going to be affected or is it about 1,000 children,

because about three per cent is closer to 1,500 than 1,000?

**Dr Bruniges:** The enrolment in government schools is certainly not 45,000. My understanding is it is about 35,000, Mrs Dunne, and we have estimated about three per cent. We can't put a definite figure on that because parents will make different decisions at different points about appropriate transition programs and we need to gauge that.

**MRS DUNNE:** You are working on the basis that you think you will have to help about 1,000 children.

**Dr Bruniges:** About 1,000 students, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, going back to the original question by Dr Foskey, will you release the criteria so that the community can better understand why a school is being shut or being proposed for shutting?

**Mr Barr:** I have at each public meeting got up and read out the criteria and the range of subissues within each criterion. There isn't a magic formula; you don't get a score of seven out of 10 in each criterion or a score out of 10 in each criterion and have to make that. I have also indicated publicly that, if this were simply the economic rationalist approach, you would pick the 39 highest cost schools and seek to close them. There is a variety of issues that need to be considered. We have looked at demographics, at social issues, at financial issues and, most importantly, at educational issues and sought to provide a regional solution in eight different areas of the city, sought to provide different educational models. We are in competition with the private sector; there is no doubting that. We need to have our public system have the breadth of educational opportunity that will be attractive to parents. We need to strengthen some of the programs within some of our schools, and we are seeking to do that as part of this program.

**MR SMYTH:** Will you make available to this committee the criteria you have read out at each of those meetings?

**Mr Barr:** I certainly will.

**MR SMYTH:** As to the criteria, one of the concerns which is being raised at a number of the public meetings and which I did not hear you mention before is environmental costs. Were environmental costs in the criteria and in your considerations? Was the transfer of costs currently covered by the government to parents considered in your deliberations?

**Mr Barr:** As part of the broader social and economic issues, yes, those issues are taken into account. There is obviously in a change in provision going to be some change and some further distance for some students to travel, but in other cases it would be, in fact, a shorter distance, depending on the region that individual students might live in. Yes, there are changes. We have sought to address that through transitional funding. As part of an ongoing process, should particular proposals go ahead—and there is a variety of different options in different regions—we will be working closely with school communities to manage those transitions.



**MR SMYTH:** If the criteria were changed from school to school, how could you have a valid comparison of which schools should remain open and which schools should shut?

**Mr Barr:** The territory is not homogenous. We have different issues in different communities. We need to look at education provision. We need to provide clear pathways and linkages. An example is that it would be desirable in our system that continuity of, say, language study is available, that you are able to continue, if you are studying a language at primary school, into high school and college to study that language. We would like to develop stronger educational pathways as part of this process to ensure that schools are working together, that those communities are engaging, and some of the proposals in different regions seek to strengthen the relationships between schools and to ensure that when students make transitions from primary into high school or high school into college those transitions are well handled and that there is a continuity of educational programs across regions and across schools.

**MS MacDONALD:** My question is on the same subject matter, minister. In the few meetings that I have been to—I have not been to a lot of them, but I have certainly been to the one at Melrose primary and preschool as well as the one at Woden, the general consultation meeting—the question that kept getting raised in my hearing and directly with me was: what is the rationale behind closing my school as opposed to closing another school down the road? Do you feel that this has been fully explained to the community?

**Mr Barr:** As part of this process, we are seeing a general acceptance that we need to make some changes to the education system, but I am finding increasingly that parents, teachers and members of the community are acknowledging that the system requires some reform. Of course, each individual school community says, “Yes, we agree with the overall need for change but, please, not our school.” That obviously presents some very difficult challenges for the government in seeking to have a broader look at educational provision across the territory.

In each individual region we have sought to ensure that those educational pathways are there. That has presented some very difficult challenges. I think in an ideal world, if you could go back and redesign our system and redesign where the schools are located, you could get some better geographic fits, but unfortunately we don't have that opportunity. We have had to make some difficult decisions in terms of making changes to education provision in some of the regions and that has involved, as I say, some very difficult decisions around individual schools. With the instance that you raise in relation to the school at Chifley, the difficulty there is that that is a school with around 80 students.

**MS MacDONALD:** I am aware of the population but I know it has been pointed out to you that 19 of the 22 places in the preschool are filled. There is a changing demographic in Chifley in that a number of young families are moving into the area. They are concerned about the fact that if you close down this school you might have to reopen it in five years time because a number of students will be ready to go in. They are also concerned about whether the school building will still be there or whether it will be sold off for flats.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, yes. In relation to the school buildings there is no hypothecation of land or building sales as part of this education package. Those schools and the land are

zoned for community use. Members would be well aware that there is a strict planning process and there is an Assembly planning committee. Any changes to the land use policy would require change through the Assembly.

**MRS DUNNE:** This is not a public meeting, minister. You can say those things at a public meeting.

**Mr Barr:** As part of this process we are not seeking to fund our capital investments in schools by selling off land. Those buildings will remain in community use and they will be handed to the property group within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services, which looks after surplus government property.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, you categorically ruled out the selling of empty or closed schools. You talked about schools that are showing their age, such as 1960s buildings. What will be the government's bill to maintain all those empty buildings and schools? Can you tell us now what that bill is?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Pratt, building management costs will be handled by the property group within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. I think your question would be better directed to that group.

**MR PRATT:** Are you saying, therefore, that DTAMS will now pick up the added costs of maintaining closed infrastructure?

**Mr Barr:** The property group within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services will take over the management of those properties. Obviously a long list of community organisations, sporting groups, and a whole range of organisations seek to rent space from the government. I, as education minister, will not be involved in the management of that surplus government property; that is a matter for that department and that minister.

**MR PRATT:** How can you make statements that there will be savings when transitional costs will be going to other departments to maintain stock for which you are currently responsible?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Pratt, there are some operational savings from closing a school site, such as the supply of utilities, electricity, water, telecommunications, et cetera. In education, a large part of the costs relates to salaries and wages. So you would not have to operate an administrative structure on a school site that was no longer operating. For example, you would not need a principal at a school that was no longer operating.

**MR PRATT:** Is there a likelihood that a number of empty schools will end up like Yarralumla brickworks—poorly maintained, fire traps, and vandal havens?

**Mr Barr:** No, Mr Pratt. I do not see that as being the case. If you look at the usage of former schools across the territory you will see that a variety of different organisations seek to use school facilities. One of my other ministerial responsibilities is as Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation. I have been approached by a number of sporting groups, Basketball Canberra in particular, seeking an indoor training facility to create a basketball centre of excellence. It was pointed out to me that our championship winning

basketball team, the Canberra Capitals, currently shares training facilities at Radford college with the under-14s and under-16s.

Team members get about an hour for training and they have to share the court time. It seems logical to make available an indoor hall, a gymnasium, for a basketball centre of excellence. The Jigsaw Theatre Company also approached me looking for space to set up a theatre and arts hub and to ensure that it has some rehearsal space. So there are a variety of organisations. I am sure many members would be aware of, and would have been approached by, community organisations that are seeking to find some suitable accommodation across the city. There will be ample opportunity for school buildings to be retained in community use but to serve a different purpose.

**MRS BURKE:** As shadow minister for disability services I have serious and major concerns for students with a disability and their parents regarding potential transitional arrangements. What consultation was conducted with the parents of children with a disability who are currently attending any or one of the schools earmarked for closure prior to the announcement of school closures? What plans are now in train to cater for the future schooling needs of this cohort of children affected by school closures? How many of the schools earmarked for closure have been retrofitted, refurbished or adapted to cater for the needs of students with a disability, and at what cost? How will we retrieve that cost?

**Mr Barr:** As I indicated earlier we will be engaging in individual transitional arrangements for individual students and families. In a moment I will get Dr Bruniges to outline the process we adopted in making contact with individual students and their families to seek to put transitional arrangements in place.

**MRS BURKE:** But there was nothing prior to that?

**Mr Barr:** We are doing that now.

**MRS BURKE:** But there was nothing prior to your announcement?

**Mr Barr:** No. We are seeking to engage with families as part of this consultation process. We are seeking to make transitional arrangements available now to ensure that families have a good amount of time to make any adjustments that might or might not be necessary. It is important to have plans in place should changes go ahead. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline that process.

**MRS BURKE:** You did not answer that part of my question relating to the retrofitting, refurbishing or adaptation of schools for children with a disability.

**Mr Barr:** We would seek across all government buildings to ensure that they are brought to acceptable Australian standards.

**MRS BURKE:** That was not my question, minister. My question was: how many of the schools earmarked for closure have already been adapted for children with a disability and at what cost, and how will we retrieve that cost?

**Mr Barr:** I do not have that figure in front of me but I may be able to be assisted on that

issue by one of the departmental officials. Those buildings would still remain in community use and would still be used by people who may have a disability. Our investment in those buildings would not be lost because those buildings would still be available for community use. I will get Dr Bruniges to answer the first part of your question and then seek assistance from other officials in relation to the second part of your question.

**Dr Bruniges:** As part of the strategy, individual letters have been written to every parent in those units. A team will begin to visit schools with those units and work with parents on individual transition plans. I understand that correspondence from the department went out to individual parents this week. A number of conversations and meetings have already been held at different school sites. Some communities have asked questions about whether groups of students will be kept together or relocated if the proposal were to come to fruition.

Individual parents want to make different decisions based on sites and on information. Our officers can support them with that individual planning. With reference to costs and to equipment in our schools, you would be aware that some of the equipment for students with disabilities could be relocated. We will implement programs and look at what facilities and equipment can be relocated with those students, so there is that possibility. Mr Curry might have more to add about the program and its structure as a result of initial letters going out.

**MRS BURKE:** I wish to follow up one point. How many letters have you written and how many students and households has that involved? Do you have that number?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes. Mr Curry, do you have that figure?

**Mr Curry:** We have written to the families of all students who are registered on our SCAN database; in other words, students who receive special education support through the department who may be affected by these proposals.

**MRS BURKE:** Do you have an indicative number?

**Mr Curry:** I cannot give it to you off the top of my head but I can provide you with that number.

**MRS BURKE:** Thank you.

**Mr Curry:** The correspondence to all those parents is about having individual meetings with them. There will also be group meetings, so if it involved a particular unit—say, an autism unit—the discussion with all parents would be about that unit, what their wishes were about moving together as a unit, or whether they wanted to look at other choices. I guess it is very much about individual transitional planning, what choices parents want and what they would be looking for in a new facility at a new location. We want to make this a collaborative exercise.

We do not want to be making decisions on behalf of these people; we want to make decisions with them to ensure that they get the desired outcomes. We appreciate that these are the people who will be most anxious during this period of change and while

proposals are out for consultation, so we need to be very sensitive about their needs. It might be that the transition process is longer for some of the students with disabilities. We appreciate that and we will work with them if that is required.

**MRS BURKE:** Do you not think you are putting them under a high level of angst if you have not yet decided what schools are being closed? It is hard for all students but you are putting students with a disability under enormous pressure by proposing to take them through a process that might never occur.

**Mr Curry:** The issue is about working with them so that the preparation is in place and there is some level of certainty if the decision is made.

**MRS BURKE:** But you are preparing them for something that might never happen.

**MRS DUNNE:** I would like to establish the number of people with whom you have consulted. Could you give us a breakdown of staff costs and tell us what consultation has occurred with people on the SCAN list? What do you envisage spending?

**Mr Barr:** Again, I do not have that information off the top of my head.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, I did not expect you to have.

**Mr Barr:** I can get that for you.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, will you be releasing the data on the cost of educating special needs children in particular schools?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. Obviously, within the budget papers there is an average cost across the territory. We can release, and we have undertaken to do so, the costs of individual schools. I understand that this has already been a matter of some conjecture. There is an expectation or a belief that somehow costs have significantly blown out. When taken across an entire school it does not dramatically affect the cost per student at an individual school. Obviously there is an impact, but this comes back to a larger issue across the territory; that is, that the government deliberately seeks to provide additional resources to students who have particular needs. That is a deliberate policy decision.

As a result of the current spread of schools across the territory some students are attracting additional amounts of money without having additional educational needs. That is detracting from our ability to move funds into schools and into areas where there is a distinct and clear educational need, which is not fair. That is not a policy decision; it is a reflection of the distribution of schools across the territory at the moment. As we have limited funds we are seeking to ensure that they are directed to areas that have immediate educational need. My responsibility as minister is to ensure that those resources are put into the right areas and that they are not allocated purely on the basis of a geographic region or some accident, such as the fact that a particular school has lower enrolments.

**MR BERRY:** Minister, teachers have been warned that if they participate in opposing school closures they could be disciplined. Will you issue an instruction to all schools that teachers, as community members, should be able to participate in the debate about school

closures? Will you issue that instruction today?

**Mr Barr:** Teachers have a professional code of conduct. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline that code. We are not seeking in any way to stifle people's opportunity to contribute to a debate. In a professional capacity, all public servants have a responsibility to adhere to those professional standards. However, what individuals do in their private time is not my business. I do not seek in any way to stifle debate or to stifle the views of individual teachers. However, as public servants they have a professional responsibility. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline that.

**MR BERRY:** Leaving aside the public servant issue for a moment, will you issue an instruction today that teachers, as members of the community, are able to participate fully in the school closures debate?

**Mr Barr:** I do not need to issue an instruction, Mr Berry. My position is very clear. Teachers, as public servants, have a professional responsibility, but what they do in their private time is their business.

**MR BERRY:** Teachers are being warned that if they participate in opposing school closures they could be disciplined. I am asking you to tell schools to inform teachers that, as community members, they are able to participate.

**Mr Barr:** They are able to participate as community members, but they have professional responsibilities as public servants.

**MR BERRY:** Of course. Will you ask for the instructions that are being issued to be withdrawn?

**Mr Barr:** They are within the guidelines of the teachers' professional code. I would not seek to change the code as a result of this consultation process.

**MR BERRY:** Would you take a question on notice and ask each school what instructions it has issued to teachers?

**Mr Barr:** I am happy to do that, Mr Berry. Teachers have a professional code. They have all signed up to that code as part of their employment as public servants in the territory. I reiterate that they have professional responsibilities. Teachers play roles but they also have their private lives within the community. I fully respect that.

**MR BERRY:** But will they be allowed, as members of the community, to speak out against school closures?

**Mr Barr:** That is a—

**MR BERRY:** Yes or no?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Berry, they have professional responsibilities, and they have their—

**MR BERRY:** Is that a no?

**MRS DUNNE:** Did you take the name of the teacher who stood up last night and asked a question? Will something happen to her as a result of her standing up?

**Mr Barr:** No, Mrs Dunne. I am not taking anyone's name.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, while we are discussing the issue of teachers you said earlier that the savings from staffing would be redistributed to create better educational outcomes. What will happen to the teachers involved in this process? This week teachers have already taken industrial action regarding their enterprise bargaining agreement. How do you expect to be able to maintain a level of education if teachers get more upset about these issues?

**Mr Barr:** As part of this process if students were to transfer to another campus teachers would obviously go with them. We have a well-established staffing formula relating to teacher to student ratios and to the provision of teachers on individual school sites. As part of this process there will be no involuntary redundancies. Every year there is a turnover in our teaching staff; we see that regularly as part of this process. Some teachers retire and some teachers move interstate. As I said, as part of this process there will be no involuntary redundancies. Obviously we will seek to make some changes on individual campuses but some schools will get more teachers because they will have more students.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Dunne.

**MR BERRY:** I am not yet finished on the matter involving teachers. I need to clarify this issue because teachers need to know. I think you have been obfuscating a little about what teachers, as members of the community, can and cannot do. Teachers need to understand exactly what they can do in relation to this school closure debate because many of them feel very passionate about it. I think you said that they could do what they liked in their own time. Does that mean they can speak out against school closures in their own time?

**Mr Barr:** As long as they adhere to their professional code of conduct.

**MR BERRY:** Would you tell me how that might limit them?

**Mr Barr:** I will get Dr Bruniges to outline that code.

**Dr Bruniges:** With reference to individual citizens, everyone has a right to his or her opinion. With reference to teachers' professional work within the context of a school, I would expect them, as employees in school classrooms, to conduct everyday classrooms and to focus on quality teaching and learning. If, as private individuals, they have a voice about things that affect their community the professional code of practice in the EBA would not prohibit or prevent them, outside the context of the school and the nature their work, from speaking as individual citizens for or against an issue.

**MR BERRY:** Let me pose a hypothetical question. If teacher A were to say in a public meeting, in a public place, or on television, "I am stridently opposed to these closures," is that okay?

**Mr Barr:** Some teachers already have, Mr Berry.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, when did you and your government start to take an interest in the drift to the non-government sector?

**Mr Barr:** I have been education minister now for 10 weeks and this issue was apparent to me from day one in the job. I have outlined, and I am sure that you are aware, that I have a strong commitment to public education in the territory. As minister, I sought to undertake from day one some of these difficult reforms in order to ensure sustainability in the public education system. It is an issue of concern to me.

**MRS DUNNE:** When the budget proposal came up from the department was concern expressed in that proposal about the drift to the private sector?

**Mr Barr:** A variety of concerns, issues and challenges confront our education system. They were all presented to me as incoming minister. I have sought through this, the first part of a reform process for education in the territory, to start to address some of those issues. Obviously some of them have been around for the duration of self-government. This is not the first time these issues have been a major feature of public debate on education. I have been in the job for 10 weeks and I am seeking to address these issues.

**MRS DUNNE:** I recall occasions when Mr Pratt, the previous spokesman on education, and I asked questions of your predecessors at estimates committee hearings and at annual report hearings about the drift to the non-government sector. Year after year at those hearings we were told that this was not an issue. When did it suddenly become an issue?

**Mr Barr:** It is an issue for me as the new education minister.

**MRS DUNNE:** So there was a Damascus-like conversion in the Labor Party when Andrew Barr became Minister for Education and Training?

**Mr Barr:** I cannot answer for my predecessors. I am simply saying that I have been education minister for 10 weeks. I believe this is one of many issues that we need to address. You can look back to the election of the Howard government in 1996 as a major factor in the commonwealth withdrawing from providing adequate support for public education. More and more responsibility has been shifted onto the states and territories to provide public education.

**MRS DUNNE:** And the GST as well.

**Mr Barr:** We cannot ignore these issues.

**MRS DUNNE:** We are talking about your stewardship and the stewardship of previous Labor ministers. You do not have to go back to 1996.

**MS MacDONALD:** I ask a supplementary question on this issue. On the issue of school closures, some people are suggesting that they will increase the number of students going into the private system. Do you agree with that?

**MRS DUNNE:** It is an expression of opinion.



**MS MacDONALD:** Let me ask the question in another way.

**MRS DUNNE:** Good.

**MS MacDONALD:** Mrs Dunne, this is not question time in the Assembly and you are not a member of this committee. I do not interrupt you, so please do not interrupt me when I am asking questions.

**MR PRATT:** Relax!

**MS MacDONALD:** Will the school closures impact on the numbers going over to the private system?

**Mr Barr:** That is difficult for anyone to give an absolute view on. I have a sense that, if we do not do something to address the drift, it will continue and possibly accelerate. I do not have an expectation that this will result in an immediate reversal in the drift.

I think we need to set up our system—look beyond the next couple of years and even beyond the next election—and look towards where our system is going to be in five, 10 and 15 years and ask if it will be appropriately resourced in order to be able to compete effectively with the private sector. That is what I am looking to establish with our public system.

**MS MacDONALD:** So by these changes the aim in the long term is to stem the tide of students moving over to the private sector, and there is a belief that this will actually stem that tide.

**Mr Barr:** In looking at all of the issues that confront parents when they make education decisions, I think there are some issues that the government system needs to respond to. Some of those issues relate to different educational models and in seeking to provide some alternatives in our system in relation to, say, seven to 12 secondary schools. We simply do not offer those at the moment.

Certainly in the exit surveys that schools are undertaking with parents who are choosing to leave the government system, we are finding that our inability to offer particular educational models is a factor in why some students are leaving our system. We are seeking, as part of this process, to provide a variety of educational models so parents are able to choose and to support models that they are particularly happy with. It seems incumbent on us to at least provide parents with the opportunity to have an educational model that they are happy with in the government system.

**MS MacDONALD:** On the issue of the seven to 12, what evidence is there—or what numbers, and where have you got the numbers—of the people moving across into the seven to 12 system? It seems to me that the college system is quite well regarded in this town.

**Mr Barr:** The college system is very well regarded, but it is clearly the case that not every student in that age group is in the college system, and there are some who choose alternatives. All we are seeking to offer in this proposal is that alternative. Surely our system is big enough, across the territory, to offer an alternative education model. That is

all we are seeking. If the communities do not want such a model, then we would not foist that upon them. But there is a growing trend away from the government system. As I said, there are myriad reasons for this. Some of them relate to perceptions about discipline, uniforms and a whole range of religious, moral and values issues. It is difficult for the government system to address in a secular level of democracy.

I think it is important that we seek to engage and to provide some alternatives to our current virtually one-size-fits-all model for public education, so that that option is there for students and parents who would like to go to a government school but cannot find the government school that suits their needs.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey, did you have a supplementary?

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes. For a start, I would like to ask you, minister, to table the information about all the reasons you have suggested why people are transferring from the ACT government school system to the private system.

You clearly have some evidence there. I ask you to table that and also to answer what the implications for the ACT government school system are if, as many have suggested, the 2020 plan actually accelerates the move of students from the government to the non-government sector. Could that be one of the aims of the 2020 plan?

**MRS DUNNE:** It would certainly be cheaper for the ACT government.

**Mr Barr:** I will endeavour to get all of the research. It is done at an individual school level when students, particularly at transition points in the system, exit public education. We seek to engage with parents and students around why they have taken particular decisions. I will seek to have that information collated in a useful form for the committee. In relation to your second question, we already have a significant drift from public into private. I am seeking to address that.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes, but, meanwhile, short term?

**Mr Barr:** There are always risks in any change process.

**DR FOSKEY:** I asked for a risk analysis before, and you said you did not have one.

**Mr Barr:** But there are also risks in not acting. That is the easy thing to do, isn't it? The direction of your questioning is: "Oh minister, don't do anything, just let the drift continue."

**DR FOSKEY:** No, sorry. The question was: has the government considered the implications if there is an accelerated move of students from the government to the non-government sector, and was that—I want to hear it clearly from you—an intent of this proposal?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, those issues have been considered. No, it is not an intent of the proposal.

**DR FOSKEY:** Though it may be an effect.

**MR BERRY:** This is an enormous period of instability which you must have predicted. Has there been an assessment done about the increased drift which would be caused by this period of instability? Has there been an assessment conducted?

**Mr Barr:** It is difficult to give exact numbers on any change.

**MRS DUNNE:** Have you made a prediction informally?

**Mr Barr:** No, we have not sought to make a prediction. We have a view that, in strengthening educational programs in the schools, we will see, and also as part of the capital investment program, the quality of our schools increase. We will be undertaking aggressive marketing campaigns to ensure that we see the public education system presented in the best possible light, that we have a sustainable system into the future and that we have outstanding educational outcomes in our system. It is obviously a difficult climate in which to address some of the perceptions that some in the community have about our government system.

**MR BERRY:** I am only talking about the instability that has been caused by the process.

**Mr Barr:** From a personal point of view, I reject outright any assertion that the private system delivers better educational outcomes than our government system does. In fact, you need look only at the evidence and the strong results that are achieved by students in the public education system to see that our system is a very good one.

**MR PRATT:** Yes, but that is only the top echelon.

**Mr Barr:** But that does not mean we cannot seek to strengthen it and to address some of the areas where we have a perceived weakness, and seek to put additional resources in to address those concerns.

**MRS BURKE:** You say exit surveys were conducted. I would have to question that. Parents have actually phoned my office to tell me that they left the system three years ago and nobody has ever called them. Why was this not picked up earlier by your department, and why was action not taken much sooner? It is all well and good to blame the commonwealth. Why was action not taken sooner when you knew the facts?

**Mr Barr:** In fact, the department has been working on a variety of strategies. You may be aware that, for the first time ever, all the colleges got together and produced a joint college handbook this year.

**MRS BURKE:** I am not talking about that. I am talking about the drift from the public school system to private school.

**Mr Barr:** That is exactly what we are seeking to—

**MRS BURKE:** But they would have known a long time before.

**THE CHAIR:** Excuse me. Please let the minister respond.

**MRS BURKE:** I am sorry, chair.

**Mr Barr:** That is it. These are exactly the issues that we are seeking to address. We are looking at providing new and more effective marketing strategies for the government schools; we are looking at, for the first time, a collaboration, as I say, across all the colleges, to see that they are no longer seeking to compete against each other and are seeking to present a united front for government and secondary college education. That is an important step forward.

You will have seen, in the advertising of open days for schools, that there has been much greater emphasis put on cooperation and collaboration, particularly at those transition points of six to seven and 10 to 11, where we have identified issues where we lose students. We are seeking to have schools work more closely together to ensure continuity of education programs and that there is a clear pathway. That is very important in retaining students throughout the system.

**MRS BURKE:** Is it not true to say—and this is very embarrassing for you—that your department and your government have been caught napping on this matter for three, four or five years?

**Mr Barr:** You can seek to make all the overstatements you want. That is your job as an opposition spokesperson.

**MRS BURKE:** I do not think it is an overstatement, I think it is an understatement.

**MR PRATT:** It is a question.

**Mr Barr:** I am seeking to address these issues. Work has been undertaken by previous ministers to address these issues. I am seeking to build on that work to ensure that our public education system is as strong as it can possibly be.

**MR SMYTH:** Going back to Dr Foskey's point about what we know about the drift from the government to the non-government sector, you have just said you will have to go back to the individual schools and collate the data. Are you telling this committee that you cannot put your hands on a document now that details the reasons for the drift from the government to the non-government sector?

**Mr Barr:** I can tell you that there are a variety of pieces of information available. Some of the information is collated at the school level. We would need to pull all of that together to give the full range of issues, but we are obviously aware of a number of key issues that people express. I am sure you may well have been approached by individuals who have expressed their particular views about why that is. People have a variety of issues.

**MR SMYTH:** But you say it again. You now have to collate the data that the schools have been collecting. Does that mean you are making decisions based on a lack of data? If you have not collated it before, then the job has not been done properly. Why has it not been collated before this point?

**Mr Barr:** The data is available within the department and it will be made available.

**MR SMYTH:** No. You said to this committee—you have said it twice now—that you are going to have to ask the department to collate the data from individual schools.

**Mr Barr:** In order to provide the specific issues that Dr Foskey raised, I indicated that we would need to do some work to provide the information in the form that she would like.

**MR SMYTH:** Perhaps Dr Bruniges can tell us exactly what data the department have available at the moment that they can provide to this committee that tells us why there is a drift from the government to the non-government sector.

**Dr Bruniges:** The ACT is not the only jurisdiction undertaking this issue in terms of a drift from government to non-government education. In fact, if you look across jurisdictions and research, there have been significant reports done by Professor Tony Vinson in New South Wales that have looked at public perceptions in terms of drift that outline a number of factors.

**MR SMYTH:** Sorry, no. In case I am not clear, what data do you have that your department has put together? I am disturbed that the minister has said twice that it has not been collated. If we are making decisions where the data has been left in schools, then the data is flawed, or the decisions are flawed, because they are based on a false premise.

**Mr Barr:** That is a ridiculous assumption. You are talking rubbish.

**MR SMYTH:** What could you give this committee today, now? What data do you have that you have collated prior to this meeting?

**Mr Barr:** The question needs to be directed to me. I will get Dr Bruniges to respond to those specific issues. But that assertion you make is rubbish, and you know it is rubbish.

**MR SMYTH:** You said it twice. Have you misled the committee?

**Mr Barr:** No, I have not.

**MR SMYTH:** You have said twice that data has not been collated—“I will have to get the department to collate from individual schools.”

**Mr Barr:** I have indicated that, in response to the specific issues Dr Foskey raised, in order to present the information in the way she was seeking it, we would have to put that information together in a form that would be acceptable to Dr Foskey in relation to her question.

**MR SMYTH:** And you said you would have to go to individual schools to get the data.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I said that some of the data is kept—

**MR SMYTH:** You do not have the data at departmental level?

**Mr Barr:** The data is fed through to the department, obviously.

**MR SMYTH:** You do not have the data at departmental level now?

**Mr Barr:** Of course we have the data at departmental level.

**MR SMYTH:** Then why are you going to the schools?

**Mr Barr:** To get the specific information that Dr Foskey requires, which will be different in some instances from the way the data might be held now, we will need to go back and ensure that all of the data that is available that would address the question Dr Foskey raises is presented in a way that will answer that question. Equally, if I presented a piece of information that did not answer the question Dr Foskey asked, you would then rightly accuse me of not fully answering Dr Foskey's question.

**MR SMYTH:** No. Dr Foskey's question was quite broad. What you said was, "We would have to go to the schools." So you are making decisions based on a lack of data.

**MR PRATT:** Or incomplete data.

**Mr Barr:** No. You are wrong.

**MR SMYTH:** All right. Provide us and the committee with the data immediately.

**Mr Barr:** We will be providing that data.

**MR SMYTH:** Then why do you have to go back to the schools?

**MRS DUNNE:** What is the survey instrument, or what instrument is used to ascertain why people are moving? What are the criteria used for that instrument, whatever it may be, to be administered? Where is the data stored? What data is held in the schools? What data is held in the department? Which information was used to come to the conclusion that people are leaving the government system because—and therefore we have to do this; they are leaving for A and therefore we have to do Q?

**Mr Barr:** Thank you for the question. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline.

**Dr Bruniges:** On a departmental level we have a parent satisfaction survey that is carried out in terms of our school review process and our excellence framework. That data is carried out as part of that process, so we collect that from data. We look at trends in the areas of parent satisfaction and dissatisfaction over a whole range of variables. Exit interviews are actually held in some schools that go into bigger depth about why parents are choosing to exit the system. Those ranges of reasons are going to be—

**MRS DUNNE:** Only those who are exiting the system, or those who are exiting that particular school?

**Dr Bruniges:** Exiting the school. It may well be to another government school, it may be to a non-government school or it may be interstate. There is a whole range of things that would need to come into play. The exit interviews that some schools carry out when parents actually move are at the school level. In terms of the parent satisfaction measures

that we do for our school review process and excellence framework, we also look at evidence that looks at student satisfaction in terms of students' perceptions of schooling.

**MRS DUNNE:** But student satisfaction is across the system. I am asking what instrument is delivered to people who are exiting a school. Is there a uniform approach? Are there interviews in some schools? Is it a survey in other schools? Does everyone get asked why they are leaving?

**Dr Bruniges:** No, not everyone gets questioned as to the reason they are leaving.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is right. I am glad you said that because, as an exiting parent, I was not asked.

**Dr Bruniges:** No, not every parent is asked. In terms of those exit interviews where we want to find out in the ACT context, the department has a research base about looking at market share and what is happening in other jurisdictions that we've drawn on to have a look at that.

What we need to do is to take that evidence, look at our parent satisfaction survey, have a look at whether the reasons we are getting for satisfaction or dissatisfaction are similar to those in larger jurisdictions, and indeed across the country, to be able to put us in the best position to look at the research and the way forward in terms of what parents are satisfied with or not.

**MRS DUNNE:** First of all, the parent satisfaction survey and student satisfaction survey is something that is administered across the board to all people in the system. Is that right?

**Dr Bruniges:** It is not administered across all people in the system, it is administered as part of our school review process in terms of our excellence framework.

**MRS DUNNE:** But it is not delivered to people who are exiting the system or exiting a particular school. It is not designed for that purpose.

**Dr Bruniges:** No, it is not. What it is designed for: we would have factors in there of both.

**MRS DUNNE:** I understand what it is designed for, but is there something which is designed for ascertaining the reasons why people are leaving a particular school or the system, and is it uniformly administered? Everyone in the back row is shaking their head.

**Dr Bruniges:** No. We do not have a uniform instrument that captures the data about why people are exiting the public education system in the ACT.

**MRS DUNNE:** Therefore, minister, how can you provide the information that you said you will provide to Dr Foskey?

**Mr Barr:** Exactly, Mrs Dunne. That is why we would need to go back and analyse aspects of the data in order to provide the specific information that Dr Foskey has asked

for.

**MR PRATT:** The government claims that it tries to meet all the cultural and social needs of our children in the public sector. To pick up on your previous statement, against that, why is it therefore tough for schools to cater for religious values in a secular democracy? That is the statement you made. Why is it tough to do that?

**Mr Barr:** Obviously for some parents who have particularly strong religious beliefs, the religious education provided in the Catholic systemic system and in independent Christian schools is at a level considerably greater than the public system would offer. We would not seek to emulate in our government schools the religious instruction that might be part of education in the private sector. As I say, we live in a secular level democracy. We would not seek to impose particular religious values upon students in the government system.

**MR PRATT:** If the perception is that the teaching of religious values is something which may be a driving factor, do you have no plan at all for how the government sector could meet those needs, either on a proportional basis in some schools or somewhere in the system? If that is a major driving factor, why can you not arrest it?

**Mr Barr:** I do not see that as a particular role for the government system. We have a responsibility to ensure universal access to education. We would not seek to enter into the arena of religious education. There are obviously a variety of different religions that people choose to believe. That is a matter for them, but it is not a matter the government system should seek to engage in.

**MR PRATT:** But if you cater for a range of other social needs, why, when clearly religious values are a strong basis of this society's tradition, can you not also? Is it a practical problem?

**Mr Barr:** I will probably need to get Dr Bruniges to answer that part of the question but, as an overall philosophical position, I think there needs to be a clear separation of church and state, and I strongly support that separation. We live in a secular level democracy. We would not seek to impose religious instruction in government schools.

**Meeting adjourned from 10.42 to 11.01 am.**

**THE CHAIR:** We might get started. Mr Gentleman has a question on output 1.1.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, the first question is basically on funding whilst we are on output 1. Earlier you mentioned that there has been a reduction in funding from the federal government since 1996. I want to open this up a little bit. The opposition seemed quite upset about the statement. Can you tell me what the amounts of reduction have been since 1996?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Gentleman, I would need to get the department's finance officer to give you the fine detail but there has clearly been a policy direction from the commonwealth government to withdraw support for public education and seek to channel additional funds into the private sector. That has been a very clear and conscious policy decision on its part. I certainly feel that that is a poor public policy decision. It obviously has an



effect on the states and territories in the provision of public education in their jurisdictions. Mr Donnelly may be able to provide a little bit more information on that reduction in commonwealth funding since 1996 or he may need to take the question on notice.

**Mr Donnelly:** Yes, I probably would need to take some of that question on notice. I know that commonwealth funding in about the past five or six years has increased by around 30 per cent for government schooling, but I would not be able, off the top of my head, or from information that I brought with me today, to do a comparison back to 1996.

**Mr Barr:** Perhaps looking at the real increase or decrease across that time.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** If you can come back to me with that, that would be good.

**THE CHAIR:** So you are taking that one on notice?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, that is fine.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Strategic indicator 1 on page 381 of budget paper 4 shows that in many primary school indicators ACT students, for the most part, are above the national average and achieving above benchmark results. Could this be a reflection of the low student-teacher ratio? In simpler terms, if our current system is outperforming other systems, why is there a need to radically alter the ACT schooling process?

**Mr Barr:** I would not see the proposal as a radical alteration. The key educational outcomes—and that is what we are seeking to enhance in the change—are to build upon the success that the ACT has and has achieved consistently for some time. Obviously we have benefits in relation to the socioeconomic background of our community. More broadly speaking, there would be an expectation and there is a strong culture of support in investment for education in our community. It is an important and valuable thing to be part of a community that values education so highly. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline some of the key educational issues that confront us into the future and how we will be seeking to build upon these already strong educational outcomes as part of this reform process.

**Dr Bruniges:** In relation to that strategic indicator 1, we know that the ACT does extremely well in national benchmarking across other jurisdictions, but I do not think we can ever be complacent. We know from research that quality teaching is a significant variable in making a difference. The quality programs that we put in place in those fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy are of critical importance right across the nation. The benchmarking measure gives us comparable data across jurisdictions as a means of comparing how the ACT is faring. In addition to that, we also need to look internationally. Increasingly Australia is looking to international markers of progress such as the OECD studies, the TIMS and the PISA studies. All of those give a very important frame of reference for the ACT community and education system to be tracking how it is performing relative to other jurisdictions and relative to the international.

Some of the most recent initiatives of collaboration of cost jurisdiction should enable us to have higher-quality diagnostic data. That is going to be an incredibly important step for teachers in every classroom to be able to receive information back that enables them to tell where students' strengths and weaknesses are. We are able to look at cohorts of students, such as indigenous students, to look at particular strengths and weaknesses. So it becomes more than a number. It becomes a curriculum issue for teaching and learning, so we are able to say that these are the skill sets that students are particularly strong at, these are the skill sets that students are particularly weak at and be able to build programs on that continuous improvement cycle.

So the national indicators are one means of comparison. We need to look at our indicators—how is the ACT performing over trend data and time? We need to use the national comparisons and the international comparisons, and some of the national work that we are involved in should deliver that strong diagnostic capacity to make sure that we are constantly focused on improving teaching and learning in those areas.

The other thing I should quickly say while we have literacy and numeracy—and they are disaggregated in the reading and writing areas here—is that we will see a number of other measures come to the fore in civics and citizenship. We have science testing. All of those areas are on the national agenda and that should also give us other backdrops in other critical key learning areas for how we are performing.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, or perhaps Dr Bruniges, the comparisons of ACT educational performance against national education are very important but is it not also important that in developing our skills to compete internationally, the OCED and the PISA figures are becoming even more increasingly important?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, that is very true. Unfortunately those studies are not carried out every year. They are on a cyclical basis of three to four years and have different areas of emphasis in them. So while they provide us some information on a three to four-year cycle, I think we have to have our own information. Our national benchmarking gives us the annual cycle, but even closer than that we have to look at our own diagnostic measures, trying to get information that is more than a number, that gives teachers the material that they need in diagnostic capacity—what skills the students are finding hard, what skills the students are finding easy—in order to program and plan. I believe that is really critical in being able to lift the overall standard. So I think we need both, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** I recall that the last lot of figures, particularly against the OECD benchmarks, indicated that our higher performing ACT students did very well, as well as against the PISA benchmark. I recall too that the problem was in the lower echelon of students the average performance rating was not particularly good. Has that improved since that snapshot in 2004?

**Dr Bruniges:** That question on improvement is not possible to answer. We would need the next cycle of tests starting to come around to have the comparable measures between the 2004 data and the next PISA cycle.

**MR PRATT:** It is a four-year cycle, is it?

**Dr Bruniges:** PISA, yes, a four-year cycle. I am sorry, Mr Barr is correcting me. It is a

three-year cycle. So the 2007 measure will be directly comparable to the 2004 and we will be able to then look at how we quantify the improvement across those three years. To make a statement about whether it has gone up or down we have to rely on that standard system and, as I said, to get that international comparison again, we would have to wait until 2007, Mr Pratt, to be able to make that statement.

**MR PRATT:** Do you agree that that second number—that is, the mean averaging performing figure for that lower echelon—is the one that we should be mainly concerned about?

**Dr Bruniges:** I think we should be concerned about the whole scale. I think we have a responsibility to students whose performance falls right across the continuum and that we should be putting in place programs and practices to make sure that every student, no matter where they are on that achievement continuum, continues to do well and be lifting the standards as a whole. On the Australia wide data and information, I know Professor Barry McGaw from the OECD has made comments about the lower end of the scale being a particular issue in the Australian jurisdiction. Our programs need to address, as I said, the whole continuum of learning to make sure that we are pushing those students that fall at the top of the scale even further, and address the shortfall of skills for those at the bottom of the scale to make sure that we are maximising their learning opportunities.

**DR FOSKEY:** Mr Barr, in relation to primary schools in particular, in the 2020 plan, does the stated capacity of a school reflect its original capacity or its formal capacity at the start of this year, and with whom were these figures checked?

**Mr Barr:** The capacity figures for primary schools were undertaken during the most recent round of K to 3 class size configuration. When that policy initiative was put in place to have a maximum class size of 21 for kindergarten to year 3, we went around and recalculated the capacity figures for primary schools. Schools are at any time able to request a capacity review. A number of primary schools, as they approach their stated capacity, come to the department and seek a review of their capacity so as to increase the number of students they can take in a given year. We look at classroom teaching space. The formula for primary schools is between 21 and 30 per teaching space depending on the variabilities of individual schools. Some schools have had their capacity dramatically reduced over the years as a result of the leasing out of some space within schools.

The peak enrolment figures for particular schools are instructive of how that capacity has changed over the years. Some schools that used to accommodate nearly 700 students now have 70. We have seen capacity come down in those schools as a result of particular policy initiatives, changes in the use of particular rooms within schools. The fundamental point is that at any time a school can seek a review of its capacity with the department. We undertake that on an ongoing basis. When the class size initiative was put forward between 2002 and 2004, all the capacities for primary schools were reassessed at that point.

**DR FOSKEY:** I know the minister has been made aware at public meetings that schools contest the excess capacity, in that many of those classrooms are used for educational related purposes. I have heard some advertisements on commercial radio that are exactly on this issue of excess capacity in schools, and how much this is costing government. Are these advertisements being paid for by the ACT government or by the ACT Labor

Party?

**Mr Barr:** The ACT Labor Party.

**DR FOSKEY:** Why does the Labor Party feel the need to spend its money on these ads, and are other members of the Labor Party happy with that?

**Mr Barr:** Dr Foskey, I am not responsible to answer for the Labor Party. You could seek to address the ACT branch secretary in relation to Labor Party policy and how the branch secretary chooses with his campaign committee to allocate party funds, but that is not a matter within my portfolio responsibilities.

**MR SMYTH:** Were you asked for your opinion on running some ads?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, if I could just bring you back to capacity, and I refer to Tharwa primary school. Representatives from the school were in front of us last week. They were told that the school's capacity is 50 and it has 29 students enrolled. They say they were told that they have two classrooms with an availability of 25 students per classroom, but they have never had more than 35 students at the school. So whilst they do have computer labs and an arts centre in those classrooms, how do you work out that capacity and take into account the need for room for computers?

**Mr Barr:** As I say, the formula for primary schools is between 21 and 30 students in a classroom space. The K to 3 years are limited to 21 students. I will need to get advice on the issue at Tharwa. I will need to get some advice on the specifics, so I will get Mr Donnelly to respond to that.

**Mr Donnelly:** In respect particularly of Tharwa, you are correct; there are two classroom spaces at that school. On average the 21 students in K to 3 and 30 students in years 4, 5 and 6 work out at around 25 students per classroom space. So in relation to Tharwa, an assessment has been made and has been on the record for quite some time that the capacity of that school is 50 students. A number of schools around the ACT have a capacity far in excess of the number of students currently attending, and I guess that is one of the things that this proposal is trying to address.

In respect of the computer facilities and art facilities and other things that might be in a classroom space in Tharwa and might be in a separate room or other location in some other schools, the assessment of capacity is based on the available teaching space for that amount of students. So assessment has been made at Tharwa that there is sufficient space within those classrooms, notwithstanding the provision of other facilities, for 50 students.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Donnelly, you are saying, using Tharwa as an example, that the dedicated art room for the purposes of accounting by the Department of Education and Training, is considered a teaching space, which on average would take 25 students?

**Mr Donnelly:** No, that is not at all what I am saying.

**MRS DUNNE:** You are saying the opposite?

**Mr Donnelly:** I am saying that where craft facilities are in the back of a classroom—and I am not sure whether this is the case with Tharwa in particular, but in other schools in the ACT—you may have a larger classroom space that incorporates an art facility. That will be classed as one classroom space with a capacity for 25 children notwithstanding the fact that in some classes—I have just been advised that in Tharwa, in particular, there is a separate art room over and above the two classroom spaces.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry to delay this, but using Tharwa as an example, at Tharwa there are two classrooms, and you are working out that they have on average a capacity of 25 because that is the average of 21 and 30 averaged over the years? So you are saying two classrooms, 25 students. In addition to that there are other spaces that you do not count, because they are not considered as classroom spaces.

**Mr Donnelly:** Given that I am not familiar with Tharwa, perhaps I can give the committee some detail of the methodology that is used to calculate capacity. Each school in the territory obviously has a large number of rooms. Some of those rooms are assessed as being classroom spaces and others of those rooms, specifically specialist facilities like craft rooms and libraries, are not assessed as teaching spaces.

**MRS DUNNE:** What about wet areas?

**Mr Donnelly:** Depending on the design of the school, there might be a wet area within a classroom or there might be a specific craft area. So, in a hypothetical school, there might be 20 rooms. Fifteen of those rooms might be assessed as classroom spaces, teaching spaces, and from those 15 we will deduct specific allowances for things like computer rooms and other specialised facilities that each school is required to have. So you may end up, after those rooms have been deducted, with 12 teaching spaces. In a primary school we would say 12 teaching—

**MRS DUNNE:** Twelve times 25?

**Mr Donnelly:** Exactly.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Whilst we are still on capacity, minister, I have had a letter from a constituent who says that her child's school, Isabella Plains, has had its capacity gauged incorrectly due, in this case, to two demountable buildings that have not been removed by the department. She says that these demountables would be at least 65 per cent utilised. How do you respond? Are those counted?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Gentleman, yes they are. They are classrooms. If the school was at a point where it needed to utilise those spaces for teaching, it would. Other schools across the system do have demountables and they are being utilised as teaching spaces and they count those demountables towards their capacity and seek to fill them with students. There are countless examples across the system where demountables are counted as part of capacity.

**MR SMYTH:** A supplementary on that issue: all of the spaces that you are counting in your surveys, the government pays for the maintenance on all those spaces, does it not?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** So if the government is paying for it, it is being counted in?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** I am told that at Gilmore primary there are six demountables, which the school board pays maintenance on and the government has refused to pay maintenance on. So it does not get an allowance for its demountables when it comes to maintenance, but they have been included in the count for available teaching spaces.

**Mr Barr:** My understanding is that would be school-based management funding.

**Mr Donelly:** I am not familiar with the specific case at Gilmore, but if you are talking about the school board funds, the school board allocates funding from the department and from parental contributions and other funding sources, but the vast bulk of each school's funding controlled by the school board is provided by the department to run the facilities that the school is provided with. In the general case—and again I will endeavour to check through the course of the day whether this is the case for Gilmore—there is a formula which looks at the teaching spaces provided and provides an allocation to each school for those teaching spaces. I would be very surprised if the transportables are not included in the teaching spaces, which give rise to the SBM funding for Gilmore primary.

**MR SMYTH:** So you will take that on notice and get back to us?

**Mr Donelly:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Sorry, could I just go back to what you said, Mr Donelly, because I am confused. You are saying that not all teaching spaces are counted for the purposes of capacity because, quite frankly, some of them are only used part of the time and they are not what might, in old-fashioned parlance, be called permanent classrooms. So in a primary school with the year 5 home base, that is a teaching space for which the average occupancy is 25, and you are adding all those up. When you get to school-based management, how do you account for those other teaching spaces which may be a computer room or the band room or something like that? How do you account in the school-based management for the amount of money it costs to maintain something which does not carry an average occupancy of 25 kids?

**Mr Donelly:** The school-based management funding is quite a complex set of formulas based on the floor space occupied by the school and a large number of other variables. Whether a room is classed as a teaching space or a non-teaching space is counted in the floor area of the school and therefore attracts funding under the SBM allocation formula for that floor space. One of the reasons that savings are available through a school rationalisation program such as the one that the government is proposing is that the school-based management formula funds that space whether or not students are using it. So if there is again a hypothetical school with 10 teaching spaces and five non-teaching spaces, for a total floor area of 3,000 square metres, whether there are 250 students in that school or whether there are 100 students in that school, the SBM funding formula is essentially the same. Small elements of the funding formula increase or decrease based on changes in student numbers but the vast bulk of that funding is fixed, based on the

size of the school and a number of other factors.

**MRS DUNNE:** Take a school that has 3,000 square metres, for argument sake, but 1,000 of that is let out to someone else. Who pays for the maintenance on the 1,000? Is it the person letting it out, is it the department or Property ACT or is it the school board and the school-based management?

**Mr Donnelly:** The answer to that will depend on who is doing the leasing. Some of our schools have wings or components of the schools that are managed by a private property group, and different arrangements apply to those. But where it is a departmental tenant, the school continues to receive school-based management funding for that portion of the school.

**MRS DUNNE:** Do they receive any of the proceeds of the rent?

**Mr Donnelly:** They do not, not if it is leased through the department. Again there is a third process where schools can, I guess, casually hire their own premises. In that case they receive the proceeds.

**MRS DUNNE:** That would be hiring out the hall to the scouts?

**Mr Donnelly:** Exactly. But with long-term leases managed by the department, the department receives the rent for those and obviously to some extent the rent offsets the fact that we are still providing school-based management funding to the school to maintain that component of the school.

**MRS DUNNE:** So you are saying that the school pays for the utilities effectively of your tenants?

**Mr Donnelly:** We are saying that the department continues to provide funding to schools to allow them to continue to pay that funding. In most of our schools things like electricity and heaters are not separately metered in the components of the schools that are let out. Therefore it would be quite difficult, administratively, to say, for example, that the tenants will meet 30 per cent—or 33 per cent in your example—of the heating costs.

**MR SMYTH:** Just following on from that, and it leads into the next question, can you provide in writing how you determine the capacity of a school, minister?

**Mr Barr:** That is available on the 2020 website. So that is there in writing for you.

**MR SMYTH:** Can you provide in writing how utilisation of a school is determined?

**Mr Barr:** Can you just clarify exactly what you mean by how utilisation is determined?

**MR SMYTH:** You have in your 2020 document capacity utilised. So, for Hall primary school capacity is 175, capacity utilised is 73.

**Mr Donnelly:** I can answer that here, Mr Smyth. Effectively that is a fairly simple calculation of dividing the number of students by the capacity. So if there was a school

with a capacity of 200 students that had 100 students attending the school, the capacity utilisation would be 50 per cent.

**MR SMYTH:** Which leads to the next set of questions, which is about how you determine the cost of operating a school. I am not sure who to address it to. How is the cost of operating a school determined?

**Mr Donnelly:** Yes, I am happy to answer that. Again, when we start to get into some of these detailed facts and figures the methodology gets complex.

**MRS DUNNE:** We are intelligent people, Mr Donnelly.

**Mr Donnelly:** Yes. I was going to say the committee will excuse me for starting with the very simple and then building down. When we are talking about the average cost per student, which I guess is what Mr Smyth is getting to, the calculation is again a very simple one. It is total cost of the school divided by the number of students.

To obtain the total cost for the school, we look at a number of different sets of costs. There are direct costs, which are things like the principal and teaching and administrative staff salaries, where we can say we know how much we pay a principal at a particular school and we know how much we pay the teaching staff, so we can say definitively that those costs belong to that school.

We look at costs like school-based management and expenses, which we have talked about earlier today, where we can say we give a particular school a particular amount, and we look at some on-costs which can be calculated from those sorts of things, like superannuation, which is again attributed directly to a school. Depreciation obviously can be calculated school on school and is attributed directly to the school. There are a series of indirect and overhead costs such as, for example, my salary. While my position gives support to all schools, you cannot say that I, in a particular week or a particular year, give 10 per cent to school A and five per cent to school B. Those overheads are allocated based on direct employee expenses to the school.

**MR SMYTH:** So there is a fixed formula, then, for that allocation?

**Mr Donnelly:** Yes. The overheads, as I have said, are allocated based on employee expenses. So if a particular school has 10 per cent of the system's employee expenses, they would wear 10 per cent of the system's overheads.

**MRS DUNNE:** But how do you work that out? There is a reasonable cost in the absolute running of the school, the heating, lighting, depreciation, staff costs for the people who teach in the schools and the people in the department, and that figure has to be amortised across all of the schools in the system. Is that what you are telling us?

**Mr Donnelly:** Correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** What is the formula for doing that?

**Mr Donnelly:** It is calculated on the basis of the percentage of the employee expenses in the total schools. To take a very simple example, if we had 100 schools, each of which



had 10 teachers who are all paid equally, just to make it work correctly—

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, a worker's paradise. We understand the concept, yes.

**Mr Barr:** All other things being equal.

**Mr Donelly:** To simplify the model, take 100 schools, each of which pays \$100,000 in employee expenses. Each of those schools would wear one per cent of the total overheads for the department.

**MRS DUNNE:** So what you are saying, Mr Donelly, is that the proportion of indirect costs is determined by the proportion of employee costs inside the school?

**Mr Donelly:** That is correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** So that if a school has, for instance, a whole lot of special ed units that have extra STAs—and if you go through the statements, a lot of the schools that have special ed units or particular units have lots of STAs, which brings up their apparent student to staff ratios—because that particular school carries a particular burden of extra STAs or extra staff because of the programs they deliver, they would actually be paying a higher proportion of the indirect costs?

**Mr Donelly:** If a school has a higher level of salary expenses or employee expenses for any reason, because they have additional teachers for students with special needs or for any other reason, they will bear a proportionately higher overhead cost.

**MRS DUNNE:** So that means that if you are behind the eight ball and you have a lower student to staff ratio, for whatever reason, you will bear a proportionately larger burden of the indirect costs? Have you looked at other models for how you fund? I am not saying that that is right or wrong. I just want to try and get my head around the models for funding.

**Mr Donelly:** I would like to draw a distinction between funding and calculating average costs because obviously we do not fund on that basis.

**MRS DUNNE:** You are quite right. I understand.

**Mr Donelly:** What we are doing is calculating an average cost. Yes, we have looked at a number of different models and there are a number of models you could choose. You could—

**MRS DUNNE:** Use per capita enrolments.

**Mr Donelly:** You could do it by enrolments. You could do it by just a calculation of one 95th per school. There are almost an infinite number of models that you can choose for allocation of overheads.

**MRS DUNNE:** And how long have you been using this model?

**Mr Donelly:** Certainly for at least my time in the department, which is three years, and I

would imagine for a significant—

**MRS DUNNE:** You are not aware of it having changed at some stage?

**Mr Donelly:** No. Well, not in the last three years. Certainly this sort of allocation methodology is commonly used in other states and territories. The other point that I would make is that, in looking at what sort of overhead model you might use, one of the things that we try and do is look at things that drive the costs. If you look at the set of overhead costs that are around central office support, many of those functions are for things like payroll, for example, and that is driven by the number of teachers; for finance, which is driven, to a great extent, by the number of employees in the school; and for other support costs, which tend to be driven by employees.

If you have a greater number of employees, you tend to bear a higher level of these costs; if you have a lower number of employees, the overheads tend to rise and fall in line with employee expenses. So while there are a number of different allocation models you could choose—and if you chose a different allocation model the raw numbers would indeed change—this is one that has been used for some time and which seems to be borne out pretty well in practice.

**MR SMYTH:** So the application across the system is of a flat rate of overheads, of the fixed overheads?

**Mr Donelly:** No. It is variable depending on—

**Mr Barr:** All of those parameters that—

**MR SMYTH:** No. If I have got one per cent of the staff bill, I get one per cent of overheads. If I have got three per cent of the staff bill, I get three per cent of the overheads.

**Mr Donelly:** Yes, in calculating an average cost.

**MR SMYTH:** Do the operating costs differ between primary schools, secondary schools and colleges, the real operating costs of those three different classes of schools?

**Mr Donelly:** It does, but in the direct cost component, not in the overhead cost component. A college will tend to have 10,000 to 12,000 square metres of floor space as against a primary school that might have 3,000 or 4,000. It will obviously have more teachers, more support staff et cetera. They are going to have a larger share of the direct costs and, quite appropriately, they cost more to operate.

**MR SMYTH:** But a primary school does not have a woodwork room, a metalwork room or science labs. Surely the maintenance and upkeep of those specialist rooms are much higher than the upkeep of a standard primary school classroom?

**Mr Donelly:** Absolutely.

**MR SMYTH:** Therefore, under the flat application, primary schools are disadvantaged by this proportioning of overheads?

**Mr Barr:** No. You are attributing the wrong cost base there, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** How is it the wrong cost base, minister?

**Mr Donnelly:** All of those sorts of costs that you are outlining are the direct costs of operating either a college or a primary school and they are apportioned on a direct basis. So, dollar for dollar, if a college has an SPM grant of \$600,00 and a primary school has an SPM grant of \$200,000, then each of those costs is attributed directly to the schools. If the primary school had 200 students, then it would be \$1,000 a student. If the college had 600 students, it would also be \$1,000 per student, even though it is quite patently clear that the college costs more to run.

**MR SMYTH:** That is my point exactly. It is patently clear that colleges cost more to run, yet the primary school and the college are being attributed the same percentage share of overheads based on staffing costs?

**Mr Barr:** But there are different staffing provisions in the primary school versus the college. The college would attract a much larger share than the primary school would because the college has more teachers. It is a larger institution.

**MR PRATT:** Yes, but the formula is the same.

**MRS DUNNE:** But the formula—

**MR SMYTH:** But the formula is the same.

**MR PRATT:** The formula is the same.

**MRS DUNNE:** to work out the indirect costs, the costs of paying for the people in central office, is based upon a formula that directly reflects on the staff costs.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, but different schools have different sizes. There are obviously many more teachers and so a much larger proportion of the cost is attributed to a college than would be to a primary school.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Any further questions on this can be taken on notice; otherwise we will not go forward. I think we should go to the next output class.

**MRS DUNNE:** No. We have exhausted the formula, I think.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** But there are many questions in relation to the average cost per student that relate to this output class on primary education.

**THE CHAIR:** In primary schools?

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes.

**MR SMYTH:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes. I have a question here.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey is next.

**MRS DUNNE:** Dr Foskey. Then can I ask my questions on the output class?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** When we have finished, I think.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** In identifying the student costs of the smaller schools as significantly higher than the costs of students in larger schools, does the department take that as being equally true of every small school? In the case of Hall and Tharwa, for instance, does that include taking into account weighing it against the social or community impact analysis of the closure of that school?

**Mr Barr:** Dr Foskey, in relation to the calculation of financial costs, no, that is a separate criterion. You cannot put social factors into the calculation of the cost. You can once you have—

**DR FOSKEY:** Offset?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, and then, having arrived at the average cost per student, which, as Mr Donnelly has outlined, is a simple formula in relation to the total costs of running the school divided by the number of students in the school, in looking at the school overall you can then seek to make other value judgments about the uniqueness of a particular school. But I think in relation to calculating financial costs, that does not come into that equation. It would come into a later equation around assessing particular schools.

**DR FOSKEY:** But each small school is rated across the same formula. There is no small school or school of equivalent size that might be seen as different from another small school in another place?

**Mr Barr:** In relation to calculating the cost per student, no. In relation to other aspects of educational provision on a site, yes, there are other factors.

**DR FOSKEY:** Clearly, that is the case because not all schools are closing and sometimes the decision can seem a bit arbitrary and antilogical?

**Mr Barr:** No. Dr Foskey, that is a fact, and I am glad you have raised that point. As I indicated earlier, if the only calculation in this were simply financial, then, yes, you would simply pick the 39 most expensive schools and seek to reduce your costs in that manner. But we have not sought to do that and you have correctly identified that there are some schools that attract additional resources because of the specific needs of those communities.

That is a deliberate policy decision by government to direct resources where there is educational and social need. That is a major factor in decisions around education provision, and this is the fundamental point in this whole process. Government should be able to make those decisions based on the educational and social needs of communities, not simply because a school happens to be of a small size and therefore it attracts additional resources regardless of the socioeconomic need of that particular community.

That is at the core of how you allocate government resources, and I am not doing my job properly if I sit by and watch resources allocated poorly when there are students in our system who are crying out for additional resources but who are not getting them because they have been diverted to other schools that do not have an educational or social need for those resources but are getting them solely because of the size of the school. That is the core of this issue and that is what we seeking to address in ensuring that we can target resources where the educational and social needs are. That is the socially responsible thing for a government to do.

**DR FOSKEY:** I suppose when I said logical, I did not mean just economic in the sense that many of the decisions were antilogical.

**Mr Barr:** Exactly, and I accept that point and we have looked at more than economics in putting forward this proposal.

**MR SMYTH:** Page 10 of *For the Future*, the green covered document in the budget box, says:

In schools with enrolments between 400 and 600, costs per students are about \$8,000.

What are they exactly, minister?

**Mr Barr:** There is available on the web site a full listing of the costs for each of those schools, Mr Smyth. I suggest that you look at the census that is published each year in February and you can compare the average cost per student. That is available on the web site with that data and you will be able to arrive at—

**MR STEFANIAK:** You have got a document there. Why do you not just table it?

**Mr Barr:** It is available on the web site, Mr Stefaniak.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you for pointing to that document, minister.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth has it in front of him.

**MR STEFANIAK:** We could have a look at it now.

**MR SMYTH:** I actually do have that document, I just wanted to—

**Mr Barr:** He has highlighted parts of it. He has done some homework.

**MR SMYTH:** confirm that it was the latest figures available. If you look, minister,

through that document on schools that have more than 400 students, none of them costs less than \$8,000 per student. The “about” figure is wrong. If you run through the list, it shows that for Ngunnawal primary it is 8,700, for Palmerston primary it is 8,800, for Gold Creek it is 10,800, for Kaleen primary school it is 8,300, for Forrest primary it is 8,300, for Red Hill primary it is 8,100, for Telopea Park it is 9,300, for Garran it is 8,800 and for Chapman primary it is 8,100. If you add that up and divide it by the appropriate number, it actually comes to an average cost per student, in schools with between 400 and 600 students, of \$8,849.

**Mr Barr:** That is a devastating political point, Mr Smyth. You win the award for pedant of the year.

**DR FOSKEY:** In the mathematical world—

**MR SMYTH:** The cynicism is noted, minister.

**Mr Barr:** Come on. Seriously, you have read out—

**MR SMYTH:** It is a 10 per cent error.

**Mr Barr:** a list of schools there. It says “about 8,000”. You have read a series of about 8,100—

**MR SMYTH:** So a 10 per cent difference is about right?

**Mr Barr:** Seriously, Mr Smyth!

**MR SMYTH:** No, I am very serious. You accept the provenance of that 8,000 figure?

**Mr Barr:** I wish you all the best if that is the most devastating—

**MR SMYTH:** You accept the provenance of that 8,000 figure?

**Mr Barr:** political point you are seeking to make today.

**MR SMYTH:** Do you accept the provenance of that 8,000 figure? Who gave the 8,000 figure? What is the provenance of it?

**Mr Barr:** The statement says it is about 8,000.

**MR SMYTH:** So a 10 per cent error is acceptable?

**Mr Barr:** Nearly every figure that you read out there, except perhaps for one—

**MR SMYTH:** None of them is below 8,000. As an average it is not close to 8,000.

**Mr Barr:** There are some schools where the cost is below 8,000, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Not according to your list for a school with between 400 and 600 students. Point out one.

**Mr Barr:** The statement, Mr Smyth, says “about 8,000”.

**MR SMYTH:** Point out one below 8,000.

**Mr Barr:** We can have an argument about—

**MR SMYTH:** You have just told the committee some are below 8,000. Point out one.

**Mr Barr:** There are some schools where the cost is below 8,000.

**MR SMYTH:** Between 400 and 600 where the school—point it out.

**Mr Barr:** No. I said there were some schools where the cost was below 8,000.

**MR SMYTH:** No. I am talking about 400—

**Mr Barr:** We are talking about different things, Mr Smyth. This is a pointless argument.

**MR PRATT:** You did not listen to his question.

**Mr Barr:** You have made your little point. You can go and put your press release out now and say that—

**MR SMYTH:** I have no intention of putting out a press release.

**Mr Barr:** about 8,000 could mean a range of figures.

**MR SMYTH:** Parents are asking where you get these figures from. I now move to the statement that you made, that Ms Gallagher made and that the Chief Minister makes, that for a small school the cost is approximately 18,000.

**MRS DUNNE:** You stated that in question time on 4 May.

**MR SMYTH:** Can you give us the provenance of that 18,000 figure? How accurate is it?

**Mr Barr:** Well, there are a number. There are a number of small schools where the cost is around \$18,000. I said it ranges—

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, there is a number. There are two.

**Mr Barr:** There are more—

**MRS DUNNE:** There are two, minister.

**Mr Barr:** There are some where the cost is higher.

**MR SMYTH:** If you add up—

**MRS DUNNE:** If you look at this, there are two. Two is a number, yes. In question time

on 4 May you actually used the dichotomy between the 8,000 and the 18,000—

**Mr Barr:** Yes. There are schools that—

**MRS DUNNE:** I asked you then to provide that information. I have asked you constantly since then, and members of the community have asked you constantly since then.

**Mr Barr:** We have provided that information.

**MRS DUNNE:** If you think that is the answer to the question or this is the answer to the question, you are not answering the question that people are asking. Minister, why have you still not fixed up the data when you said you would last Tuesday?

**Mr Barr:** I do not know what more we can do, Mrs Dunne, in terms of providing data for individual schools when you have this full list. You certainly see the graph there. All that information is available.

**MRS DUNNE:** Yes, and you said in question time that schools with small enrolments cost \$18,000. This graph that you published shows that what you said in question time in answer to the question was wrong and you have never corrected it.

**Mr Barr:** I reject that assertion, Mrs Dunne.

**MR SMYTH:** If you go to the graph on page 11 and look at small schools below 100, you will see that, according to the graph, there are only four. If you add up the costs that are apportioned to them and divide by four, you get about \$17,000, which is significantly different to the \$18,000 that you have put up. If you add the next two smaller schools, the \$18,000 drops to \$15,500, an error of almost 14 per cent in your figures. How are parents, how are P&Cs and how are schools to make reasonable decisions about their future, counter the arguments that you have put forward, minister, when the figures that you use are inaccurate?

**Mr Barr:** The figures are not inaccurate, Mr Smyth. The figures are available. They have been provided to schools. There is obviously a range of costs, as you can see. I reject that assertion that inaccurate figures have been provided.

**MR SMYTH:** Will you table for the committee, then, the individual calculations and how they were achieved for each school in the ACT that led you to say \$8,000 and \$18,000.

**Mr Barr:** They are available on the web site.

**MR SMYTH:** No, the calculations.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, there are the total expenses, the number of students and the costs per student.

**MR SMYTH:** I would like to see the inputs that go to total expenses.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Donnelly has already outlined the inputs for you, Mr Smyth.



**MR SMYTH:** Obviously, you have done the individual calculations on each school. Will you provide the analysis for each school in detail, not just the figures on the web, as just about every school community has asked you for? Can you give us the detailed calculations that give you these figures?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth, we have made that information available.

**MR SMYTH:** No, you have not. All of the schools that I have been to do not believe these figures, cannot calculate these figures, and would like further detail. Will you provide a detailed break-up of these figures?

**Mr Barr:** I get the sense that it would not matter, given the line of your questioning, what figures were made available.

**MR PRATT:** Don't worry about that. Can you table them?

**MR SMYTH:** Will you table them? You must have them. You have apportioned them. Can you provide them?

**MRS DUNNE:** Can you table what the total cost per school is?

**Mr Barr:** I have provided that information and I can provide that information.

**MRS DUNNE:** And what makes it up.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, that information has been provided.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, you have given the total cost per school.

**MR SMYTH:** Hang on, provided to whom?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Chair, I would like to come back to primary schools, if we could. We are drifting out of the output class.

**MR STEFANIAK:** No, we are not. We are talking about primary schools.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, you just said that you had provided this detail. To whom has it been provided?

**Mr Barr:** It is available on the web site.

**MR SMYTH:** So you are making the economic component of this decision on the three numbers on the web site.

**Mr Barr:** And you have just had outlined to you the factors that contribute to those numbers.

**MR SMYTH:** Can I see those factors broken down school by school? Can that be made available to this committee?

**Mr Barr:** That information is available, Mr Smyth. Yes, it can be made available to you.

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, it can be?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it can be made available.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Fine. We will move on now.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, madam chair, I have some questions.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, if I could just go back to something that Dr Foskey raised earlier about Hall and Tharwa primary.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, we need to get to the bottom of this, madam chair.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** If you look at the 2020 booklet, you will see that students enrolled out of area are indicated and there is a high percentage for Hall, but I am a bit more worried about Tharwa, being in my electorate. It says that 64 per cent of the students there are out of area. Of that 64 per cent, are any of the out of area ones from outside the ACT? Where do the rest of them come from? Do they come from Tuggeranong?

**Mr Barr:** I will just get that information on Tharwa. Certainly it is the case that the vast majority of students at Hall are from New South Wales.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You get compensated by the grants commission for that, don't you?

**Mr Barr:** We get an amount.

**MR STEFANIAK:** It is \$7,000 a student, isn't it?

**Mr Barr:** It certainly does not go anywhere near meeting the cost of providing education to New South Wales students. I have acknowledged publicly that we do get money, but it is not the—

**MR STEFANIAK:** And you would also acknowledge that if Hall closes they would have to go elsewhere in the ACT and you would have to make provision for that.

**MRS DUNNE:** And you are making no savings.

**Mr Barr:** If you were to look at the other schools in the Gungahlin region on this particular point, whilst we are getting the information on Tharwa, as an overall preference we would prefer to educate New South Wales students in lower cost schools. That would obviously mean that the money we get from the grants commission would be closer to the actual cost we pay for educating New South Wales students. Mr Stefaniak, it is interesting that there is a view that ACT ratepayers are providing this system for New South Wales students. I am very clear that this system is for ACT students first. We are happy to meet the needs of New South Wales students where possible but we have to

meet the needs of our own students first. That is my position and I do not walk away from that at all. I state again for the record that ACT students will be looked after first.

**MR STEFANIAK:** But your position at public meetings, while they are still finding that stuff for Mr Gentleman, has been that those New South Wales students would still be accommodated in ACT schools because there is that capacity.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Also, you have indicated that in the case of Hall it is only, I think, about \$1,000 a student higher than the average cost for primary schools in the ACT. So it is not a superexpensive school, is it?

**Mr Barr:** Hall is not a superexpensive school, no. I have indicated that. I did that in my presentation on the night. Back to Mr Gentleman's question, Tharwa's enrolment in February 2006 was 25. It has increased to 29 as of today, I understand. Ten of the 29 students come from the local Tharwa area, 10 students enrolled at Tharwa reside in Banks, eight students enrolled at Tharwa reside in Conder and two students enrolled at Tharwa reside in Gordon. There are student who reside in Tharwa and attend other schools. Two Tharwa students go to Gilmore, one goes to Lyneham, three to Bonython, one to Mawson, one to Weston and two to Gordon.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** But none from New South Wales in Tharwa.

**MR PRATT:** I have a supplementary question on that. Minister, of those Tharwa students going to schools elsewhere, can you tell me how many of those are special education?

**Mr Barr:** I am sure we can. I do not have that information in front of me now.

**MR PRATT:** On notice, thank you.

**Mr Barr:** I will find out for you.

**DR FOSKEY:** Supplementary to that, have you attempted to get a higher allocation for New South Wales students through the grants commission as a first option, rather than closing the school?

**Mr Barr:** I took the opportunity when I was at the vocational education and training ministerial council in Melbourne a couple of weeks ago to speak with my New South Wales counterpart, Carmel Tebbitt, in relation to progressing a cross-border funding agreement. New South Wales, it would appear, would be a little reluctant, given that very few ACT students are going across the border the other way. Certainly, the quality of the ACT system is attracting students from New South Wales. I will continue to progress this issue with the New South Wales government. We can seek in the grants commission process to get additional funding. It is a complex process, the grants commission one. I am sure there are people on the committee who have had considerably more experience in dealing with those matters than I have, but that is certainly a matter that I can take up with the Chief Minister and Treasury in relation to the next round of grants commission funding.

**MR SMYTH:** I have a supplementary question. Is not the ACT government already supplemented through the grants commission process for the fact that we do operate as a regional centre and one of those considerations is the cross-border movement of students from New South Wales?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, Mr Smyth. I acknowledged that in response to Mr Stefaniak's earlier question. I will get Mr Donnelly to outline aspects of that compensation.

**MR SMYTH:** Can you tell us how much we are actually compensated for in dollar terms for the fact that we are a regional centre already?

**Mr Donnelly:** Not specifically, no, I am not a grants commission expert, but I am sure that officers in the Department of Treasury will be able to answer that question particularly.

**MR SMYTH:** Sorry, if a proportion of the payment to the ACT is to compensate, as the minister has already acknowledged, for education—

**Mr Barr:** For education, yes, but you asked a question about the broader region.

**Mr Donnelly:** Not a broad regional thing.

**MR SMYTH:** I also asked how much in dollar terms do we get. I am stunned that you can't tell me how much we receive.

**Mr Barr:** No, you asked a very broad question about money we receive for our regional capacity. Mr Donnelly can answer the question in relation to money we receive for education.

**MR SMYTH:** That is all I want.

**Mr Barr:** Okay. We can clarify that, Mr Smyth, and then we can move ahead.

**MR SMYTH:** Mr Donnelly said he could not give us a specific number, refer to Treasury.

**Mr Donnelly:** In relation to the broader regional component—in respect particularly of education—there are two main factors that the Commonwealth Grants Commission uses to compensate the ACT for cross-border students from New South Wales. One of those is specific to education. We get just over \$5 million, according to the last figures I have available from the grants commission, for post-compulsory secondary students. The second factor, which relates to primary school students, is far more complex. There is a factor which the grants commission gives as compensation for a whole range of issues called the sociodemographic composition factor and a part of the calculations underlying that factor relates to cross-border students attending ACT government schools.

The Department of Treasury has done some estimates in conjunction with our department on what the compensation level for that is. It is a complex series of calculations and is certainly materially correct but may vary at the margins. Treasury has calculated that figure at around \$6,800 per primary school student we get compensated

for New South Wales students. There is also another issue in respect of the grants commission process whereby the grants commission does not compensate the ACT for the actual number of students, but for a standard level of students, taking into account the fact that ACT education provision is of a higher standard than in some other areas and they therefore adjust the number of students on the basis of what they determine to be policy decisions of the ACT government to offer a higher standard of education.

**MR SMYTH:** So they pay at the national average, not the actual ACT cost, as they do in health.

**Mr Donnelly:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I realise that there may be more questions on output 1.1. They can be put on notice because we are now moving on to the next output class. It is 12 o'clock.

**MRS DUNNE:** Madam chair, I indicated to you when we came back from morning tea that I had questions on this output class and I have not had an opportunity to ask those questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Can I tell you how many questions you have asked so far today, because I can tell you?

**MRS DUNNE:** We can play games about how many words people utter but, madam chair, I indicated to you at the outset that I have a line of questioning which I have not had an opportunity to pursue. I have asked supplementary questions on things that Mr Gentleman and Mr Smyth asked, but I have not had an opportunity to pursue that.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** You should have asked your questions then, perhaps.

**MRS DUNNE:** That would have been discourteous.

**DR FOSKEY:** It is a big issue and we do have questions and none of us are going to exhaust our questions by the end of today. I would like to formally request that we have a spill-over day next week.

**THE CHAIR:** We will see if the minister is available.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Chair, that would be up to a private meeting of the committee to determine.

**THE CHAIR:** We will have a private meeting.

**MR SMYTH:** I suggest that output class 1.1 go through to 12.30. I think that is a reasonable time.

**THE CHAIR:** We will do that and then we will go on to the next issue.

**MR STEFANIAK:** It is a big issue.

**THE CHAIR:** It is no bigger, I would have thought, than 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, et cetera.

**MR SMYTH:** Maybe we need two spill-over days, then.

**THE CHAIR:** No, I don't think so. We won't have them. We have already committed one of them. We will leave the spill-over discussion till later, otherwise we would be wasting time discussing it now, and go through to 12.30 on 1.1 and then go on from there.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I ask questions about average costs of students in primary schools?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, the average costs in budget paper 4 on page 385 are variously described: \$9,473 was the target for last year, \$9,572 is the estimated outcome and the target for this year is \$10,346. The figures that you have provided on the web site and at public meetings are the figures for the financial year 2004-05, which are not reported in this budget. I understand why you have done that; it is a completed year, there are no estimated outcomes and the final figure is reported against in the annual report. Minister, in all of the presentations you have given in relation to average costs of primary schools you have used the figure of \$9,570 and you used it again last night at Canberra high school. Why are you using \$9,570 as the average cost per student in a primary school, when the annual report for 2004-05 gives the figure at \$9,272? What is the difference? What is that made up of?

**Mr Barr:** I will get Mr Donnelly to respond to that.

**Mr Donnelly:** The difference is, effectively, the costs of students with a disability educated in mainstream schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** Gee, I'm glad you said that, Mr Donnelly.

**Mr Donnelly:** For annual report purposes, those figures are reported separately and in the average cost, which has been broken up at a per school level, those figures are included.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you for that, Mr Donnelly. What was the average cost in 2004-05 of educating a child with a disability in a mainstream setting?

**Mr Donnelly:** It was of the order of \$20,700, a figure which I will get you shortly.

**Mr Barr:** Somewhat less.

**MRS DUNNE:** Page 129, I think.

**Mr Donnelly:** In that case, I think you already know the answer.

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

**Mr Donnelly:** No, it is not page 129. It is on page 133 of the annual report, \$20,784.

**MRS DUNNE:** What you have done is you have amortised that across all of the schools,

effectively. To get the average cost per student across the system you add up all the costs to run each of the schools, however many primary schools, and you get a big sum and then you divide it by the number of children enrolled in primary schools; is that right?

**Mr Donnelly:** Effectively, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** At no time have you taken out the 970-odd children who are special education children in that system. There are 970-odd children in government primary schools who receive special education funding of some sort.

**Mr Donnelly:** I cannot attest to the 970 figure, but there are a number.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is in the budget papers somewhere; I have read the figure somewhere on that.

**Mr Donnelly:** There are certainly a number of students in mainstream schools who receive supplementary assistance because they have special needs, yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** So the figure of \$9,570 which the minister has stood up night after night and said is the average cost is not the average cost of a mainstream child in a mainstream class; it is a different figure.

**Mr Donnelly:** It is the average cost of operating the school which, in a school which has students with special needs, will include the additional cost of the needs of those students.

**Mr Barr:** Figure “a” under average costs on page 385 of budget paper 4, Mrs Dunne, average cost per government primary school student. That is the figure I have been referring to. That cost would, in fact, come down were you to exclude the students who receive an additional amount because of their special needs. Obviously, looking across 35,000 students and the 970 figure, and I have a recollection of reading a figure like that as well, you are talking, effectively, about one thirty-fifth of the—

**MRS DUNNE:** No, there are 35,000 children in the government system, not in the primary school system.

**Mr Barr:** Sorry, so you then have less in primary schools, but is the 970 figure for primary school or the whole lot?

**MRS DUNNE:** I cannot remember. I read it yesterday, but I cannot remember where. Does that figure in the average costs on page 385 include children in special education in a mainstream setting?

**Mr Barr:** That is my understanding. No?

**Mr Donnelly:** The estimated outcome of \$9,572 in 2005-06, that is, the average cost per government primary school student, does not include the average cost per government special education student in mainstream schools.

**MRS DUNNE:** So the figures in the budget, the figures in the annual report and the

average cost per government primary school student, which is reported year on year, does not include children funded under SCAN?

**Mr Donelly:** That is correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** Why are you using this other figure, minister? Tonight when you go to Telopea Park will you be using the figure of \$9,570? If you do, will you tell people why it is different from the figure you should be using? If you are comparing apples with apples you are comparing figures in this table, which does not include figures for people who are on SCAN. You should be using the figure on page 129 of last year's annual report, which is \$9,272. Then you should take into account quite separately all the children with special education needs. They should be reported separately because essentially those costs will travel with them wherever they go.

**Mr Donelly:** Mrs Dunne, I think we are comparing apples with apples. The cost of meeting the needs of students with a disability in individual schools as published on the website are included to get to a system average that includes the costs of educating students with a disability across all schools. So we are comparing apples with apples. Students with a disability are in the figures on the website. If you take them out of a particular school—we have done the calculations for Melrose primary school and we are working on the calculations for other schools—you will also need to decrease the average cost because the average cost will no longer contain additional costs relating to those students.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have made this point consistently for two weeks now and it has not been fixed up on the web page, although the minister undertook to fix it up. The figures might end up telling us exactly the same story, but they are flawed and misleading. People need to be confident that you are talking about children in a mainstream setting or children who get special education. The figures in the budget and in the annual report are reported quite differently. For some reason you have suddenly decided to amalgamate them and come up with a figure that has no provenance anywhere. You cannot go back and say, "Where did that \$9,570 come from?"

**Mr Donelly:** Let me explain why that decision was taken and the way we classify those costs in the accounting system. While we can report them across the system it is difficult and very resource intensive to split them out on a school-by-school basis. Although the minister has given undertakings that those numbers will be published, those calculations have not yet been completed. Reporting at a system level we can quite easily say that \$22,117 is the average cost per student in a mainstream school. Because of the way in which we have established and set up the accounting systems it is far more difficult to do that calculation on a school-by-school basis.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, I refer to page 385 of BP4, average cost per government primary school student. Part of the reason for the reform process the government is undertaking is that everything—health, education and everything else in the ACT—costs 20 per cent more. We are trying to constrain costs against national averages.

**Mr Barr:** Perhaps not everything, but across the board it would average out that way.

**MR SMYTH:** It is interesting that the average spend on a primary school student for the



2005-06 financial year is \$9,572, yet that figure is increasing next financial year to \$10,346. We are going through a reform process. It currently costs \$9,500 per student in our school system, yet when we have gone through this reform it will cost \$10,300 per student. How do you justify that?

**Mr Barr:** Obviously the government incurs a range of increasing costs every year. Salaries and wages are a rather large component of that. You would expect, as each year goes by, that costs would increase. I will get Mr Donnelly to outline some of the factors contributing to that.

**Mr Donnelly:** I will make two comments in response to that question. The first is that in 2006-07 very few of the proposals on which we are consulting would have been implemented. Indeed, a small component of schools—from memory, I think it is eight schools—will no longer operate from February 2007 if the proposal goes ahead as planned. Obviously the savings for that is at best a half-year effect on a small portion of proposals contained in the 2020 document.

Another issue increases the total cost per student in 2006-07. In closing those eight schools the government has to write off, in an accounting sense, the value of those assets. If we are no longer using schools for school purposes, the accounting standards require us to write that down to the net carrying amount. In this case it would be zero for those buildings. The average cost per student includes the write off of those schools that are closing in 2007.

**MR SMYTH:** On page 394 of BP4, total ordinary expenses, the 2005-06 outcome is \$519 million against a budget of \$508 million. Yes, there is a dip: the expected outcome for 2006-07 drops to \$475 million where you talk about a half-year effect. However, in 2007-08, where you expect a full year effect, the figure bounces back to \$504 million. In reality this process will not lead to genuine long-term savings at all.

**Mr Donnelly:** If you look just above those figures to the figures of \$57,139 million and \$89,340 million, you will see that the biggest single issue contributing to the increase in total expenses from \$475 million to \$504 million over those two years is the additional write off of further schools in the 2007-08 financial year as a result of closures.

**MRS DUNNE:** So “other expenses” includes the \$71 million capital write off over four years?

**Mr Donnelly:** You say it is a figure \$71 million.

**MRS DUNNE:** I think the minister told me it was \$71 million.

**Mr Barr:** Did I?

**MRS DUNNE:** Somebody did.

**Mr Donnelly:** It certainly proves the write off figure.

**MR STEFANIAK:** It sounds about right.

**Mr Donelly:** A set of figures about two-thirds of the way down on page 402 outline that.

**Mr Barr:** I will do a quick calculation now to confirm that Mrs Dunne and I had a conversation relating to this issue.

**Mr Donelly:** So the total cost is \$65.4 million.

**MR SMYTH:** In 2005, the last school year, what percentages of students were educated in the government system?

**Mr Donelly:** Just in primary schools?

**THE CHAIR:** We are talking about primary schools at the moment.

**MR SMYTH:** Would you then break it down for primary schools and others?

**Mr Barr:** We are just getting that figure.

**Mr Donelly:** In 2005 the figure across the system was 59.3 per cent.

**MR SMYTH:** So it was 59.3 per cent in primary schools?

**Mr Donelly:** No, across the system. I do not have the figure for primary schools, but I could calculate it.

**MR SMYTH:** What is the expected percentage of students in 2006?

**Mr Donelly:** It is 59.0 per cent across the system.

**MR SMYTH:** Do you have a projection for 2007?

**Mr Donelly:** No, Mr Smyth, that is not easily available, although I could calculate it.

**MR SMYTH:** Could you calculate the breakdown in both 2005 and 2006 of primary school, high school and college students?

**Mr Donelly:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want to take that question on notice?

**MR SMYTH:** He will do that now and give us the figures later.

**Mr Barr:** Perhaps he can do it during the break and we will get back to you this afternoon.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** While we are dealing with primary schools, you indicated in your 2020 booklet that two primary schools in Tuggeranong were due to close in 2006 and three in 2007. Earlier Dr Bruniges referred to staff movements. Will there be any redundancy payments for staff in that projection? How will the department look after educators?

**Mr Barr:** As a broad principle we have indicated that, as part of the process, there are no involuntary redundancies. If the proposal were to go ahead from one campus to another, as the students moved the teachers would follow them in large part. Obviously you would not need to import an executive structure because the receiving school would already have that. I will get Dr Bruniges to give you some information on that.

**Dr Bruniges:** We would need to manage that as a department through recruitment, through following the students and, where we could, keeping students and teachers together on a new site. With individual work force issues it is incredibly important that we do individual transition planning with each of those staff members. When you look at the HR you will see that we also have policies about mobility, the rollover of teachers at different sites and teachers moving around the system. We need to look at expertise and make sure that we get program continuity.

Earlier the minister referred to language programs. If some of those schools have language components we go through an exercise of looking at the receiving school, building better quality programs and maintaining continuity in particular sciences, or arts and music programs. That would all be part of our transitioning process. We would do the same thing with parents and students as we would do with teachers in our work force.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** If some educators take up voluntary redundancy in the future what are the current provisions in their EBA now? Are any changes projected in the new bargaining period for voluntary redundancy?

**Dr Bruniges:** No, we would not anticipate any voluntary redundancies in teaching staff. It is incredibly important that we have a work force. As I said, we will be able to manage that as we move teachers around at the end of the calendar year and we will also continue to recruit the balance of new teachers into the system. So it is not anticipated that we would have any redundancies.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, the other night the school boards for Mt Neighbour, Kambah high school and another primary school told me they had tried to get further details from you on how you analysed school-costing profiles, but they said you were not writing back to them. Why is that?

**Mr Barr:** Obviously we seek to address all the information requests we get. Clearly, we get a large number of them. I spoke with some of the board members of Kambah high at the community cabinet meeting in Tuggeranong a couple of weeks back. I believe I have accepted an invitation to visit the school next month.

**MR SMYTH:** Yes, but initially that was on 15 July. The schools have closed. The date falls within the holidays. The schools were very upset by that.

**Mr Barr:** We sought to find a time that was mutually convenient. I am happy to visit the school when it is able to receive a ministerial visit. I indicated that I did not seek to interrupt any education going on at the school but that I would happily visit at a time that was mutually convenient. If there is a problem with that time I will get my office to arrange another time that is more suitable.

**MR SMYTH:** Unless, of course, you only want to see it empty.

**Mr Barr:** I have accepted invitations to visit many schools and I will continue to do so. In relation to the specific question, I will get my office to check on the status of responses to specific questions that might have arisen from schools in Kambah. We will seek to get that information to the schools as soon as possible. Some information that was being sought was made available on the web site late last week and earlier this week. If there are any outstanding issues I will seek to ensure that they are addressed as quickly as possible.

**MR PRATT:** I understand that the information being sought is much more specific information than what is provided on the web site. They cannot understand in the 2020 document how these calculations and formulas were determined.

**Mr Barr:** Sure.

**MR PRATT:** They emailed you a couple of times chasing up that information. Can you indicate when you will be able to get back to those three schools?

**Mr Barr:** I am attending a public meeting in Tuggeranong on Thursday night.

**MR PRATT:** No, I am talking about responding to written requests.

**Mr Barr:** As you would appreciate, Mr Pratt, my office is receiving a large number of requests for information.

**MR PRATT:** From 39 schools I imagine.

**Mr Barr:** It is also receiving a large volume of correspondence. I will endeavour to ensure that all that correspondence is answered as quickly as possible. I am not in a position now to indicate exactly when; I would have to seek advice from my office as to whether that correspondence is in train. I undertake to do that for you.

**DR FOSKEY:** A number of schools, for example Cook primary school, pointed out to me that in your calculations relating to the cost of schools you chose to ignore the contribution made by tenant organisations and other community activities in countering school costs, sometimes adding to the costs of running those schools. I refer specifically to Cook primary school, which receives no rent from tenants but it receives an allowance from the Department of Education and Training to offset its costs. Does that allowance cover the costs of utilities for these tenants? How do these transactions affect the average cost per student calculation for Cook school?

**Mr Barr:** That question was asked earlier, Dr Foskey.

**DR FOSKEY:** About Cook?

**Mr Barr:** The general principles that apply to all schools. Cook is no different in that regard. I suggest, for the sake of timing, that you look at my answer in the *Hansard* record.

**MS MacDONALD:** Cook primary school is close to capacity and it is projected to continue to be close to capacity, yet it has been suggested for closure. I do not know the state of Cook primary school as I live on the other side of town, but it has been suggested to me that people are unsure why it is proposed to close down that school. I am curious to know the rationale behind closing a school that appears to be running effectively and that it is suggested will continue to run effectively.

**Mr Barr:** This question was asked at the public meeting last night. When you look at that region you will see there are four primary schools within a radius of about four or five kilometres. One and a half kilometres to the north you have Macquarie primary school. In the adjoining suburb, which I think is about 2½ kilometres away, is Aranda school and on the other side is Weetangera primary school, if my Belconnen geography is right.

The issue relating to Cook is that there is one too many primary schools in that region. Because Cook leased out its entire west wing to other organisations, and that leasing is managed as part of urban services, it does not have the capacity to take students from Macquarie. Macquarie has the capacity to take additional students. However, we have to bear in mind that a year 6 class will pass out of Cook and move on elsewhere, so we need to reduce the number of students that will be taken by Macquarie.

**MRS DUNNE:** But the kindergarten class will move in to replace them.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly. People always ignore this and they always seem to think it is a figure that you cannot adjust. Out-of-area enrolments can be adjusted. We hear consistently that the priority for that school is about providing for local communities. The web site whereis.com tells us that Cook and Macquarie primary schools are 1.3 kilometres or 1,300 metres apart. If that proposal goes ahead, Macquarie has the capacity to take all the students from Cook.

**MR SMYTH:** Have you ever tried to walk your six-year-old 1.3 kilometres?

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes, exactly.

**MR PRATT:** On a morning when it is minus four degrees?

**Mr Barr:** As I acknowledged last night, you can look at planning decisions that were made prior to self-government and ask why it is that schools were placed between suburbs. If they had not been we would not have this problem. We have enough students in that region for three viable and vibrant primary schools. Currently we are operating four buildings. These are the difficulties we face in seeking to make these changes. I acknowledged publicly that we have to make some very difficult decisions.

In the context of the provision of education we have to ensure we have high-quality schools in the region, so this is the proposal we put forward. However, it is a proposal. I have already met with the Cook parents and citizens association and school board representatives. I am happy to continue to engage with those communities in relation to options for the future. I have an open mind about education provision in that region. However, we have to accept that the demographics in that region, like all others in the city, are changing. We need to make our education provisions fit that need in the future.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. If there are any further questions I ask members to place them on notice. The committee will adjourn for lunch and come back at 2.00 pm.

**Meeting adjourned from 12.30 to 2.02 pm.**

**THE CHAIR:** We will get started.

**Mr Barr:** Before we begin I have some information that we took on notice in the morning session that I can now provide the committee in relation to a couple of questions.

**THE CHAIR:** You were all here this morning, so I do not need to read the card again. Would you like to give us that information?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Pratt asked me a question in relation to correspondence from Kambah high. I understand that correspondence from Mr Parker has been received by my office. It is currently being processed and a reply will go out to him very shortly. I am visiting Kambah high on 25 July, at the invitation of one of the students on the school board. I am also meeting with the P&C and the school board on 14 August. There has been some correspondence in relation to Mount Neighbour as well. That has been received by my office and is currently being processed.

Mr Berry asked me a series of questions in relation to the teachers code. I would like to advise the committee that there is a section on political activity in the 2006 booklet entitled *teachers' code of professional practice*. I thought it might be worth reading the opening sentences there. At page 30 of the booklet it states as follows:

Teachers have the same rights as everyone else to express their political views and to make public comment.

However, a teacher must be sensitive about how they exercise these rights. Teachers need to ensure that there is no reasonable perception of conflict of interest between their private political opinions/activities and their official responsibilities.

Teachers need to be careful about expressions of political opinion in the workplace and the appropriateness of sharing their views with students.

This document is, of course, available to all members of the committee and I believe it is on the departmental web site. If it is not, we can certainly make copies available to members. I think Mr Donnelly has some further information.

**Mr Donnelly:** Mr Smyth asked earlier about the funding for transportables at Gilmore primary school. I have been advised over the lunch break that funding is indeed included in the schools SBM allocation in respect of operating those buildings.

Mr Gentleman asked about Australian government funding in 1996 compared to 2006. In 1996-97 Australian government funding to government schools was \$27.4 million. In 2006-07 that figure had risen to \$43.8 million, which is a 60 per cent increase. Over the same period, Australian government funding to non-government schools increased from \$46.7 million to \$116 million in the 2006-07 budget, which is an increase of 148 per

cent.

Finally, Mr Smyth asked a question around certain percentages. In 2005, 62 per cent of primary school students attended government schools. In high schools that percentage was 52 per cent, and 63 per cent in colleges. In 2006, in primary schools the percentage is 62 per cent, in high schools 51.9 per cent and in colleges 63 per cent.

Mr Smyth also asked about our forecast for 2007. There are a couple of complications with providing that data. First and foremost, we do not do any forecasting on what students in the non-government sector might do in the future. That is dependent on a whole range of factors which we are not privy to, including the capacity of non-government schools, their plans for marketing and other things which we are not aware of. So, despite agreeing before the break to endeavour to provide those figures, I am unable to do that for 2007 projections.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, on page 376 of budget paper No 4, output class 1.2, the first two columns show the estimated outcome for 2005-06 as \$124.534 and the 2006-07 budget as \$116.381. Can you tell us where the \$8.51 million reduction in total cost is going to come from?

**Mr Barr:** I will get Mr Donnelly to address that.

**Mr Donnelly:** The main difference between that \$124 million figure in the 2005-06 estimated outcome and the \$116 million in the 2006-07 budget relates to the write-off of Ginninderra district high. During the 2005-06 year when it was decided to demolish that school and build a new preschool to year 10 school on that site, that school was written off. The write-off of that is reflected in the 2005-06 estimated outcome. Of course that write-off is a once-off, and will not occur again in 2006-07.

**MRS DUNNE:** In the mid-year review the write-off of Ginninderra district high was 10 point something and now it is 11 point something else. Can somebody explain what the difference in the write-off is?

**Mr Barr:** We will take that one on notice and get back to you.

**DR FOSKEY:** Has the department done any follow-up of students who were transferred forcefully from Ginninderra high? Given the conversation this morning about transition and so on, and given its usefulness in informing this much larger range of transition, has there been a follow-up of students from Ginninderra high to see which circumstances worked best for students?

**Mr Barr:** I will get Dr Bruniges to address that question.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes. We have been working with principals to make sure those pathways are individually followed. If there are any issues of concern or issues the principals have, we have asked them to raise those with our directors of schools.

Monitoring those individuals as they have moved into their new school environments, in

terms of programming, wellbeing and how they have fitted in, really needs to happen at each school. Principals and staff, I know, have had a whole range of activities around making sure, when those students first began at the commencement of this school year, that the transition was working well for individual students.

**DR FOSKEY:** I would like to follow that up with some talk about the new school models that are being offered. We are told that they are being offered as an alternative mix in the public schools. I have a series of questions. First of all, where is the pedagogy, or where is the ideology even, behind the idea that this mix is what people want, and that they are offering students better educational models?

**Mr Barr:** Just before we get to the detail of the individual models, one thing I have found interesting in the debate so far has been perhaps the inherent conservatism of people in seeking to question all of these different models. Had that same conservatism been in place in the 1970s when the ACT sought to break away from the New South Wales system and instigate the college system—had we had this same level of reticence to even try and look at other educational models—we may well have never moved to a college model.

This jurisdiction has a strong record of being willing to engage in, and adapt to, new educational models which have consistently proven over the last 30 years to provide better educational outcomes. I do not see that, in 2006, we should say that education was perfected in the 1970s and there is nothing new that can be looked at. I think there is too much of a sense that we reached this nirvana in education in the 1970s, that we cannot look beyond and that we cannot look at how educational needs are changing. Look at my own personal experience. I finished my degree at the ANU in 1995 and never used the internet. I did not have to; it was not a feature of my educational experience.

**MR PRATT:** Were you doing basketweaving?

**Mr Barr:** No, I was not.

**DR FOSKEY:** I think I have been through many more changes than you, Mr Barr.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly. I am simply seeking to make the point that things change.

**DR FOSKEY:** We did not even have pens.

**THE CHAIR:** We are not going down that avenue.

**Mr Barr:** When I went back to Lyneham high, did I not see your photo on the board as a teacher at the school when I might have been a student there?

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes. Did they have desks then?

**Mr Barr:** Certainly they did not have the range of facilities that are available for students now. Getting back to the point of the question, we need to be innovative in looking at different educational models. We have a considerable amount of research available to us both internationally and nationally. We undertake our own research. We have some very successful trials and models that have been working in the ACT. I will



get Dr Bruniges now to outline some of the educational thinking behind some of these models.

**Dr Bruniges:** A particular issue is the early years of schooling. We look across different jurisdictions in Australia and the emphasis that is being put on early childhood development and the research base that is starting to underpin some of that work.

There are discussions about whether or not indeed you have a curriculum that runs down to the early childhood, or whether you extend that developmental period of time where students need to focus on play and a whole range of social skills in the early years, and what are the best foundations we can build as a schooling system that actually accommodate the individual learning needs of students.

In terms of the early years of schooling research, one of the models proposed in the proposal looks at a P to three concept—having five years there in the very early years for some students so that you encourage a better continuity of learning. So we now have teachers who are especially qualified and trained in the early years of schooling and who in fact come out with degrees from universities.

As we pick up work force capacity issues around what teachers need to specialise in what area, the early years of schooling have certainly been one. From a research basis, universities have certainly looked at early childhood, where we get bachelors of education majoring in early childhood development.

One of the models in terms of schooling structures proposed is in the early years of schooling and taking that P to three concept. We would then need to look at how our new P to 10 curriculum framework would fall into play with that so that by 2008, when that comes about, we have a schooling structure and we have a continuity of learning.

Moving up the line into the traditional upper primary, I guess middle schooling is another approach that is there. For some parents a middle schooling approach is one that they are choosing to engage with. The research that underpins that really looks at those issues of transitioning in the early adolescent years and how critically important it is for some students that they maintain a high level of engagement.

In fact, in the schooling sense you can put in a structure where you have not so many expectations, where you do not have one different teacher for every subject area, but in fact you reduce the numbers and differentiation of teacher expectations in those early adolescent years and provide a more integrated approach to teaching and learning across fewer teachers for the same students.

I guess the other thing I would have to say in terms of middle schooling is on the pastoral care issue. We should have that right through our school system. I think that is actually highlighted as middle school approaches. A lot of people, I think, look at middle schooling and see the US style, where they have set middle schools. The work we have done here in the ACT in looking at a middle school approach really picks the very best out of what we have seen in some of the international settings, to make sure that we put in place a middle school approach as opposed to some of the approaches taken by some of those schools in the states. I have been fortunate enough to visit some of those in the area of Chicago.

In terms of our college sector, we have our college review and how that is put at the forefront—the importance and, I guess, the innovation of the college system when it came into the ACT. For the ACT in embracing that, it is like no other jurisdiction. As for me, I can look, I guess, across state borders to be able to say that that was an innovation—and we need to make sure that we have got that continuing.

I have heard it in public audiences today. Parents will say they want continuity of learning for all secondary schools. Some parents make choices. They will look at student needs and think about the range of choices that they feel best suits their individual students. They have a range of models across the early years of schooling—the P to six and the middle schooling. I guess, through the consultation process, what parents will do is really share with us what they believe is right. That is going to be different for different students and different models based on parents' judgments about what they feel is best for their students.

**DR FOSKEY:** Can I suggest that, in inner north Canberra for instance, the closing of a college to provide a seven to 12—or is it six to 12—school does not actually increase choice. Perhaps you would be providing the extended schooling without closing the college. Have you considered the unintended consequences for schools of this model? For instance, people from Melba high school were here the other day. There are a couple of models proposed for them. Each of those has a number of consequences. They have just thought through some of those. Clearly it needs a lot more thinking. Those consequences could be much more serious than you might imagine as you blithely offer choice to parents. Often it is more to parents than to students, because they are usually the ones who make those choices.

**Dr Bruniges:** I think that is a really important point. There are probably two dimensions here that we have to think about. One is on behalf of students learning and thinking about the continuity and where it is sensible to actually get those break points and programs. The other dimension that comes in is around parent choice—because they will make choices, I guess, on a whole range of different variables—and trying to look at a public education system, trying to look at those dimensions.

Do we have quality learning environments? What are the characteristics of a good school? Do we provide programs that actually address the whole range of student continuum? Do we have coverage across all of the key learning areas that are critically important? Do we offer a range of settings where students are able to access things—not just within the school context but, for example, our ANU college that links our college system together and takes the very best that this community has to offer in programs in the sciences and in the mathematics—and use the expertise in networks for learning, as opposed to stand-alone institutions, where all you can do is stand and deliver within the context of your institution, rather than tapping the resources of the community and building those in as a broader educational provision and learning network for students?

I think we have particular challenges across all systems in education—to look at the ways in which we can get the very best opportunities to link those networks, to look at the education sector, to be able to pick the eyes out of what we do well to make sure that we have the best possible outcomes for all student challenges.

**DR FOSKEY:** Of course, in talking to the people who experience these—the teachers and the students—that seems to be the bit that has been left out. It is the bit that has been left out as you confidently assert these models.

**Mr Barr:** I would make the point that, as part of this process, one of the questions I have sought to ask the community is: without in any way wanting to detract from a college system, is there room in our government education system for the seven to 12 model? One of the attractive features of the Campbell high site was that that school was built as a seven to 12 school. It has close proximity to the CIT campus at Reid, and it has the potential to create pathways from seven to 12 into vocational education and training that the CIT offers. There are some very attractive features of that model for Campbell high.

If the answer to the question “is there room for a seven to 12 school in our government system?” from the community is a resounding no, then, as I have said publicly, of course we would not seek to foist a model on the community that they were not at all interested in.

There is a sense that—and certainly this came up in the college review—the transition from year 10 to year 11 presents some challenges for some students and that, if you like, the freedoms of college—free periods, no uniforms, calling teachers by their first names and a range of things that are perhaps different from a more traditional model—present some challenges for some students. Whilst we acknowledge the excellence of the college system, we have to also acknowledge that it does not suit everyone and that we need to make provision—I believe we need to make provision—within our system to attempt to meet the needs of all students.

I accept and appreciate that there is in this town a strong focus on university as the post year 12 option, but 70 per cent of our students will not go to university. So we need to have a strong focus on the programs and educational opportunities that are available outside of that university stream. One of the issues we are seeking to address as part of this process is to see that those pathways are clear, that those linkages are made and that we start making them earlier too—that we start looking right back to year nine as a point where we can begin to set those pathways up for students, so they see the wide range of opportunities that are available for them.

**MR SMYTH:** Is this being driven by the department, or is this being driven by the huge weight of correspondence you have received over the last couple of months asking for a seven to 12 school in the ACT system?

**Mr Barr:** I think there are political and educational imperatives behind seeking to look at different education models.

**MR SMYTH:** That is fine, but what I am asking is this: before you announced it, were you being inundated with correspondence from the community asking for such a thing?

**Mr Barr:** It is certainly an issue that has come up in particular regions where we have seen the private sector offer that model. An example the Chief Minister has used quite publicly on a number of occasions is in relation to, say, Radford. You have Radford and Kaleen high two or three kilometres apart on the same road. Radford has a waiting list of 5,000 and Kaleen high is currently about half full, I think.

**MR SMYTH:** Going back to my question about how much correspondence, how many parents approached the department or yourself before the budget announcements asking for a six to 12 college in the ACT?

**Mr Barr:** I have only been minister for 10 weeks. Certainly in the initial consultations I have had, and in seeking feedback from my contacts within the educational sector, there has been some interest in at least having a discussion about this idea. I am happy to engage further in that discussion. I do not think we should shy away from having a discussion about that issue. Certainly for those people who come to the ACT from other jurisdictions who are more used to the seven to 12 model, there is a question raised about why we do not offer it. To answer your question: no, I have not had a truckload of mail about the issue, but that does not mean we cannot put it forward for discussion.

**MR SMYTH:** I am just trying to seek where the initiative is coming from. Dr Bruniges, has the department been inundated with requests for a seven to 12 school in the ACT?

**Dr Bruniges:** There are two things I would like to say there. The first is in terms of the college review. There are a number of community consultations that happen. I am sure that, in those discussions in the different forums they were held in, in the context of the college review that was conducted with principals and different communities, as that process was being raised there were some issues raised.

The second thing is in terms of public meetings. I have seen and heard individuals from the floor stand and ask that very question about traditional schooling models and pathways. There are very public expressions of individual parents, saying, “Why can’t we go back to the traditional schooling structures? I actually want for my child a seven to 12.”

In terms of correspondence, no, the department has not received a flow of correspondence about that issue in particular. But I think the evidence is in communities and their willingness to engage in our college review process and think about those things. From what I have observed—and I have spoken to individual parents after the public presentations—it is certainly something that is, as I said, worthy of discussion and debate.

**MR SMYTH:** In the consultation on the college system, did it come up very often in the public discussions?

**Dr Bruniges:** I know Mr Curry was much closer to that process than I was, but my understanding is that, yes, there were a number of parents who raised that in community forums about traditional schooling structures. Mr Curry might add some more detail as to quantum.

**MR SMYTH:** What is the definition of “a number of parents”? Is it one or two at each meeting?

**MRS DUNNE:** There were two this morning.

**Dr Bruniges:** We would have to go back and look at the data. We are happy to do that.

**MR SMYTH:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Curry, do you wish to add anything?

**Mr Curry:** No, that is fine. Dr Bruniges has answered the question, I think.

**MRS DUNNE:** The college review published in January this year touches on other structures and other models. The FAQs that are on the web site refer to the college review. But why did you so selectively quote from the college review in the FAQs?

Why did you, for instance, leave out the quote that says, “The Review believes that some of the perceived ... strengths of the traditional high school model can be built more obviously into the current ... model,” rather than changing the model? On the specific question of whether there should be another model, it says, “The Review decided, however, not to recommend a three year college,” although we are looking at three and four-year models for colleges. It goes on to say that, rather, work needs to be undertaken that should be seen as ensuring the strong foundations and possible reconsideration of the issue at some time in the future. Is some time in the future less than six months after this review came out? On pages nine and 10 it says:

Investment in any other model would constitute a significant distraction from current and emerging imperatives.

I gather from reading that college review that the “current emerging imperatives” were about those pathways that you talked about. I think they are very important because you have actually demonstrated time and again that you are doing that by, for instance, the university college and the extension of the university college.

Why, when the college review specifically ruled out a seven to 12 model and a nine to 12 model, are we, within six months of the publication of that review, going down the other path? I reiterate Mr Smyth’s question: where is the demand and where is the evidence of the demand, apart from anecdotally a few people standing up and saying, “Why don’t we have a seven to 12 model like we did when we were in New South Wales”?

**Mr Barr:** I will take the first part of that question. I have said publicly that I am not seeking in any way to undermine the college system; it will remain in large part. There is a proposal on the table to reconfigure the schooling in a couple of colleges where there is an enrolment issue. We are seeking to adjust and provide an alternative, but it is a proposal. We are taking community feedback on that proposal. As I have said, if there is not support for that model, then we would not proceed with it.

**MRS DUNNE:** This morning you said, “Surely our system is big enough to offer an alternative education model.”

**Mr Barr:** Yes. That is my personal view. But if there were a very strong view to the contrary that that is not wanted, then, as I say, I would not seek to foist such a system onto the community. But I feel that at least asking the question during this process is not an unreasonable thing to do.

**MRS DUNNE:** Despite the fact that, as recently as January this year, the college review said, “Don’t go down that path; we recommend that you do not go down that path”?

**Mr Barr:** There are a number of recommendations that the college review makes. We will be looking at each of those. There are some that we are already doing work on, obviously.

**MRS DUNNE:** I should hope so.

**Mr Barr:** The review did not say, “Thou shalt never consider these issues again.” I am asking questions; that is all I am doing. I am seeking some feedback on that and providing some options. As I say, if they were not options the community wishes to pick up, then we would not proceed with them.

**MRS DUNNE:** I wish to follow up on some of the things that Dr Foskey raised about the connectivity and the continuity. Dr Bruniges, you talk about the strong continuity that you get in a P to 3 school because you have five years in a P to 3 school. A P to 6 school gives you eight years. I will give you a series of questions. Why would you break at five years when you can go to eight? You talked about the American example of stand-alone middle schools, generally speaking, not being desirable, but that is what you are proposing for the Melba high school site, a stand-alone 5 to 8 school.

What thought has been given to the impact on enrolments in surrounding schools if you start providing middle schooling as, for instance, you are proposing at Kaleen or Stromlo and possibly the Melba cluster, because what you are proposing to do in Melba is quite unclear? Look at the Melba cluster, for example. The idea is obvious on paper. Charnwood feeds into Melba feeds into Copland. However, what happens to the children who attend school in Evatt? The parents at Evatt see Melba high school as one of their destinations, but the Evatt primary school is a P to 6 school.

You are possibly giving them more choice, but it is Hobson’s choice. If you establish a 5 to 8 school and they do not go there in year 5, they become disenfranchised. The program is set up for 5 to 8. If the Evatt children decide they are going to go to Melba at some stage, so they go at 5 rather than at 7, that creates a problem. If they opt not to go in year 5, there are no actual pathways for children in that Evatt cluster because Melba provides 5 to 8 and then 9 to somewhere else, and Kaleen provides 6 to 10 under the ideal model. So what happens to those children who are still in a traditional P to 6 school? Where is their pathway?

**Dr Bruniges:** I think the first one was about five to eight, why five years for some and eight for others. When you think about early childhood, they are probably key growth periods in cognitive development and to have the first five years is going to provide, I guess, better stability for continuity of learning. When you think about the eight years, if you are going to put in an early childhood focus you would want it focused not on the eight, because students are going to be at a different developmental stage in upper primary years.

So the notion behind the first five years is to put stability in those early childhood years of readiness where you are looking at, I guess, making connections between curriculum. For some students, because every individual student is an individual, their degree of

readiness to progress to the next stage of development is going to vary. So some parents are going to make the decision for their children that P to 8 or K to 8 is probably the best continuity of learning. For other students, they feel as though a solid five years first of all based on that integrated curriculum notion and then a change into another environment for the middle years is the best approach.

It is not about one size fitting all. Parents are going to make decisions based on their judgment about what best suits their students and we see that all the time, where they look at different settings and they choose different programs—some will choose music, some will choose science, some will choose languages, some will choose arts—for a whole range of different reasons. So I guess the schooling structures that are put in the proposal really put on the table a range of those options for consideration.

**MRS DUNNE:** Why are freestanding models on offer when the department of education and successive ministers have constantly said the American freestanding model is not appropriate? Why have we suddenly got a freestanding model?

**Dr Bruniges:** I might ask Mr Curry to look at the cluster note on that, but the notion for Melba is actually to have a group of schools and that would operate quite differently to a stand-alone, traditional United States school that only just focuses on that. What we are trying to do is to build the connections between surrounding schools and Melba so that you get that. Mr Curry, you might want to answer on the detail.

**Mr Curry:** I guess the Melba concept is really about, in essence, creating one school in the end with one culture, with teachers interacting with each other and with opportunities for students in the different campuses at times to access programs and specialist facilities across campuses, cross-fertilisation of students and teachers. So it is about building one culture right across so that over time it will be seen as one school with consistent management structures, consistent student welfare practices and so on.

**MRS DUNNE:** That would, in fact, mean that my question about the continuity of the children in the Evatt cluster of schools would be made even more difficult because they would be excluded in a way that they are not now. You don't have a Melba collegiate school. There is no obvious entry point for the children who leave other schools in the area at year 6, and Florey.

**Mr Barr:** I think, Mrs Dunne, that there is a growing sense within regional areas where schools are working together that there are already cluster meetings that principals and teachers attend. So I think that you are perhaps overstating the potential for alienation. We can perhaps agree to disagree on that aspect of it, but I think you will find that the philosophies and the interaction between those schools in those regions are quite strong. So I don't necessarily see the problem to the extent that you have identified, but nonetheless we can look at strengthening those links to avoid some of the issues that you perceive might arise.

**MRS DUNNE:** Dr Bruniges talked about middle school and the differentiation of teacher expectations. I am not sure I know what that means. Could you explain what that means?

**Dr Bruniges:** When students finish at year 6 and then go on to 7 to 10, what often

happens in terms of timetabling is that often in primary schools, probably in more cases than not, students in year 6 would have one classroom teacher and they might have a couple more in terms of specialists for music that swap or teachers rotate. Once you head off into a secondary school environment, the normal course of study is to pick up subject discipline areas, where you have a maths, a science, an English teacher, a PDHPE teacher, a history or geography teacher. So the number of differing sets of expectations that can occur in some of those middle years for students can be quite broad, depending on how many teachers teach year 7 at the secondary level.

So to think about a middle-school approach which actually uses teacher expertise, if you have training you normally have a major and a minor in terms of secondary teaching, to be able to lessen the number of teachers for a group of students and to have a more integrated approach can provide for students that better integrated curriculum. It lowers the number of differing sets of teacher expectations because there are fewer teachers teaching the class, but provides a more integrated approach.

**MS MacDONALD:** Minister, my question relates to Campbell secondary school and the proposal to change it to a 7 to 12 school. It crosses over into the college area, of course, because the proposal is to close Dickson college. I might come back to that when we get to the colleges because I have some questions on that as well. If it goes ahead and you do end up having Campbell as a 7 to 12 school as opposed to doing it in another area—I am not opposed to the idea of having a 7 to 12 school in the ACT, because I think there are some parents out there that do want to have that choice, but I do not know whether Campbell is the place to put it—how will you accommodate the students from Dickson college? If Campbell becomes a 7 to 12 school, will you need to build extra facilities in order to cater for students coming across from Dickson college?

**Mr Barr:** As to the current enrolment at Campbell, I understand that 57 per cent of the students are from New South Wales. So, given that the proposal would be to commence in 2009, we would be seeking, as each year passed through, to take on fewer students from New South Wales on that site so as to free up the capacity at Campbell to take additional enrolments from ACT students. We would need to look obviously at aspects of the configuration of the school over the next 2½ years to see where we might need to enhance facilities. As you know, I will have \$90 million over the next four years to invest in enhancing school facilities, so that we can look at some of the particular needs that that campus might have.

As I indicated earlier, one of the attractive features of that school is that it was originally built as a 7 to 12 school. Also, it has proximity to the CIT campus at Reid, so we can also look at the delivery of particular specialist programs at the years 11 and 12 level off the Reid campus of the CIT to take advantage of the outstanding array of facilities that we have at that campus only a short distance away from the Campbell one.

**MS MacDONALD:** Do you believe that by turning away the New South Wales students you will not need to build any extra facilities?

**Mr Barr:** It is not so much turning away New South Wales students, but we can seek to accommodate New South Wales students in other high schools within our system.

**MS MacDONALD:** Such as Lyneham high school.



**Mr Barr:** It would not be Lyneham because Lyneham is currently very full with ACT students, but there are, of course, other high schools across our system. I am sure Kaleen would welcome some additional enrolments. But we do have the capacity, given the time frame for this proposal, to make the necessary adjustments to enrolment in the time.

Also, I would make the observation that the 7 to 12 model may not suit all of the students who currently attend or would presume to attend Dickson in 2009 or who have indicated that they would want to. They would seek possibly to attend a college at a years 11 and 12 stand-alone model and they would then have options available to them. Into the future there, obviously, we are looking at providing a college campus in Gungahlin, so there will be a variety of options around should that model proceed, but we certainly do have time and that is why that process would be staged to occur in 2009, to give us time to make the adjustments that would be necessary.

**MS MacDONALD:** I appreciate that Campbell was built as a 7 to 12 school and that you may well be able to cater for students if you suggest they go elsewhere, but I would suggest the parents of many of the students from New South Wales who are going there are probably working in town and that is part of the attraction for them of going to Campbell, so they are not necessarily going to want to go over to Lake Ginninderra.

**Mr Barr:** I acknowledge that point, but I come back to the fundamental one, which is that we do have to design our ACT system to meet the needs of ACT students first. Whilst we are happy to educate New South Wales students in our system, I think you would agree that we should not be designing our system around their educational needs as opposed to the needs of our own students.

**MS MacDONALD:** No, but we are set in a region.

**Mr Barr:** We certainly are and we have responsibilities as the major city in the region. But again I stress that in my view we need to ensure that we are meeting the needs of ACT students first. That is the process by which we accept enrolments currently. We have priority enrolment areas within the ACT. The second tier of enrolments is out of area and then New South Wales students have been able to fill up remaining spaces. I would not see us moving away from that order of priority.

**MS MacDONALD:** So, going back to the original part of my question, you do not envisage that there will be a need to do any building of infrastructure.

**Mr Barr:** We will need to look at the site and look at some of the specialist facilities that we might wish to add and the particular programs that we might wish to add. But again I make the point that we also have the opportunity to take advantage of some of the facilities that are available at the CIT and by 2009 I hope to have strengthened and enhanced the range of subjects that will be available at the ANU secondary college. I have also begun negotiations already with the University of Canberra to have a University of Canberra secondary college as well. I think the educational landscape will have changed quite a bit by 2009. We intend to move ahead with a variety of different models and linkages. I think the initial successive of the ANU college sets a fine example for directions that we can head in the future.

**MR SMYTH:** Just to follow up on that for a start on the future of Kambah high. Where do you see the students from Kambah high going if it is to close? Will they be heading north to Stromlo or going south? Is it P to 12 to be established at the Wanniassa campus?

**Mr Barr:** No, it is P to 10 at Wanniassa. That is my understanding.

**MR SMYTH:** It won't be extended.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, not according to the book.

**MR SMYTH:** I am just curious about that. Everywhere else seems to get a choice, but we are not going to have a P to 12 in Tuggeranong, so there is no consistent application.

**DR FOSKEY:** Do you mean 7 to 12?

**MR SMYTH:** Sorry, 7 to 12. Wanniassa has already got co-location of a primary school and a high school. How is it a priority for other areas but not for Tuggeranong, if it is such a good thing to have and if there is such a demand for choice?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth, I am happy, if there is a call from the Tuggeranong community to examine a 7 to 12 model, to look at doing that.

**MR SMYTH:** I am trying to highlight the lack of consistency in what you are attempting to apply, in that it seems to be "we will fit something up here because it fits our needs but we are not applying it consistently over the whole of the territory".

**Mr Barr:** Obviously, we looked at the capacity of particular buildings also to meet particular needs and it is not quite as simple in terms of configuring different schools.

**MR SMYTH:** I am sure it is not.

**Mr Barr:** No. I am sure equally that, if it was deemed to be the case that we did not have the capacity in the high schools in Tuggeranong to run a 7 to 12 program in their current configuration, everyone would be howling at me that I was trying to foist on them a model that physically just could not fit into a school. I am happy to have that discussion. If that is a model that the community desires, we can definitely look in the future at providing such a model. In answer to your question specifically on Kambah high, there will be options for other high schools in Tuggeranong, but there are also Melrose and Stromlo. I think there are probably five or six different high schools that students could choose to attend.

**MR SMYTH:** None of which are on bus routes that are easily accessible and most of which tend to go against the flow of the parental traffic in terms of where they go for their jobs. So, in terms of disadvantage inflicted upon parents, the closure of Kambah will inflict some of the harshest cost transfers on the hip pockets of parents with children at the government school.

**Mr Barr:** My understanding is that Kambah receives a number of out-of-area enrolments because it is apparently on the way from southern Tuggeranong; it is the

transit route for parents who are working in Woden or the city. Wanniasa is reasonably close by on that particular transit route also.

**MR SMYTH:** It is southwards of it.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly Melrose is on Athllon. As I observed earlier, we have the ability to work with ACTION, to look at routes and timetabling, to ensure that there are services that meet the new needs, because we would not need to run a bus to a school campus that was no longer being used.

**MR SMYTH:** As a new question, can you tell us—perhaps the head of the department would like to tell us—what are currently understood to be the drivers that are forcing parents or making parents move their children from a government high school to a non-government high school or college?

**Mr Barr:** That is, in fact, a similar question to what you asked this morning.

**MR SMYTH:** No, a different question, just across the board. What is your understanding currently of why we have this continuing trend away from government high schools? Based on the figures from Mr Donnelly earlier, 62 per cent are in primary schools, 63 per cent are in colleges, but only 52 per cent of our students are in government high schools.

**Mr Barr:** I will get the departmental officials to give you some more detail, but anecdotally I hear a variety of reasons raised. Some of them are around uniform-discipline perceptions, others are around just the physical quality of school buildings. Some of our high schools are not particularly attractive buildings at this point. Some are showing their age and need renewal. If you were to compare the physical quality of some of the campuses and some of the facilities that are on offer in the private sector versus the public, I think the government schools need some work done on them and that is something that I will seek to address as part of this package. Part of this budget is to do the work on upgrading the facilities at government high schools.

I think if you were to compare the facilities available at, say, Canberra Grammar, Radford and a range of other private schools, they are in advance of what the government system is currently offering. So we are seeking as part of this proposal to improve the quality of the facilities the government high schools offer. There may be some issues around religious instruction and other things that are a factor. It is not something that is an issue for me personally. I am not particularly au fait with why some parents choose a religious path, other than that was their upbringing and their belief on it. You get some anecdotal evidence that there are some parents who are not religious in themselves but seek to send their children to schools that do have some of those values, not necessarily because they want to pick up on that religion. It is complex. That is my impression 10 weeks in. I will get Dr Bruniges to give you some more information from a departmental perspective over the longer run.

**Dr Bruniges:** In terms of, I guess, some overarching regions that I am aware of from looking across things like Professor Tony Vinson's report in other jurisdictions and some of the research that has been done, the factors include things like convenience, parents who are very busy and might have different jobs but would actually choose to drop off

their students at a certain point on the way to work and that is convenient coming home. Also, whether there is childcare or related family or after-work care and provision there. Some of it might be just relatives in terms of where they are seeking to support students outside school time.

Another issue is around pastoral care. The pastoral care issue is really quite significant in terms of, particularly, the lower secondary area. Another area is in terms of quality learning environments. Things like perceptions about information and communications technology and provision. People see it as an advantage for students to be in places where there are high levels of technology. Something that I believe isn't spoken a great deal about but is there and is tagged in some of the research is peer group engineering and the choice of parents to want to make decisions about their friends and keep their students with their friends or a particular peer group of students that they have grown up with through school. One set of students will move and parents will feel more comforted by the fact that they are moving their students with those students.

And just the matter of parents making a choice, so making a judgment about their child and what they feel best suits the needs of their particular child at a particular time during the continuum of schooling. That does not mean they choose the non-government sector. What we do see and you see in the statistics is that they will make one choice at one point in time for their students and a different choice at another point in time. I think parents are actually making judgments about what is best for their students in early years, primary years or in fact college years. We see those statistics vary to that degree where parents are exercising different choices at different times for different reasons.

**MR SMYTH:** The minister mentioned discipline and you have mentioned issues such as pastoral care. A number of parents have put it to me that they feel that their kids are safer in a non-government high school. Are statistics kept on the incidence of bullying and violence in the government high schools?

**Dr Bruniges:** In the high school sector, in terms of our national safe schools framework, there are requirements under the commonwealth grants legislation and the receipt of money that we have to be highly accountable for working within that framework. So there would be data collected in terms of that framework that we are working through. The other source is in terms of the school's excellence, the excellence framework and the work that we do in terms of review and development of each school. When I first arrived last year, restorative justice was an issue. There is different program development and schools are seeing the need to build up programs in support of pastoral care. I think it is across both sectors. I do not think it is unique to one or the other. I actually think it is a broader community issue about how we handle some of those really important social responsibility issues in all sectors of education.

**MR SMYTH:** How do we compare in the national data?

**Dr Bruniges:** I will have to go to Mr Curry. I am not sure about the first report. I think it is due to come out, our data collection. It is not out yet. We will have a means of comparison. In terms of the receipt of funds, we are required to report to the commonwealth government. We will have our first comparable data once the first report comes out on the framework.

**Mr Barr:** I think that a lot of this is driven by perceptions and sometimes these perceptions are unfair and are not borne out in reality. We do face some challenges around addressing some of those perceptions and it is difficult once something is ingrained or a school gains a particular reputation. Often adverse publicity when it is not necessary or the commentary is ill-founded can cause great difficulty. We have had experiences where some unfortunate incidents have been used to blight the reputation unfairly of schools. We face a challenge in addressing those perceptions and I acknowledge that. It certainly is a difficult challenge, but we can't give up on seeking, where the perceptions are wrong, to change those perceptions.

**MR SMYTH:** What data could you give us at the moment in regard to the incidence of bullying and then, much stronger, in terms of actual violence and how many times that is reported to the police?

**MR PRATT:** In high schools.

**Dr Bruniges:** The individual schools will hold that information; so we do not collect that. The things that we will be collecting are to meet the national safe schools framework data and we can certainly get a list of what those indicators will be that we will be working on collecting. But the individual schools would actually have that level of data, Mr Smyth.

**MR PRATT:** Why wouldn't the department collect that data? Why wouldn't the department want to know the detail of what schools are reporting in this area?

**Dr Bruniges:** I think for two reasons. The collaborative work around the national safe schools framework gives us an opportunity to look at those things. Among the lessons and information that we need to look at are case studies as to why. In terms of each individual school level and dealing with those, in some of the situations you would actually want to look at trends across your whole department and the national safe schools framework will give us that bigger picture across departments.

At the local level, many of those incidents are to do with classroom teachers and schools and locally, even nationally, there is recognition that we do not have a way of coding particular incidents. There has been a lot of work done in that framework about how you code, how you define, how you describe and how you count, and that is all part of the national collaborative work. Certainly, as a departmental head, I do want to know what is happening in the schools and, through the national safe schools framework and the indicators there, I will be looking very closely at monitoring both across the system and in individual schools.

If there are particular trends, rather than one-off instances, it would be critically important for us to think about programs, what is needed in areas of teacher professional learning, not only in terms of curriculums or programs, but actually how we equip our work force, our teachers, our professionals, hone their professional judgments about when to intervene, when to negotiate, when to collaborate, when to consult. All of those things are very vital information for us to make sure we have got quality education systems.

**MR PRATT:** In terms of safe schools and safety in schools, what strategies do you have

in place for dealing with repeat offenders among students who are bullies and who are violent? I have seen the annual report briefs, but they are fairly general. Can you give a bit more detail on what you intend those strategies to be now?

**Dr Bruniges:** One of the strongest ones that the committee may be aware of is around the area of restorative justice and looking at developing cultures in school. I actually think it is bigger than the programs. I actually think it is educational culture and the community impact and how much flows from the community into the school setting. I actually think it is a whole range of things. In terms of bullying, there is the no way web site and there are national initiatives whereby teacher resources are being developed across all jurisdictions and we are able to have a resource set and programs for teachers to have to best match the needs of their classroom to the programs on that web site.

There has been an enormous amount of collaboration across jurisdictions and we need to pull the best from the collaboration and make teachers aware of those web site links so that they can tap into the best possible resources. In some ways, as to those educational resources, you can have a whole library and a bank of all kinds of resources, but the teachers in classrooms are the best people to match what it is that their students need to what is the best resource and then to explicitly design a teaching and learning program to meet the needs. I, as the departmental head, could say, "On Thursdays, you will all do X," but it is really about trying to get down to the local level and valuing teachers' professional judgment, to sum up the needs of their students, to have ample resources at their fingertips that they can draw from and then design a program to do that. We have seen that work in restorative justice practices around the country.

I do not think it is a matter of one size fitting all or one program going to be the magic silver bullet to fix the issues. It is much broader than that. In fact, you would want it integrated through all the lessons. I do not think you have one lesson on violence or bullying; you don't do that. I was part of a kindergarten class at Richardson when I first arrived here that used an interactive whiteboard in terms of students being able to classify acceptable and unacceptable behaviour right from kindergarten. So you want it to be an integrated approach in some ways. In some ways you would want a streamlined program and in some ways you would want to target a specific issue. I think our job at the department is to monitor that, to listen to what teachers are telling us they need, and to design and go out and get the best resources we can to match that need, so it would be more needs driven from what teachers are telling us as well.

**MR PRATT:** I know that in the last couple of years a number of high schools have developed or experimented with the concept of having learning support units or special classes to identify repeat offender students in that vulnerable life of the entire school spectrum which is the early high school years and leading up to about years 9 and 10. How is that concept going? Clearly that is a choice made by a number of schools. Are schools that decide to set those up getting support from the department to back them up? How is that working?

**Dr Bruniges:** I would hope so. In each school environment clearly the school board plays an important role for the kinds of systems they have got in place. I am aware of different kinds of systems where students will go to a green room. There are different levels of behaviour and individual schools will make judgements about how well those are working and whether or not they need to adapt them or adjust them. This year will

give us the opportunity to look at that broader national framework and benchmark what has been successful and what has not and where we actually stand with respect to other school systems, both government and non-government.

In terms of special programs, some schools implement individual programs where they will have an individual program, a behaviour that they are monitoring individual students on. Some have a notion of timeout systems that give students an opportunity to reflect and think about the nature of their behaviour. Bullying is a behaviour, so you are into behaviour management.

**MR PRATT:** Change the entire culture of that child.

**Dr Bruniges:** That is right. It is very complex. People think about that. There are a whole lot of interactions with parents that need to happen: the bully-victim situation, why does that occur; what is exacerbating that in terms of group dynamics within the classroom; what is happening in the overall school environments? I have seen some schools that have observation checklists for playground behaviour.

Sometimes it is not just within the classroom. To go out into the playground to observe student behaviour and the way in which they interact with other students is certainly a significant part of the data that schools will do. Teachers will be on playground duty observing that kind of behaviour. So there is a whole range of programs.

The plus for us is to be able to look at it, I guess, nationally, to tap the national resources and to make those professional judgement decisions locally. As department head, I monitor those and listen to the needs of teachers to see how we can draw in more resources to support that. That is one of Mr Curry's areas of expertise.

**Mr Curry:** Going back to your original question, Mr Pratt, I was just going to add to how schools develop the models that we are talking about. They might be internal models. As part of the school review process that all schools undertake on a three-year cycle, the school looks at the student environment, and it actually does that on an annual basis. Out of that self-assessment and then the parent satisfaction issues, the schools will look at the safety issues for students and for staff and they will then develop models as part of their ongoing planning process. Gathering that data then allows them to make decisions about their future planning. They then might take decisions about looking at some sort of alternative set-ups or arrangements within the school. We have student management consultants that then can work with the school on best practice models around that and best practice approaches to managing students. I think that just covers the question that you originally asked.

**MR SMYTH:** There was an incident recently where apparently 11 young men were involved and there might have been repeat behaviour and there might have been a number of young women involved. How does it get to a stage where that that happens?

**Dr Bruniges:** I guess one of the issues in all communities is that you are always going to have a number of incidents that you need to deal with. I mean, for me as department head, once I become aware of an incident, then I need to be able to put in place appropriate procedures and practices to ensure that we are monitoring that in an appropriate way.

**MR SMYTH:** All right. But, again, how does it get to an incident like we heard about recently in one of the high schools where a number of young men were involved. I spoke to a parent who said some of these kids were in one of these special units. I understand the unit might even have been dissolved, but the behaviour was not addressed. I see some shaking heads in the background. If that is incorrect, I am fine to be corrected, but that is how it was put to me.

**Dr Bruniges:** In terms of the procedures and processes we need to have in place, Mr Smyth, some of those actually look at a review of practice to make sure that we are monitoring it. When we become aware of situations like that, until we actually get the data, the evidence—we have a number of personal privacy issues in terms of procedures that we need to go through—we need to follow that protocol.

**MR PRATT:** Just going on with that, Mr Smyth refers to a letter that I have written to the minister, so the minister knows which high school I am talking about here. The quite serious allegations by a number of teachers and some parents around that particular issue very much talk about unimpeded behaviour over a period of 12 months by that particular gang of boys in that particular school leading to what were some very, very serious allegations. So here we have unprecedented behaviour by a gang of boys with no charges laid by the police because the young 13-year-old girl decided not to lay charges. But how would it get to that? Is that not a serious breach in the system at that particular high school?

**Mr Barr:** Madam Chair, I seek some guidance from you. If we are going to delve into this matter now, it might not be appropriate to do it in a—

**THE CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you, minister. I am not quite sure of the status of this matter and whether or not it is the subject of any police investigations.

**Mr Barr:** I have also received correspondence from Mrs Dunne and my office has been in constant contact with Mrs Dunne. I am sure she will acknowledge that that has occurred. I trust it has been to her satisfaction.

**MR PRATT:** Should we seek to take this matter in-camera, Madam Chair? Minister, would you be prepared to—

**Mr Barr:** I seek the guidance of the committee around the use of time. Just on the broader issue of the recall, I am certainly available to come back. I would prefer that it be next Wednesday morning, if that suits the committee.

**MR SMYTH:** Fantastic. We are free.

**THE CHAIR:** There is already something else booked in, but that can be changed.

**Mr Barr:** I will seek guidance, but in terms of how we deal with the remaining output classes—

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Chair, the minister is responding to one of the member's queries already. This sounds like it is not actually delving into the estimates process. Perhaps it



would be better—

**Mr Barr:** If that is the view—

**MR PRATT:** No. I would make the point that it does address the issue of systems and procedures applicable to high schools and goes to the heart of the question that we were asking before: why the drift from high schools to non-government schools? Is this an issue? I think this committee needs to examine it.

**MRS DUNNE:** Madam Chair, could I intervene? I am not a member. I am only a visitor here. The matters touched on are exceedingly sensitive and go to high levels of personal privacy. If the committee wants to pursue questioning on this, my advice would be that we would clear the room—

**MR PRATT:** No. We are not—

**MRS DUNNE:** because of the nature of the enquiry. We could treat it as a passing reference and talk about the structures in general, but I would prefer it if we did not actually dwell on particular examples.

**THE CHAIR:** As far as I can see, we have two options before us. We can stop referring to a specific matter and talk about more general matters with regard to the subject matter you are discussing or we go off this particular incident entirely now—

**MR PRATT:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** and leave it at that. The second option is to do that at the moment, and if you want to come back to an in-camera hearing, we can do that on a spillover day. Those are the two options that you have right now.

**MR PRATT:** Chair, I thought we had already determined that we probably would come back and take this matter in-camera.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I think that is a matter that the committee should decide.

**DR FOSKEY:** The committee will decide that.

**MR PRATT:** In that case I am prepared not to pursue this matter any further today. But we do have to make a serious decision about an in-camera process.

**Mr Barr:** Well, that is a matter that the committee can decide and I will receive advice from you in relation to it.

**THE CHAIR:** We will go on. Mr Gentleman, you had another question?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Thank you, Chair. It is on a different topic from the theme we have been pursuing. Minister, I refer to page 384 of budget paper No 4, which deals with accountability indicators. I refer specifically to students in year 7. In 2005-06 there were indicators for reading and writing. You can see that they have now been changed. As the notes indicate, they have been separated. There are different indicators for reading and

writing.

Under literacy, section 1. deals with indigenous students in year 7 who meet and exceed the national benchmark for writing. You have set quite a high target compared with the estimated outcome for 2005-06. Have you put some specific strategies in place to address the estimated outcome for 2005-06?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Gentleman, in the last sitting of the Assembly I tabled the most recent progress report on our efforts in indigenous literacy. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline some of the strategies in place.

**Dr Bruniges:** The move from the one indicator to two is to make sure that we are looking after each of the aspects. It is very easy to have an indicator that is wound up with two dimensions and you really do not know who has achieved in reading and who has achieved writing. In terms of the transparency, to unpack those at a more strand level is incredibly important.

In terms of our indigenous students, yes, we have put in particular strategies. I, as department head, have asked my staff to track every individual indigenous student so that we are individually monitoring the achievements of those individual students, collecting data on an individual basis and, as I said before, building up the plan of that. As to these benchmark results, we always have to remember that the benchmark data holds national comparability at the moment. It is a minimum benchmark so we would want to set that target fairly high. We want it to be realistic. We want it to be achievable, but we want it to be within reach.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey has the next call, and then Mrs Burke.

**DR FOSKEY:** Again, this goes across all the levels; it is in relation to the changes overall. I note that \$6 million is going to be saved from restructuring the central office, and I have one question there around the item central office benchmarking at page 389. I am interested to know what has been the benchmark base, but also what will be the impact of this restructuring. I note there is a loss of \$6 million, and I assume that means fewer people working there, to support the wide-ranging change, in particular the support the teachers will need, given—and I will not go into them—the huge number of changes that will occur.

**Mr Barr:** Dr Foskey, I will just address that. At the top level a principle I have is that, given the limited resources that we have available to us in the territory and for education, my objective is to see that those resources are directed into schools and into teaching and learning and that we are as efficient as we can possibly be in our administration.

I do not see value in having bureaucracy for the sake of it. I think we need to ensure that we can provide support services to our schools, our teachers and students. I do not see a need for an overloaded ministerial support unit, for example. I do not need my hand held to the extent that we have a bloated bureaucracy in that sense. As a philosophical position, that is the direction I am heading.

I will get Dr Bruniges and Mr Donnelly to outline how we are going to configure our head office and to address the particular issues you have raised about benchmarking.

**DR FOSKEY:** I would like to know before they start. At the moment an awful lot of your officers are involved in various work around this whole restructure, so it would seem you are needing each one of them. But back to the benchmarking and back to support for teachers.

**Mr Donnelly:** I will start by giving some of the background to the benchmarking that was done. In pulling together this year's budget, my understanding is the government did look at a number of national benchmarks right across the government and the cost of central support for education services. Effectively, the central office component in the ACT is significantly more expensive than in other jurisdictions. The savings that are contained in this year's budget make some attempt to bring that figure back closer towards the national average.

In terms of how the savings will be achieved and the detail of that, I will pass over to Dr Bruniges. But in relation to one of the final things you said before you handed over, there is a transition period. You will note that while it is just over \$6 million a year from 2007-08, there is less than a half year effect of those changes in 2006-07 and that is to some extent in order to aid the transition of what will be quite a significant restructure.

**Dr Bruniges:** As part of starting on that process, Dr Foskey, I have released a new senior executive structure. We look at the numbers of SES. As the first phase of that restructuring I have reduced the number of SES staff from 15 to 13. I have looked carefully at what I think will be needed to position the ACT department and keep its pre-eminent position in terms of learning outcomes.

So I have two arms. The first one looks at the education network, where we really see curriculum and professional learning. That is one directorate. We look at student services, being another. We look at external relations, higher education and vocational education, being the other positions in that restructure. On the corporate side, I have looked at governance, risk and regulation as being a major area. I have looked at measurement, monitoring and reporting. From some of the conversations we have had today about measuring, monitoring and reporting, that will be a significant area. We are still awaiting some decisions on the shared services model in terms of finance and facilities.

My first step in going through and looking at those savings is to restructure the department. That structure is out as of 10 July. The next phase of that will be to identify the functions that each of those staff will be responsible for delivering, and then we will design a structure to deliver those functions. I would hope that by the end of July I am in a position to be able to put that structure out for the three months consultation that I am required to do under the certified agreement. At the forefront of my mind is really how best we underpin the work of schools and support teachers. That is central office, the restructure component.

In terms of specific areas, there is a specified curriculum in the budget papers of 0.9. Bringing together the curriculum area with the professional learning area will mean a reduction in people in central office, but what I will gain is the capacity to purchase in the best possible curriculum resources from other jurisdictions and have a resource bank in each of those areas as we go towards our new curriculum framework.

Rather than remaking the wheel all the time in the key learning areas of science and mathematics, we look for an efficient way of getting the best practice material in. In the TAE, there is another specified \$1.5 million there. At the commencement of this year I relocated that area into Manning Clark office and we are able to work and look at efficiencies across the whole department now all being located in the one area with TAE.

We are looking at things like efficiencies across the area of data management analysis and reporting functions. While in the past some directorates had that own function, what I want to do is to bring that all into that directorate called measurement monitoring reporting so that we are more efficient in the way in which we process data and our reporting requirements through a number of memorandums of understanding and commonwealth agreements.

That is the process we have started on. In answer to your question about support for teachers, the teacher professional learning fund that is part of the EBA continues. I have had conversations with principals about how we might prioritise teacher professional learning in the areas of greatest need, whether we then purchase other resources or other programs interstate or whether we need to adapt or create our own, and that will all happen when we identify the functions and then the structures. I am expecting those processes to be in place over the next six months.

**DR FOSKEY:** Did you respond about benchmarking, what you were benchmarking?

**Dr Bruniges:** I will be benchmarking. I will be looking at other jurisdictions.

**DR FOSKEY:** That is what you are benchmarking against? Okay.

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes. I need to continue to do that in each of the areas.

**THE CHAIR:** A supplementary question from Mrs Dunne.

**MRS DUNNE:** I have a supplementary on this. I am trying to envisage this in my mind, and it is starting to look like an innovation. Is it possible to provide the committee with what it looks like now and what you envisage it will look like so that I do not have to cross my eyes too much?

**Dr Bruniges:** Yes, certainly.

**DR FOSKEY:** That is a good idea.

**MRS DUNNE:** Thank you.

**MRS BURKE:** It may be out of left field, this question. It is really in relation to capital works and support for disabled persons. I am not sure if we can go there, Chair. Is that okay?

**THE CHAIR:** Do you want to do it later under special education?

**MRS BURKE:** I probably could leave it for later, yes. It is on page 392.

**MR SMYTH:** I have a couple of quick questions. Has allowance been made in this budget for the teachers' EBA?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, there is, at page 389. There is a supplement to the three per cent we have factored in. We are obviously, Mr Smyth, still in negotiation on that matter, but I have indicated that I have been given an allocated amount by the Treasurer.

**MR SMYTH:** If you are unsuccessful in keeping it to that limit, will that necessitate going back to the Treasurer for more funding, or are there hollow logs?

**Mr Barr:** I anticipate, Mr Smyth, that I will be sticking to the allocated budget that I have—

**MRS DUNNE:** Ministers do not know where hollow logs are.

**MR SMYTH:** Because I notice on—

**Mr Barr:** If there is a need, in the process of negotiations, to change that parameter, then, yes, I would have to go back and—

**MR SMYTH:** All right. To follow up on a question I asked this morning about the average cost per government student, this morning in relation to primary school students you said, "Well, you know, things always go up. There's CPI and wage increases and things." I notice that for government high school students the outcome for this year is \$12,765 per student, but the expected outcome for the coming year is \$11,929. How are you going to save that \$836 per student?

**Mr Barr:** I think Mr Donnelly answered this question earlier. It relates to a write-off of the Ginninderra district high building.

**MR SMYTH:** So that flows through into this as well, does it?

**Mr Donnelly:** The average cost per student data includes all expenses, including school write-offs. In 2005-06 the high school sector gets a one-off write-off for Ginninderra district high. Therefore that is not contained in the 2006-07 estimates. Equally, on the primary school side, 2005-06 has no allowance for write-off of schools, but the 2006-07 estimates do include the write-off for the schools that are proposed to close at the end of 2006.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey has something.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes. Given the incredible challenges facing teachers, what are you offering them during this process of restructuring in terms of their working environment? We already know the situation around the EBA and the dissatisfaction with the government's offer. There are other issues, such as the packages that are offered, more face-to-face teaching, a widely disrupted environment and less attractive salaries. What can you offer teachers to make them want to stay in the system, given there is a worldwide shortage—it is worldwide but there is certainly a shortage in Australia—of qualified teachers? A number of our teachers are probably thinking, "We could move off

now. We could retire now and do something else.” I am wondering how you are going to make them want to stay.

**Mr Barr:** Thank you, Dr Foskey. This is something that my brother, who is a teacher in the system, regularly raises with me, and had done prior to my becoming minister, and that is his concern about the physical conditions that he is expected to teach in and that the conditions of some of the school buildings are not acceptable. So one of the things that we will be addressing is the teaching environment.

In terms of refurbishing buildings, certainly staff room facilities can be upgraded as part of this process as well. In looking at creating new facilities in new schools, there is opportunity there to ensure that the physical environment is better for teachers. I think that is one thing that we certainly will be addressing.

Another is access to information technology. As part of the expanded IT package in this program we will see made available to teachers a wide range of cutting edge information technology, and that will certainly assist teachers in terms of their lesson planning and a whole range of things that will assist them in their professional work. I will now throw to Dr Bruniges to outline some of the other features that we can offer teachers in our system.

**Dr Bruniges:** As we move towards our new curriculum framework for 2008, better curriculum and teaching and learning support will be the key. As I have mentioned before, Dr Foskey, our capacity to purchase in best practice in terms of materials and units of work should alleviate some of the current workload issues that teachers are faced with in terms of not having a curriculum framework in this jurisdiction.

For the first time they will actually have a curriculum framework. It will be the first framework across all jurisdictions here in Australia to integrate the national learning outcome statements and our provision of teaching and learning and pedagogy support for teachers in terms of information communication technology and how that then relates to curriculum.

That online environment has provided, I guess, an opening for a wonderful support for teachers that they have not had before. I guess part of our role is going to be to collect those high quality materials that they can access and that we can license as a jurisdiction so that they do not have to go out and create the wheel and so that they are able to have ready access to what I see as their core business, and that is teaching and learning and resources to support that.

**Mr Barr:** I will just add before closing—I think we are going to afternoon tea, Dr Foskey—that we have a very attractive system of teaching. In the last round we had 180 positions or thereabouts and we had 1,300 applicants for those positions. So we are a very desirable jurisdiction in which to teach and we certainly have no problems attracting high quality teachers into our system.

**Mr Donnelly:** I can add, minister, that notwithstanding the offer which is on the table, the teacher application round for this year closed last Friday. While we do not have final figures on the number of applicants as yet, early indications are that it will be very similar to the number that we had last year.

**THE CHAIR:** We will go to afternoon tea now. When we come back we will deal with output class number 1.3.

**Meeting adjourned from 3.33 to 3.52 pm.**

**Mr Barr:** We need to clarify one issue, madam chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, do you want to clarify something or can I refer to the schedule?

**Mr Barr:** Refer to the schedule.

**THE CHAIR:** If committee members are in agreement, we will deal with college education until 4.30 pm and then go on to special education. We will then deal with non-government education and early intervention. If we have time we will deal with vocational education, but if we do not have time it will probably fit in better with CIT on a recall day. If everyone is happy, that is the way we will proceed. Minister, do you have a matter of clarification?

**Mr Barr:** I understand that Mr Donnelly has a bit of additional information that might clarify an issue that was raised earlier.

**Mr Donnelly:** I refer to the second line on page 389 of BP4, “teachers’ wages supplement to 3 per cent”. That is a typographical error which should read “teachers’ wages supplement to 4 per cent”. The budget papers reflect the offer on the table at the time the budget was presented, which was a four per cent pay rise with certain productivity offsets from teachers.

**MRS DUNNE:** Madam chair, I ask the indulgence of the committee to go back to a general question.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No.

**MRS DUNNE:** It could be taken on notice.

**THE CHAIR:** Put it on notice.

**Mr Barr:** Put it on notice, Mrs Dunne.

**MRS BURKE:** Given that we are on the colleges section, I refer to page 380 of BP4, the number of students receiving special education assistance in mainstream schools. I notice that there are 115 in the college system. I ask the minister and departmental officials to keep that thought and that page in mind. I jump forward to page 392 of BP4, capital works program, capital upgrades, and seek clarification. Having regard to the issue to which I referred on page 380, I refer now to page 392, which shows an allocation of \$1.270 million for support for disabled persons. I want to clarify whether “persons” means students and/or accessibility to the school area for students and persons visiting the school.

I come to a broader question. I noticed an allocation of \$11.3 million in capital upgrades.

Minister, how have you worked out the amount of money to be spent if you do not know what schools are closing and what schools will be staying open? For example, how do you know that you will need \$1.270 million for support for disabled persons if you do not know what schools will be closed?

**Mr Barr:** You asked two very good questions, Mrs Burke. I will get Mr Donnelly to give you the fine detail on your first question and I will come in later if I need to.

**Mr Donnelly:** In respect of the first question, support for disabled persons tends to be focused towards students, but it also tends to have spin-off benefits for other disabled persons who might need to access the school. For example, if we put in a lift for a student who might need to travel between floors, obviously that lift would then be available for anyone else who needed access to it. In respect of the allocation of the \$11.3 million, that ongoing program runs at various levels from year to year. Last year the same program was \$11.050million, from the top of my head.

**MRS BURKE:** How did you arrive at that amount?

**Mr Donnelly:** The department runs a strategic asset management planning process that looks at the needs of all schools and prioritises work amongst those schools to fit within the available funding envelope. The process for the 2006-07 budget was completed prior to the budget being announced and prior to the government's proposal being announced. As a result of that proposal we are revisiting those figures and, for obvious reasons, we seek to minimise additional work in schools that the government proposes to close until a final decision is made on them at the end of the year. If funds become available there is certainly no shortage of additional requests from schools that will remain open that can be funded with funds that are freed up.

**MRS BURKE:** So \$11.3 million is sitting on hold and waiting?

**Mr Donnelly:** No, that is certainly not the case. Many of the programs that work and that can be continued in schools areas are in no way affected by these proposals.

**MRS BURKE:** How do you know what schools will continue, minister? That is the question I am asking.

**Mr Donnelly:** We can say with absolute certainty that all the schools that were not in any way affected by the process, and that is the vast majority of schools—

**MRS BURKE:** So you have excluded 39 in all?

**Mr Donnelly:** You would not seek to invest money in a building the future of which is uncertain at this stage. I need to stress also that this money is separate from the \$90 million the government is providing for further infrastructure upgrades. We have this \$11 million in a rolling program that is part of the budget every year. A number of initiatives are ongoing processes, particularly the older school refurbishment program. That effective program, which has been in place for a number of years, has seen a number of important improvements delivered in some of our older schools.

**MRS BURKE:** Is any of the money earmarked for Dickson college?



**Mr Barr:** We would not have that level of detail. I would assume so, Mrs Burke. As one of our larger colleges, and being in need of some maintenance, I would be surprised if there were not at least one or two projects in the asset management plan relating to Dickson college.

**MRS BURKE:** All that stops, though.

**Mr Donelly:** In the case of Dickson college, regardless of the outcome, it will be operating in 2007 and 2008. So we would need to undertake maintenance work, and routine work would need to be done at the school. As I said, regardless of the outcome of the consultation process, that school will be operating in 2007 and 2008. Next year, any students entering year 11 will complete their education up to the year 12 level at Dickson college. So we would need to ensure that the facilities were up to standard and that maintenance work was carried out where necessary. Another important point to make is that these buildings will be retained in community use, so we need to ensure they are of an acceptable standard and meet the needs that they may have in the future.

**MR SMYTH:** I have a supplementary question relating to capital works that I should have asked earlier. Melrose high school is the only high school that does not have a gymnasium. Work was meant to have started by now. I note on page 123 of BP3 that the revised completion date is March 2007. Has that work started?

**Mr Donelly:** That is my understanding.

**MR SMYTH:** I know that men have been driving around, marking the ground and doing other things, but all the kids were asking me the other day when the gym is coming.

**Mr Donelly:** I believe that tenders were recently received for it. I am not sure about the evaluation of tenders for the construction. Obviously the design work has been progressing for quite some time. Tenders were recently received for the construction of that gym. If they have not been evaluated and a contract signed, it would not be far off. Work will commence in the near future. At this stage we see no reason to believe that the gym will not be completed by March 2007.

**MS MacDONALD:** I refer to Dickson college, an issue to which I referred earlier when we were dealing with high schools. The proposal is to close Dickson college and to have years 7 to 12 at Campbell high school. I do not understand why we are looking at keeping three colleges open in the Belconnen area. It is great that we are looking to open a college in Gungahlin because that quite clearly is needed, but why are we keeping all three colleges open in the Belconnen area? I do not wish to say anything negative about colleges in Belconnen, but I know that enrolments in Copland have been the subject of concern for a long time.

**MRS DUNNE:** Steady there, Ms MacDonald.

**THE CHAIR:** I probably cannot make any comment.

**MS MacDONALD:** Enrolments have been the subject of concern for a long time. That college does a lot of good work but it suffers a lot of competition from other colleges in

the area.

**Mr Barr:** Sure. You will see from the proposal that when we looked at the provision of education in the region we put forward different models for that Copland site, recognising, as you have identified, that there are some enrolment issues. The options we put forward for Copland will add additional years onto that site. So there is a nine to 12 option, or a seven to 12 option for that site. We sought to address issues for that college. If Hawker college is not at 100 per cent capacity, it is very close. Lake Ginninderra is at about 65 per cent capacity. Obviously it is a very new or newer building than the other two. It is located in the town centre so it has the advantage of being accessible by way of public transport.

Most of the bus routes for the surrounding area feed into Belconnen interchange and it is certainly accessible for some parts of north Canberra. When I was a student at Lake Ginninderra I was living in O'Connor. I used to catch the 432 bus from outside my front door to Belconnen interchange or, when I was feeling particularly fit, I used to ride my bike over O'Connor ridge, which is quite a pleasant ride. In some instances the north Canberra suburbs of O'Connor, Lyneham, Turner, and north Lyneham are closer to Lake Ginninderra than they are to Dickson, or it is a similar distance.

You identified a complex issue and one that involves a difficult balancing act. The point I make about Copland is that, having been through a period where its enrolments were quite low, the recent trend is that its enrolments have gone up by about 50 per cent. If they have not gone up to that extent they are going up significantly.

**MRS DUNNE:** The budget papers state they have gone up by 51 per cent.

**Mr Barr:** So it is certainly a college on the rebound, if you like. We sought to strengthen the programs, accepting that we need to utilise more of the capacity of that campus by adding some additional years in our proposal.

**MR SMYTH:** What are the out-of-area enrolments for Copland?

**Mr Barr:** Out-of-area enrolments are 23 per cent.

**DR FOSKEY:** My question relates to the university admissions index. The scaling table used to set university admissions index scores in the ACT against New South Wales results has been questioned. It has been said that the ACT does not score anywhere near as high as our socioeconomic status indicates we should, and a number of students have had their UAI score changed on appeal. I believe the department has commissioned a review that has now reported. Can you now let us know what that review found and can you provide it to the committee?

**Mr Barr:** I acknowledge that there has been some controversy in relation to this issue. Going back to my own days in the early 1990s and the then TER, this has been a vexed issue for some time. I will get Dr Bruniges to outline the issues we have been looking at in the context of that review, and I will ask her to address the questions you have asked.

**Dr Bruniges:** With reference to the calculation of the ACT university admissions index, an inquiry was carried out in the ACT by the Board of Senior Secondary Studies and the

New South Wales Technical Scaling Committee, the group that reports to the New South Wales and ACT vice-chancellors committee. The independent evaluation done by Monash University looked at the methodology of meshing the ACT's UAIs with those in New South Wales. It established where we fit in relation to New South Wales and where we should be brought in. The report concluded that no evidence had been provided that supported any contention that the UAI conversion process disadvantaged any ACT students. That was a clear outcome of the report prepared by Monash University. Representatives from the board of senior secondary studies are available if you require detailed information on the review done by Monash University.

**MRS DUNNE:** Is the report available for tabling?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Well, it is one expert analysis and, as you are probably well aware, there has been another quite expert analysis which has a different outcome. So, how do we weigh those two analyses against each other, except that you have commissioned one and the other is probably by now a frequent and possibly even unwelcome critique? It seems to me that perhaps we have not reached satisfaction yet.

**Dr Bruniges:** Sorry, Dr Foskey, I should make it clear that it is not a department report, it is a board of senior—

**DR FOSKEY:** It is an expert.

**Dr Bruniges:** It is a board of senior secondary studies. So I should approach it.

**DR FOSKEY:** It commissioned that?

**Dr Bruniges:** To do that rather than the department.

**DR FOSKEY:** Sorry, yes, of course. Thank you. But you are able to make it available?

**Mr Barr:** We will approach the BSSS to have it make it available, yes.

**Dr Bruniges:** I do not have jurisdiction over the BSSS.

**MS MacDONALD:** In the 2020 document Dickson college is identified as a high-cost delivery site. We talked a little bit about that earlier in output classes, but can you say what it means again and why this is the case at Dickson college?

**Mr Barr:** I think it relates to a number of factors. The age and condition of the buildings, I believe, would be one of those, but I might get Mr Donnelly to outline the whole range of issues there.

**Mr Donnelly:** Dickson college is the second-most expensive college in the ACT on cost per student basis. Again I refer members to the cost per student, which is published on the department's web site. I do not have those figures in front of me, although I am sure someone does. I recall that Dickson is of the order of \$13,500 per student.

**MRS DUNNE:** \$13,759.

**Mr Barr:** \$13,759.

**Mr Donelly:** There we go; my memory is not too bad. The reasons for this are effectively fairly similar to the reasons most of the schools across the system are relatively more expensive. With such a large proportion of fixed costs in a school environment, if you have more students across which to amortise those costs, on average your cost per student will be lower. It is an economic concept known as economies of scale, and because Dickson has a relatively smaller student enrolment base than most other colleges in Canberra, but a relatively similar fixed cost base, the average cost per student is higher.

**MRS BURKE:** Again, is it not the high cost per student as a result of things like the DecAP program running out of Dickson that a smaller percentage of students of higher need demand greater sense of funding and/or time and assistance? Is that not fair to say?

**Mr Barr:** In looking at Dickson, yes, there is a component of the student population that attracts special needs funding. But the vast majority of students, and it would be in the order of 90 per cent to 95 per cent or thereabouts, are mainstream year 11 and 12 enrolments.

**MRS BURKE:** But that component for that special cohort of students is included in the \$13,759 figure, correct?

**Mr Barr:** That is my understanding, yes.

**MRS BURKE:** So, when we talk about quality learning environment, we are now removing that choice for parents. I know it has been said, but it has been put to me that we are removing the choice for parents in the north of Canberra of a quality learning environment. Is it fair to force parents into a model that is not suitable for their students and they did not choose? Minister, is it not simply the case of this whole exercise making parents and students pay for the Stanhope government's financial mismanagement? If you are just putting it down to finances—

**Mr Barr:** No.

**MRS BURKE:** Well, it is bound to be a no.

**Mr Barr:** Mrs Burke, I am surprised that it has taken until 20 past four for that line to emerge.

**MRS BURKE:** Would you answer the question? I know the answer, and it is going to be yes. What are you doing? You are putting money over people, obviously, are you not? Those students are high-demand students, a cohort often at Dickson college. That is why the cost is bumped up. You have answered that, but is that fair and reasonable?

**Mr Barr:** I have acknowledged that there is a component of the cost that can be apportioned to the students who have special needs. But there are students with special needs in other colleges as well. They are not all at Dickson. It is worth noting overall, in

putting together this proposal, Mrs Burke, to address your issue about money before people, the money before people solution would be, as I say, to pick the 39 highest-cost schools and target them.

**MRS BURKE:** That is what you are doing in Dickson's case. You have clearly said that it is the second highest.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, but not the highest. So there are other factors that we have sought to consider. As I have indicated today and have on previous occasions, we will be engaging with the community about these issues. I met with the Dickson college committee yesterday and I am beginning a dialogue with them about means in which we can look at increasing the utilisation of the Dickson college facilities. They have some interesting ideas and I put some ideas of my own to them. We will continue to talk, the point being that we are seeking to achieve a higher utilisation of these facilities. If we are able to do that, we have an option to move forward with education on that site. I am very happy to engage with the community about that, and that is a process I have already begun.

So, we have a consultation process. We are having a public meeting next Monday night to discuss this further. I have visited Dickson college. I have met with the committee. I am hosting a public meeting next week. I have undertaken to continue to meet with the Dickson college P&C, board and student committee, and I will continue to do that. That is something that I have said publicly and I say it again here in the committee.

**MRS DUNNE:** Before I launch into my supplementary, just for Ms MacDonald's edification, these 2004-05 figures have the enrolment for Copland college at 363 but by 2006 it is 450. It shows it is a college on the up, rather than a college on the down. But my question, minister, is about Dickson college and the provision of services for children from Black Mountain who have courses to attend for integration, for want of a better name, both at Lyneham and at Dickson college. What is going to happen to those children when Dickson goes and there is no real alternative?

**Mr Barr:** We would obviously seek to continue programs that are operating at Dickson out of the campus at Campbell. We are seeking in all of these proposals not to lose the ability to offer those programs. One of the conceptual things that have been difficult for some people to fully comprehend in all of this is that the programs are not in themselves tied to the building. They can be offered in other buildings, and from time to time new programs are also offered in other schools, in other buildings. If we were to accept the logical reality that you could never relocate—

**MRS DUNNE:** No-one is saying that. Are you giving guarantees that the sorts of programs—

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I certainly have been doing that.

**MRS DUNNE:** Have you spoken to the parents at Black Mountain?

**Mr Barr:** I personally have not had that conversation but I am aware that the departmental people have been in close contact with parents about all of the changes that may come. But I stress again in relation to the proposal for Dickson that we would be talking about a change process in 2009. So there will be ample time to work with the

students and parents about any change that may occur at that time.

**MR SMYTH:** Just on the special units at all of the colleges—and you are right, there are special needs students at all the colleges—is it possible to break the figures down into average cost per student not in a special program in each of the colleges and then the cost of the special programs by college, so we can do an apples with apples comparison?

**Mr Barr:** I believe it would be. I think the same issues that we face per campus become the complicating factor. I believe it would be possible, but it would take some time.

**MR SMYTH:** I am happy to wait.

**Mr Donelly:** The same work we are doing in respect of particularly the primary schools that have been mentioned over the course of these hearings is also being done for Dickson college and will be available when the rest of that data is completed.

**MR SMYTH:** Is it possible for all the colleges, though, just so you get a like comparison?

**Mr Donelly:** There are four units at Phillip college and units at Erindale college and others. I have been told that it is Canberra college and Dickson mostly.

**MR SMYTH:** In the main, yes. So you will take that on notice?

**Mr Donelly:** Yes, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** It is interesting because the P&C association today has put out a press release saying the figures are flawed because you cannot compare them, and it has called for an extension of the consultation period beyond the December deadline. If you are genuinely committed to a genuine dialogue with the community, minister, surely the full data would be out there so that people could talk at the same level. Part of the angst that is out there in the community is that they feel like they do not know. The numbers they have do not compare with the numbers they are getting from you, from the department and from others, and they are confused. A large number are quite happy to have a reasonable dialogue, but reasonable dialogue starts with accurate information.

**Mr Barr:** Sure. Certainly, Mr Smyth. I acknowledge that it does aid the conversation.

**MR SMYTH:** It does not aid the conversation; it makes the conversation. Knowledge is power. You have the knowledge, you have the power. The community is disempowered by what you have done.

**Mr Barr:** Sure. If we are all working off agreed data that does aid the process. The only observation I would make is that in some instances I think there will be some people for whom no data will be agreeable. You will convince some people that even the published data that is on the web site, that has been put there every year in relation to enrolments, and some people do not seem to believe that we have a census in February every year. There are some people who do not believe budget papers or a whole range of things.

**MRS DUNNE:** They are only an aspirational document, are they not?

**MS MacDONALD:** Some people do not believe we landed on the moon either.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, Ms MacDonald, yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** I just want to follow that up. This comment you made earlier, Mr Barr, where you said that you were having fruitful discussions with the Dickson college community and that you were seeking a higher utilisation of the facilities, you seemed to be implying that in this case if the Dickson school community can come up with a way that those facilities would be better utilised they have got a better chance of staying open. I acknowledge that you will have a difficulty, even if you come up with the most excellent data that is ticked off by 10,000 experts, a lot of people will not accept it because—

**MR SMYTH:** They will still be ticked off, yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** The way that process has begun has set up an us and them—and lots of them, because they are all playing off against each other. So, it really comes down to this key matter which came up earlier with the Ginninderra school closure, which I would have hoped that you had learned something from, but there was never an acknowledgement that there was a problem with the process. Here we have a problem with the process. Your first answer in the Assembly was to agree to consult meaningfully with any school community before making a final decision to close the school. How is it possible to have such a conversation after announcing that you want the school—any of the 39 schools—closed in six months? How is that a meaningful consultation?

**Mr Barr:** Dr Foskey, I think the difficulty, as you alluded to earlier, is that there is no perfect consultation process.

**DR FOSKEY:** No.

**Mr Barr:** An alternative, and one that has been put to me, is that I should have just announced a number of schools that we felt we needed to close and left it open and said, “Right, we need one college, one high school, 15 primary schools and 22 preschools.” That has been put to me as an alternative option, that we needed to put our cards on the table about the size of the change we were seeking to make, and then not name any of the schools. I think the first question I would have got straight after that would be: well, come on, minister, have you not done any of the work and done any of the demographics?

**DR FOSKEY:** I would not have suggested you did that at all.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, no-one would have suggested that.

**Mr Barr:** Well, I have had that suggested to me as what should have been done. We have a process, we are three weeks into it now. We will continue the consultation process until December. We will engage, as I have. Many of you have been to the public meetings I have been holding, and I will continue with those. There are three more: one tonight, one tomorrow night and Monday of next week. We have opened a process of written submissions. As I have indicated, I am meeting with individual school

communities and with clusters of schools. We are seeking to engage as thoroughly as we can. It is a difficult process, but the point I make is that in my observation of politics in this town we obsess over process and use process and concerns about process as a cover for not stating a position on the issues. The issues are: Do we have too many schools? Do we need—

**DR FOSKEY:** Why did you not put that to the community? That is the issue.

**Mr Barr:** This is exactly what we are discussing.

**DR FOSKEY:** That is what you have the discussion about.

**Mr Barr:** This is exactly what we are discussing.

**MR SMYTH:** No, you are not. You are discussing which ones survive.

**Mr Barr:** This is exactly what we are discussing.

**MR SMYTH:** Schools pitted against each other.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** If I could just ask you to comment on this, and it is about the consultation period, something Gary Humphries said in 1990. He advised future governments to have full and adequate consultation on criteria for closures, backed by any research needed, but having made a decision they ought to stick to it firmly and not meander. On the consultation period he said, “The government issued draft criteria for the closures in May, giving the public one month to comment.”

**MR SMYTH:** How many closed? How many closed?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Well, minister, what have you learned from that? Have you come further than that in one month?

**Mr Barr:** Obviously we have moved on in our methods of consultation from what occurred in 1990. It is certainly the case that the consultation process and the way that we are seeking to engage with the community now are significantly different from previous approaches of previous governments.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is not very much different at all. That is the trouble; it is just about the same.

**Mr Barr:** I believe, Mrs Dunne, that it is certainly a better process.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is exactly the same.

**Mr Barr:** Nonetheless, if Mr Humphries, your former boss, was so wrong then and so badly wrong—

**MRS DUNNE:** He was wrong.

**Mr Barr:** It is interesting that the Liberal Party is allowed to have a different position in



2006 from 1990 but the Labor Party is not. Is that the imputation?

**MRS DUNNE:** No. I am simply saying the system was wrong then when it was proposed by a Liberal minister and it is wrong now when the same thing is being proposed by a Labor minister.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, Mr Pratt, did you have a supplementary?

**MR PRATT:** Yes, I did. Minister, listening to a number of parents from colleges and schools, primary and high school, and representative groups in this room and at meetings, the constant message from those people is that they see 2020—and is this not correct, minister?—as nothing but a cynical exercise to pit schools against each other to see who survives; and, secondly, it is a predetermined position, where you have already decided where these cuts will occur and the consultative process is merely a Clayton's exercise?

**Mr Barr:** No.

**MR PRATT:** That is the constant feedback.

**Mr Barr:** No.

**MR PRATT:** Are they all wrong, minister?

**Mr Barr:** In answer to your questions, Mr Pratt, no and no.

**DR FOSKEY:** I was interested in whether the community engagement unit, which was set up to help departments with exactly these processes, has been consulted over this strategy. Has it informed your strategy?

**Mr Barr:** Dr Foskey, the community engagement manual that was launched last year sets out a range of policies and procedures around how you would seek to engage, and this approach is consistent with that manual.

**DR FOSKEY:** So you did not seek its advice, you just looked at the manual, although it exists to give advice?

**Dr Bruniges:** Sorry, Dr Foskey, I called for someone from the community engagement unit to come and speak to all the SES staff and we were privy to information there that gave us the framework from which to carry out any consultation that we might be doing around program areas and so forth. So we have sought advice on a general level. We had someone come out from that unit who spoke at length at a senior executive meeting on that process. We have modelled stages in line with what appears in that manual.

**DR FOSKEY:** Finally, did the Community Inclusion Board have any input? Was its advice sought on this project, given its interests in poverty impact analysis and the likely impact, which no-one has mentioned today, on the residualised groups, the groups that do not have the choice, whose school will move and they will still be there?

**Dr Bruniges:** During this phase, I have set up, and will continue to set up, a number of

meetings with the different bodies, including the Community Inclusion Board. People like the Chief Minister's Youth Council have approached me for a meeting. So during this period the department will be meeting, as part of the consultation phase, with all of those groups in order to set input and collect the evidence needed to inform final government decision.

**MS MacDONALD:** Referring to the colleges ACT handbook 2007—and I note that Dickson college is listed in that book—at the back it has which colleges provide which studies. I note that there are a number of specialised studies only found at Dickson college. There are also a number of studies which are only found at one other college. That is the case for all colleges. I do not think that Dickson is exclusive in that regard. I noted the extremely specialised studies like oceanography, and there are history subjects which are either only found at Dickson or found at Dickson and Narrabundah. There are also subjects like Aboriginal studies. Other people can look them up if they are really interested, but there are specialised studies there. I appreciate that colleges provide specialised areas and students pick to go to a college on the basis that that is where they will find that subject. So you have students travelling across town. It is not unusual for students to travel across town to go to Narrabundah college, for example, if they want to study politics.

**MR PRATT:** Who would want to study politics?

**MS MacDONALD:** Good question, Mr Pratt. I do not know.

**THE CHAIR:** So is there a question?

**MS MacDONALD:** Yes, there is a question amongst that. I am curious to know how they will be dealt with if those subjects will be taken up by the 7 to 12 school. If they will be allocated out to another college, where will the teachers for those subjects go? Will any of those specialised subjects fall off the curriculum?

**Dr Bruniges:** I would presume, Ms MacDonald, some of those subjects would stay with expertise. One of the things that we have to look at protecting across the whole system is that we do not have a very small set of teachers who can teach marine biology, oceanography or a range of things, because under mobility policies if those teachers move sometimes programs fall out. Consideration of that is a bigger issue. At the moment it is really to do with the senior secondary year 11 and 12 curriculum, where they will have different lines and different expertise and programs built up.

We hope in the main that they will continue as 7 to 12, but in some of those programs, for example, in areas of expertise like oceanography, that very much relies on the skill set of the teachers. We will need to look across that, across all program sectors to make sure we have a work force coming into those schools, that we have a series of succession planning to ensure that they continue if those teachers retire. We have to make sure that our younger teachers are being skilled up in those areas where we have considerable program depth and we would want to see that continue as part of the secondary curriculum.

When you consider all of that, there will be instances where separate colleges have particular areas of expertise. They will want to develop that internally. Different

colleges, you rightfully say, in different places tend to focus on areas, but we would want to continue those programs and make sure that we matched—if it were to come to fruition—the staff expertise that we needed in areas that you have mentioned, into the setting where the students could get that program continuity.

**MRS DUNNE:** Recently, minister, I had a return visit to CCCares at Stirling college, which is a very fine program that I am very supportive of. A couple of people have raised with me what is going to happen to Stirling college in the reorganisation and the restructure and specifically what is going to happen to the range of programs that is now called CCCares?

**Mr Barr:** I will get Dr Bruniges to address that.

**Dr Bruniges:** I launched that program, as you know, Mrs Dunne, and those programs are integral. At this stage there are no plans that I am aware of to change CCCares at any location. The work that has been put in and the quality of the changes that I have seen on two of my visits there in recent times support those young women we need to focus on, and we need to look at other opportunities that they have. On the day that I was there I was with the tertiary sector, who were interested in providing other career options beyond schooling for those women so that they could get involved with tertiary and higher education. We should not stop at the schooling sector, and I would like to pursue that and make sure that for each of those young women there are pathways and that we are able to maximise their life chances with further study and training.

**MRS DUNNE:** If it is not proposed that you move CCCares from the Stirling college site—and I think that is probably good, and there were people who complained that it might have been integrated into the main Canberra college campus, and I think there are problems with that—can you look at some improvements? I know there have been improvements in infrastructure there, but the playroom needs carpet on the floor. When Dr Bruniges and I were there the other day it was freezing, and you cannot put children down on the floor.

**Mr Barr:** Mrs Dunne, thank you for raising the issue. That is certainly something that we are going to look at as part of the capital upgrades and the school refurbishment package.

**MS MacDONALD:** Sorry, can I just ask what you are talking about?

**MRS DUNNE:** CCCares is one of my hobbyhorses, Ms MacDonald.

**Dr Bruniges:** The CCCares program is conducted at Canberra college in partnership with ACT Health. It is connecting young carers to life opportunities and personalised support, with a number of community agencies coming together to support a number of young people who may be deemed at risk. We have 23 young parents there, eight of whom are refugees and recent arrivals to Australia. At the moment I think there are 21 or 22 children in the program, and that program operates to enable those young parents to re-engage with education, to ensure that they do not drop through the system and limit some of those life opportunities. It is a unique setting. Having launched the program, as I said, getting cross-agency and making it meaningful is really critical for those young people. We do not want them to fall through the safety net. It is a great example of

starting out small and growing to support the lifelong learning of those young parents.

**MS MacDONALD:** It sounds good. I just did not know what you were talking about.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Foskey?

**DR FOSKEY:** Thank you, everybody, for your very reasoned cooperation today. I have not been as perhaps verbally appreciative—

**MRS DUNNE:** Nice.

**DR FOSKEY:** Yes, “nice” is the word. Yes, I haven’t been nice. It’s not an issue that’s easy to feel nice about, but one of the things that I wanted to ask is this: there is a successful program operating on the south side. Is there room for that to be extended to the north side—Dickson college perhaps? What I’m talking about is this: you have offered us a number of models—a repeat of six and so on. But I haven’t heard any offerings of, say, another school like the co-op school, another program like the Dickson college program for students at risk of falling out.

We have got so many different groups of kids. We have kids who don’t go to school at all. I am watching my daughter’s peers dropping out of school. I have watched it all the way through. There has been nothing to catch those kids and I want to hear us talking about bringing those kids in. We are not going to do it with a seven to 12 grouping, for a start. We need to be thinking a bit outside the square here. This requires innovation.

The School Without Walls was innovative; it’s gone. It was collapsed into something in Dickson college. I am not saying that is the right thing right now, but something is needed. Lots of things are needed, and that is where consultation might have teased out those things and the models that you offered the community might have been just what everyone wanted.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, thank you for those points, Dr Foskey.

**DR FOSKEY:** Sorry, there is a question there somewhere.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, thank you for those points, Dr Foskey, I think—

**MR PRATT:** Why not?

**MR SMYTH:** Why not? You could pick which question you want to answer.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MS MacDONALD:** Which of it do you want to be the question?

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, I’m really conscious of the time. We said that we would move on to the next output class at 4 o’clock.

**Mr Barr:** I’ll be very brief in response.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr Barr:** You highlighted the cooperative school model and I think we see these P to three early childhood options as picking up on the strengths of that particular model and seeking to replicate that in other parts of the city. Although it is not the exactly the same as what the cooperative schools cater to, we are seeking to pick up on those themes and to address the exact issues that you have raised. In relation to a north side equivalent for the CC program, that is exactly the sort of issue that I am engaging in with Dickson. It's not that specific one but that is the sort of thinking that we are having and that we are engaging in at the moment, and I'm—

**DR FOSKEY:** It's not reflected in the documents.

**Mr Barr:** I acknowledge that and there is always a difficulty, Dr Foskey, in how much information you can put into the first booklet, if you like. So as part of the process over the next six months all of these issues are going to come to the fore and we will be addressing them.

**DR FOSKEY:** Except that the way you have set up the process, what you will get in submissions is people defending why their schools should stay open—

**MR PRATT:** Survival.

**DR FOSKEY:** and not answering all these diverse needs that I'm now realising you do recognise, though I don't see any evidence of it on the web site, in the documents—anywhere.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, on page 110 of budget paper 3 under capital works, I see there is \$1 million for a new secondary college at Gungahlin. Why does it take \$1 million to undertake a feasibility study into whether or not we need a college that I think we all agree Gungahlin deserves?

**MRS DUNNE:** It was in the Labor Party policy at the last election, except you have blown out the time frame.

**Mr Donnelly:** Perhaps I can assist with that, minister?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**Mr Donnelly:** Mr Smyth, the feasibility study is a little bit broader than whether we are going to build a college in Gungahlin. I think it's pretty well accepted that that will happen.

**Mr Barr:** That will happen.

**MR SMYTH:** Well, couldn't you have just saved yourself \$1 million?

**Mr Donnelly:** What the feasibility study will achieve is to look at a number of issues

around the potential for colocation of a CIT campus. I'm not sure if you are aware of this, but the block for the college is right next door to a block that is reserved for, or planned to be, a set of sport and recreation facilities. This feasibility study will look at the opportunities for those two facilities to be designed as part of the one process so that they are complementary to each other, rather than potentially have this department design a college and then working out that all the sport and rec facilities are in exactly the wrong location for the college students to be able to use them.

The final point I would make is that there hasn't been a college built in the ACT since I think the late 1980s, which is nearly 20 years ago—probably more than 20 years by the time the college is actually completed. It's important that the department update its knowledge of what is required in a 21st century college, rather than building one that is quite similar to, for example, Erindale.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, is that good expenditure of \$1 million? I would have thought that most of that would have been achieved in a design phase rather than in a feasibility phase. If we all agree Gungahlin should have a college, if we all agree Gungahlin should have sports facilities, and if we all agree that ideally Gungahlin should have some sort of CIT facility which, of course, poor Tuggeranong doesn't have, as much as it could have—

**Mr Barr:** I'm working on that one. I'm working on that one, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** why waste \$1 million on that level of feasibility study? Surely the experts that you would employ to do the actual planning and the architectural work would have the knowledge you are just about to spend \$1 million to get.

**Mr Barr:** I think, Mr Smyth, it may be that it suffers a little from, if you like, budget labelling and that there will be more, as Mr Donnelly identified, than a feasibility study. There will be additional work that is done that will head in the exact direction that you have outlined. I do think it is important that in designing new facilities we get it right, because there are so many examples of schools across the territory where we didn't get it right—

**MR SMYTH:** Sure.

**Mr Barr:** and there are some pretty shocking buildings that don't meet the needs of student and teachers. I think it is important that we get that right and that we are at the forefront in terms of all the environmental issues that go into a good, green building design and make sure that we address all of those things and that we do this properly. The additional feature here in relation to how the CIT campus would work, and relate with years 11 and 12, is important as well. It will be the first time that we have done that, and I think it is important that we get it right.

But I do accept that on face value the term “feasibility study” perhaps isn't the best, but that I think is a general term—that is a budget descriptor. I certainly see it as more than just that.

**MR SMYTH:** All right. Just a follow-up and I will be very quick: the numbers that you list, for instance, in Copland, Hawker and Ginninderra college, and indeed Dickson

college, include in most cases very large out-of-area components. Is it possible get a breakdown, say by postcode, of where those students come from? You obviously have the data.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, it is available. I think Copland, obviously, and Dickson take the bulk of Gungahlin students at the moment.

**MR SMYTH:** So you will take that on notice?

**Mr Barr:** But obviously the projection is that the number of students in Gungahlin is going to grow significantly.

**MR SMYTH:** So that's on notice?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to move on to 1.4, special education. Mr Pratt, I believe you have a question and I know Mr Gentleman has one as well.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** No, you don't? Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** Trawling through *Hansard* I came across the following comment—

**MRS DUNNE:** You need to get out more, Mr Pratt.

**Mr Barr:** Well, you said that, Mrs Dunne.

**MR PRATT:** After the soccer, Mrs Dunne, I've been permanently damaged.

**Mr Barr:** Bedtime reading.

**MR PRATT:** That's it. This is a February 2001 quote and it says—

**Mr Barr:** So not from me then, I take it.

**MR PRATT:** No.

**Mr Barr:** Okay.

**MR PRATT:** No, you were still in nappies then.

**Mr Barr:** That is a little harsh.

**MR PRATT:** In political terms.

**Mr Barr:** In political terms, thank you.

**MR PRATT:** I quote: "We will certainly be caring. We will not let people down like

you. We won't reduce." That was Jon Stanhope talking about autism funding programs and he was talking particularly about the north Ainslie autism unit. Has Jon Stanhope had a conversion on the road to Damascus? What has happened in the last four or five years? He was committed to this, but clearly not now.

**Mr Barr:** I don't believe that in relation to our education programs there are any—I mean, there might be changes in terms of where the sites they are delivered from but there is no change in the provision. But I might get Mr Curry to provide some information if he can.

**Mr Curry:** I am not quite sure if you are you asking specifically about the north Ainslie unit at that time or—

**MR PRATT:** I am not so much asking about north Ainslie but the level of autism schooling, the number of programs and the dedication of those programs to those communities that need them. There is going to be a lot of disruption here and this flies very much in the face of the Chief Minister's conviction at that time.

**Mr Barr:** We have acknowledged that there will be some effects on some students—that the physical location of programs would change should the consultation process result in some schools closing. But we give an absolute guarantee that all students will be looked after in the transition, that there will be individual plans. This has been the case when some groups of students or some units wish to stay together. We have said that we would accommodate that as well.

There certainly are instances of parents—I have met with some parents—who currently travel out of their area, travel a considerable distance, to have their children in a particular program. It was the attractiveness of that program and the teacher that saw them make that decision to travel quite large distances at times, and not necessarily ones that were convenient, in terms of accessing programs that were close to work, say, or to study. We will be addressing all of that but I might get Mr Curry to give you some more detail at this point.

**MR PRATT:** But surely a lot of parents cannot travel as well as some are able to and are willing to. That is the issue.

**Mr Curry:** The provision of special programs for students with autism has probably been the greatest area of growth in the ACT since the time I have been here, which is October 2001. Parents of students with autism choose the full range of settings, in fact—from mainstream classes, LSCs and LSUs through to the autism specific units we have set up.

Back in 2001 I think the program at north Ainslie was possibly the only autism-specific unit at the time and it was actually a unit that offered an ABA-type program. It was specifically set up around that purpose. I am referring to the applied behaviour analysis program, which a small number of parents seek for their children as part of an early intervention for students with autism.

We have had significant growth. We have about 20 autism-specific units across the ACT now, which is quite significant. Then we have, as I said, students with autism whose



parents choose a learning support unit and those who choose a learning support centre. And then there are those who choose mainstream and get additional support that way. So really it has been an enormous growth area for us.

The schools that have autism-specific units that may be impacted if the proposals go ahead will be Melrose and Giralang. They are the two that we would need to look at very carefully and work with the parents about what they are looking for in terms of another location or what they would particularly like to have in that location—whether they would like to go as a group or look at other opportunities.

I think we appreciate that they are the people we will need to work very closely with in terms of helping them through that transition process. It may take a little longer for those people. It may not be something that we can actually effect right at the beginning of next year. We may have to extend the planning and transition for those people so it's a longer process for them.

**Mr Barr:** It is just perhaps worth adding that in the context of the last two budgets we have seen an increase of about \$8 million put into providing assistance for students with a disability. Through Ms Gallagher's portfolios and through the work of Therapy ACT we are seeing additional resources being applied to these areas as well. So there has been, in addition to the education side, work done in disability children's services through my colleague's portfolios.

**MR PRATT:** But no increase in 2006-07?

**Mr Barr:** There's an indexation component, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** Yes, that is right. Just taking the Melrose example, as you look at analysing the impact with a closure at Melrose, what are the nearest—they don't need to be school specific—other autism programs? What would be the nearest to Melrose?

**Mr Curry:** Rivett has autism units but I—

**MR PRATT:** Yes, but Rivett—

**Mr Curry:** don't think in discussions with the parents at Melrose they are looking to move together as a group. It is probably going to be an issue about another location for them. They can go as a group and it might not necessarily be to an existing school that has a unit; it might be to another setting altogether.

**MR PRATT:** I see. You are prepared to develop a new capability.

**Mr Curry:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** Mr Curry and Mr Barr, when you talk to these groups of students is the option on the table that they stay together where they are as a group? I mean, if they want to stay together as a group do they state as a first option that they want to stay where they are as a group?

**Mr Curry:** Clearly people have expressed that view, and that is part of the government's

consideration around the proposals and what decisions are made by cabinet later in the year. There is a range of opinions coming forward from the groups.

**DR FOSKEY:** Clearly if you are moving them, this amount of money that's in here is inadequate. If, in fact, your plans do come to fruition, then an extra \$10,500 isn't going to cover these costs. I'm looking at special education and your budget for next year, on page 377.

**MRS DUNNE:** That's \$1.5 million.

**DR FOSKEY:** Output 1.5. Sorry, \$1.5 million.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** I'm not used to thinking in millions. However, I am sure that my issue remains relevant. I was a Yarralumla parent. When I was the president of the P&C some of us fought to have that unit there. There was a whole issue about community acceptance. It's not just a matter of moving a unit. It's a matter of preparing the receiving school so that their concerns about their own children's education, et cetera, are addressed. You just don't do that in six months. It was a long process.

**Mr Barr:** Sure, I acknowledge that, Dr Foskey. But I think there is increased awareness in the community now around these issues. I think that there has been more of a focus on it, certainly in the last three or four years. I think in some instances you underestimate the welcoming nature of school communities. I'm sure there are—

**DR FOSKEY:** I've been around, Andrew.

**Mr Barr:** a number of school communities who will welcome additional units and additional students to their campuses with open arms.

**DR FOSKEY:** I hope so.

**Mr Barr:** That's certainly my expectation and the feedback I have had. I think we have got to look on the positive side here and err in favour of the good side of human nature, rather than—

**DR FOSKEY:** No, I wasn't saying that that wouldn't be the case. I'm just saying that it's still not a simple process and obviously some schools don't want to let them go.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**DR FOSKEY:** They fought against them, they got them and they want to keep them.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, that point is acknowledged, Dr Foskey.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Burke.

**MRS BURKE:** Thank you, chair. Probably my question flows on quite nicely, and I note Mr Curry's comments. Parents do in fact choose a full range of services because autism

spectrum disorder commands that. That is obvious. With that in mind, I would ask you now, in terms of quality learning environments, about basing learning on the needs of young people with autism. I note the goodwill of the Stanhope government in terms of trying to keep pace with that, although with a lot of it funding is not being apportioned to front-line service, I have to say. I think you would acknowledge that too.

**Mr Barr:** You would have to take that up with my colleague, I think.

**MRS BURKE:** I will, indeed. The question I really want to get to the nub of relates to Rivett primary school. Why, minister, after all the money that has been spent on that extensive upgrade to adapt Rivett primary school to students with a disability, particularly autism, would you even be considering—and I had this from a member of your staff—a group transfer of these students to, say, Woden special school, where they in turn may also be cojoined with Alfred Deakin students? That is my first question. Secondly, are either one of these two schools equipped to deal with the influx of these special needs students? If not, how long will this take and at what cost?

**Mr Barr:** Thank you, Mrs Burke, for the question. The proposals for Alfred Deakin and Woden are around an administrative linkage rather than seeking to combine both schools on one campus. They will continue to operate on a—

**MRS BURKE:** No, sorry, the students being moved as a group. That is what I was advised was being considered.

**Mr Barr:** No. My understanding of the proposal, and I can get some more detail provided to you in a second, is that we are seeking to have an administrative link. And I point perhaps to the—

**MRS BURKE:** I am referring to Rivett, as a group move.

**Mr Barr:** I will address the Woden one first and then we will get to that. You did not ask about the two—

**MRS BURKE:** I am referring to the Rivett children being moved to Woden special school, which in turn may be linked with Alfred Deakin. I don't know how that is all going to work.

**Mr Barr:** I am sorry; you have lost me there. I'm not sure how that—

**Dr Bruniges:** No, sorry, I haven't heard it either.

**MRS BURKE:** I'm just asking you—

**Mr Barr:** I haven't heard that one, either.

**MRS BURKE:** I was told by one of your staff and I said, "What—students with autism being moved from Rivett as a group to somewhere else?" I mean, we are talking—

**Mr Barr:** Perhaps afterwards you can tell me which staff member.

**MRS BURKE:** Yes, I will.

**MRS DUNNE:** You will beat them up later, yes.

**Mr Barr:** Well, I don't know I will do that but I will just seek some advice.

**MRS BURKE:** The first part of the question is relevant to why, after all the money that has been spent on that, would you actually be looking to upheave, as Dr Foskey has said, this group of children from Rivett?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, the Rivett issue is a tricky one. When looking back at the history of the school I noted that at its peak Rivett had 705 students; it's now got 71—

**MRS BURKE:** And they fought hard and took on the special unit because of that.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. The difficulty in Weston Creek as a region is that there are too many schools. You have got a couple in Rivett and Weston Creek with 71 and just over 100 students. They really are struggling just in terms of the ability to offer a broad curriculum. In a school of 71 you are talking composite classes all the way through. There are inherent difficulties that that school faces with its enrolment levels. These are some of the difficult decisions that the government has to confront. There is not the prospect in the Weston Creek region of ever going back to a level where there are going to be 700 students at that school.

Obviously the capacity of that school has been adjusted down as a result of some of the changes that have been made over the years, but these are some of the realities around changing demographics in our communities. If you look at the geography of Weston Creek, you come back to the question: why was the school at Holder closed all those years ago? It is, if you like, the geographic centre there. That may well have offered an alternative option.

In the consultation meeting I had in Weston Creek just last week that issue did come up and I was talking with some parents afterwards. I have had some meetings already with some of the other schools, and perhaps a new school at Holder is something that we can look at as part of this process. It would provide the geographic solution that we are looking at.

**MRS BURKE:** If you get rid of Rivett, there will be a big blank there.

**Mr Barr:** Sure.

**MR PRATT:** Is Holder still there?

**Mr Barr:** Holder is currently occupied by Therapy ACT.

**DR FOSKEY:** That raises a supplementary question for me. You have been saying that these schools will close and then they will probably become homes to community groups, but there is always a chance of them being reopened with a demographic shift. You have not said that Holder school could be reopened.

**Mr Barr:** No. The issue there is that the government has committed a large amount of money around the single therapy service and the hub is that Holder site. Therapy is pretty well established there. But, as I have indicated to the Weston Creek community, we are happy to look at some of those issues. This is not the only budget. There will be future budgets. Should the territory be able to address the issue whereby we have, effectively, been paying for our recurrent expenditures off land sales, and this budget goes a long way to doing that, then the capital does become available down the track. There are options, Dr Foskey, and we will happily look at them. This is something that comes up as part of the consultation process.

**MRS BURKE:** Minister, I really hope that you will deal with this cohort of people as expeditiously as possible, because the representations I am being presented with are horrific and cannot be understated. I am not exaggerating. I am sure that you know, but I am imploring you not to drag your heels concerning people with disabilities, particularly this group of people.

**Mr Barr:** I met with Rivett yesterday, Mrs Burke.

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

**Mr Curry:** I have met with Gay Von Ess, whom Dr Foskey would know, who is heading up the autism advocacy group or association at the moment and invited the autism people to come and work with us so that our decision making in that process will be very collaborative. When I answered Dr Foskey's question and talked about a longer transition time, I should have added that part of that is about the preparation of the new site as well as preparation of the young people to go to that site, which you so rightly pointed out.

**MRS DUNNE:** Some of the points that I would like to range over flow from what Dr Foskey and Mrs Burke were saying. Minister, I am sure that in the last few days and weeks you have been confronted by people whose level of domestic and day-to-day living is beyond the understanding of most of us. We don't know we are alive. I just draw to your attention the example of the lady who stood up at Copland college the other day and described to you the two, possibly three, autistic children in her family. The level of impact that that has on their lives is beyond my comprehension and probably beyond the comprehension of most people in this room. These people struggle every day and they do not go home and leave the problem behind them.

One of the parents who spoke to me last month about the problems—Mr Curry touched on it—spoke about the process of getting autistic children, in particular, used to a new system. You just can't say, "The unit is finished and we are going to move you in." You have to talk them into the system, you have to have them visit the system, you have to take them out, you have to give them photographs and you have to talk them through the system so that they get used to it. This is not something that happens overnight, and the six months process is not going to be enough time. I think Mr Curry has touched on that. At the same time, you are constrained. You can't, in a sense, make a decision for the autism units ahead of the six months because then you are in breach of the act. So you've got yourself coming and going.

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** When are you going to come to some sort of conclusion so that these parents are going to be assured that they are not going to be told something on 6 December and have to make adjustments for 1 February, say, and that they are going to be given some consideration about that very difficult transition? Parents have said over and over again that transition for any child from one school to another is difficult. It is multiplied a thousandfold in this case.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I acknowledge that, Mrs Dunne. You have identified the particular difficulty that I do face. What we have sought to do is that from the beginning of the next school term we will begin individual meetings, individual consultations, to develop transition plans, so that there is, if you like, a plan A and a plan B so that should a change occur there is absolute certainty around what will then happen and that we can work with that and use the next six months to work through that process. I recognise that that is not ideal, is not perfect, but, given the constraints that you have just identified I have, I think that is in the circumstances the best that I can do at this point. The other point I would make, though, is that in instances where a proposed closure is for the end of 2007 or 2008 then obviously we have more time to work through it.

**MRS DUNNE:** But we are not talking about that with Rivett or Giralang.

**Mr Barr:** No.

**MRS DUNNE:** Or Melrose.

**Mr Barr:** In those instances, no, and I acknowledge that. We have already made contact and we will be working intensely from the beginning of the next school term to address, as best we possibly can, those issues.

**MRS DUNNE:** The other question, if I might have your indulgence, madam chair, is in relation to the special schools. If you go through the descriptions of various schools you will find that it says for places like Cranleigh and Black Mountain that the proposals won't substantially affect these schools. I alluded to the programs between Black Mountain and Dickson, and there are other ones with Black Mountain and Lyneham. Concern has been voiced to me by, again, a parent with multiple children with disabilities, and again I say I do not know how these people can unremittingly give love, care and attention to children who have such high needs. He is particularly concerned about all the programs at Cranleigh that outreach into mainstream school programs and go to Holt or Higgins, or both, go to St Monica's and go to Macgregor. What is going to happen to those sorts of programs run for Cranleigh when some of those schools close and what sorts of arrangements are going to be made to continue those programs in other schools? First of all, the schools have to be identified, the schools have to be squared away, the school communities have to be squared away and, even though you will not be closing Higgins and Holt for three years, it is going to take some time to make sure that that is seamless.

**Mr Barr:** My expectation would be that those programs that were running at Holt and Higgins would transfer to the new west Belconnen school, but it may be that there are other surrounding schools that wish to pick up on some of those programs or offer additional ones. I am just looking to my right to see if there is any additional

information.

**MRS DUNNE:** Has there been any thought put into that at this stage, or is it too soon?

**Mr Curry:** They are discussions that the special education director and the school director for that area will have with the principal of Cranleigh. The programs you are talking about I am guessing are the early intervention-type programs that operate as annex programs of Cranleigh.

**MRS DUNNE:** The program I know about best is where some of the children go to St Monica's for half a day or two half days a week, which is not so much early intervention but giving children particular skills and experience of a mainstream classroom. That is the one that I know about best, but that is happening in other schools. Has there been any discussion, because at least two parents have raised concerns with me about the continuation of those programs and the uncertainty? Quite frankly, minister, they don't need that uncertainty.

**Mr Barr:** No, I acknowledge that point. In fact, if you are able to provide some contact information, I can ensure that the department is in contact with those families as soon as possible to address that.

**MRS DUNNE:** I will check with the parents.

**Mr Barr:** Also, the point you have raised there is part of the rationale behind the seeking of closer ties with the Woden school and Alfred Deakin. I think we have seen a successful model at the Turner school as well. I know from my own experience as a student at Turner primary that it was Turner and then there were the Hartley Street kids and you were very separate. When I went back during back to school week to visit my old school the culture had changed completely and you could see the integration of the students from both campuses, if you like. There is a very successful program at Turner, one that I think has very strong community support. That is the sort of model that we are seeking to emulate with Alfred Deakin and Woden.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay, we will go to the next output class, which is output class 2, non-government education.

**DR FOSKEY:** I just wish to repeat or put differently my concern about something which has been picked up as a general impression and which I feel you have not really responded to, that is, the push from the uncertainty around the public education system right now for those who can afford it, some of whom may have been on the brink and others for whom it wasn't even a possibility, to move over to private schools for which more certainty will still be there in a few years. If this happens, will you need then to review the 2020 document, maybe do a 2121 document, because the numbers may be significantly different when the census settles down in February of next year and you have made your decision in December on something else that is no longer appropriate?

**THE CHAIR:** I do not think that is a question about non-government schools.

**DR FOSKEY:** It is; it is about the move to them.

**Mr Barr:** I will seek to address those parts of it that I can. Although I have an expectation of living a long and happy life, Dr Foskey, I don't see myself being here in 2121. I think that is possibly a little bit beyond me.

**DR FOSKEY:** Sorry, 2021. You got me again!

**Mr Barr:** It has been a long day. Having clarified that we are talking about this century, I take your point, Dr Foskey, that in large part the demography is not an exact science, that we will obviously receive additional information as we go through, as we move ahead. There will be the possibility to make adjustments should there be a major difference as a result of census figures or all of a sudden the alleged baby booms I am finding out about at the moment occur spontaneously in suburbs all over the city.

**DR FOSKEY:** At \$4,000 a pop. No wonder there are so many twins.

**Mr Barr:** What has been jokingly referred to as the plasma TV screen allowance. Friends of mine who work in retail have happened to indicate that that is one of the things that mum, dad and the newborn come in to look at purchasing. Should there be a major shift in demographics that has not been factored in as part of our census data, our enrolment data and the ACT demography data that is available to us from the ABS, from Centrelink, from a whole range of sources, if all of that is wrong and we need to have a look at it in some of the outyears, yes, we would retain that flexibility, Dr Foskey. The point I would make overall, though, is that even if all of the proposals go ahead the surplus capacity would reduce from around 18,000 to about 7,000. So we have left ourselves a significant margin for error, if you like, if suddenly 7,000 more students appear to enter the government system.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, if I could bring you to the output description on page 377. It says that these amounts are allocated for varied reasons, but it also refers to the administration and payment of Australian government grants. Can you tell us the amounts of those grants? I am a bit naive on this.

**Mr Donelly:** I believe I gave that figure earlier, Mr Gentleman.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** You gave me the figure for the actual increase over 10 years.

**Mr Donelly:** The Australian government grants in 2006-07 to non-government schools are budgeted at \$116 million.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** You mentioned earlier that there had been an increase over the last 10 years of 148 per cent in comparison to 60 per cent for government schools. Has there been any reason given to you as to why that difference occurs?

**Mr Barr:** I suspect that that is a deliberate policy preference of the commonwealth. Certainly, a number of people have had significant call to object to that policy decision. It is interesting as to the values that lie behind that. It is, from my perspective, an abrogation of the commonwealth's responsibility to ensure adequate funding for public education across Australia. It is certainly something that I know the Australian Education Union has very strong views on and it is something that is of concern to all states and territories.



There is, as I'm sure you are aware, a vociferous demand for the territory to increase its funding to private schools, to reach some particular benchmarks, but at the same time we are seeing the commonwealth walk away from its responsibility to provide money to government schools. In the cost shift that has been given to the states and territories around public education, we do have to step in to fill that void and that obviously limits our capacity then to meet all the needs that the private sector, the private schools, place on us. The point made about the increase in commonwealth funding to private schools is that it certainly has been significantly in advance of the increase to government schools and certainly has met the needs of private schools in the territory over the last 10 years.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Do you know what that works out to be per capita, per student?

**Mr Barr:** We can get that information, I'm sure, but I cannot give it off the top of my head, no.

**Mr Donelly:** Just for Mr Gentleman's information for the future, page 393 of budget paper 4 contains a summary of Australian government grants, including the grants to non-government schools, which together total that \$116 million figure I read out earlier.

**MR SMYTH:** One could reverse Mr Gentleman's comments and say that because of state government failing the federal government has been forced to take up the slack.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have a question?

**MR SMYTH:** I do have a question. What percentage of the additional education funding, both recurrent and capital, this year is going to the non-government sector?

**Mr Barr:** I understand there is an indexation component. I am just looking to Mr Donelly to get the exact figure.

**Mr Donelly:** I am not sure if this is the answer you are hoping to get. If it is not, please let me know. Indexation funding has been provided to the non-government sector at a rate of 2½ per cent of the base, and that contributes about an extra \$0.8 million to the base level of funding for non-government schools. In addition to that, obviously, there is an enrolment change to cater for the additional students that the non-government sector is educating this year, and that is an extra \$0.2 million.

**Mr Barr:** I understand that that information is on page 410 of budget paper 4.

**MR SMYTH:** It is just nice to get it on the record. What is that as a percentage of the extra recurrent funding that has gone to the education budget in toto?

**Mr Donelly:** That I would need to take on notice.

**MR SMYTH:** All right. I am told it is about 6.7 per cent of the total recurrent put into this budget. Minister, as the non-government sector, by your own figures earlier today, now occupies 41 per cent of the education scene in the ACT, why is it only getting an additional 6.7 per cent in support from your government?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Smyth, I see the priority that the territory government has at this point in time as being to address the issues in the public sector. I am determined to ensure that we bring government schools to the highest possible standard. I think that the government system has struggled for resources in comparison to the private sector.

**MR SMYTH:** And the non-government sector doesn't struggle with resources.

**Mr Barr:** There are some schools within the non-government sector that have higher needs than others, but there are some private schools that, frankly, are doing quite well, thank you very much.

**MR SMYTH:** So you punish them all for the sake of a few.

**Mr Barr:** I am not seeking to punish anyone, Mr Smyth. What I am seeking to do with this budget is to look at investing heavily in government education. The territory is the major funder of public education. That is our major responsibility. We are the minor party in funding—

**MR SMYTH:** But you are funded for that through the grants process.

**Mr Barr:** Certainly, and we do provide a level of funding to private schools, but the commonwealth and parents are the two largest providers of funds for private schools. The territory has a role. We provide a proportion of funding, but our first priority has to be our own system.

**MR SMYTH:** I would have thought they were all your students, minister. Are you the minister for all education in the ACT?

**Mr Barr:** I certainly am, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** So why do you discriminate against one sector in favour of another?

**Mr Barr:** Because the commonwealth discriminates in the reverse way, so the territory has a responsibility—

**MR PRATT:** So you do discriminate?

**Mr Barr:** I need to balance the resources, Mr Pratt, that are available.

**MR SMYTH:** The Commonwealth does fund through the grants process, minister.

**MR PRATT:** That is right.

**Mr Barr:** If the commonwealth government were to pick up a greater share of funding for the public system, the territory would have more resources to apply to the private sector. But in simple terms, Mr Smyth, I need to ensure the viability of the public education system. We provide the majority of funding for public education. I will not walk away from that. I will happily accept that there is a huge ideological gulf between me and you on this particular issue—the Labor Party and the Liberal Party.

**MR SMYTH:** No, I support both systems.

**Mr Barr:** No, I do not believe the Liberal Party does, and that is a fundamental point of difference between the two parties.

**MRS DUNNE:** No, it is not.

**MR PRATT:** Where did you make that up from?

**MR STEFANIAK:** That is right, so you are closing 39 schools. What crap!

**MR PRATT:** Where did you make that up from?

**Mr Barr:** You may not like that.

**MR STEFANIAK:** What crap, Andrew!

**Mr Barr:** You may not like that but your party's federal policies—

**MR PRATT:** You are misrepresenting.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, in capital funding this year, could you please outline the capital initiatives to support the non-government sector in the ACT for the 2006-07 financial year?

**Mr Barr:** No, Mr Smyth, my priorities in capital funding this year are in the public sector.

**MR SMYTH:** But how much is going to the non-government sector?

**Mr Barr:** An amount goes to the non-government sector through the interest subsidies scheme.

**Mr Donnelly:** The subsidies scheme, and I have signed off on that.

**MR SMYTH:** That scheme has terminated of course. New initiatives this year: how much of the money the government has put aside for capital works in education, given that 41 per cent of our students are in non-government schools, has gone to the non-government sector?

**Mr Barr:** A very small—

**Mr Donnelly:** None.

**MR SMYTH:** None.

**Mr Donnelly:** But then again the ACT government, to the best of my knowledge, has never funded or taken responsibility for capital projects in non-government schools.

**MR SMYTH:** When will you fund all your election promises to the non-government

sector?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, we have indicated, or the Chief Minister has indicated, that during the term of the government we will seek to meet all of our election promises.

**MR SMYTH:** So they are going to have a bonzer year next year, are they?

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Pratt, you have a supplementary?

**MR PRATT:** Minister, what proportion of GST funding revenues goes to education?

**Mr Barr:** That the territory receives?

**MR PRATT:** That the territory receives.

**Mr Barr:** We expend around \$1 in ever \$4. The education budget for the territory is 24 per cent of the total territory budget, so about \$1 in every \$4 is expended on education. I do not think there is an easy answer to your question because obviously we receive a variety of income sources—our own source revenue and obviously money from the GST and grants commission adjustments, and all the rest of it. I do not think you can hypothecate a proportion of GST expenditure either. I suppose on one level, Mr Pratt, I could say that every dollar we spend on education is sourced from the GST money, but that would mean that you could then hypothecate all the money we raise from rates as being spent on some other feature. There is not an answer to your question. Our inputs are many and varied and our expenditure is not hypothecated to where we have received that money from.

**MR PRATT:** But I bet you can say yes to the question that the commonwealth does make significant inroads into funding for ACT schools, both government and non-government sectors?

**Mr Barr:** We do receive some money from the commonwealth for the public education system, but as we have just identified, the growth in funding since 1996 has been about 60 per cent for government schools and 140 per cent for the private sector.

**MR STEFANIAK:** You have had a growth in GST, have you not, too?

**MR PRATT:** That is right.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. The GST magic pudding is meant to pay for abolishing a whole raft of other taxes and then pay for everything else. It is a magic amount of money, Mr Stefaniak.

**MR SMYTH:** It is a good amount of money.

**MR PRATT:** A very good amount of money.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Minister, while we are on these non-government schools, what is the cost to parents in comparison between non-government schools and government schools?

**Mr Barr:** There is obviously no cost to parents to access public education. It is in our Education Act that education is to be free. There are obviously extra curricula activities that do attract—

**MRS DUNNE:** Subject levies.

**DR FOSKEY:** And curricula.

**Mr Barr:** In relation to private schools, the cost varies depending on the particular school. There are some very high-fee private schools and some somewhat more moderate ones. Short of doing a web site search or ringing each of the private schools I do not think I could give you a per student cost, but it is quite significant in some private schools, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Stefaniak, do you have any questions on this output class?

**MR STEFANIAK:** Yes, thank you very much, madam chair. I have just two questions. Firstly, could you tell me how much the ACT government is giving in 2006-07 to the non-government sector? You have given a global figure which includes largely commonwealth funding. Minister, we have seen probably over a 10 or 15-year period—but it seems to have accelerated in the past few years—a significant drift of students from the government sector to the non-government sector. The second question is, has your department done anything to ask parents or done any exit polling as to why—

**MRS DUNNE:** We have been here all day, and then he comes in and asks that question.

**Mr Barr:** Mr Stefaniak, we have covered all of this at length.

**MRS DUNNE:** We will give you the reference in the *Hansard*.

**MR PRATT:** That has done the rounds, Bill.

**MR SMYTH:** To death.

**MR STEFANIAK:** I withdraw that question and I will look at the answer in the *Hansard*.

**Mr Barr:** I invite you to look at the *Hansard*. Mr Donnelly has the figure.

**Mr Donnelly:** \$38 million.

**MRS DUNNE:** On the subject of the \$38 million, what is the break-up? It does not appear as one easy line.

**Mr Barr:** The information I have is that the per capita recurrent funding is \$31.882 million; that there is \$1.79 million towards early learning support, K to three.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is in addition?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, this is in addition. So students with disabilities, \$868,000; the interest subsidy scheme, \$3.107 million; IT grants, \$880,000; and there is a small grant to the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools of \$38,000.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Just one quick question. You may have answered this. If you have, fine, but if you have not you might have to take it on notice, I suspect. What are the arrangements in relation to the interest subsidy scheme for the non-government sector and just what outstanding grants are there? How much money will you be paying this current year and also into the outyears, and when is that scheme due to finish?

**Mr Barr:** I believe I have recently signed off on some advice from the non-government schools council on the application of that money. Do you have that information?

**Mr Donnelly:** I have limited additional information in that regard. The scheme, as I understand it, has outstanding commitments until about 2019 or 2020. Obviously we move from a position where in recent years almost all of the scheme has been expended on interest subsidy projects to a point where in the past year I think we had of the order of \$70,000 remaining in the scheme. We do not have final figures yet for this year, but the figure will be of the order of \$300,000 or \$400,000, I expect. The figure of funds unallocated to particular projects under that scheme will obviously grow between now and 2020 when the scheme expires.

**MR STEFANIAK:** Can you provide what current programs are being paid off under that scheme as well?

**THE CHAIR:** Did you want to finish something, Mrs Dunne?

**MRS DUNNE:** I want to finish the question I asked before.

**MR STEFANIAK:** All yours.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Donnelly pointed out that there was a 2.8 per cent indexation this year?

**Mr Donnelly:** 2.5 per cent.

**MRS DUNNE:** How did we come up with 2.5 per cent indexation?

**Mr Donnelly:** The 2.5 per cent is the amount of indexation applied to all outputs of the department, government schools, non-government schools and all others.

**MRS DUNNE:** So how did we come up with 2.5 as an indexation figure, when most of the education indexation figures are close to 6 per cent?

**Mr Donnelly:** This is a figure Treasury calculates each year. I understand it is standard right across the whole of government, so education does not get greater or lesser supplementation than urban services or health.

**MRS DUNNE:** So irrespective of the fact that what might be roughly called the education CPI is well in excess of the general CPI figure and the general figure of

indexation, that is not taken into account anywhere in the budget?

**Mr Donelly:** Well, it is not taken into account in indexation specifically. Obviously the education CPI is loosely calculated—could be described as being calculated as—

**MR SMYTH:** No, loosely is much better, very broad. We could go to WPI. Whenever it is sending you a bill the government goes WPI.

**Mr Donelly:** The Education CPI, which is actually known as the AGSRC, the average general schools recurrent costs, is calculated by summing the total of expenditure across states for all jurisdictions. So every dollar that is spent in the ACT education budget is added to every dollar that is spent in the New South Wales budget, the Queensland budget, et cetera, and that then comes up with a cost per student on a national basis. To calculate the education CPI, as you have put it, the AGSRC from one year is compared to the previous year and a percentage increase is calculated. So while the department receives supplementation for our activities at 2½ per cent, any other initiative, and indeed any other savings proposal, goes into forming a small part of that AGSRC which then flows on to education CPI.

**MRS DUNNE:** The point I want to make, minister—and Mr Donelly has given a very good description of the weird science that determines the AGSRC and it is inexact—is that it clearly indicates the figure of 2.5 per cent for indexation in the education portfolio, the same as 2.5 per cent in the health portfolio, nowhere near addresses the costs in the education portfolio. So if you are only giving 2.5 per cent to the non-government sector or to the government sector, you are robbing the system. How are you addressing that?

**Mr Barr:** Are you seeking, Mrs Dunne, to arm me with the material I need to go into battle with the Treasury?

**MRS DUNNE:** I am only here to serve, minister.

**Mr Barr:** You are only here to serve, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Smyth, do you have a question now?

**MR SMYTH:** Well, it sort of crosses what Mrs Dunne said. We also do not use, is it not true, Mr Donelly, real CPI? We use an ACT version of CPI. CPI in budget paper 3 for the coming year is listed as 2¾ per cent, yet we are applying an ACT, ALP, we-are-fair-to-everybody CPI at 2½ per cent.

**Mr Barr:** The ACT ALP world, where we live in a world of lower inflation, Mr Smyth.

**MR SMYTH:** Minister, why are we applying a different rate of CPI that is below the CPI forecast in the budget paper?

**Mr Barr:** I think that is a question you need to direct to the Treasurer.

**MR SMYTH:** To the Treasurer?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. We would use the—

**MR SMYTH:** But you are applying it. You are the education minister and you are applying a CPI that is less than the CPI that is apportioned in budget paper 3.

**Mr Barr:** That is a question you need to ask of the Treasurer.

**MR SMYTH:** No, you are the minister that is applying an ACT CPI at 2½ per cent when the budget papers say ACT CPI is 3¾ per cent.

**Mr Barr:** That is a treasury figure, Mr Smyth. It is a question you would have to take up with the Treasurer.

**THE CHAIR:** Your time is up, Mr Smyth. Mr Pratt, did you have another question in this output?

**MR PRATT:** I did.

**Mr Barr:** It was a reminder to make sure you take your coffee mug with you, was it not, Mr Pratt?

**MR PRATT:** Well, my staff keep beating me up. Minister, you are right. Thank you for looking after my humanitarian needs.

**Mr Barr:** Always have your best interests at heart, Mr Pratt.

**MR PRATT:** Minister, the appraisal for SCAN has been completed. Can you detail here now what the outcome of that appraisal has been?

**Mr Barr:** Personally no, but I will get Mr Curry to provide that information for you.

**MR PRATT:** Thank you.

**Mr Curry:** You are talking for non-government schools?

**MR PRATT:** Yes, SCAN—student centred appraisal of need process.

**MRS DUNNE:** In non-government schools or generally?

**MR PRATT:** Non-government schools.

**Mr Curry:** Could I have your question again please?

**MR PRATT:** You have completed the appraisal of the SCAN needs?

**Mr Curry:** Yes.

**MR PRATT:** Can you tell us a little bit about what the outcome of that appraisal has been?

**Mr Curry:** The students with disabilities in non-government schools go through exactly



the same process as in government schools. The same eligibility criteria or disability criteria are used in the same SCAN process. If you want to know the outcome in monetary terms I would have to take that on notice. I cannot provide that off the top of my head. But I could get that for you.

**MR PRATT:** Please.

**Mr Curry:** Yes.

**MRS DUNNE:** Can I follow on from that, madam chair?

**MR PRATT:** I have not finished. Where is the money for the program? I think that is for the minister, sorry; that is budgetary. Go ahead, minister.

**Mr Donnelly:** The minister read out a list of funding to non-government schools. One item was funding for students with a disability.

**MRS DUNNE:** \$868,000.

**Mr Donnelly:** That is the funding allocated to SCAN.

**MR PRATT:** You have already given that, have you?

**Mr Barr:** \$868,000, yes.

**MR SMYTH:** How much was the outcome of the SCAN and how much should it have been funded to, to meet the need in the non-government sector?

**Mr Barr:** We will take that on notice.

**MRS DUNNE:** That is the question I want to get to.

**MR PRATT:** It is the actual requirement versus the need.

**THE CHAIR:** We will get that on notice.

**MRS DUNNE:** I am not quite sure whether—I am quite happy to take it on notice, but what I want to know is: do all the children in the non-government system who go through the SCAN process get the same funding?

**MR SMYTH:** If they get funding.

**MRS DUNNE:** It is \$868,000. If a child with condition A is were in a government school, would they get the same funding if they were in a non-government school for that condition? Would they have the same SCAN process and the same dollars attached to them?

**Mr Donnelly:** The situation in non-government schools is complicated by the fact that the Australian government gives significant support for students with a disability in the non-government sector. I am aware there has been a continuous debate about who should

pick up the slack, if you like.

If, for example, a student is assessed as having an additional need of \$10,000 and the commonwealth gives \$3,000, there have certainly been some representations made that the ACT government should pick up the additional \$7,000. As far as I am aware, we are not—we have not been that generous—but I believe that we meet the same proportional share of funding for students with a disability as we do for other non-government students.

**MRS DUNNE:** What you are saying is that the ACT contributes in the vicinity of 15 to 17 per cent of the recurrent grants to non-government schools.

**Mr Donnelly:** That is correct.

**MRS DUNNE:** So that the children with SCAN would be getting roughly 15 to 17 per cent of the proportion of that \$868,000.

**Mr Barr:** That would reflect that proportion of that.

**Mr Donnelly:** Nearly there, but not quite. The 15 to 17 per cent ACT contribution is the share between the ACT government, the commonwealth government and parents. Obviously, we do not expect parents in the non-government sector to pay additional fees simply because their child has a disability.

**MRS DUNNE:** I was waiting for you to see the error of my calculation.

**Mr Donnelly:** I imagine it would be against the Discrimination Act if a school sought to impose such fees. Accordingly, I think the latest figure are that the ACT government provides roughly 25 per cent of the government contribution. So in terms of total Australian government and ACT government contribution to non-government students, we hit about 25 per cent of that. The \$868,000 is well in excess of 25 per cent of the assessed need of the students with a disability in the non-government sector.

**MRS DUNNE:** Are you confident that the commonwealth is providing the other 75 per cent?

**Mr Donnelly:** I am being advised no.

**MRS DUNNE:** Mr Donnelly says the minister is not confident. What are you going to do about that, minister?

**MR SMYTH:** How long have you been a puppet-master, Mr Donnelly?

**Mr Barr:** I am happy to examine those issues. But, as you would perhaps appreciate, 10 weeks in, this is not—

**MRS DUNNE:** You keep telling us 10 weeks.

**Mr Barr:** something that I have had time at this point to turn my mind to, but I am happy to—

**MR PRATT:** But the pay increase is worth it.

**DR FOSKEY:** One thing that became clear when the representative of the preschool association spoke to us on Monday was that there are some concerns about your estimation of capacity of preschools. As it turns out, there are different sizes of preschools with different capacities. There was quite a strong suspicion that that had not been taken into account when capacity was estimated, to the detriment of some schools.

My second question is in relation to something that applies to other schools as well. Often underenrolment is related to a rather delicate aspect which has nothing to do with location. Why people might go past a school is because at that time it may have a staff configuration that, for some reason or other, they do not like. That is choice.

The third one, which was also raised by the preschool association, is that there is an awful lot of stuff there that parents have paid for. What happens to that if preschools are closed?

**Mr Barr:** In relation to the first question, the preschools are of course able to seek a reassessment if there is a disagreement about a capacity issue. That offer is available and, from time to time, if preschools make changes to the configuration of the school they may seek a capacity review.

I think the same issue applies there as it has in primary, secondary and colleges. The times that reviews are sought are generally when there is a desire to take an increased number of students into a school, rather than what has become the flavour of the month lately—to say, “No. We’ve got no more room; we cannot have any more.” Normally it is the other way round. I have indicated that we are happy to go back and have a fresh look. If there is violent disagreement about a capacity issue, we will undertake to look at that. The second one?

**DR FOSKEY:** Staffing—staffing as a reason why people bypass a school, and temporary—

**Mr Barr:** Yes, I have had a parent approach me after a community meeting and indicate that the reason they did not send their child to a particular preschool was that they did not like the teacher there. That is going to happen from time to time. I am not sure that we were able to address that issue. If a particular parent does not like a particular teacher, then I do not think there is anything the government can do to address that. In relation to assets from a preschool, they would go with the preschool association.

**Dr Bruniges:** I am also aware. I have had one meeting with the Canberra preschool society and I think next week I have another—their general meeting. I presume you are referring to the contribution they make to the learning environment. The preschools have spoken to me about cushions for reading corners and the huge contribution parents make to support them.

**DR FOSKEY:** I am not talking about the toilet paper.

**Dr Bruniges:** I am pleased to hear that at this time of day.

**MR PRATT:** They are taught not to use it.

**Dr Bruniges:** In terms of all of that, that is a wonderful contribution. You cannot ever underestimate what the parents do.

I think the interesting part, in terms of an education continuum, is that preschools have traditionally been one year. One of the issues I have had discussions on with the preschool society, and wish to continue to have discussions on, is that maybe we need to think a little bit in education about do we need an early childhood institute. Do we need a different structure that accommodates more than just one year of schooling, where parents are committed for one year, which has traditionally just been the preschool year? And then there has been a transition for those young children into kindergarten—to link some of our programs—preschool-primary links—and try to get that smooth transition.

That raises the big question about the notion of the early years of schooling that we have previously discussed today. What do we see as that continuum in the early years of schooling? Should the training of our teachers in the early years with specialisation in early childhood development be a component of our thinking in the future about the early years of schooling? Indeed, our new curriculum framework under the act has to be P to 10.

There are a lot of big questions about when you have your core of teaching and learning coming out, your curriculum framework for P to 10, a schooling structure that is trying to link and bring together preschools and primary schools, so you have a better continuity there, and then maintaining, I guess, the huge level of engagement that people have in preschool. We see that in so many other phases in terms of volunteers in schools and the huge contribution parents make right up the schooling continuum.

**MRS DUNNE:** Could I continue on that point, please?

**THE CHAIR:** I am conscious of the fact that there are two committee members waiting to ask a question and we have five more minutes to go.

**MS MacDONALD:** I appreciate what you just said about the linkages and I certainly do not disagree with that being an issue. I think there are other issues around it, such as the issue of whether or not one year is the way we deal with it, or whether or not we do it for a couple of years in the lead-up to kindergarten for a smooth transition from childcare.

There is also in my mind the issue that preschools are often only open for certain days. You cannot send your child there. How does that link in with childcare? You do not necessarily want children that young to actually be going through the whole educational process five days a week from 9.00 to 3.00—they cannot cope with it—or even 9.00 to 1.00.

I am mindful of the fact that a preschool such as Chifley has 19 out of 22 spaces filled and that the demographics of that area are changing again. There have been a lot of people getting to retirement age and beyond. There are now young families, or people wanting to have families, moving back into that area. I know it was said to you both last week at the meeting that, when you walk around Chifley you see women out pushing

prams, or women out who are pregnant.

**THE CHAIR:** Hurry up. It is nearly six o'clock.

**MS MacDONALD:** Yes, I am getting to it.

**THE CHAIR:** We have Mr Gentleman.

**MS MacDONALD:** Yes, okay. I will get to it faster if you do not stop me. It makes it worse. I know that they are also very interested in keeping their preschool open because they are very fond of it. It may not be the most modern building, but it is a lovely little preschool and there are other things that go on.

I am actually not going to the community consultation meeting this evening, I am going to the Chifley preschool meeting, and they will ask me questions. What do I say to them in terms of the fact that they have an enrolment of 19 out of 22 and would probably have had around about that number next year as well?

**Mr Barr:** There have been some quite difficult issues that we have had to confront in this process. Picking up on the model of the successful trial around linking preschools to primary schools, the primary school has about 80 enrolments at the moment. The projection is that that is not going anywhere, that it is possibly going backwards.

It is difficult to maintain stand-alone preschools in the new thinking around linking preschools with primary schools. To the extent that the preschool might not be in the position where it is running at 27 per cent capacity in the same way as the primary school is, they are perhaps suffering for the lack of enrolment at the primary school.

**MS MacDONALD:** Just a quick question in relation to something that was brought up by the preschool association on Monday, and that is the timing of it. They mentioned the issue that, if all the preschools are closed down, given the consultation time frame, that leaves them with only a two-week time frame.

**Mr Barr:** We have said it is the effective registration date at a preschool that will be the crucial factor, and parents will be guaranteed a place in a preschool in the region, I understand. There will be preschool facilities not too far from Chifley for those parents.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I understand the minister's time constraints, so I will leave my question, thanks, chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Will you put it on notice, Mr Gentleman?

**MR PRATT:** He is here at your pleasure, Mick. Go ahead.

**MRS DUNNE:** Madam chair, I understand the time constraints, but I have question. What is happening to Spence preschool? Is it the only freestanding preschool left in the territory?

**Mr Curry:** The thinking around Spence preschool, that is obviously part of the consultation process, is that it could be incorporated into Southern Cross school and be

part of the early childhood school that is being established there.

**MRS DUNNE:** But it will stay open?

**Mr Curry:** In the short term it may stay open, but it might well be encompassed in the P to three school that is being established there.

**MRS DUNNE:** At Southern Cross? Spence, not Scullin.

**Mr Curry:** Spence, sorry. It is late. Spence will be staying as it is, and possibly linked with Fraser.

**MR SMYTH:** While we are at it, let us go to Gilmore, Kambah and Tharwa.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister, officials and Dr Bruniges. We will be taking any other questions on this output class on notice.

**The committee adjourned at 6.02 pm.**