LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

(Reference: Inquiry into standardised testing in ACT Schools)

Members:

MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)
MRS E KIKKERT (Deputy Chair)
MS T CHEYNE
MR A WALL

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

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Secretary to the committee:
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 620 50435)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

WITNESSES

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 1.32 pm.

McGOVERN-HOOLEY, MS KIRSTY, President, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. In the proceedings today we will hear from a range of witnesses in relation to the committee's inquiry into standardised testing in ACT schools.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. If you take a question on notice, please send the response through to the secretary as soon as possible.

Would you like to make an opening statement? Before you do that, I would like to ask whether you have read the privilege card on the table in front of you. Could you please confirm that you understand the implications of that statement?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes, I have read the privilege statement, understand it and accept it. In terms of making an opening statement, I would like to say that I represent the 87 public schools in the ACT and, as of our recent merger with the Canberra Preschool Society, 17 preschool parents associations and a small number of play schools. We act on their behalf and coordinate work with them all the time. So we are here to talk on behalf of parents in public schools.

THE CHAIR: I note in your submission your support for standardised testing and your appreciation of the data it provides to parents. I was wondering, however, if there are any changes that you would like to see implemented in the standardised testing and NAPLAN programs.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Generally, parents express a lot of support for standardised testing and independent testing. We want to understand how well our students are performing, what they are achieving and what the learning gain is. Whether NAPLAN, as a tool for that, is the best tool, we have a lot of questions about. Generally speaking, our members would like that to be reviewed.

We did a recent poll in our meeting, asking parents for their thoughts and feelings on those things. The response essentially was that two-thirds of parents would like it reviewed and one-third of parents would actually like NAPLAN gone. This was all the P&C representatives in our general meeting. I would not say that NAPLAN has a high level of support, if that was your question.

THE CHAIR: You will have to extrapolate out a bit, but two-thirds want it reviewed; what kind of reasons did people give for wanting it reviewed?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Generally, the feeling is that it is not giving parents the depth of information, that it is too infrequent, and there is not enough follow-up in terms of when the results come back with a score. What do you actually do with those results?

It is very disconnected from the current A to E reporting system that you have at a school. When I say it is infrequent, it is only happening in year 3 and year 5, so they are not really getting a good sense of how their students are progressing from the beginning.

On top of that—and this is not consistent with all parents—many parents also find that it creates an enormous amount of stress and anxiety in their kids, particularly in the younger cohort, in year 3, who are increasingly anxious and worried about the tests and about how they perform in the tests. We do not feel comfortable with having that level of stress placed on our kids.

THE CHAIR: Bringing a few of those points together, you would like to see more frequent testing, but maybe not having to start as early?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Since we put this submission together, the Gonski 2.0 report has been released federally. They talk about diagnostic testing. I think that is something that parents are expressing a lot more interest in. We do not want our kids, for example, to have a problem with reading in kindy that then translates into year 1, that then translates into year 2, that then translates into year 3, and where nobody is going back and looking at addressing how that continues.

At what point is there an intervention where we say, "That child needs some more support," or "That student needs some more support around their learning and we need to get them to catch up"? There seems to be an issue around reporting where those things are not addressed. That is what we are looking for, if you like, in terms of a testing tool, to understand that if there is a problem, what is being done to address it? It is about having a more diagnostic approach to make sure that they are meeting the learning goals and that they are actually progressing and not having gaps in their learning.

MRS KIKKERT: How often do you meet with the Education Directorate?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: We meet with the Education Directorate formally, with their senior executive, once per term. Often we have many other meetings with various different personnel throughout the term as well. I have attended about six different meetings in the past fortnight, so we do meet with them quite frequently, and in a number of different capacities and things that we do.

MRS KIKKERT: In your submission you mentioned that some schools offer a wide variety of specialist programs while others struggle to provide a qualified teacher librarian and a specialist language teacher. Have you spoken about this issue with the Education Directorate in previous years?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes, it has been one of those items that comes up on the agenda. Recently, this week in fact, we put it as one of our key points as to why we see differentiation and issues around quality of education across schools. We focused specifically on teacher librarians; I think only around a quarter of our ACT schools have a teacher librarian employed at this point. Also, when it comes to specialist teachers, we need to have better mapping. For example, if you are learning Indonesian in primary school, you should be able to go to a high school that is offering you

further development in that language. It is the same with music, sport, any of those kinds of different curriculum work that we do.

MRS KIKKERT: I am assuming that this issue has been there in previous years. What has been the Education Directorate's response to that?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: We have not seen very much action in terms of any policy change around how that should get changed. I guess that would be the way I would respond.

MRS KIKKERT: Have you raised it many times before?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I have been in this role for just this year, since the beginning of last year, so I cannot talk for the previous presidents, because I am not them. However, I have certainly been raising it this year and we are trying to work as constructively as we can.

We see some of the issues arising around the way schools are funded, in that schools are not actually provided any separate funds or separate line of funds; they have to somehow manage within a very small size of school to be able to employ all of these different teachers. Therefore it becomes challenging and often you find that principals are just prioritising some of those specialist streams down. A lot of those employment decisions are purely up to the principal. In a lot of ways it is a systemic issue. That is what we understand. How we can change that in schools is something we are still working on.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary on that. Talking about the discrepancies between schools, we have heard testimony that some schools are doing practice tests for NAPLAN and others are not. Does the association have any views on that?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Parents would prefer that NAPLAN be just like another day. The more work you do around NAPLAN and the more preparation you do for NAPLAN, the more you actually increase the stress and anxiety around NAPLAN. From our perspective we would prefer NAPLAN to be more like another day at school and it should not be a high-stakes environment for students. We do not want it to be an HSC, in year 3 and 5 in particular, to draw an analogy.

MR WALL: Where do you see the high-stakes environment being fostered from? Is it by teachers, peers in the classroom, parents or broader community commentary?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I do not feel it is coming from parents, because parents do not often see a huge level of value in NAPLAN. We do see it coming in some ways from the school, and obviously from the teachers and the environment around the communication that is being given to the student around NAPLAN.

We are looking at a cohort coming through our schools at the moment where there is a lot more work being done around engagement in education; so when you have a student who is really engaged in their school, they are really proud of their school and they are really part of that community, they actually feel an enormous sense of responsibility. They do not see NAPLAN as being something that is about themselves

and their own performance; it is actually about the school's performance. If they are not performing well, they think they are letting the school down. I think that is part of the whole public nature of what NAPLAN has become, and kids take that on board. I think you are seeing a number of different factors playing into that, around what our public narrative is around NAPLAN, as well as what it means to the student, what it means to the school, and right down to what it looks like in the classroom.

MS CHEYNE: While we are talking about the anxiety, you mentioned the messaging that schools can be sending. Do you have some examples of what those messages are?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I can relate one parent's experience that he talked about at our general meeting. He said that his daughter was not sleeping for three days before the test because she was so worried about it. He engaged with the school, and they did not feel that there was anything over the top in terms of what was being said about NAPLAN, but she was just taking on that whole responsibility idea that "I have to do well for my school".

MS CHEYNE: What age was she?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: She was in year 3.

MS CHEYNE: What?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Do you know if that was a school that was doing practice testing?

THE CHAIR: In preparation?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I do not know if that was a school that was doing practice testing.

MS CHEYNE: There are verbal messages, "please do well", but the more practice testing that schools are doing, the bigger deal it suddenly seems to be.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: You would need to do a bit more research. What we do know is that the experience is very different at every school. Some schools do treat it very much like another day. "By the way, here; just do this." Others do a lot more work around it. It just depends on the school and the principal.

MS CHEYNE: We were hearing the other day from the principals that they have some students who do not turn up. They are not formally withdrawn from it by their parents but they just do not appear. Have you heard of that?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I would put that down to a lack of engagement from parents around thinking that NAPLAN is important. I withdrew both of my students. I have two children with autism spectrum disorders and I have withdrawn both of my kids from it this year because I did not want to put them through that whole experience. I did not personally see the value for them in participating in NAPLAN.

MS CHEYNE: With the children who are withdrawn—maybe just from your personal experience—do other students treat them differently?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I do not believe so.

MS CHEYNE: Do they say, "How come you get special treatment?"

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I am not aware of that.

MS CHEYNE: I am just wondering if there are barriers to kids being withdrawn by their peers saying, "Special treatment."

Ms McGovern-Hooley: One of the things that always impresses me about Canberra parents is that around 40 or 50 per cent of them are public servants. They are all very articulate, very intelligent people and they are very opinionated about specific things. You will find that parents will exercise their vote, if you like, through that.

MS CHEYNE: It kind of filters down to their kids as well in terms of—

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I just think it is as simple as it is. They are just saying, "You don't need to do it; it's okay."

MS CHEYNE: That is helpful to know. I think we are hearing later today about trend issues of performance with the testing. I note you said that the council's view is that the decline is related to the school-based management and that what you would like to see is the Education Directorate ensuring equity in education being applied. Are you able to expand a bit for me about what the weaknesses are with the school based-management and what equity would look like?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: At this point in time through the policies of school autonomy you can have a very different experience depending on which school you go to. We in the ACT have been in a position where, because our school capacity in the past has been fairly low, you have been able to pick and choose schools. In some ways that was very much encouraged. So principals were therefore also encouraged to develop their own programs, their own individual cultures, things like that.

Now as we are moving into a situation where our population has grown and we are now really being pushed to say that your priority enrolment area is your local school and that is the school you will be going to, those issues around differentiation in schools become much more problematic, because you want to make sure that every student has access to the same opportunities as everybody else. That is in a broad sense in terms of your access to school culture, environment, curriculum and all those kinds of things. While we celebrate the fact that each school is individualised and has all of those things, we also want to make sure that you can get equitable access to the same opportunity.

The flip side of that is that we know that students have a very different experience and the implementation of policy at a school level into procedures and processes is very different. Some parents will have a very positive experience and other parents will have a very negative experience depending on the school they go to. That can come

down to all kinds of things, from school engagement through to looking at testing, looking at how your reports are, any kind of bullying or any other kinds of concerns and issues. That is where we would really like to see a more consistent application of process: all of the policies that have been done at the directorate level, which are very sound, very good work, actually being implemented properly through schools.

MS CHEYNE: And they are not?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Not always. For example, we just had a consultation with our Tuggeranong schools and they talked very much about how they liked the fact that they were small schools. They felt that they had really great access to principals and to their teachers and that there was a really great community there because it was a small school. We know that people who are in larger schools do not necessarily have that same engagement.

I may talk to my teachers every day. I SMS them and things like that. So we have very strong relationships. I am in a privileged position in that way because my children are in a learning support unit and so we do need to have that level of engagement.

But I get continually reminded by other parents that they will be lucky sometimes if they get to have a conversation with their teacher more than once or twice a term. This level of engagement for parents can be quite different. Our challenge and what we are trying to really push with education is how we can make the kind of experience that we are seeing in some of our Tuggeranong schools be replicated in some of our larger schools and be replicated for more students.

MS CHEYNE: More broadly.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: For more families.

MS CHEYNE: So it is not about taking away the individualised nature of the schools but it is making sure that those basic building blocks, basic principles, basic methods of engagement are kind of the same wherever you go. And then on top of that is where you can get a bit more—

Ms McGovern-Hooley: There has to be an expectation around what I am going to get. There is an expectation around what this should look like for our family and what this should look like for my student. I would have an expectation that my curriculum is going to be implemented; that if I have problems, this is the process through which we talk to each other and resolve it; that if we identify a particular issue or a problem, this is addressed. So there are a lot of expectations that we have around the system. I also recognise that our schools do a really wonderful job. Our principals do a really wonderful job. Often a lot of these issues come around engagement, communication and all those kinds of issues. It is about how we build that.

MS CHEYNE: Tying this back to the trends with our NAPLAN results, is the council's view that this individualised nature, where some of those basic principles and processes, basic things, are not the same everywhere is feeding into this broader problem?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It is very easy to overlook learning difficulties, to overlook problems. The way things have worked in the past has been that if you are really unsatisfied with the school it is really easy to move. You say, "Is Education really aware of it?" Well, it has never been something that has been really pushed that hard, because it is very easy for parents to move. If that changes in the future, this is going to become much more of a problem.

MS CHEYNE: And it is likely that it is going to change, because of the growth and the need for priority area enrolments.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: At the moment we have had a lot of flexibility in our system and if you have not been happy with a school, for whatever reason, "That's okay. I'm going to go up the road; I'm going to go to the next suburb." That is not necessarily possible anymore. That is really why it is starting to have an impact now.

MS CHEYNE: And you think we are seeing that in things like NAPLAN results?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes. The Auditor-General's report was really good work. We were very impressed with the analysis that came back. What we would like, though, is some more information about where those results are coming from, and to look at the difference in the comparison sets. What are the similarities and the differences in the benchmark we are being compared to in New South Wales? With a New South Wales or a Queensland school of a similar socio-economic group, how similar is it really in our profile?

We know that in the ACT you will probably have a couple of kids in every school who are homeless. Our disadvantage is spread about much more thinly than it is in other states where socio-economics is more concentrated. So how does that affect our results? I think there is a lot more work that we need to do around it. However, when you are looking at a long-term trend like that, you know we should be doing better and we should be looking a lot harder at what we are doing.

MR WALL: In your submission you talk about how both the directorate and individual schools can use data from standardised testing help in training and assessing personnel and also planning the curricula. You state that there are some inconsistencies as to how that is done from school to school. Have you measured how common that practice is across schools? Even anecdotally, what sort of feedback are you getting from parents?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Anecdotally we know from our P&C. In one of my schools' P&C our principal will bring all the test results in with all the graphs and say, "Here, here and here we're doing really well. We're really happy with this; we're seeing the learning gains we're looking for. Here we actually have gone down. We're really concerned about that and therefore we're changing our numeracy program and we're going to trial this." That is how you want to see those tests used. That is what they are there for. We know that that does not happen in every P&C. It may be because that is just not being shared or maybe because it is not being done; we do not know. But we know it is not done in every P&C.

MR WALL: Yes. And you would like to see that done in every P&C?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: We would, yes.

MR WALL: You also touch on the consideration that schools are limiting participation of students to try to, anecdotally, you are suggesting, improve scores. How common is that practice?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It is really hard, without doing some proper surveys, to say that it is very common. We do know that it gets discussed.

MR WALL: So a teacher at the school will raise it with the parents and suggest, "Maybe your son or daughter might be best not coming in tomorrow"? What is the process?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I think it is really hard, because you have got parents who are not necessarily that keen on their kids doing it in the first place. I know from my personal situation that the whole process of doing a social story, doing a practice, explaining what it is about and doing that whole pre-teaching thing for somebody with a cognitive disability is a really hard thing to do in terms of time and resources and all those kinds of things. So I do not necessarily fault a school or say that it is not okay. You are weighing up the effort required to make it successful for that student versus the outcome of what it is doing for the school. And in many cases you will just say, "Look, the weeks of preparation on this are not going to be worth the benefit for that particular student." On the other hand, I do not know that schools, certainly public schools, are necessarily taking NAPLAN results that seriously.

MR WALL: You do not think that the public schools take them seriously?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I do not know that I would see that as being a big issue in public schools. But that is just my feeling on it. I know that there might be a belief around that and there might be discussion about that with parents. But is it really happening? I do not know.

MR WALL: Thank you.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I do not know if I could answer that question very well; I am sorry.

MR WALL: Well enough.

THE CHAIR: I know you have talked a lot about the benefits of the data coming out of NAPLAN. Do you think that data should be publicly available on a website accessible to everyone?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It is a really tough question. We have advocated for many years for there not to be league tables published in the *Canberra Times*. Essentially what you end up with is a socioeconomic ranking of every school. Socioeconomically it is based on your education, your profession and your income, so it is automatically going to be biased towards the education that your parents have. In that sense, we do

not see it as being of value to the community.

We know that parents in the surveys that we have done do not use it to choose their school, for public education. So from that perspective, we do not see a lot of value in having it in a form where you can compare schools. We do not see that that is really of any value.

However, there is having that information available to the principal, to be able to make changes, having that available to the Education Directorate. And then there is a transparency issue. You will find that we would like to see it, but we do not necessarily want it to be published in a way that is derogatory to lower socioeconomic groups.

THE CHAIR: There is a lot of talk that these standardised tests are high stakes. Do you think it would be less high stakes if that data were not publicly available?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Absolutely. For example, there is PIPS. There is other testing that is done within schools that is not published, and it is not high stakes. That is just something that you go off and you do with the teacher for an hour and then you come back. That is an example.

MS CHEYNE: I saw your Facebook quick poll about whether NAPLAN influences you. Everyone went, "No." But I did see that there were also some people who commented saying, "No, it does not influence us because of the priority enrolment area."

Ms McGovern-Hooley: "We do not have a choice."

MS CHEYNE: Yes. Do you think that maybe—

Ms McGovern-Hooley: The chicken and egg?

MS CHEYNE: Yes.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It would, probably.

MS CHEYNE: That if it were not there, maybe NAPLAN would factor into the thinking?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It might. But it would be a number of different factors. When parents are looking at schools and trying to decide on schools, they are really wanting to look at the culture, the activities, the experience and what it is going to be like for their student at that school. How supportive are they? What is their positive behaviour for learning programs? All those types of things are what they are looking at for schools. It is about that whole experience, not just the academic side of it. It becomes part of a number of different factors that you are looking at.

MS CHEYNE: I saw that a decent part of your submission was dedicated to the hidden terms of reference about alternative forms of assessment and reporting, such as the A to E reporting. Clearly council is not a fan of A to E reporting.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: No.

MS CHEYNE: I do not have kids and I have not seen it in practice here. It is something I grew up with in Queensland. But I am interested in your perspective. I note you refer to language being technical and reports not being written in plain English. What is going on?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It is possible to get an A to E report the way that it is currently set that has lots of information on it and tells you nothing.

MS CHEYNE: Can you expand on that?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: The way ACARA define A, B, C, D and E is that a C means that you are performing as expected for your year, an A is two years ahead and B is one year ahead to behind. That means that when we went to school we would be getting an A and now you would be getting a C for that same performance. It is very confusing for parents to wrap their head around. And we have anecdotal feedback that they do not want to give that report card to their kids, their student who the report is for, because they do not want them to feel disillusioned and discouraged by getting a D, for example.

While some of the reports have another grading for effort, for example, and those types of things, as a tool for giving us information about our students' learning and where they are up to, it is quite ineffective, I think.

MS CHEYNE: And demoralising for kids?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes. "I have been putting all this effort in and I am getting a C." And with what we know in our culture—

MS CHEYNE: With C being meeting expectations?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes. The second part of that is that it is not illustrating learning gain. By that, I mean that it is just that example I was giving earlier: if I have not learnt to read this year, there is nothing in there that really tells you very explicitly that you have a really big problem. A lot of the language is very sanitised, I would call it, for parents. They are trying to keep everything very general and positive. We appreciate that, but it means you are not having those difficult conversations around the additional support. Unless you have a learning difficulty or a diagnosis of some kind, if you are just not performing that well, if you are in that little gap, there is not a lot of intervention, not a lot of flags, to say, "Hey, you need a bit more help."

MS CHEYNE: With that sanitised or anodyne language, do you get an impression that some teachers just have a list of things to say and they just copy and paste them in?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I know a number of teachers personally as well, and they do not do that. They do try to personalise those things. But there is a certain form that they are meant to be keeping when they are writing these reports. They are not trying

to be negative, but at the same time it is not a very realistic example.

MS CHEYNE: What would be better than A to E? Would it be meeting expectations, exceeding expectations? Would it be sound achievement, high achievement and very high achievement?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I would like to take that into a consultation, I think. If you asked every parent it would be different. But what we are unhappy about in this situation is that it is not giving us enough detail about where their performance is. It is not giving us enough information. If you think about it, it is like getting a performance evaluation report in your work where all they are doing is telling you about the good things you are doing.

MS CHEYNE: Right.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: That is probably a better analogy. It is not "What do we really need to work on? Where are the big gaps that I need to be focusing on?" We need to have some more information around what are my next goals, what am I focusing on, what are we working on next, what are the things that I need help with—as well as all the things we are doing well with?

MS CHEYNE: And there is no detail currently of like—

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Not a lot. It is up to the individual teacher to make an appointment with the parent or for the parent to say, "I am worried about this." It is really outside that reporting structure that you are having those conversations.

MS CHEYNE: It is almost like why do a report then if that has to happen.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Some of the feedback we have had has been where I got to the end of the year and the midyear report did not actually signal to me that very clearly there was a problem. Now we have got to the end of the year and she is on an E. You get those kinds of comments back anecdotally.

MRS KIKKERT: I have a follow-up question on that one. Would the reporting depend on the schools and the teachers?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Very much.

MRS KIKKERT: I have five kids. They are all in public schools: college, high schools and primary schools. They receive a grading in their reports, and straight underneath it the teacher mentions what my kids are struggling in and what they need improvement on.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: That depends very much on the teacher.

MRS KIKKERT: It comes down to the teachers and their reporting process. I just want to clarify that.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: In your example—Mrs Kikkert's example is different—there is no detail in terms of learning gain. You mentioned that is really valuable to parents, and we heard it in evidence this week that knowing where the student has come from to where they are is sometimes what the school and also parents really need to know. We know that if a kid has a pretty rough start in the first few years of their life it sets them back almost forever. So knowing that they are making gains on that versus gains compared to everybody else is important, but at least in some schools there is none of that.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes, it is not highlighted or flagged. Maybe the more appropriate way to say it is that it is really up to the teacher and the principal who oversees the reporting.

MS CHEYNE: A witness on Tuesday said they would perhaps be better for older age groups who were more easily able to understand what that means. But it sounds to me from what you are saying that there is just such a lack of information associated with the grade in some cases that it does not matter what age you are.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: You are spending half your time trying to explain to the parents what the grade means. This is really acute when they change over, where you have gone from an older system into this new A to E system. The parents are going, "They've had A's for the past three years and now they're getting C's and D's. I don't understand." That is where you are saying, "Well, actually, there's something not quite right here about the communication. If you were getting A's before and now you're getting C's and D's, where's the communication around that?"

MS CHEYNE: Particularly if that is the first time you hear that about your student.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It is because they are being graded differently; the grading is being conducted differently. It is about the management and the communication around that. I know there have been a number of consultations and different things Education have done with parents. Each school has gone through, "This is our report template," those types of things. But the actual framework around what that means and what the grading means cannot be changed because it is ACARA. It is only how it is presented that has been personalised for the ACT. We would like more specific information about how our students are doing, how they are performing and where they need to go.

MS CHEYNE: I know the system has been in for a few years, but what did it use to be?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: What I talked about previously—an ACT system that was before the national curriculum.

MS CHEYNE: But how was the reporting?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I think it was still an A to E report in most cases. I am not sure.

MR WALL: We have spent a fair bit of time talking specifically about NAPLAN this afternoon. I am keen to gauge what council's view is on other forms of standardised testing that are used. The two big ones are TIMSS and the PISA testing. What views does the council hold on those and their application in ACT schools?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: To be fair, they have not impacted parents very much in terms of the outcomes and the results so they have not been a very large part of our conversation.

MR WALL: Why do you think they have not drawn the same attention as NAPLAN?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Because they are not publicly reported in the *Canberra Times* in a league table every year.

MS CHEYNE: Does the issue come down to the *Canberra Times* being irresponsible by publishing a league table?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: We have told them that a number of times. We worked with the AEU to ask them to relook at how they were publishing it.

MS CHEYNE: What was their response to you? It seems like this is one of the sources of the anxiety. We have heard generally that NAPLAN has at least some value but that this league table upsets everybody.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes, that is true.

MS CHEYNE: And they are just like, "No, it sells papers."

THE CHAIR: They did not publish it this year.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: That was as a result of a huge amount of work writing letters to the editor and approaching them to look at it differently. But you are right; I think the general response was that it sells papers and they just kept doing what they were doing. It is the value of it; you are trying to benchmark schools. If we support the goal that every school in the ACT should be a great school—which we all support—then stacking them up against each other ultimately does not have a great deal of value. The flip side of that is that parents want transparency around how our schools are performing. So it is how we do that in a way that is not a league table.

MS CHEYNE: Is it also true that a league table could potentially have a cyclical effect? If you are down the bottom then everyone feels pretty rubbish so then maybe do not want to perform next time it comes around. Or parents go, "I'm going to avoid sending my kids there at all costs," which also might have an impact on that school in keeping it at the bottom.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes, one of the things we have not been able to do is determine how a school with a low socioeconomic score can improve their NAPLAN scores. I do not think anyone has really nailed that yet or really understood that clearly. That needs a lot more work and rigour and research around it.

But at the end of the day if it is so tied to socioeconomic status of the community then a league table has absolutely no meaning, and I would say that NAPLAN has not performed its job in the sense that if those rankings have not changed very much over ten years then something else is going on that we need to be looking at around how we improve those scores that is far above and beyond the scope of NAPLAN.

MS CHEYNE: The league table is comparing schools to different schools rather than where schools have come from. For example, all the schools in the league table could be improving but the league table stays the same. Equally they could all be going backwards but the league table stays the same, hiding perhaps a broader issue.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: So league tables really suck.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes.

MR WALL: Using Ms Cheyne's example of league tables and consistent improvement or consistent decline in NAPLAN scores, is that a failure of NAPLAN or is that more a failure of the way the data is reported? Do you think there needs to be a form of measuring performance across schools in a consistent manner to see primarily how they are performing to make sure that there is not a structural issue in the curriculum in a specific school where numeracy is not being taught to a standard?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: If I had to sum up parents' attitude towards testing it is that we want standardised testing. We want to know how students are performing against each other. We want to know that we are progressing. Is NAPLAN the best tool? We do not know; we are not experts in testing. In terms of what NAPLAN is testing for, it is a really grey area. If you are asking what is it actually telling us, all we know is that it is a score. Is it telling us they are getting better at reading? It does not give us that. So in that sense I do not think NAPLAN as a brand—

MR WALL: So you think there is a lack of information being given to parents of what that score means and how to interpret it?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: And what is done with it? What should I do with it? What happens when I get the letter that tells me what the score is? In a friend's case, she opened it and apparently her student is doing way above the average. She is going back to the school now saying where is their gifted and talented program. That is an example.

There can be some very good value in this, where we can say, "Actually that is what we want." Is NAPLAN the best tool to do it? I would not have a comment on that in the sense that I am not an expert on testing. What we know is that what we are getting from it is probably not as good as what we would like it to be. And we do not have a very clear understanding of what it is actually measuring in a sense that that is how well the school is doing. Is it how well the student is doing? What does it actually mean? It is sitting very separate to that. I do not know if I have really answered your

question.

MR WALL: It is context. It is helpful.

MS CHEYNE: Just on that, though, because it is testing only numeracy and literacy, equally it is perhaps not giving a holistic picture of the child. You could be an awesome rote learner and smash those tests. But on critical thinking you might be awful and you might have really poor social skills and be hopeless at sport.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: But it is not identifying aptitude for language, music, sport, arts or any of those types of things. Yes, numeracy and literacy are important. We want our kids to learn to read and to be able to count and those sort of things. It is the fundamentals. You look at the future of education.

We also have a whole lot of other skills that we are now looking at in education that we want our students to be learning—engagement, collaboration, being able to understand and take ownership of their own learning—because we know they are going to probably have five different careers or whatever. There are a lot of other things.

When I was talking about what parents are looking for in a school, there is a lot more around that than just numeracy and literacy. In that sense NAPLAN is not measuring it. The depth of what NAPLAN measures is very limited and it is only done in two years. It is not going to give you a really good sense of things. If I find out in year 3 that I have got a really big problem, that is far too late. I want to know in preschool and kindergarten, and we want to be addressing these things as we go through. To my mind, it is only a very blunt instrument that give us a little information. It is not giving us all the information that we are really looking for from a school.

MS CHEYNE: I am going way out here but the fourth industrial revolution has passed and the skills that we really should be seeking are not really those numeracy and literacy ones. Yes, those building blocks are absolutely important but I think it has been proven time and again that the skills that we are going to find valuable in the future are those human skills, skills that cannot be replicated by a machine.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I am probably going to use the wrong words to describe this but we are seeing strategic plans in schools now with goals that are things like, "We are going to teach students to have autonomy over their own learning." They are teaching students to say, "This is what I am going to learn. This is how I am going to go about it." They go off, they do it, and then they are able to check back and say, "Yes, I have understood that now." It is building that autonomy of their own learning experience. It is much more of an empowerment process where you take control of your own learning. And that is a really important skill for the future and it is a really important way of engaging children in their learning.

You are starting to see these really good shifts in some schools around building those sorts of things. But again, it is: how do we measure that? How do we actually get an understanding of the benefit of that? And how do we communicate that to parents and make us all understand that it is a valuable skill? Those are the sorts of things. In a lot of ways we see NAPLAN as being a small part of that and we are really wanting

something that is a lot more holistic.

MS CHEYNE: But given the emphasis that is put on NAPLAN, particularly for older students, it must get a bit confusing. "They want me to be this holistic person and to be very well rounded but also you better smash this test; otherwise we are going to judge you." It is very problematic.

MRS KIKKERT: The standardised testing is not a one size fits all. That is where I am coming from. That is where you stand. Is that correct? Would you say that?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: In terms of its implementation?

MRS KIKKERT: That is right.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes.

MRS KIKKERT: Having a different variety of standardised test is better than having just one. I am saying that because NAPLAN tests do test numeracy and literacy. Then the A to E grading tests the students on everything that they teach in school: PE, health, geography, history, whatever. It provides parents with the grading of their child in a specific area, what they need improvement on, whether they need extra work on it or whether they are good at that subject. Would you suggest that having one test does not fit everyone? It is having a different kind of standardised test to accommodate different kids.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: The Gonski 2.0 approach of diagnostic testing is almost like a weekly, fortnightly, monthly kind of thing. "This is this part of the curriculum, this is what you are going to learn." You go back and you check. You make sure that they have understood that and then they move on. Then they go on to the next level.

It is much more of a level-based kind of progression that I think we are finding very appealing as opposed to an infrequent dipstick that sort of gives you a feel for where they might be performing compared to everybody. But we also recognise that you would need a fairly significant level of IT investment and infrastructure and all those kinds of things to be able to make a system like that work.

I think it is more detailed. It is telling me that I am doing that well, in geography for example. It is not going to let me help my child improve. Give me some more detailed information around what is it that they need and how I can help them and how they can help themselves. Those are the sorts of things we are looking for in testing and getting results, yes.

MS CHEYNE: There was something I think Mr Wall touched on before. I think it is the bit in your submission about how the Education Directorate is using test data to inform policy and teaching. I know that you mentioned that some P&Cs get information presented to them by principals who go, "We are doing well here, not doing well here, we are going to fix that," but it is not for everybody.

I also note that you went on in the submission to talk about the standardised testing being skewed by limiting the participation of people and that the directorate could be

providing greater oversight of the implementation of that testing. What would that greater oversight look like practically? Would it be like having an Education Directorate official there?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I think it is as simple as getting the numbers and then looking at the participation rates in the schools.

MS CHEYNE: That is not being done?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: As far as I am aware. I do not know. I have not asked. We have not asked. We do know that overall we have the lowest participation rate in NAPLAN in the country, I think, in the ACT, the figures I was looking at.

MS CHEYNE: Do you recall what those figures are?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It is still above 90 per cent. It was 92 or 93, I think. I cannot remember.

MS CHEYNE: And states were in the mid 90s?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Were higher, yes. I think it is really looking at the numbers. Where you have got lower numbers than you would expect to see at the school you would be going and actually doing some work with that principal. I would be hoping that the school improvement director would be looking at those sorts of things just to look at what the barriers are or what the issues are in that particular school about why the participation rate is low.

MS CHEYNE: Should the Education Directorate also be providing guidance or advice to principals, "This is our expectation of how you use NAPLAN data in forming your curriculum"?

Ms McGovern-Hooley: I am aware that they do look at that, school improvement directors. That is one of the things that they are looking at when they go in and provide assistance to a school.

MS CHEYNE: But would it be helpful if the guidance were given to principals to also be presenting this to their P&C? You said it does not necessarily happen to every—

Ms McGovern-Hooley: It does not necessarily happen but I think that this is what we would be looking for: to say, "How can we, as parents, be more engaged in the learning in the school and support the learning in the school?" These are the things that we really would like to know and get involved with.

MS CHEYNE: That would also go to Mr Wall's point before about transparency. That is another way of achieving that—

Ms McGovern-Hooley: Yes. That is how it is meant to be used. We want to know that this is working for our students or that this is not working for our students. These are the things that we want to know.

THE CHAIR: We are out of time. I would like to thank you, Ms McGovern-Hooley, for coming in.

Ms McGovern-Hooley: You are welcome.

THE CHAIR: It has been an absolute pleasure. I do not think you have taken any questions on notice.

MACINTOSH, PROFESSOR ANDREW

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, Professor Macintosh. Thank you for joining us. I would like to direct you to the pink privilege statement that is in front of you. I ask you to confirm that you have read the privilege card in front of you and that you understand the privilege implications of that statement. I will then invite you to make a short opening statement.

Prof Macintosh: I can confirm I have read that.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make a short opening statement?

Prof Macintosh: I thought the best use of our time would be for me to take you through the report and talk you through the key findings and what it says about what is going on in our school system, plus what it means for NAPLAN and how effective NAPLAN is in helping us make our schools better.

If you flick to page 9, the way we have set out this data is that, firstly, we did weighted averages for school performance, comparing schools to their SSSGs. The numbers you see there in colours are the differences between the means for our schools versus their SSSGs over the period, the period being 2012-16.

I should explain the colours. Pink means you are below; heavy red means that you are six months or more below in learning. What you see there is across the board for our government schools, primary schools and secondary schools. All of the averages are below, and they are significantly more below in writing and numeracy, particularly in our high school years. That is the first thing that jumps out. That is not a good result; you would want to see different colours. You would see the colour coordinated over on the other side; you want to see greens and at least you want to see yellows, and what we are seeing is pinks and reds, which is bad.

If you flick over to the next page, page 10, it breaks it down by socio-economic group. Again they are weighted means for the period, so weighted on the basis of student enrolment. Again, not surprisingly, you see similar profiles, so it is across the socio-economic spectrum. What we are seeing is underperformance. Again the underperformance is worse in writing and numeracy, and particularly in our high school years. Throughout those years 7 and 9, in writing and numeracy the results are very significantly below where we would want to see them, and that is not a positive thing. If you flick over to page 11, you see this sea of red, other than for reading.

The general take-out messages that we had in our talking points on this were that we have systemic underperformance in our government school sector. It is most acute in writing and numeracy and in our high school years. On average we have students between eight and 12 months behind in our high school years; 12 to eight months behind in learning. When you break it down by socio-economic group, the spread goes from six to 16 months behind.

To give you a feel for what that means, because we are talking about averages here, we have the box and whiskers, on pages 14 and 15. They are the results for individual

schools relative to their SSSGs. Those box and whiskers show the spread of results for each of the years over the study period—12, 13, 14, 15 and 16. What they are telling us, if you look at year 3 and year 5 writing and numeracy, is that somewhere between 25 and 50 per cent of our schools are at least six months behind in learning. If you flick over the page and go to page 15, which shows high school results, you see that things are significantly worse. For writing and numeracy, we are talking about somewhere between 50 and 75 per cent of our schools being at least six months behind in learning.

What I am trying to tell you is that we have a systemic problem, and there are only two explanations. Either we are systematically underperforming in our schools—that is, our students are not learning as well as students are in other jurisdictions—or we have a systemic problem with NAPLAN. NAPLAN is not comparing apples with apples; it is comparing apples with oranges or some other fruit.

It is particularly important to draw attention to the fact that the results are better in reading than they are in numeracy and writing. The reason that that is important is because if there were a problem simply with the ICSEAs in our SSSGs—that is, we were not comparing just apples with apples—you would expect there to be a consistent pattern between subjects, and it is not the case. Reading is significantly better than what we are getting in writing and numeracy, which to me says that we are doing something better in reading. Again if it were just an ICSEA problem, it says we are doing something really good in reading, but we are not doing the same thing in writing and numeracy. The first thing I would do in this situation is find out what we are doing in reading. We are clearly doing something better than we are in writing and numeracy.

The other thing that comes out of this report and out of the data is that the problems seemingly are across our school sectors. It is not confined just to government schools; it is also in non-government schools. The problems are not as acute in our non-government sector as they are in the government sector but they are still there. For numeracy in secondary non-government schools, we are still talking about a lag in learning of between six and nine months. That is still very significant. For writing, it is five months, almost at the level of what we define as significant for these purposes.

We have a problem across our entire school sector, government and non-government, and it is particularly the case in high school, which suggests that what is happening is that, rather than the line of learning looking like this, it is looking more like this, and we want to raise it up to this. But we do not know the true causes of what is going on. As I said before, it might be that NAPLAN is not doing a good job of comparing apples with apples, but we do not know.

I am imploring you as our politicians to conduct a thorough investigation to find out what is causing this. We have no answers because we do not know what is going on in our schools. There is no good data, for example, on what teaching methods we are employing in our schools. We do not know. That is number one.

Number 2: I think there is real scope for us to conduct some trials into direct instruction. I know that is a phrase that people loathe, so we can call it teacher-led instruction. What we do know from a lot of literature is that this stuff works. We have

data from other schools from NAPLAN that shows that direct instruction works, so we have the capacity in the ACT to trial those things, and NAPLAN is a ready-made platform to test the efficacy of any intervention, whether it be in teaching methods or anything else. NAPLAN is a very cost-effective method of doing evaluations of how effective any intervention is in the school sector.

If people want to ask questions about the school report, or ask questions about what I expect is going to happen in 2017 or 2018, I do not mind; it is up to you. I can also just keep going, because I am a lecturer and, as a consequence, when I get going, I get a head of steam, and you have to pull me back.

MS CHEYNE: I only joined this committee a week and a half ago, so it is not my area of expertise, but what is teacher-led instruction? I did see it in your report; you have mentioned it now.

Prof Macintosh: At a very high level, teacher-led instruction is where you break a subject down into its components. The mantra behind teacher-led education is: "I lead, we do it together and then you do it." The teacher starts, breaks down the subject into its components, whether it be maths, reading or anything else, teaches the students those components, builds them up into the whole, then moves on. We as the class then carry out the same activity and you then apply it on your own, apply the subject and, through the application of it, it ingrains the knowledge into you and it makes it easier for you to apply it going forward.

The polar opposite of it is constructivism. That is the idea that you can learn by exposure and simply by problem-based learning; so if we expose people to problems, they will learn the processes and learn the knowledge that way.

MS CHEYNE: That is currently what we have got—

Prof Macintosh: They are savagely opposed, apparently. I do not quite understand how it has become an ideological battle, but it has, with the left tending to be attached to constructivism and the right tending to be attached to teacher-led approaches. I personally do not see it as being naturally aligned to any side of politics or any ideology. At the end of the day I think we should be using the teaching practices that work and that the evidence tells us works.

MS CHEYNE: But we are not doing teacher-led in the ACT at the moment?

Prof Macintosh: We do not know. We suspect that it is not widespread. One of the issues that you get when you have school autonomy is that you are likely to get a diversity of practices. My guess is that we have teacher-led approaches being used in some areas; my guess from the data is that it is probably in reading. But we do not know. I am pretty sure that the directorate does not know. There is no clear picture of what teaching practices are being employed throughout the territory.

MRS KIKKERT: There is no sense of accountability from the school to the directorate on how they are teaching their students, is there?

Prof Macintosh: I cannot answer that. I do not know that they—

MRS KIKKERT: I suppose that is something we can ask the Education Directorate.

Prof Macintosh: Yes. I do not know.

MRS KIKKERT: But your guess is right. I have five kids and they are all in public schools. They do have teacher-led experiences with students; so that is good.

Prof Macintosh: Yes, that is good and I hope they are working. It might be that people are using teacher-led approaches but not applying them effectively. That is another explanation. There are many different things that can explain what we are seeing in our schools and what we are seeing in NAPLAN data. Outsiders cannot do it without somebody inviting them to do it and paying them to do it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for appearing, Professor Macintosh. I have a very quick question. I note that you are a legal expert; you come from the ANU law school?

Prof Macintosh: I am.

THE CHAIR: Is education policy a passion of yours? Is this a work project that we are looking at?

Prof Macintosh: It is something that I have done through my thinking. I am not an expert in education policy. I do not hold myself out as an expert in education policy. My real expertise is in policy analysis. My work is not purely legal; I am not a doctrinal or legal scholar. I am really a policy analyst. That is really where my skills lie, with a particular interest in information and how information is used in policy processes, hence my interest in NAPLAN.

In my particular area of expertise, which is environment, we beg for data systems like this. We do not have them in most areas of environment policy. So when I see something which is as powerful as this being threatened by people saying they want to get rid of it, it greatly aggrieves me, particularly when education is such a cornerstone of our economy and our society.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate your enthusiasm for pursuing your passions and for being here today. I will lead off with a substantive question. Why is it, in your opinion, that both public schools and private schools are underperforming? Is it due to the ICSEA value or is it due to the quality of teachers in the ACT?

Prof Macintosh: That is what I said before; we do not know. There is one hypothesis that goes something along the lines of the ICSEAs not accurately capturing the nature of public servants. Given the number of public servants in the ACT, that results in a skew in our data. Personally, I find that hard to believe but it is one hypothesis that needs to be explored.

There are other things. This is the second time that we have done this. The previous time we did it in the report we completed firstly in 2015 and then we spent two years basically discussing it with the directorate. One hypothesis there was that in our schools, because of our distribution of public housing, we tend to get a higher number

of hard-to-teach children and that is skewing the way that people can teach and that is causing problems. But, again, we just do not know, and no-one knows.

THE CHAIR: One of the things you said in your opening statement was that because we are doing well in reading, therefore that disproves the theory that the ICSEA values are misaligned. Is it possible that the ICSEA values are misaligned but that we are doing so well in reading that even with ICSEA values placing us higher, our reading is actually just that much better that we are still above average?

Prof Macintosh: That is right. If it is purely an ICSEA issue, the whole bar would raise. So rather than seeing red, you would be seeing light greens with reading being a dark green, being that we are significantly outperforming. But clearly we have got difference in results and a consistent one across the years between reading and the other subjects, which suggests that there is something going on. It is either that we are doing very well in reading, or we are doing very poorly in the other subjects, or somewhere in between.

MS CHEYNE: Sorry, is reading also still behind, even though we are ahead?

Prof Macintosh: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: So it is still behind; it is all behind?

Prof Macintosh: It is all behind.

THE CHAIR: Just not as bad.

MS CHEYNE: But reading is not as behind.

Prof Macintosh: That is right. If you want the full spread, the box and whiskers give you the full spread of what is going on in the schools. We have still got a fair number of schools, even in primary school years, where we have got 25 per cent of our schools that are seemingly still at least six months behind in learning. But then look over at writing and numeracy and it is significantly worse than that.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you, professor, for being here today. What prompted you to write the paper?

Prof Macintosh: I think, as I just said to Michael, at the end of the day education is a cornerstone of our democracy. If we do not get education right, we will end up with having the entire society behind. That is answer one. Answer two is that I am a researcher. This is what I do and I particularly like numbers.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you. On page 5 of your working paper you reference both the 2017 ACT Auditor-General's report *Performance information in ACT public schools* and also the 2016 report by Professor Stephen Lamb of Victoria University who was commissioned by the ACT education directorate. Would you care to elaborate on their findings comparative to yours?

Prof Macintosh: They show the same thing.

MRS KIKKERT: They show the same thing?

Prof Macintosh: Yes. As I said, our paper from 2015 that was finally released in 2017 showed, for higher socio-economic primary schools from 2008 through to 2016, the same thing. In respect of Professor Lamb's analysis—I think he had one year, 2013 data for numeracy and I think writing, from memory—it showed the same thing.

He used different statistical techniques. He did not just simply apply the NAPLAN approach, but his results show exactly the same thing. You can see from the NAPLAN. You do not really have to do it. It shows that the data is that far out that it is glaring. Then the Auditor-General found exactly the same thing for years 2015 and 2016 for government schools only. It does not really matter the way you cut the data; the data is showing the same thing. There is a problem.

I can also say that for 2017 and 2018, we have not gone through the data yet like we had in this paper. But I can assure you from the high level numbers that we have seen that it is the same. The results are going to be pretty much the same.

MRS KIKKERT: What are your views on other standardised tests?

Prof Macintosh: I do not have real strong views. As I said, I am not an expert in education policy; so I do not have any real insight. I know there are quite a few different standardised testing approaches that are applied. In the schools that I have exposure to, they are applying different standardised testing that has been used at the schools. But I have no basis for saying that they are good, bad or indifferent.

MRS KIKKERT: Earlier in your opening remarks you mentioned something about your wanting to talk some more. Is there something in particular that you want to talk about?

Prof Macintosh: No, it is just the value of NAPLAN. As I understand it, NAPLAN is kind of the focus of this inquiry and certainly the benefits or negatives associated with standardised testing. For me, NAPLAN, as I said, coming from my area of strongest expertise—being environment policy—I see this as a fantastic asset. Let me rewind: in most classrooms you will find that teachers test their students and they test their students to see how their children are going and that provides the basis for reporting back to parents. That is fantastic and it needs to happen. Of course, it always needs to happen.

But what NAPLAN allows us to do is, firstly, to allow principals and school leaders to evaluate areas of strength and weakness, so where they are doing well comparative to other schools. That is fantastic. That allows them to pick out the good things they are doing in some subjects, the weaker things they are doing in others and to transport them across. That is the case with reading. As I said before, let us find out what we are doing in reading and at least try to transpose that same sort of approach to writing and numeracy.

The second thing that NAPLAN allows to happen is that it allows our directorate, our

minister and others—the senior policymakers—to evaluate what is going on across our schools, to identify things like this. That is an incredibly powerful tool to be able to say, "Here we seemingly have a systemic problem in a number of subjects; so it begs the question: what are we doing to do to address that situation?"

The third thing it does is that it allows people like me, externals—parents, unions, others—to evaluate school performance and to hold people accountable. That is incredibly important in our system. At the end of the day, we have got school autonomy and I would hope that someone is going to hold people accountable. Preferably, that would be the minister and the directorate. But this system allows external parties to hold people accountable for their performance. It is a government service at the end of the day or it is a private service, but someone is paying.

The final thing is that it allows people to test different approaches. The one that is obvious is different teaching practices. NAPLAN allows people to trial different interventions in their schools and then to test how effective they are in improving performance. As I said before, it also allows schools to say, "I identify other schools that are doing well; let us go and learn about what they are doing at those schools, transport them into our schools, run trials in our schools and then evaluate how effective they are in improving our performance."

If you abandon standardised testing, you abandon that. The only way you can then do it is to hold your own standardised testing practices, pay externals to do it on a case-by-case basis, which I will guarantee you will be more expensive than what NAPLAN is.

MS CHEYNE: To begin with, I know you said that one of the things that is valuable about NAPLAN is that it allows the evaluation of school performance. But is it true that it really only allows the evaluation of school performance in one area? Do you think how schools are doing on NAPLAN is actually indicative of how the school is doing overall?

Prof Macintosh: No, it is not. It tests academic performance and it tests academic performance only. And it tests—

MS CHEYNE: In a very narrow area.

Prof Macintosh: In a particular area, that is right. We could broaden out the test; we could do it in other areas. Then you have got to start asking the questions about the costs versus benefits ratio. What sorts of benefits do we get from broadening out standardised testing across other areas versus the cost of doing it? But certainly if I were going to design a standardised system across the country, I would start here.

MS CHEYNE: Why?

Prof Macintosh: The returns are biggest. At the end of the day the core thing we are trying to get out of schools is teaching knowledge and skills. This is what you get from academic teaching and that is what NAPLAN gives you.

MS CHEYNE: In your paper there are some possible explanations for the

underperformance and you talk about the differences in the attributes and skills of teachers or the differences in teaching practices. Again, I appreciate that we do not have data on that. But how can it be the differences when we are doing so badly overall, when it is so pervasive? It does not matter whether it is government or non-government. Is it really differences? Surely there is a problem that is not necessarily related to different teaching practices. All these schools do have different teaching practices, and yet it is that pervasive.

Prof Macintosh: Starting with teaching practices, do we know? Of course, it is not every school; you can get that from the box and whiskers. Not every school is underperforming. So do we have in the ACT a situation where the majority of schools are applying ineffective teaching practices? I do not know.

MS CHEYNE: So you think that would be worthy of further analysis?

Prof Macintosh: Absolutely.

MS CHEYNE: So of the schools that are underperforming what are the teaching practices they are employing?

Prof Macintosh: I would prefer to do it across the board. Let's find out what are doing across the board. What we want to get out of this is data on those who are doing well. If it turns out that the schools that are doing well are applying one teaching practice and those that are doing poorly are applying another one, that is prima face evidence that that is the causal factor and we can replicate it elsewhere. So you would want to have data across the board.

The other one to put in there is different attributes to the teachers. For that hypothesis to hold, you have to be basically saying that we have got weak teachers, just people with lower skill in the ACT compared to other jurisdictions across the jurisdiction. Personally I do not think that holds water, but we do not know. There are ways of testing that, but I would find that hard to believe. I know quite a few teachers and I do not see them as being low skilled.

MS CHEYNE: Another possible explanation is a greater emphasis being placed on NAPLAN by teachers. Do you think coaching has that amount of influence to really bring a school up from underperforming to performing?

Prof Macintosh: If you coached somebody in how to answer NAPLAN tests and you poured resources into it, I am almost sure you could improve your NAPLAN results. But in order for that to be an explanation of what we are seeing it would have to be across the board again. We would have to see a systemic issue whereby ACT schools are not coaching their kids in NAPLAN in the way that has been applied in other jurisdictions.

It could be the case; it could be that ACT schools place less emphasis on NAPLAN compared to other jurisdictions. I would not write it off immediately. It might be one factor. At the end of the day that would be my guess. We have a couple of things going on here that are driving results, and if I had to hazard a guess I would say it is probably something to do with ICSEA slightly jimmying the numbers a little.

But there are other factors because slight differences in ICSEA values are not going to get you there.

MR WALL: And if the NAPLAN performance increases too much relative to what the underline is, your funding gets trimmed, so there is almost a disincentive to fabricating the NAPLAN score, is there not?

Prof Macintosh: It is interesting. If you look at some of the schools there are some anomalies in ICSEA values. I will not mention any.

MS CHEYNE: You said you could talk about what you think is going to happen with the trend or what we are going to see in 2017 and 2018. What is that?

Prof Macintosh: Same again.

MS CHEYNE: As in continuing to trend down?

Prof Macintosh: I would imagine results are going to be comparable to what we saw in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

MS CHEYNE: You do not think that there is any reason to think we could be improving?

Prof Macintosh: No. The high level data suggests that that has not happened. If anything, there could even be a slight worsening. But my guess is that it will be comparable to what we saw in the previous years.

MR WALL: The report you prepared here is a five-year spread between 2012 and 2016. Have you tracked cohorts through that? So the cohort that took their year 3 in 2012 took year 5 in 2014.

Prof Macintosh: Yes, the cohort data and the way they have changed through time.

MR WALL: Yes. Have you followed that through to see if there is consistent growth with that cohort or if there is deterioration in performance to try to dispel the ICSEA?

Prof Macintosh: We do not have all those data; they come off a different part of the site. Across the board the rate of improvement in the ACT is not as high as you see in comparable schools. We know that. We know that from the data but we also know it from the group data presented in this report. If it were not the case then you would not see that fact in years 3 and 5, and they seemingly get further behind.

MR WALL: The differential gets worse as time goes on.

Prof Macintosh: Yes. As I said before, the line seems to be that rather than that.

MR WALL: So even if there is an issue in the ICSEA rating of schools that shows that over a child's progression through the ACT education system they are not—

Prof Macintosh: They are not progressing at the rate.

MR WALL: They are not attaining the same standard of growth as students in other jurisdictions.

Prof Macintosh: Yes. It is diverging lines. It is the case that the lines seemingly are doing that. And in years 3 and 5 it turns out the lines are closer together and as they go on they get further apart. They are not catching up

MR WALL: Leaving aside the debate around whether it is ICSEA value or not, it would suggest a structural issue inside schools across the territory.

Prof Macintosh: That is what we think, yes.

MR WALL: That is what the data is suggesting.

Prof Macintosh: That is right. We do not have all the cohort data, and that is why I pause there. But from the information we have seen clearly that is the case. We do not progress at the same rate as the SSSGs.

MR WALL: One of the recommendations in your report is an independent inquiry. What do you think the composition of that inquiry should be? Who should conduct it?

Prof Macintosh: I would recruit myself a bunch of basically education specialists, particularly education statisticians, to evaluate what is going on. Plus you would probably need a social scientist to do some of the stuff around teaching practices and what is going on in individual schools. You want to draw that data out.

MS CHEYNE: How long would it take?

Prof Macintosh: How much money do you have? I would say six months, if reasonably resourced. If you get a team of researchers, if that is what you want to do, given that it is a government inquiry it is going to have a head or heads, three people on a panel including an education specialist, one or two real education specialists and then probably a general policy person. Then you would want a group of researchers to work with them to carry out surveys, conduct interviews and analyse the data that we have.

MS CHEYNE: Can you give a ball park figure on what "appropriately resourced" is?

Prof Macintosh: A couple of hundred grand, 300 grand would probably get you over the line, depending on how many resources would come out of the directorate. The directorate have staff that could assist. I know they have a statistical unit that could do the stats. It is the ACT; there are a lot of statisticians who can help out with these sorts of things. Also other institutions specialise explicitly in this stuff.

MS CHEYNE: Is it really worthwhile to do that sort of inquiry, given that this is such a small part of the whole learning journey for a student?

Prof Macintosh: I just hold that up—I think it is incredibly important. At the end of the day, these data are telling us is that we are lagging behind in academics; we are

not performing as well as we should in academic performance. People are not learning the skills that they need to learn.

MS CHEYNE: In numeracy and literacy.

Prof Macintosh: That is right. And it is not just there; it plays into grammar and spelling, but numeracy and literacy are the headline subjects. We are not giving the kids the skills they need. If our results—again, averages—look like that in year 9 they are not catching up by year 12 and it means kids are not graduating with the skills in order to get into decent universities and get into the degrees they want. We are chopping off options for our children.

I think that there is almost nothing more important than carrying out this for the ACT. And I hope to god the result is that it is something to do with NAPLAN because that would make me feel a lot more comfortable. But I do not think it is the case.

MR WALL: As an academic in your local university do you see a disparity in the skills that NAPLAN measures—numeracy, literacy—between students coming from schools and colleges in the ACT compared to counterparts from either overseas or interstate?

Prof Macintosh: That is a really good question. I do not have enough exposure to our early year academics. I do not teach in years 1, 2 and 3. Law obviously has five years—we subject them to torture. But it would be a really interesting question to ask our academics in the big subjects and the house disciplines in law doing undergrads whether they are seeing a disparity between them. We do not identify them, of course, but there would be data to identify whether those students are turning up and then lagging.

The problem is we get only people who score over 98.8 or something so we are getting the very high achievers. It would be interesting to do it at UC and other parts of ANU that teach a broader cross-section of people.

MS CHEYNE: Or even just following students wherever they go.

Prof Macintosh: Yes. It would be really interesting. I do not have the year 12 data, the ATAR scores for across the territory. They too would be great to interrogate to find out if we see the same patterns in our ATAR scores—

MR WALL: Does our bell curve line up with other jurisdictions?

Prof Macintosh: Yes. That is right. You can do the same analysis, obviously not out of NAPLAN but you can do exactly the same statistical analysis to find out whether, after you control for socio-economic status, our children are underperforming relative to other jurisdictions.

THE CHAIR: You are quite a proponent of direct instruction. How across the current teaching methods in ACT schools are you? Do you know if schools are utilising this method?

Prof Macintosh: No. And I would not even say that I am a massive proponent of direct instruction. I know that it works. I have seen it work. I know that the evidence suggests that it works. That is all I can say. I am not a massive proponent of it. As I said before, I just think we should be led where the evidence shows us. The evidence is that consistent studies have been done on direct instruction since the 1960s in the United States and they consistently show it works. It is always listed as one of their factors that is correlated to good performance. That, to me, suggests that it does work. That is why I think we should do a trial.

If we did a trial in the ACT we could see whether this pays dividends in the ACT. We can actually show it. My guess, having seen the evidence, is that it would work. The data suggests it does. For me, the real benefit of doing those trials in the ACT is to show that it does work, to show people in the ACT that it does work. But I do not really see myself as a big spruiker of direct instruction. My guess is that it is not the solution to everything. There is a whole bunch of things that influence academic outcomes at schools. Teaching practices is one of them. I would be suggesting that we need to look across the board at all the factors that influence academic outcomes and pursue all of them simultaneously, rather than hanging our hat purely on one thing.

MS CHEYNE: And isn't one of those things that influence academic outcomes the kind of start you get in life? We have certainly got to focus on early childhood education and trying to make sure kids have an equitable start to their education. I think there have been studies that have shown that if you are behind in year 1 you do not really ever catch up.

Prof Macintosh: Data seems to suggest the same thing; that is right.

MS CHEYNE: Yes, that is why—

Prof Macintosh: A good start—that is right. Good early childhood education matters. Expectations matter. Your household situation obviously matters. Teaching practices matter. The quality of your teacher matters. There is a whole bunch of things that the research in this space illustrates or demonstrates: tells us what works in this space. That is why I say again that we have got to actually pursue all of them. A six-month inquiry that costs us somewhere between $300,000 and $500,000 would give us a better picture of where we are falling down against all of those things that we know work and which ones are we not doing well.

THE CHAIR: If you could, in what ways would you improve NAPLAN?

Prof Macintosh: Look, I am not in a position really to say. I am not an education specialist. To me, it has a whole bunch of features that are really good. I love the fact that they have the standardised scores that allow you to make comparisons between years. I love the fact that you can extract the data and do these sorts of analyses. I love the fact that it collects information on socioeconomic status. The one thing that I probably would change is not how the test is conducted, although obviously this year's issues with online—it is not ideal. Again, I do not have the specialist knowledge to be able to evaluate the comparability between the results, but obviously the thing was not good for NAPLAN's reputation.

What I would change is the accessibility of the data. As I said, one of the key things that you get out of this is the ability to hold people accountable. The difficulty we have in extracting these data should not happen. These are our data. These are the public's data. I do not like league tables. Comparisons have to be apples to apples. But NAPLAN allows you to make those comparisons. At the very least we should be able to extract these sorts of data that allow you to make comparisons between schools that are genuinely, properly comparable. We should be able to access those data for all years, and everybody should have access to them so that people can just do this analysis without having to go through the rigmarole of extracting information, which is not all that easy.

MRS KIKKERT: We have heard from many people that it is just far too stressful for young kids—and older kids, teenagers—to go through test after test. They prepare for the NAPLAN test several weeks beforehand and also sit for the test, and sometimes parents leave their children at home because they do not want them to be exposed to such a stressful experience. What are your views on that?

Prof Macintosh: I have not seen any evidence. I have heard the anecdotal stories about people getting really stressed about them. Of course nobody wants to see children being overly stressed. That is not a good thing. But then again I have not seen any data to show that it is a systemic issue. In any of these tests there are going to be children who get anxiety about it. And I would add that I think that conducting this sort of system-wide testing that we have with NAPLAN gives people a chance to identify those kids who have those characteristics, who get stressed in tests. At the end of the day, whoever you are, you are going to have to do tests at times in your life. It is unavoidable. So it gives the opportunity to treat them at the same time and go through processes to help people who suffer those sorts of anxieties. But before we do anything, I would like to see some data on to what extent this is a problem.

MRS KIKKERT: That is really good feedback, actually. It provides teachers and parents with ideas of where their child is at and also provides tools for them to deal with mental health issues.

Prof Macintosh: It certainly exposes the people who have those sorts of issues, who get stressed and have anxiety over tests. Hopefully, having identified those children, it follows that people adopt interventions in order to help those children. That does not necessarily follow, of course, but it certainly does expose at an early age if that sort of thing is part of a child's profile.

MS CHEYNE: This is a cute question, just to follow on from that. In terms of possible explanations, could it be that ACT kids get more stressed?

Prof Macintosh: It could be. It could be that we are hopeless high achievers, that we are all aspirational and have that classic middle-class anxiety, that we just embody it. Look at us. We are all hopelessly over-educated and as a consequence we have higher rates of anxiety. It is possible. But we will never know. When you talk to people about this stuff, you hear a million excuses about what could explain it. We have turnovers in our student population, for example, because of the transient nature of the ACT's population. It is possible, particularly in certain schools. There are certain schools that have really high turnovers, through no fault of their own. The Defence

schools would have really high turnovers and expect them to have issues. Is that skewing the numbers a little? Probably. Does it explain everything? Probably not. But there is a whole bunch of other issues that are thrown up and excuses that are thrown out there. This is why I say we need to unpack them. We need to find out which ones are valid and which ones are not, and which schools suffer those sorts of issues. There are particular schools that get treated unfairly; their numbers just are not comparable. They have to be identified and basically protected from bad reputations that are completely undeserved.

MR WALL: This may be more of an anecdotal answer from you, given that it is outside your area of expertise, but do you think that the community, parents specifically, have enough information on or enough guidance in interpreting the results for their student, their school or the education sector as a whole? You said that it is an opportunity to hold them to account. But do you think that the community is informed enough about the actual results rather than just the hype of NAPLAN to interpret—

Prof Macintosh: I think there still needs to be more education about the fact that you have got to compare apples with apples; that it is the comparison to your SSSG that really matters. I do not think that that has got through. I am a parent of three children, and I have these data presented to me and the information sheets that come with it. Personally I find it relatively easy to read, but I am highly literate in NAPLAN and those subjects. I question, probably like you, whether the broad community is fully across what NAPLAN means, what the results mean and which comparisons we should be making, both at the school level and for your child.

You have probably seen the results you get at the child level. They plot you, and that is really useful information you get. It compares you against your class and against the national mean, and against your SSSG mean, I think, too. That is really useful information but I imagine that there are quite a few parents out there who do not fully understand what they are looking at. Also I am pretty sure you do not get your school data and the comparison between your school and your SSGGs. You do not get those data as a parent, and that would be useful. It would be useful not only for individual years but through time. Let us say you have 100 children in a year, because of the size you are going to get variability in your results, so you need that time series.

MR WALL: Ten high performers are going to—

Prof Macintosh: Skew your numbers. You expect the numbers to bounce around a bit, and having that time series gives you a much better picture about how the school is performing as opposed to one year where it can just be a cohort that shifts the numbers.

MRS KIKKERT: Who does that? Recommending that the comparisons of the school year throughout the whole school and also in previous years—who recommends it? Is it up to the education directorate in each state to specify what information it passes on to teachers?

Prof Macintosh: I am not sure. My guess is that ACARA has quite a lot of control over what data gets put out, but you would have to ask the directorate the extent to

which they have input into the presentation of the data. As I understand it, I do not think our directorate has complete control over the way it uses the data. ACARA has real control.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay, thank you.

Prof Macintosh: That is your understanding too?

MR WALL: That is my understanding, yes. Ultimately it is their data.

Prof Macintosh: Yes. I would like to say it is ours but that is okay.

THE CHAIR: I have a very similar question. Does the directorate get the data in a different format to what is publicly accessible?

Prof Macintosh: Yes, as I understand it. The directorate gets different data. The schools get different data. The schools get student-level data, including the progression data. The directorate gets those data, as I understand. I am pretty sure that the commonwealth education department does not get those data, which is another curious thing. I would have thought that the commonwealth education department should have those data as a matter of course but I am pretty sure that they do not.

MRS KIKKERT: The minister and the education directorate have known about this data for many years now—and more data as well?

Prof Macintosh: Certainly it has known that there have been systemic problems with performance in NAPLAN since at least 2015.

THE CHAIR: With that, I think we are all out of questions. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all witnesses who have appeared today. The secretary will provide you with a copy of the proof transcript of today's hearing when it is available. If you have taken any questions on notice, could you please get those back to the committee secretary as soon as possible. I would like to thank you for attending.

Prof Macintosh: Thanks very much.

The committee adjourned at 3.15 pm.