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Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Indigenous education funding arrangements

WEDNESDAY, 30 MARCH 2005

PORT HEADLAND

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 March 2005

Members: Senator Crossin (*Chair*), Senators Barnett, Jacinta Collins, Kirk Stott

Despoja and Tierney

Substitute members: Senator Allison to replace Senator Stott Despoja for matters relating to the Schools and Training portfolio

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Bartlett, Boswell, Buckland, George Campbell, Carr, Chapman, Cherry, Colbeck, Coonan, Denman, Eggleston, Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Fifield, Forshaw, Harradine, Humphries, Hutchins, Johnston, Knowles, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Mackay, Marshall, Mason, McGauran, McLucas, Moore, Nettle, O'Brien, Payne, Ray, Santoro, Sherry, Stephens, Watson, Webber and Wong

Senators in attendance: Senators Allison, Crossin, Kirk and Johnston

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The implications of the Government's proposed changes to funding arrangements for targeted assistance in Indigenous education, as contained in the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004, and in particular:

1. Proposed changes to the IEDA and IESIP programs, with reference to:
 - the new tutorial assistance arrangements and Whole of School Intervention strategy under IEDA, and
 - new strategic initiatives for indigenous students in remote areas and the new flagship project for teaching literacy under IESIP.
2. The likely educational outcomes of the Commonwealth's new indigenous-specific funding measures, with reference to:
 - the Indigenous Youth Leadership and Indigenous Youth Mobility Programs, and
 - the Government's objective of accelerating educational outcomes for indigenous students, as stated in the 10-point national agenda for schooling announced in November 2003.
3. The accountability requirements applying to funding agreements made under IEDA and IESIP programs, with reference to:
 - the new framework of performance monitoring and reporting on educational outcomes, and
 - the new financial reporting arrangements.
4. The effect of the proposed funding measures on current state and other systemic indigenous programs, and future implications for the operation of ASSPA committees.
5. The extent of consultation between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, schools and parents, especially ASSPA committees, about policies and details of changes to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000.

Committee met at 11 a.m.

CHAIR—Welcome. I declare open this hearing of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee here in Port Headland. On 7 December 2004, the Senate referred to this committee an inquiry into the implications arising from changes to targeted assistance in Indigenous education. These changes will follow with the implementation of the Indigenous Education (Financial Assistance) Bill 2004, agreed to in the last sitting week in 2004. I thank those present for having us here today. We are recording today's proceedings. If you want to tell us anything in confidence we can organise for the committee to go in camera. That would mean that anything you say to us when the committee is in camera could not be used in our report. Because the session is being recorded it is almost like a mini session of the Senate, so whatever you tell us is protected by parliamentary privilege.

New Speaker—I am Janet Matthews, principal at South Headland Primary School. I have been principal since the beginning of 2004. The school has approximately 330 students, 75 per cent of whom are Aboriginal. I was very keen to be involved in this inquiry when I was offered the opportunity because the changes to the funding for Aboriginal students within the school have had serious implications for us from the start of this year. The time frame for funding has been highly inappropriate for school use.

One of the issues we have is that we have relied on funding through ASSPA, especially, which is the Aboriginal support program for parents, to initiate a number of programs within the school. They include breakfast programs, lunch programs, curriculum support programs, fitness and health programs and social programs, including pastoral care. I noticed when I read the terms of reference for the Senate committee that the time for submissions had closed before we were even aware of the funding process. So we were not aware of how we were going to apply for these funds until after school commenced—probably the very end of February. I think 18 February was the closing date for submissions. The process for funding is protracted. It goes through four stages. We had to put in quite a lot of documentation and ultimately we do not know whether we will get any funding by the time it goes through the four stages. Yvonne was involved in that so I will let her explain to you how she had to go about applying for funding.

CHAIR—How much funding did you get last year under the ASSPA funding?

New Speaker—About \$50,000.

CHAIR—What sort of programs did that fund?

New Speaker—Some nutrition programs, physical health and fitness, curriculum support programs and NAIDOC week, which is the big cultural event. It was divided up so that a certain amount went to learning programs, a certain amount went to social programs and a certain amount went to bringing parents into the community. Quite a lot goes into bringing the community into schools. I will refer to the program for NAIDOC week in a moment. It was all designed to be spread over certain areas, and we used all the funding. We also use it for school swimming—you probably saw the bus just leave.

New Speaker—I am Yvonne Denham. Last year the kids paid \$10 and this year they have had to pay the full amount—\$30. It is quite difficult for our families, especially if they have three, four or five kids going swimming. The funding subsidised excursions as well.

New Speaker—This is Janet again: we have 140 or less students going to swimming whereas normally we would virtually have the whole school going. Last year I think almost every student went unless they had an ear infection or something.

CHAIR—Kids are not attending the swimming program because it is too expensive to find the fees?

New Speaker—Yes, and at the moment staff are buying loaves of bread and giving the kids vegemite sandwiches for lunch.

Senator JOHNSTON—What sort of money are we talking about?

New Speaker—For staff?

Senator JOHNSTON—For the swimming.

New Speaker—It has been \$30 every year for many years. This year they actually made it \$40 with a week's warning. So our parents have actually paid \$30 for each child. That is just for pool entry and the bus.

Senator JOHNSTON—And that is every week, once a week or twice a week?

New Speaker—Sorry, that is for 10 lessons over two weeks.

CHAIR—But with the ASSPA funding some parents only had to pay \$10 because you could subsidise it?

New Speaker—Yes. Probably most of our Aboriginal parents only paid \$10 per child, not \$10 altogether. It is the same with school camps for years 6 and 7. Some families had full funding if we felt that they were genuinely needy families or they had extended pay periods to pay for camp. What they could not pay by the end of the year we then subsidised. There is no guarantee that we can rely on any funding for things like that at the moment.

New Speaker—I think ASSPA funded the bus and stuff like that for camps.

New Speaker—This is Janet speaking: yes, they always hired the bus and a small group of kids—there were maybe 20 kids last year, I think—were funded for camp.

New Speaker—That is quite significant. It is \$3,000 or \$4,000 to hire a bus to take them to either Coral Bay or Broome, so it is quite a significant amount.

Senator JOHNSTON—Just for the record for our Eastern States readers, Coral Bay is about 700 or 800 kilometres away?

New Speaker—Yes, Coral Bay is 800 kilometres away and Broome is 630 kilometres away.

New Speaker—They are the best beaches in Australia.

New Speaker—This is Janet again: they went to Broome last year so it is Coral Bay this year. The things that we are really noticing are the opportunities to give kids nutrition. I know one school has contacted Centrelink and some of the parents have actually signed forms to allow \$4 a day to be removed from their Centrelink payments to pay for school lunches. That is \$20 for one child. Some of our families have four children. Whether they are able to have it or not, some of the kids are just coming to school without breakfast and lunch. Our Aboriginal staff do a check of each block to see who does not have lunch. Then, as I said, we have been making vegemite sandwiches.

Senator JOHNSTON—The teachers have been funding that themselves?

New Speaker—Yes, pretty much, or the Aboriginal staff have. We have one Aboriginal teacher and the others are non-teachers—they are AIEOs and teacher assistants. We did look at maybe getting leftover bread from Action or Coles or the bakery. The high school beat us to the bakery and Action has a policy of not giving out any food. I did not actually go to Coles because I thought their policy was the same. By then we were just grabbing a loaf of bread and using it.

New Speaker—We actually had a fruit program as well last year for morning break at recess time. We would have a big bowl of fruit in every block and the kids could go and grab a piece of fruit at recess time.

New Speaker—This is Janet again: while the program outline is talking about curriculum and putting a lot of emphasis on that, you cannot teach kids with empty stomachs. Their behaviour becomes more erratic. The kids do not really like vegemite sandwiches. We did have a policy through ASSPA where people could get three emergency lunches a term. We also had cracker biscuits and cheese or something on the blocks for dire straits people who had used their emergency lunches. Most of the community respected those three emergency lunches. If a child is hungry, legally we cannot use school funds for that purpose. Anyway, if we used school funds for that purpose, we would not have the school funds we need for the things we are supposed to be using them for. So it has really created hardship for our school. The process, I think, goes to DEST here first, doesn't it, Yvonne?

New Speaker—It does. Initially you write a concept plan addressing certain areas. That goes to DEST, who forward it to the education district council in Karratha. The story we got was that the plans would be ranked, returned to DEST in South Hedland and then go to DEST in Perth. It is fine once they have gone through that process, but there is no guarantee they will come back to you and invite you to put in an application for the funding. So by the time it gets back to us it is probably going to be April or May and then we still need to put in the application for funding. Of course, we do not know which parts are going to be approved and which are not. It is a long, complicated process. It requires a lot of consultation with the community and, at the start of the year, rounding people up and getting them together to go through that process was not easy.

New Speaker—We have a lot of people going through lore at the beginning of the year, so they are not around the town to consult with.

New Speaker—When people go through lore, they leave and go out to the communities. A lot of people went to Yandeyarra, which is an hour's drive or about 100 kilometres. Some of those people left in late November, quite a lot left in December and the last ones came back about three weeks ago. A lot of people in the town are very traditional and like to have input into decision making, but it is hard for us to attract people and get them in, as Yvonne said, so that made it really difficult.

CHAIR—So last year you had a functioning ASSPA committee which got the bucket of money and decided where it was going to be spent. What has changed this year? Do you have a functioning ASSPA committee?

New Speaker—No, not really.

New Speaker—The ASSPA committee were not very interested in the process unless they were having some say in the spending of the money.

CHAIR—Do you mean this year?

New Speaker—Yes.

New Speaker—They have had input to the concept plan, but that has been it—it is going to come into the school. I think that ASSPA funding, in principle, was a really good idea. I know it was abused, and that is one of the reasons why the process has been changed. Unfortunately, that has probably penalised those ASSPA committees that have worked in close liaison with the schools, but, as far as I am concerned, there are much simpler ways of distributing the same amount of money, such as per head of population. If the schools know they are going to get a certain amount of money, say \$50,000, they can then submit their concept plan. They can say: 'We have got \$50,000 and these are the areas we need to target. We know that there are the issues of literacy numeracy, attendance and parent participation. How are we going to do that?' Your acquittal is based on the plan.

CHAIR—But therein lies the very problem with the changes. Your funding is not certain any more, is it?

New Speaker—It is totally uncertain.

CHAIR—In fact, you might get only \$20,000 of the \$50,000. If you have put in for, say, \$70,000 you might be lucky enough to get that. We now understand that there is already a particular allocation of money for this district, so there is only a certain bucket of funds.

New Speaker—We have really been kept in the dark.

CHAIR—The common problem we heard when we were in the Territory and with people yesterday was that there is no guarantee now.

New Speaker—No, and there will be nothing before the July gateway when the schools' next funding comes through. The first gateway is in February—

CHAIR—You are always going to be six months behind in implementing the programs you want to implement.

New Speaker—Exactly.

New Speaker—Also, we now have to put in a separate application for NAIDOC Week, a separate application for this and another application for that. So we are constantly having to write applications for money when there is no guarantee we are going to get it. I can understand why schools like Port Hedland which have small Indigenous populations have simply said: ‘We won’t bother. We will find the money elsewhere.’

CHAIR—So your parents are feeling frustrated and disempowered?

New Speaker—At the first ASSPA meeting—I have been in three schools with significant Aboriginal populations—there is always a very good roll-up of parents because a lot of the decision making is made at the AGM and that is where parents find out how much funding the school is going to get. That does drop off through the year, down to the real hard-core people. Just like any P&C, initially you might get 20 out of 80 attend and then you might get six or seven attend for the rest of the year. There was no interest at all in having a meeting for a process which did not have any idea of funding. That process is where the Aboriginal community really feel they have a say in what is happening with their kids education.

It is unfortunate that the community has not made the leap to being like a P&C to try and generate funds, but I do not think that is going to happen in very many places. I do not think it is about an expectation to have the money but rather a genuine reticence about putting yourself forward to do that promotional stuff. Most Aboriginal people are very shy and very modest, which are two things that would put them off.

We probably spent between \$10,000 and \$15,000 on NAIDOC Week. We had an enormous number of people at the school. The Aboriginal people who came and spoke to groups of students were mostly the old people. They are on pensions and get paid through a speakers program. The men went out and hunted. The school was like an open air restaurant. There was cooking. The people had bain-maries and everything with all the food in big hotpots. They had hired a lot of facilities to be able to do this.

It was just wonderful. We would have had 400 people out in the playground. That is more or less the traditional area in the school where the people have always met and cooked. Every penny that went on that week was worth while, because it just brought so many people in. People from other schools came down and visited, including a few of the staff.

Senator JOHNSTON—That is a bit of a model for other schools on how to do their NAIDOC Week.

New Speaker—It was really good. There had been an experiment to see whether or not having NAIDOC Week or having cultural activities through the year would be the best way to integrate some of the cultural studies. It just proved that having a set week really makes a difference.

CHAIR—If you are not going to get your funding until July or August, how can you plan your NAIDOC celebrations?

New Speaker—We cannot. The other thing is that I heard that the maximum amount we can apply for for NAIDOC Week is \$1,500.

Senator ALLISON—What did you spend on it?

New Speaker—I am not sure, but probably between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

CHAIR—Where did you hear that there was a cap on it? Who told you that there was a cap on the funds for NAIDOC Week?

New Speaker—I saw the form. Someone got the form for me. To be perfectly honest, I thought I read somewhere that there would be grants of up to \$1,500. I would have to check back. It is possibly in my work basket.

New Speaker—Another issue is our Aboriginal language program, which NAIDOC also helped to fund.

New Speaker—Yes. Sally can explain that. You went to South Australia, didn't you, before I came?

New Speaker—Yes, not long ago. They helped to fund that. We use the local language, Nyangumarta, for the children, but they are also offered Indonesian. The kids get a choice of which language they would like to learn, but probably 80 per cent of them learn Nyangumarta. The ASSPA committee used to help us fund things to do with the program, like buying resources and things like that. Also, if the kids went on a trip to the beach or out to the bush, the ASSPA committee would fund the bus and food and whatever else for the kids so that they could do that. That has gone now as well.

New Speaker—I really think that the ASSPA program here is a very good one. Before I was a principal I taught in a city school with about a 60 per cent Aboriginal population. There is a bit more vision here for using the funding. We had an art exhibition to open NAIDOC week. We had one of the elders open it. It was really like a professional art exhibition. From that, BHP and the art gallery said, 'We'd like to combine with you to do something bigger next year.' The practicalities will be that we probably will not be able to do anything bigger. BHP were going to fund some prizes. We had to buy staff for that; we could use some of our funding. Everything is a little less because we are trying to allocate some money to keep these programs going without knowing what will happen. Where they are learning programs you can do that; you can incorporate them through your cultural studies and things. We are supporting what we are losing when we can only do that marginally. I do not know if that makes sense. If we are looking at language or the arts then we have to look at it through the art program in the school, and we only get so much in our budget. When our whole program for art is probably a couple of thousand dollars, we had a \$2,500 budget for the NAIDOC project through the NAIDOC week planning for the art project. We just do not have that flexibility.

New Speaker—It helped top up those sorts of things.

New Speaker—Yes, it topped up a lot of things. It was really good. It was great because people actually came and looked in at the school through the week. Our school does not attract a lot of external visitors. When I came last year I was very conscious of the fact that we had to lift our image, and we have worked hard to do that. These things have helped us do that. When Andrew came this year, he made that comment that someone said something about at the shopping centre. You asked what the schools were like, fishing around a bit, because Andrew has a little boy, and you heard quite a positive comment about the school. You used to hear a lot about South Hedland primary, but you do not hear much negative stuff at all these days. We worked very hard for that, but it takes money to help you do those things. We are really suffering; I am not going to pretend we are not.

CHAIR—Tell us a bit now about the ITAS.

New Speaker—We had an ATAS teacher last year. We have applied again. It was brilliant, because it targeted Aboriginal students close to the benchmark. Because you are on an education fact finding mission, you probably all know about the benchmark. We had a full-time teacher for two terms. She worked with about 25 students in small group work. It was very interesting. One of my friends is in the section of the department where they analyse all the test results. He contacted me and said, ‘We’re very interested in these five students. They’ve made a lot of progress in three areas, but not in writing.’ When I researched it, they were five of her students. She had gone through a process where she decided listening and speaking were the keys to improving their literacy. So she started off with listening and speaking and concentration games. I think she had most groups for about 40 minutes or an hour a day.

New Speaker—Probably an hour.

New Speaker—And then she went from listening and speaking to spelling and reading. Writing was last. The WALNA testing is actually in August and she stayed through till the end of third term, which is September, so the writing did not actually show in the WALNA testing because of the way the progression went. But it was very interesting that all those kids actually moved. We have applied for a teacher again. At the end of last year when they came to do a review and meet the teacher and the kids, we asked about ATAS for this year—now it is ITAS. The comment then was that they did not know if they would keep a teacher in the same school or the same district or whether they would move districts and give someone else a year. That is okay, but it seemed a bit negative, because you need to have a bit more impetus than a year. However, I think they have actually increased that program. I think the idea is to increase that program, which would be excellent.

CHAIR—So how many children did not reach the benchmark?

New Speaker—Exactly how many? This program was attracting the kids close to the benchmark. In that group we had probably about 25 students. But we would have had as many as that below—

New Speaker—That was only from years 4 and 5.

New Speaker—That was years 4 and 5. We would have had funding—

New Speaker—You know that the changes to the guidelines mean that only those who fail year 3, 5 and 7 generate the funding.

New Speaker—I could print it off for you immediately and show you how many were below.

CHAIR—So you are talking about probably 20 or 25?

New Speaker—We are talking about a third of our kids being below the benchmark.

CHAIR—Okay

New Speaker—We are looking at about a third of our kids being below the benchmark, and we have some who are very well below.

CHAIR—So you have applied for that funding?

New Speaker—It will come as a teacher.

CHAIR—When are you likely to know about that?

New Speaker—They thought that the information would be going out last week, so I emailed to see if we were getting a teacher. But there has been a hold-up in the notifications so they are anticipating that it will be before the end of term.

Senator ALLISON—Let us go back to how you decide which student is given the tutoring. You said that this teacher dealt with only 20 students. Is that right?

New Speaker—Yes. Last year, the guidelines were that they were to deal with students just below the benchmark. In a moment we will show you—

Senator ALLISON—At every level?

New Speaker—No, at years 4 and 5.

New Speaker—We looked at the year 3 testing.

New Speaker—To see where they had been.

Senator ALLISON—So there is no tutoring for the ones who were well below?

New Speaker—No.

Senator ALLISON—What is the rationale for that?

New Speaker—Funding will ideally be higher now they are going for all those below the benchmark. But I think that if you want to make a change you are going to have a better opportunity of doing so with students who are close to the benchmark rather than with ones who

are well below it. Some of those students who are below probably do not have good attendance. If you want to make a significant change, there is a lot to work with with someone who is just below the benchmark. A much longer process is required for someone who is well below the benchmark. But the success of the program is probably what has encouraged them to now go to students well below the benchmark—to anyone below the benchmark. The maximum was a teacher and we had enough students last year to have had two teachers, but I do not think they could have done a better job. The teacher working with the kids stayed with the same kids right through. But now they are looking at two levels, I suppose. If we got two teachers, we could definitely use them.

CHAIR—So you did not target the tutorial assistant at grades 1, 3 or 4?

New Speaker—No, because we cannot get teachers here. That had to be a teacher—

CHAIR—Not even tutors? You did not use tutors?

New Speaker—No. The guidelines for the juniors were not for tutors. It had to be a teacher. We would not have qualified for a full-time teacher and there are no part-time teachers up here now. Basically, there were some teachers here who were wives of people from BHP Billiton and so on. A number of those have left because of the close-down. At the moment, how many relief teachers do we have available?

New Speaker—About two.

New Speaker—Two for the town. Are these last year's figures for those below the benchmark in year 3?

New Speaker—These are last year's.

New Speaker—For the—

New Speaker—For reading?

New Speaker—Yes.

New Speaker—Aboriginal students or all students?

New Speaker—Aboriginal students.

New Speaker—Seven in year 3, eight in year 5 and 12 in year 7—which has gone now, of course. That is reading.

New Speaker—That was reading.

New Speaker—I can do the same in writing, spelling and numeracy.

New Speaker—It will be roughly the same.

New Speaker—We had our year 4 and year 5 kids in that.

New Speaker—Yes. That was taken from their year 3 tests.

New Speaker—The year 3s.

CHAIR—ITAS funding will now be generated on 30 students.

New Speaker—Yes. It was probably about 30 students. But we did have a bigger tail in year 3 this year. That was last year's year 3s, the year before. They are not the ones we were targeting before. I know Pam did the list. I think it is about 30 students again.

CHAIR—Is there some concern that you will get the tutorial money later in the year rather than at the start of the year?

New Speaker—It would be better at the very beginning. Last year it was 20 weeks. This time it came out with the possibility of 30 weeks, so I assumed it would be in terms 2, 3 and 4. But really terms 1, 2 and 3 would be of more benefit than terms 2, 3 and 4. Halfway through term 1 to halfway through term 4 even would be better, but the earlier you get it the better.

CHAIR—So what is the hold-up? You do the WALNA testing in August.

New Speaker—Yes.

CHAIR—Is there any way in which you would have those numbers and could calculate it before the end of the school year so that the money is there, ready for the next school year? Is it possible to do that?

New Speaker—Absolutely. It is absolutely possible.

New Speaker—The only problem with it would be the fact that we have a lot of transient children. That would be the only difficulty with that. But certainly, if you could put in those at the end of the year so that you could start at the start of the year, that would be fabulous.

CHAIR—How many kids do you have here who do not sit the test because they are away that day or they are not around?

New Speaker—We did not actually have very many. You would be able to check that pretty much on the screen. We did not have very many who were away. I was surprised that we did not have any results for one boy, because he was always at school, but then I found that he had gone to Tom Price for a week and he had done the test there. I went looking for his results for another reason myself, because he transferred somewhere. Our attendance is worse in junior primary.

New Speaker—For example, in the reading, in year 3 last year there were 38 students and four students did not sit the test.

New Speaker—Yes. But we do tell them that it is really important for them to be at school to do the test.

New Speaker—Especially if the funding is going to rely on it.

CHAIR—That is right, because the funding does not take account of those people who are not here.

New Speaker—But it is not just that.

New Speaker—We have some special ed students who come back in the afternoons for inclusive afternoons, but they are not here during the testing time. They are at Cassia. They do not usually sit the tests—we would not include them, anyway—but now they can be excluded from the school statistics and so on. I saw the ITAS as one of the most positive things for Aboriginal education—to have that person. The kids did some small group work. Initially they were hoping that it would work better with the teacher being in the classroom with the students, but the students really did not want that. They did not want to feel shamed. So then I contacted them and they said, ‘No, the comfort of the students is more important.’ But they did a lot of things where they took what they were doing back to the class or they invited the class to see things. They had the parents come in to see the little books they had made. That, to me, was a really great way of using the funding. It was very good indeed.

Senator CARR—I have been listening quietly. How often do you have the situation where funding is delayed for so long?

New Speaker—This has been the worst delay that I have known, but it was because there were just no parameters. We had no idea. There were no guidelines whatsoever.

New Speaker—We just knew that it had changed and it was changing, but no-one knew for sure exactly how it was changing and what impact that would have on us.

New Speaker—I was at Derby District High School last year and it came up in admin meetings that the whole thing has changed and nobody really knows what to do or how to go about doing it. We just have to apply for this big bucket of money and just write down everything. There is confusion across the board.

CHAIR—You might have missed it, but it was interesting that Jan was saying that they did not find out about the changes in the guidelines till after submissions to our inquiry closed.

New Speaker—We did not know what we needed to do. We did not know what the process was. When I read that I could not believe it. I was really interested and very pleased that we have actually had the opportunity to know a little more about what goes on, because when Tim spoke to me—and then I got it off the net—I was really amazed. There has not been very good communication about it at all, from my point of view. Whenever there were meetings, the comment from everyone was: ‘No-one is sure of the process yet,’ or ‘The plans for the process have not been formalised.’ We did not know it was a four-stage process until we started writing the submission. And we really do not know how appropriate our submission is.

Senator JOHNSTON—So you have had no assistance in terms of how to properly and efficiently go about applying for the funding?

New Speaker—We had this booklet.

Senator JOHNSTON—Tell us about your understanding of the booklet.

New Speaker—The booklet has a lot of empty pages! It lists who may apply in the index. It says: ‘Funding submission information has been created to assist applicants, both individuals and organisations, in applying.’ We looked at it and we did not really think it was much assistance at all. I know another school just wrote down everything they did last year and put that in for their submission. They were not as reliant on funds; however, they have a significant Aboriginal population—over 30 per cent, I think. Another school I know with 20 Aboriginal students just said, ‘We’re not bothering.’ In a way I was really very cynical and I really looked upon it as: ‘Is this the whole plan for the funding change? Is it because it is going to be so complicated and so uncertain that they are hoping that a lot of schools will not bother to put in for funding?’ If people came along and asked what we did in our school and we walked people through, I think we could justify every cent of the funding that we have had. We are very moral in the way we use it. I truly believe that. We use it according to the guidelines.

CHAIR—With these guidelines, submissions for NAIDOC funding go through the ICCs.

New Speaker—Did I give you the wrong one? I beg your pardon.

CHAIR—No, we might get of copy of this. Are you telling us that submissions for any funding you want for NAIDOC Week celebrations now go to the ICC and not to DEST?

New Speaker—I am sorry, I thought I had the other one. Yes, those submissions must go to the ICC.

CHAIR—In the past, when you would have got a bucket of funding coming to the school under ASSPA, you could have used that money for NAIDOC?

New Speaker—It was perfect for NAIDOC.

New Speaker—We cannot use it for NAIDOC now because we are targeting literacy and numeracy, attendance and parent participation. Even though some of the incursions or excursions that you may do in NAIDOC Week are literacy based, basically you cannot use it for NAIDOC Week, like we did with—

CHAIR—If you want money for NAIDOC Week you now have to apply through the ICC. So NAIDOC Week activities are not seen to be strictly educational now?

New Speaker—That is the implication. I just feel that the implication—this is a personal interpretation—is that people are not using money in the way we presume. A lot of emphasis in education currently is on data collection to show improvement. I think there are a lot of things we use the funding for that lead to improvement, but it is like going up a mountain—there are a lot of pathways up a mountain. I know that is a corny analogy. But you have to make people want to learn. You are not necessarily going to make people want to learn by just saying, ‘What we are looking at is literacy and numeracy.’ NAIDOC was perfect for parental participation and attendance, but there is nothing more important to Aboriginal people than their culture. That is

where we put a lot of our funding. Our greatest emphasis, I suppose, is on culture. I know that I make lots of mistakes, but we have a lot of really good people around us who let us know if we do something that is culturally inappropriate. They are the avenues by which you reach people. We need to reach people to get their children into our schools. Ultimately, that is what we need to do.

CHAIR—And there are a couple of Indigenous parents here?

New Speaker—These are two of my wonderful staff. They have come here especially to meet you.

CHAIR—Do you want to come and join us at the table?

New Speaker—Yes, Nora and Denise, please come over.

Senator CARR—Can I put to you another proposition which is sometimes put to us. If you are a public servant in Canberra, you have a view that the Commonwealth spends all of this money and the states are basically siphoning it off for administration or whatever—or nefarious activities, as public servants in Canberra would see it. Governments and politicians do too; I am not confining it to them. If you are a schoolteacher—and I have been both; I have done the schoolteacher bit and I have done the politician bit—you do not look at it in terms of pots of money with strict lines of accountability. So long as you are not stealing the money and getting new carpet put down at home, you look upon it as a resource.

New Speaker—It is definitely a resource.

Senator CARR—You have a lot of kids. You are trying to meet educational objectives and not these bureaucratic requirements. So we are caught here. On the one hand, if I were to play the devil's advocate and try to find any rationale here at all, the Commonwealth is saying, 'We are trying to improve accountability because Labor senators keep giving us buggery in the Senate estimates.' They want to be able to show that they are spending the money in a certain way. The problem is that, when it boils down to you, you do not care about all of that stuff. Would that be a fair description of it?

New Speaker—No, I would say that we have always worked within the guidelines, although sometimes the guidelines frustrate us. It is true and not true. For example, we use ASSPA funding for a bus for camp, although not all of our students are Aboriginal. We hire the bus because that helps everybody. So I suppose that, if you look at it that way, we use the money—

Senator CARR—That is the irony, isn't it. In every other area of government activity we require flexibility and we want to cut red tape.

New Speaker—Exactly.

Senator CARR—These are the sorts of buzz words that are used. But when it comes to your work, you are being required to deal with ever-increasing amounts of red tape?

New Speaker—Yes, we are.

Senator CARR—And ever-decreasing levels of flexibility?

New Speaker—Yes. Yet in our curriculum framework and the philosophy of our whole education department here, one of biggest points is flexibility. I suppose we feel at the moment that we are being made to be unreasonably accountable for this funding in the sense that it is being used wisely. It is really hard to be very motivated to put in for funding when you really think that, at the end of the day, you can probably expect \$20,000, if you are lucky, or perhaps less.

New Speaker—Don't say that—Rachel will say, 'We'll get the whole lot.'

New Speaker—I have to be honest. I just think that, by the time it goes through four processes—

New Speaker—And if there is a limited bucket—

Senator CARR—And this is not the only program you are applying for.

New Speaker—Who knows what people see as valuable?

CHAIR—And what they see as valuable as bureaucrats might be different to what you see as valuable.

New Speaker—That is right. And who are they to say that what we are applying for is not as valuable as what someone else is applying for? Nora and Denise have both been on the staff for over 20 years.

New Speaker—Nora has.

New Speaker—Denise, how long have you been on the staff?

New Speaker—A bit over 10 years.

New Speaker—They have 30 years of experience. Nora and Denise are both at Warrawee kindergarten. It is an Aboriginal kindergarten that started off site and then became part of the school. They are both AIEOs. Nora teaches a small amount of Aboriginal language for about 15 or 20 minutes at a time. Actually last year the work from the kindy went to Canberra for the ACSSO conference and then they asked if they could retain it in Perth for the WACSSO conference, because it was a snapshot of the Pilbara. Nora, would you like to explain how you have seen the new funding affecting the school, or are you too shy?

New Speaker—I do not want to talk.

New Speaker—Do you reckon it has been a bit hard on our kids—with lunches and some of the other programs?

CHAIR—You have noticed a change this year?

New Speaker—Yes, I have.

CHAIR—What sorts of changes have you noticed?

New Speaker—Our homework centre is not going, and we have not gone on many excursions and things at Warrawee kindergarten. And with the lunches, yes. There are a lot of changes.

CHAIR—Are Indigenous parents as involved in the school this year as they were last year, or have you found that they have lost interest?

New Speaker—No, we have a lot of young ones coming through Warrawee and they are very keen.

CHAIR—That is the preschool level?

New Speaker—Yes.

Senator JOHNSTON—Will we get a chance to have a look at the kindergarten?

New Speaker—We would love for you to have a look.

Senator JOHNSTON—And you can show us all the things you are doing. Jan, I want to come back to the application for a moment as I am concerned about the amount of time your staff members have to designate to seeking this funding. The NAIDOC application form we have here says: 'If you have any problems or require further information do not hesitate to contact the nearest ICC office for guidance.' Have we done that and how is that working? Be frank.

New Speaker—I have not even looked at the NAIDOC submission, and I do not think my colleague has. But we did get our program out from last year. This is the program for the week, and we thought we might send something like that with the submission.

New Speaker—The bottom line is that we are schoolteachers. We were trained to be schoolteachers; we were not trained to write submissions. It is the same with admin. You are not trained for admin; you are essentially a schoolteacher who has got yourself into that position.

Senator CARR—This is not the only process you are involved in—there are lots and lots of others?

New Speaker—Yes. This has become the most complicated. There is another one that is also an Aboriginal program which is called ILSS, which is the Indigenous language support system. That targets students at year 1. Last year I felt that the acquittal process for the ILSS program for the teachers doing it was just unbelievable. It was just terrible. We get roughly \$3,000 of ILSS funding per student. It targets children who do not have a lot of knowledge of standard Australian English yet. With the acquittal process, one girl took sick leave in the end. She was given so many hours a week to do it, but the demands were just ridiculous. She had a very difficult year 1-2 class. When she was given time off to do it, her class would play up for the relief teacher. She would be in the school, she would see it and that created its own stress. Then she did it on the weekend. In the end I think we contract paid her to finish the process.

Senator CARR—Let me be clear about this: you are saying that the Aboriginal education programs are the most complicated of all the ones that you do?

New Speaker—I believe they are, yes. That is my personal opinion.

Senator CARR—That is a big claim in education.

New Speaker—I am sorry, but I cannot get the sack for this. I am saying what I truly believe.

Senator CARR—We actually want to hear this. We need to know this stuff. As I say, I have some experience of this matter, and if you are saying that this is the most difficult of all that is a serious problem.

New Speaker—This one now is the most depressing one because we are just putting in our hats with no real expectation—to be perfectly honest. Would you agree with that?

New Speaker—Yes.

New Speaker—I would like you to meet nanna Janet Stewart. How long have you been at the school, Janet?

New Speaker—About 27 years.

CHAIR—A life member.

New Speaker—Janet is an AIEO and she is our Aboriginal language teacher. She is a teacher for 0.5 and an AIEO for 0.5. She meets with the community a lot, so she is very important. All the AIEOs, if we have issues, will sit in on interviews with us and contact families and so on. Do you want to say how you think the funding has changed things this year?

CHAIR—Do you want to talk to us about what you have noticed has changed this year without the ASSPA funding?

New Speaker—We are struggling, with parents, for swimming, lunches, excursions and things like that. We like to take our kids out to the river and talk to them about our culture and things like that, but we do not have funding for that, because I do my Aboriginal language program.

CHAIR—The kids cannot afford to pay, so they miss out?

New Speaker—The parents are struggling out there. Some of them have five or six kids. Today a parent with five kids came in and I asked him if they were right for lunch. Maybe they were okay today, but next week there may be no lunch. Some of the parents may not have any money to send their kids to school. They keep them at home because there is no lunch at school.

New Speaker—Our school caters for four communities. There is a community 50 k's from here—

Senator JOHNSTON—What is the name of that community?

New Speaker—Martu Martu Block. There is also Jinparinya, which is 30 k's out, and another one opposite that.

Senator JOHNSTON—Is there a school bus every day?

New Speaker—School buses go out to 30 k's but not 50 k's. There is also Ngarla Njamal and Tjalka Wara, which is 12 k's from here. They are all Aboriginal students there, so we cater for all those as well.

Senator JOHNSTON—So they have very diverse capabilities and backgrounds.

New Speaker—Yes. I am a language teacher and I speak Ngarla. Auntie Janet is a language specialist and she teaches Nyangumarta.

CHAIR—Now that kids are expected to buy their lunch, do you find that they do not come to school because they are too ashamed?

New Speaker—Yes, they are ashamed to ask someone.

Senator JOHNSTON—Too ashamed to say, 'I haven't got my lunch today.'

New Speaker—Yes. So they just stay home.

CHAIR—So, because you do not have the funds, maybe there are not as many kids coming to school.

New Speaker—It makes it hard for Aboriginal kids. The other day, we went to visit one family which had five kids, because they told us they did not have any pencils for the kids or money for lunches. We told them to bring the kids along. We usually have something there for them to encourage them to come. But with no ASSPA funding, there are no kids and no lunch. It makes a lot of difference. Some of the parents can, but some of them cannot.

New Speaker—We had a breakfast program running here for children coming from the communities, because they leave home around 6.30 and do not have time to have breakfast. Now we do not have funding for that. It was good having the breakfast program here.

Senator JOHNSTON—What time did that program start? Tell me about how it worked in practice. How many kids did you have coming along?

New Speaker—I should go and find Margie. She ran that. I am in the kindergarten and when I came in at 8 o'clock I used to get breakfast for my little ones. What Margie ran was pretty good—she gave them toast and cereal with milk. That was a good start for the kids. We had lots of kids coming to that. We had a uniform program as well. They had uniforms.

CHAIR—With a heavy emphasis on the Commonwealth this is a competitive tendering environment now. There is an emphasis on literacy and numeracy outcomes. How have you worded your submission? If you are buying pencils, uniforms, sandwiches—

New Speaker—Basically, you cannot include them in that.

New Speaker—The Smith Family have helped with uniforms. They changed their parameters because they used to require an 80 per cent attendance rate before they would assist students with uniforms. They have dropped that and are going more on a needs basis. We will find Margie because she also became the liaison person for the Smith Family which was really good.

CHAIR—We will take a break and have lunch.

New Speaker—I would like to say something off the record but I will say it in my office.

CHAIR—We will finish recording, thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 11.56 a.m. to 1.10 p.m.

CHAIR—Have you had experience with that in other schools?

New Speaker—I have had dealings with ASSPA before in schools with Indigenous students. My main concern with regard to the changes this year is that we have been left without any money. ASSPA funding for us is nothing too fancy. It is about accommodating our Indigenous kids and supporting them with basics like clean clothes, food, pencils, pads—things that other students in our school already have when they come to school. The changes in the funding arrangements leaving us without any money have left us completely high and dry.

CHAIR—How much ASSPA funding would the school have got last year; do you know?

New Speaker—Off the top of my head, I think it was about \$45,000. Is that in the ballpark?

New Speaker—I think it was \$32,000.

CHAIR—Can you also just both tell us your names?

New Speaker—My name is Glenys Pianta. I have been here at Baler primary since August 2003.

New Speaker—I am Charmaine Durshell. I have been here for seven years this year.

CHAIR—So have you had quite an active functioning ASSPA committee in the past? How has it operated in the past?

New Speaker—Usually the AIEOs run it, because we cannot get the parent support, but it has been running all right.

New Speaker—You might get about 10 people in alternate discussions or meetings who will take the time to come in and help us and give support to the committee. It might be for a function: for example, NAIDOC, Anzac Day, AGMs, sausage sizzles, learning journey nights or parent evenings. Some do come in and show support.

CHAIR—So you get your \$45,000. What did you spend it on last year?

New Speaker—Incursions, excursions—

New Speaker—Nutrition programs, lunch and breakfast programs, NAIDOC Week, stationery—that is about it, I think.

New Speaker—Parent participation as well, which was a big thing—was it about 30 per cent?

New Speaker—Yes.

New Speaker—Thirty per cent of that goes into the parent participation.

New Speaker—When we told the parents about that, that made them want to come in and help and give a bit of support—I do not know whether the dollar signs were there to make them think they were going to get paid for it or whether it was because there was going to be food—a sausage sizzle or something—to feed them or transport to pick them up and take them home.

New Speaker—For example, swimming lessons are quite expensive, and generally our ASSPA would have paid for our Indigenous kids. This year a lot of kids missed out because we simply did not have the funds. The argument that these Indigenous people receive welfare and should support their children is a nonsense to us. That is not our argument. Our argument is that when the kids come to school they do not have these things. They do not have the fees for the swimming lessons, bus fees, new uniforms, pencils or books, and that is where ASSPA has stepped in and supplemented these kids. The money is being spent on the fundamentals for the children—clean clothes, food, stationery, bus fees and swimming fees. These are all things that a lot of our kids will receive from their parents. For whatever reason, these kids are not receiving from their parents, and that is what our ASSPA is being used for. That is why starting up, first term at least, without any of these funds has really hurt us this year.

CHAIR—So most families would have three, four, five or more kids?

New Speaker—Yes; some.

New Speaker—Some families are quite big.

CHAIR—So you have not received any funding now? Tell us where you are at with the new process.

New Speaker—We have put in our concept plan as well as our Aboriginal education plan. We are waiting on that from DEST.

Senator JOHNSTON—Who drew up the concept plan?

New Speaker—The three of us and our other AIEO. We did it together.

Senator JOHNSTON—Was it a burdensome task?

New Speaker—It was. For example, we did the concept plan, which was fine. It runs along the same lines as our old ASSPA submissions. It was rejected because we needed an Aboriginal education plan, which we produced. It is a nonsense; it is a waste of time. They wanted an Aboriginal education plan outlining how you teach Aboriginal children and what the best way to teach Aboriginal children is. It is ridiculous. Why would you have one? We have to teach Aboriginal children exactly the same as we teach every other child. When they go on to high school, further training, university or employment people are not going to ask, ‘How can an Aboriginal child learn best?’ They are going to teach them exactly the same way as they teach everyone else. Aboriginal kids need to be exposed to the same range of methodologies and pedagogies as every other child in the school. Having to sit down for however many hours it was and create an Aboriginal education plan was just a bureaucratic exercise and an absolute waste of our time.

CHAIR—Who requires you to do that?

New Speaker—I honestly do not know who requires it.

Senator ALLISON—Did they give you some examples of an Aboriginal education plan which might give you some ideas?

New Speaker—No. The ideas I got were out of a plan that the department of education and training in Western Australia has as their policy. I got a lot of ideas from that. I really veered away from curriculum because I think teaching specific curriculum to our Indigenous kids is really restricting them in their learning.

Senator ALLISON—Do you mean culturally specific?

New Speaker—Yes. I think it is selling our Indigenous children short. They have to learn exactly the same as all the other children. They have to be exposed to a wide range of learning experiences, exactly the same as all other children. I think specifically targeting culturally sensitive materials and learner styles in that way is restricting our students.

Senator ALLISON—How does that philosophy sit with your parents and your education workers?

New Speaker—What I want for our Aboriginal kids is the same as for any kid. I want them to be able to learn in a range of settings and environments. I do not want to treat them any differently because in life they will not be treated differently. When they move on from here I want them to be able to learn just like any other child.

Senator ALLISON—Is that something you support?

New Speaker—Yes, that is how we see it and that is what we want. Aboriginal education is part of the curriculum. As Dave was saying, we are not going to be in there speaking to them and making them feel different or alienating them by explaining something to them differently from the way we explain it to a non-Indigenous child—by having two sets of rules for one class.

CHAIR—What sorts of things does the concept plan have in it?

New Speaker—It is very much along the lines of our old ASSPA submissions. We put away money for NAIDOC Week, for uniforms, for stationery, for lunches, for camps and for swimming lessons.

Senator JOHNSTON—Have you been told that some of those programs are not going to come under the umbrella? For instance, NAIDOC Week is probably not going to be covered.

New Speaker—It will be separate, yes. And that is another submission.

Senator ALLISON—What do you understand will be and what will not be funded?

New Speaker—NAIDOC Week will be funded separately so we will have to do a separate submission for that. Insofar as our concept plan is concerned we are not sure what will and what will not be funded.

Senator ALLISON—You have not been given any indication at this stage?

New Speaker—No, we have not.

Senator ALLISON—Are you aware of the budget that has been set aside for this district or region?

New Speaker—I am not aware of the specifics of the budget. We were working on about the figures of last year, considering that we have about the same number of Indigenous students as last year. We were planning on a little more than last year. Until such time, the school is covering ASSPA's expenses. Most of that expense is food, because our kids do not come to school fed. That is the bulk of our expenses—feeding the kids through the canteen. We are running up a bill with the school until the finances come through.

Senator ALLISON—Do all the Aboriginal children at the school use the breakfast program?

New Speaker—No, not all of them.

Senator ALLISON—How does it work?

New Speaker—On a needs basis; the AIEOs know their students with the needs.

New Speaker—If there is a genuine case by word of mouth in the community or if somebody approaches us during school hours or after school hours to check their kids out every morning because they are low on food or money, we will take care of them. We let them know the door is always open for breakfast or lunch. It is one of our duties anyway; it is what we do. We go and ask the kids. If they did not have much sleep or they want a feed, a drink, an apple, fruit—brain food, they call it—we will cater to their needs.

New Speaker—AIEOs are also colour blind when it comes to any child who needs support regarding rest, nutrition or stationery. It is across the board; our guys are completely colour blind.

CHAIR—Have you noticed a lack of interest in parents' involvement this year? Are they still keen to get involved in the school council or the ASSPA committee? We have heard a lot of evidence that this year, because of the funding arrangements, people are just not interested: they do not have the money to control it, it is too bureaucratic, so they have dropped away. Have you had that experience at this school?

New Speaker—A few people have asked me about this new ASSPA. We have put a few names down. I reckon it would be more than last year.

New Speaker—We definitely have good involvement with Aboriginal parents.

New Speaker—It is by word of mouth. It is about how we sell things like the ASSPA programs. We say, ‘Look, this is what’s happening.’ We always approach parents who are down and depressed. We say: ‘Boost yourself up. Come and have a cup of tea. Sit down and have a yarn with the other committee members.’ We try to get them on board, even if we go out and pick them up or organise transport. It varies. Maybe at one meeting 10 will rock up and at the following meeting maybe five or six will turn up. The number may dwindle.

CHAIR—When are you looking at getting some of your funding through?

New Speaker—We have no idea at all.

Senator JOHNSTON—Have you asked?

New Speaker—We have been given a time line of late April, but then we have to do further submissions. We have to do another submission.

CHAIR—To actually get the money?

Senator JOHNSTON—The four-step process.

New Speaker—Yes. It is getting a bit late in the year, to be honest. Our kids need to be fed today. Our kids needed their stationery in February. We have made sure that the kids have everything they need—borrowing the money through a different account. Our kids have not missed out.

New Speaker—But it is sad to see that the school has to foot the bill until we actually get the funding in to reimburse the school.

CHAIR—And you have done that?

New Speaker—Yes.

CHAIR—What if you do not get the funding? That is the issue, isn’t it? Under this new funding regime there is no guarantee.

New Speaker—What do we do if we do not get funding? Do we let our kids go hungry? Do we let our kids go dirty? Do we let our kids sit next to their little counterpart whose dad works for BHP? Do we let our little Indigenous kids sit there with no pencils, no rubber, no stationery or no ruler while their mate sitting next to them has everything? What do we do? If we do not get the funding, we will find a way. I do not know how, but we will.

Senator JOHNSTON—Has your district education office been supportive of that approach?

New Speaker—Yes.

Senator JOHNSTON—The state generally has been reasonably cooperative from an administrative point of view?

New Speaker—Our manager at district office is very supportive. But, at the end of the day, there has been all of this paperwork and waste of resources when I and my AIEOs should have been with our kids and with our teachers. At the end of all this, if we were to receive no funding, we will have to work something out. We cannot have a significant proportion of our children coming to school and spending the day hungry, dirty or whatever the case may be. We will find a way. We will do something. I do not know what, but we will have to do something.

New Speaker—We will have to rob Peter to pay Paul. We will never see any of our kids go without.

Senator JOHNSTON—Do you have any idea roughly how much is in debit at this point? What are you anticipating the balance might be at the end of the day?

New Speaker—By the end of this term I think it will be seven.

Senator JOHNSTON—Thousand?

New Speaker—\$7,000 to \$7,500.

Senator JOHNSTON—So that is getting beyond the fundraising capacities of P&Cs and others?

New Speaker—Yes and no. If we did need to fundraise for our Indigenous kids, we would do it as a P&C. We have a very supportive P&C. What we were saying before is that we are colour blind because, if one of our non-Indigenous kids turns up without a feed, which happens very often, we will always feed them—always. We have been forced to look into a scheme with Centrelink where money is taken out of the family's pay every week and deposited straight into our canteen account.

Senator JOHNSTON—What do mean by 'forced'?

New Speaker—At the moment one of our deputy principals is individually asking the parents for money on a fortnightly basis and actually going out and buying the food. Our AIEOs are going down and asking local businesses for donations. We cannot keep going on like this. We have a level 4 deputy principal who is running around and asking parents for \$10 a week so he can go to Coles, buy the food and then prepare the food. It is an awfully long process.

Senator JOHNSTON—So you approached Centrelink?

New Speaker—We approached Centrelink.

Senator JOHNSTON—And Centrelink are seeking an authority from the parents to have a deduction made and remitted across to you?

New Speaker—\$4 a day.

Senator JOHNSTON—How is that working?

New Speaker—We have only done the preliminary paperwork to date with Centrelink. I am not sure how our parents will react to it, but of course it is not mandatory.

Senator JOHNSTON—Has Centrelink designated an officer or a person that we all can relate to who is going to go out and visit those parents and have rapport with them such that there is going to be a positive response?

New Speaker—That would very much be my role and the role of the AIEOs.

Senator CARR—That is \$40 a fortnight out of a dole cheque?

New Speaker—Yes.

Senator CARR—That is quite a significant amount.

New Speaker—\$4 a day will provide a very early morning tea—

Senator CARR—I understand that, but from the other end \$40 a fortnight is a lot of money too, isn't it?

New Speaker—I do not know. How much is a carton of VB—\$40? So it is a carton of VB.

New Speaker—We have gambling, drugs and alcohol.

New Speaker—A packet of cigarettes up here is \$15, so I do not think it is much at all. When people say to me, 'That's a lot of money,' I think, 'How much is a carton of Victoria Bitter up here?' It is \$44.

Senator JOHNSTON—It is a question of priority.

New Speaker—At the end of the day, \$4 a day to feed a child is not a lot.

Senator CARR—\$40 per child?

New Speaker—Yes.

CHAIR—So a family with four kids would be looking at \$160 a fortnight?

New Speaker—Yes.

Senator CARR—It is starting to add up to the dole cheque, isn't it?

New Speaker—Sometimes on a pension day mum will dish out \$20 or \$50 just to fob the kids off saying, 'Here, go and buy or do whatever you've got to do.' So you can look at it that way.

New Speaker—Living in this community, living in South Hedland, I think it is very reasonable. Living costs up here are extremely expensive. Food is very expensive. For two meals a day—a breakfast and a lunch—I think \$4 is extraordinary. I think it is great value for money.

CHAIR—But you will get some parents who will not be able to do that or will not agree to that. If you get your PSPI funding, will that help towards the \$4 cost each day?

New Speaker—We would look into that.

New Speaker—Also, we go out and do our home visits and liaise with parents. We know if it is hard for them to bring food or send money with kids. We do ask mum or dad or whoever the caregiver is to come into the school or send little Johnny with \$20 or \$40 to put into the canteen and have a card there to say they have credit against their name. This is what we do.

New Speaker—Generally they are on a pension.

New Speaker—Our canteen manager just lets them know: ‘Okay, Sally, you’ve got \$2 left. Please tell mum to put some more money into the canteen.’ That works. It is a good thing.

CHAIR—So it works that way.

New Speaker—Which is very similar, isn’t it.

New Speaker—Some families have been doing that for the last couple of years. So that is working. It is a good thing.

Senator JOHNSTON—It is a fair bit of work for the canteen staff to run those accounts. How many accounts do you run? Ten? Twenty?

New Speaker—The ladies just have the little cards and tick off their names. It is no big deal to them.

Senator JOHNSTON—So they just do it as a matter of course, and it is all run smoothly?

New Speaker—Yes. If you saw our canteen list, you would see that credit is available. You get a card, we make up your account and that is it.

CHAIR—What about in-school tuition? No funding has come through for that yet?

New Speaker—That is right.

CHAIR—How many kids would you have had here last year who did not reach the years 3, 5 or 7 benchmarks?

New Speaker—Indigenous kids?

CHAIR—Yes.

New Speaker—I do not know off the top of my head. From what I have seen, the margin between the Indigenous results and the non-Indigenous results is not huge. Are you talking about the \$700?

CHAIR—No, but you can tell us about that if you want to. I am talking about in-school tuition—the money you will get for tutors to assist those kids who did not meet the years 3, 5 or 7 benchmarks.

New Speaker—That is \$700.

CHAIR—Have they been given a \$700 voucher for that?

New Speaker—Those parents have been given the contact details of the tutoring service that the department is using.

Senator JOHNSTON—So they contact them and then they are paid directly by the department?

New Speaker—Yes.

CHAIR—My understanding is that if they get the \$700 they are not included in your ITAS funding? Is that right? They get one or the other?

New Speaker—I do not know. The parents have been given the contact details. If they choose to pursue the \$700 voucher then that is their prerogative.

CHAIR—How many parents with kids at this school would have been eligible for that?

New Speaker—Around 30.

Senator ALLISON—The school is not being a broker?

New Speaker—No.

Senator ALLISON—So you do not know whether the parents pick it up or not?

New Speaker—No, I do not know.

Senator JOHNSTON—So all you do is identify the children?

New Speaker—Yes.

CHAIR—Where would they spend their \$700 in a place like this? Is there a private tutorial company?

New Speaker—The tutorial company that the department has brought on is the company whose details were passed on to the parents. I sit very much between the parents and the designated tutorial service.

Senator JOHNSTON—Who is the tutorial service?

New Speaker—I do not know off the top of my head.

CHAIR—Have you actually applied for your ITAS funding—the in-school tutorial assistance funding?

New Speaker—No, I have not.

CHAIR—Are you planning to?

New Speaker—I think we are planning to do so at some stage.

New Speaker—A few parents have come in wanting extra tutor time.

New Speaker—We will get our committee together and work that out.

CHAIR—Did you have tutors here in the school last year—with the ITAS funding?

New Speaker—No. Another thing that supports and helps a lot of kids, not only the Indigenous kids but also the non-Indigenous children, is the Smith Family scholarships. They provide finance to get their stationery, uniforms and stuff like that. Some do and some do not, but the majority of ours would have done so. They would have made good with that one.

New Speaker—But that is very much a two-way street. The Smith Family funding very much depends on attendance. If attendance drops off, so does the funding. When we support the parents it is always fifty-fifty. We contribute towards expenses—for example, swimming fees. We go half way with them.

Senator CARR—You mentioned before that this is a different community from the other side of town. How is South Hedland Primary School different from the other schools?

New Speaker—This is very different from South Hedland Primary. We have a much greater cultural mix, a much higher Muslim population and a much lower Aboriginal population than they do. It is just a very different mix of students. We are far more multicultural. Whereas 75 per cent of their students are Indigenous we are closer to 28 per cent. We have a much broader mix of students than South Hedland does.

New Speaker—South Hedland Primary caters well for the block kids—the kids coming in from the communities.

Senator JOHNSTON—They gave us the impression that they look after the one mile and three mile kids. They understand the difficulties that the parents are having out there—transport issues and all those sorts of things.

CHAIR—Would it be fair to say that your educational offerings have been compromised so far this year because the ASSPA funds have not flowed through?

New Speaker—Our programs have not been compromised because we have been borrowing, and good management has filled the gap. We have compensated, I suppose. And the P&C has helped us significantly.

CHAIR—You have had to take money away from other resources?

New Speaker—Yes, we have. For example, the P&C always has surplus packs of stationery, for when kids move in, and they have donated a lot of them to our Indigenous kids. We have compensated for what we have missed out on. It has been an inconvenience and it has taken a lot of time. Certainly my expertise and that of my AIEOs would have been better spent in the classroom rather than locked in my office writing all these submissions. I am better using my skills sitting with a graduate teacher and saying, ‘I think it is better if you teach it this way’—giving that real one-on-one mentoring, which I see as my role—or working with my deputies who will work with their teachers rather than being locked in an office with these guys—not that it was not a pleasure—spending a lot of time on these submissions.

CHAIR—That is the start of it. Once you get your concept plans ticked you have then got to put in another application for funding.

New Speaker—Over the last couple of years Baler primary has had a lot of discipline problems, which are well documented. We have just about got it right but it really needs me showing my face around the school and being very visible. We need to be out there with our teachers and our kids. Having us locked in an office for all those hours is really working against us.

Senator JOHNSTON—Do you think it is a one-off for this year, as an inaugural approach?

New Speaker—I hope so.

Senator JOHNSTON—Next year you can say, ‘This is what we did last year, we will make some modifications and send it off.’

New Speaker—I hope that is the case.

Senator JOHNSTON—I suppose we all hope that.

Senator CARR—I have a question about the level of complexity of these forms. I have heard the experience of another principal who says that the Aboriginal education administration is perhaps the most complex of all the administrative arrangements you have to deal with. Would you agree with that assessment?

New Speaker—Yes, definitely. A lot of hurdles are put in our way. Every time we think we have passed one hurdle they put another one in our way. As a team we believe that the forms from district and central offices wanting to know how we are dealing with Aboriginal learning styles or how we are catering for their specific educational needs are just a lot of paperwork. We

feel very strongly that our Aboriginal kids have the right to learn exactly what other kids learn in exactly the same way that other kids learn so that when they go on and do their apprenticeships, jobs, university, TAFE or whatever they have that wide background.

Senator ALLISON—So they understand outcomes—

New Speaker—That is our ultimate aim.

Senator ALLISON—Yes, but do they?

New Speaker—It is slightly below. I have been at schools with much greater margins between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes. The only reason for our margin, which is minimal, is attendance. Everything we do is directed towards attendance—even these lunches which I was talking about. That will have a big positive impact on Indigenous kids' attendance. At the moment, 'I do not want to go to school, Mum,' is carrying a lot of weight and a lot of kids are staying away. Once they have signed the form to pay for the lunch, I promise that our attendance will increase significantly.

Senator JOHNSTON—It becomes: 'I have paid for your lunch so you had better go and eat it.'

New Speaker—That is right: 'You had better go and eat it, so get on that bus.' I honestly believe that the discrepancy we have at the moment can be put down to attendance. That is what we work at 6½ hours a day five days a week: how can we improve our attendance?

New Speaker—A lot of our home visits revolve around parents telling us: 'I never had food or money to send my kids to school.' If there is always food at school then you just have to do your bit by sending little Johnny or Sally to school.

CHAIR—So if they are a bit embarrassed or shamed about not having the same as other kids then they tend to keep their kids at home or kids stay at home?

New Speaker—We are like radars. We go around and suss out our kids.

New Speaker—These guys know everything about everyone—there are no secrets.

New Speaker—We will go and check out particular children. We will observe them. We hear through the grapevine in the community or somebody will let us know that they are having a bad time with domestic violence, that they are in the refuge or whatever. We will take that extra step to make them feel comfortable. We will give them a shirt so they feel good in class. We ask if they have had breakfast or if they have lunch and set that up if they do not have any. We give them a pencil case with all the materials for writing that they need, a book, a pad or whatever stationery they need.

New Speaker—At the start of the year when it was apparent that we had no funding, our P&C kicked in and provided packs of stationery. I definitely found that our Indigenous kids looked after their property better than anyone else. You would not believe how well they look after their property, once they have the property. A lot of our kids come from an environment where they do

not have anything. We hear talk about how materialistic kids have become, but a significant proportion of our kids do not have anything—they do not have a bedroom and they do not have any real clothes of their own.

New Speaker—What you have to keep in mind too is that our kids are not in charge of the finance or the budget.

New Speaker—No, it is not their fault.

New Speaker—It is not their fault. It is the parents. They receive the benefits from Centrelink or dad or whoever works. The kids do not go out to work; they have to come here to get an education—to learn, to go back home and hopefully to grow up and know better.

CHAIR—Was it a lot easier when you just got the bucket of funds on a per capita basis?

New Speaker—Yes, it was manageable. We could cater for their needs and everything was there. If it was not, we went out and got it. We sought help through Rachel.

CHAIR—David, give me your comments about the link—if we were looking for some evidence, do you believe there is a link between providing a breakfast and nutrition program, providing Indigenous kids with a uniform and with pencils, and educational outcomes?

New Speaker—I know there is. I talk a lot to my staff here about foundations of behaviour. We have three deputies looking after each block, and when a child comes to them I want them to be able to tell me why that child is misbehaving. In week one of term one of 2005 we had nine students sent to our senior block deputy, who covers our years 5, 6 and 7. Nine out of nine of those children by 1 o'clock in the afternoon had not had breakfast, morning tea or lunch and all reported that their tummies were growling and they were hungry. Those nine kids are now fed. Dennis, our deputy, tracks down the parents, asks for \$10 a week and goes to Coles and actually feeds those kids. I think one or two we have heard from since. If you are tired and if you are hungry then you are not going to learn and you not going to behave yourself. It is just not going to happen. It never has and it never will.

CHAIR—So how rational, then, is a competitive funding program where the emphasis is on outcomes, indicators, literacy and numeracy? You might have bureaucrats sitting in Perth who are looking at your funding submission and they will see that you want to provide the kids with a sandwich each day. How do you word an application so that you can impart your educational theory and knowledge about the link between that sandwich and a child's educational outcomes?

New Speaker—I honestly cannot remember how I did word it, but it was very much about foundations of behaviour and primary needs. If the primary needs are not met, nothing else will follow—nothing. You guys could try going to work dirty: you have not bathed for four days and you are wearing the same clothes. You are not going to perform terribly well. You are not going to stand in parliament and make a wonderful speech, knowing that you smell—you have not bathed for four days—and that you are dirty and you have been wearing the same clothes for four days. You are not going to get up there and shine. It is like our guys when they come here and they are dirty and shamed. They have not eaten because it was pension night last night. Mum was out gambling, and dad was out drinking. Then dad came home and released ridiculous

domestic violence on mum and the kids. You are not going to shine; you are going to fail. We have to (1) look after our kids' primary needs and (2) look at curriculum and all the rest of it. But without the primary needs our kids are going to keep failing—and our kids have been failing here for a long time. They would have really been failing if it had not been for guys like Glenys and Charmaine, our AIEOs, who for so many years have been keeping these kids afloat.

CHAIR—So if the ASSPA funds do not flow to you in the way they have in the past, this just puts these things further behind?

New Speaker—We will be out there shaking a can.

New Speaker—We are going to be picking up the pieces. I know we are not supposed to, but a lot of the time we hand out 50c or a dollar and say, 'Go and get an ice-cream,' or 'Go and buy a sandwich,' or whatever. We just do it. Like David was saying, we are colour blind.

New Speaker—It is exactly the same with our guys. I honestly cannot remember—and I know this stands for all our teachers, me and, in particular, our AIEOs—the last time I went out there with two sandwiches and ate them, because you always go out and see kids who do not have anything. They will not ask. You say, 'Have you had lunch?' and they say no. And so you have to.

New Speaker—And sometimes you do not even want to have a feed because you know there are kids out there starving.

New Speaker—Make no mistake: our community is in a lot of trouble. It really is. On a Friday morning, drive down our main street and have a look at the glass, the bricks and the debris. We are in a lot of trouble here. I feel like we have had the carpet pulled out from under us with our kids. In South Hedland, alcohol abuse and domestic violence amongst our Indigenous people and our non-Indigenous people is sky high. As a school, since the start of this year, we have really been shafted. Then again, it may work out for the best. Who knows how these things will work out?

CHAIR—The stories are very similar across a number of states, although your funding seems to be coming much later than in the Territory. It is really very late.

New Speaker—No schools in the Pilbara have had anything or heard anything, as far as I know.

Senator ALLISON—Are there any Indigenous parents on your school council or your P&C?

New Speaker—Not on our school council but we do have—

New Speaker—I was on it last year, but I was there as an AIEO.

New Speaker—So no, we have not had any nominations for Aboriginal parents onto our school council.

Senator ALLISON—Do you see it to be a problem?

New Speaker—For someone to be on the school council you need them to nominate. You need them to want to be on it. It is not a particularly popular role with any of our parents; they see it as quite burdensome and hard work. It really is getting into the nitty-gritty, being on the school council. We have not had any of the Indigenous parents put their hand up.

CHAIR—I do not have any other questions.

Senator JOHNSTON—I think it was a very good presentation. Thank you for your time.

New speaker—Our pleasure.

CHAIR—Is there anything else you want to say in closing?

New speaker—We want some money for our kids.

New speaker—Our school is the most fortunate school to have our AIEOs. I have been around for many years, and these guys are as good as I have ever seen—really good. So often you hear comments that parents will not get involved. Our parents do not have any choice, because these guys go to them.

New speaker—Our principals are always saying, ‘Why don’t you girls become teachers?’ No, I will not, because I will lose out on mixing with the community, on gaining a rapport and on friendship with the kids and the parents.

CHAIR—Liaison is what you like to do.

New speaker—That is me. I will not go into teaching. I have been 10 years as an AIEO. I have had that many years of opportunities.

Senator ALLISON—How are those positions funded?

New speaker—The Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers are funded through the central office of the Western Australia Department of Education and Training.

Senator JOHNSTON—So it is state funding.

New speaker—Yes.

Senator ALLISON—How do you work out the entitlement?

New speaker—It is based on per capita, per head. We have got 2.6. We used to have three, but we lost some numbers so we have now got 2.6. We have got Janine, who is away today. We have just over 2½. When these guys talk, people listen. They get the job done. They are outstanding.

Senator ALLISON—You have got clout.

New speaker—They have got big clout.

CHAIR—David, thank you very much for your time this afternoon, for hosting us and talking to us. We certainly appreciate it. It has been good.

Committee adjourned at 1.52 p.m.