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Official Committee Hansard

SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Indigenous education funding arrangements

THURSDAY, 3 MARCH 2005

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SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3 March 2005

Members: Senator Crossin (*Chair*), Senator Barnett (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Allison, Collins, Kirk and Tierney

Substitute members: Senator Allison for Senator Stott Despoja

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

Senators in attendance: Senators Crossin and Tierney

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 10.42 a.m.

CHAIR—I declare open this hearing of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee. Welcome to this discussion of the effects of the changes to the Indigenous education funding arrangements. The committee has heard concerns that, in making these changes, the government did not consult parent and community groups very widely and that, since announcing these changes, there has been little consideration given to the consequences of these changes. It is certainly evident to people in close contact with Indigenous communities that there has been considerable distress and criticism directed at the government over the changes to the act. We are here to find out in detail your concerns and the reasons for your criticisms of the changes. Governments are often accused of making decisions without regard to local and community opinion or need. The current government makes policy at the highest level, which is the proper role of the Commonwealth. But some would argue that it is now trying to manage the details of implementation without regard to widely different needs of children and communities.

We want to focus on the work and the role of the ASSPA committees and the changes to the ASSPA funding and, in particular, the impact of the changes to the tutoring system and the in-school tutoring system. I invite people to comment. Sue, would you like to go first and break the ice.

New Speaker—I would like to welcome all the people who have come along today. It is great to see such a good turnout. There are two aspects which have really impacted on our school. The changes to the ATAS tutoring situation are really impacting on the way teachers teach and how kids learn. We still have classes of anywhere between 25 and 28 children and, without those ATAS tutors who have been in place—and there has been an expectation that they would be in place for some years—levels of frustration for teachers and students are rising considerably. This time last year we had ATAS tutors in place. We had a homework centre running. This year we have nothing. In terms of the concept plan, which we submitted on 4 February, we are seriously concerned that we have no indication of whether we will be able to apply for any funding to support Indigenous students in the classroom.

CHAIR—Just to clarify, how many children would have received tutoring assistance?

New Speaker—This is Sue again: in 2004 somewhere between 50 and 60 students received ATAS support, and we had four tutors who were here every morning.

CHAIR—You do not have those people here now, of course?

New Speaker—No.

CHAIR—You have not heard if your concept plan has been accepted?

New Speaker—No, we have heard nothing.

CHAIR—One school had heard yesterday that some aspects of their concept plan had been accepted and they had until tomorrow to put in their funding application.

New Speaker—That, of course, brings on a whole host of other issues. The very tight time lines that we are working on with these submissions put a huge amount of pressure on particular individuals, including Indigenous parents who are very much a part of the whole process of applying for funding. I think the time lines are somewhat unrealistic.

CHAIR—You had an ASSPA committee here that was operating?

New Speaker—We did. It was a very successful ASSPA committee. In fact, last year's chairman is here, right behind me.

CHAIR—While we are here at Ross Park, can you tell us about the ASSPA committee last year and what you did?

New Speaker—My name is Pat Lawton. For the last few years I have been Chairman of the ASSPA committee. My first involvement with the ASSPA committee on an inputting basis has opened up my eyes a lot having regard to the success of the last few years, when quite a few Aboriginal parents attended every meeting and put in a lot of support. I feel that, without the ongoing ASSPA committee, there is very little involvement by those parents and little support for the school. I have also realised that the students were developing and had a lot of support from those ASSPA committee members and also from the school itself. The partnerships that I noticed developing between the parents and the ASSPA committee seemed very secure, and a lot of good ideas and development were beginning to happen within the school through the ASSPA committee, which was the main focus point. A lot of the issues were brought to the table then. I am wondering where we are going to bring those issues and how we are going to look at those issues and develop them.

I have also found there was a full commitment from those ASSPA committee members, and also the students within the school need that commitment reflected upon them. Certainly, through the tutoring process there is a very successful development rate of those students. Now the tutors have been taken out of the school we have students left with only the teachers to support them. I found in my own experience—in my school days—that I had very little tutoring, until I left Alice Springs to go interstate and that is when I found tutoring was more readily available. As you all know, the education of our children here is very important. Our future depends on those students' education. I have three children who go to this school. Last year they were supported with their homework classes. This year my children are coming home and they are watching television. They are getting three more hours of cartoons a day. They are not learning. With the after-school homework classes here they were coming home feeling a lot more proud of their work and a lot more excited and enthusiastic about their education. Today my children have lost this feeling and I am very disappointed in that as well.

CHAIR—Were you involved in developing this concept plan with the ASSPA committee?

New Speaker—This is Pat again: I had some input, yes.

CHAIR—What sorts of things are in the concept plan for your request for funding for this year?

New Speaker—Mainly the ongoing support of those tutors in the school and also the after-school homework centre. They need more support with that. It is an ongoing process. Otherwise our children are going to be left out and they are going to become disappointed and discouraged from it all. We have built up such a wonderful relationship with a lot of the students, with the parents and with the ASSPA committee, and this has all been dropped now. Where do we start again?

CHAIR—So you are telling us that this year, since the change of funding, Aboriginal parents at the school have been less involved?

New Speaker—Less involved indeed. In my time with the ASSPA committee, over the last 12 months here, I was quite excited and thrilled that a lot more parents were being involved and coming along on their own terms. The invitations were out there and a lot more people were coming. When the students see their parents turning up in the school grounds their encouragement builds up, and they are very proud of their parents being in the school at certain times. I certainly would be if my parents were coming to the school and having that involvement and input. Now, without that happening, I think there shall most likely be a lot more pressure put on the teachers from those students in misbehaviour and so forth.

New Speaker—Good morning everybody. My name is Annette Jamieson. I am the principal of Centralian Senior Secondary College. The first point I would like to make is that I do not think you can have funds flowing at the end of 2004 and then have funds cease. I recognise there has been a change in policy, and that is okay—that is the government's decision. But if you cannot implement your new policy you need to have a transition phase to ensure that funds keep on flowing and to ensure that at least current programs are operating until such a time as they need to change.

The second point I would like to make is that if the outcome sought by the Commonwealth government is to identify students who are not meeting the minimum requirements and offer them assistance then the proposed policy will be successful. But I think there is danger there. Improving student outcomes is about the quality of teaching and learning, and essential to that is building up relationships with students. What the current policy is saying to young people is: 'You are not good enough. You are the dummies. Therefore, we are offering you assistance.' I deal with 15-, 16- and 18-year-olds and, in their heads, that is how they will take this on board. We work very hard at the school to say: 'Tuition is about being successful. You are not getting tuition because you think you are a dummy.' I think it is dangerous to break that culture up.

The third point I want to make is that the funding policy seems to be about the minimum requirements. When we work with students—whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous—it is about being the best at what you do, and that does not seem to be reflected in the policy. My last point is that funding is dependent on improving Indigenous student outcomes. Fortunately, we are in the situation where our school's success rate for NTCE is 84 per cent and our Indigenous success rate for NTCE is 79 per cent. I would be really pushing to improve those Indigenous students' outcomes, though we will continue to try. I do not want my school's funding to be cut—we need the funding to maintain what we are doing.

CHAIR—I think it would be useful for us and for the record if you could tell us about your fantastic achievement in obtaining a national award a couple of weeks ago.

New Speaker—We were fortunate in the 2004 National Awards for Quality Schooling to win the award for Best National Achievement in School Improvement. That award was based on our improvement of Indigenous success rates for the Northern Territory Certificate of Education. I was fortunate that the school was awarded a prize of \$65,000. I hate to say this in this meeting, but we have been using that money to pay our tutors because we could not afford our program to stop at the start of the year.

CHAIR—You have not had a flow of funds for year 11 and year 12 students yet. DEST is going to be managing the years 11 and 12 funds and NT DEET is managing the tutor assistance in other areas.

New Speaker—That is correct. The first contact forms were emailed to the school yesterday so that we can apply for tutoring funds. That will take probably another three weeks to process.

CHAIR—We have heard a lot this week about the way in which the tutorial money is assessed—that is, it is based on failure rather than success. It was put to us by educational professionals in Darwin on Tuesday that this goes against any pedagogy that would fit with research in terms of educational outcomes. Is that a view you would also hold?

New Speaker—That is correct.

CHAIR—What effect is it having on your students?

New Speaker—As I said before, we have been fortunate because we have maintained our programs by using that money. From our perspective there has been no change of business.

CHAIR—Do we have a handle on how DEST is allocating the money? Is it similar to primary school? We heard in Darwin on Tuesday from NT DEET that the bucket of money for the Territory—and this is not for years 11 and 12; it is for other tutors—has gone from \$5 million to \$3.7 million. That is because 1,666 students did not complete years 3, 5 and 7 and that is the figure that generates the funding formula. In previous years it was 3,800 students. So, in fact, we have more students completing years 5 and 7, but they are not included in the formula—only students who fail the MAP test get included in the formula. Do you have an idea from DEST whether that will be the same for you? Will your funding allocation only come about through students who are not achieving, in a sense?

New Speaker—My understanding, on the information and conversations I had yesterday, is that funding will be operating as it has previously, which is on the basis that each student is entitled to four hours tuition.

CHAIR—Each Indigenous student?

New Speaker—Yes.

CHAIR—At years 11 and 12?

New Speaker—Yes, provided that the teacher can identify that student as needing the tuition.

CHAIR—So there are no barriers to that funding?

New Speaker—Not at this stage, but I hesitate to say that in concrete terms because of the experience of this policy rolling out. What we were told in February was a 360-degree turnaround from we were told in November.

CHAIR—In what way?

New Speaker—Basically, the message that we were getting from DEST was that this was a new way of applying for funding but it was just about writing it up differently—you would still be able to run your normal programs et cetera. I put in a draft concept plan before the submission date and I got feedback from that. Certainly, the feedback I got was totally different to the instructions that I was given and the feeling I was given in November. Things were indeed different.

CHAIR—This is the concept plan that will generate ASPA funding as opposed to the tutorial funding?

New Speaker—That is correct.

CHAIR—You have had an active ASPA committee working at Centralian?

New Speaker—Yes, we do.

CHAIR—Is that still operating?

New Speaker—Yes, we are still operating because, again, I have been using funds to make that happen.

New Speaker—One point to add is that years 10, 11 and 12 get the funding.

CHAIR—So it is not just years 11 and 12. Thank you.

New Speaker—I was the chairperson of the Anzac Hill High School ASPA committee. My four children all went to school here. What is going to happen to the government's policy of getting Aboriginal kids to school? What incentives will they have? Anzac Hill High School has a bus that picks up students from the town camps. Are these kids going to go to school and then starve? Of the kids that are in the town camps there are some kids that go from Hidden Valley and a couple that live out at White Gate, where they do not have any proper housing; they are just living in tin sheds. One of the school staff members goes around and picks up all the kids. They go out to the Jade Creek community, which is about 30 minutes from town, and pick up the kids. If these kids get to school, do they go to school and starve because we do not have any money for food to feed them like we have been doing?

Also, probably just with NT education, what support would parents have for kids that do not go to school? I have a little girl that I have had problems with for the last two years. Sometimes she does not go to school for about a month and it is more or less up to me. I work—I am a Centrelink officer at Tangentyere. In between my work and getting my kids to school I have to

run around and try and organise something for her. I do not feel that I am getting much help from the education department. With the consultations that were held, we were not consulted; we were just told last year that the ASPA committees should get together as the DEST workers would be coming to talk to us about how the new parent support participation incentive is going to work. We were told that we had to have our concept plans drawn up.

CHAIR—Can I ask you a question as a follow-up on that? What do you think was successful about the ASPA programs in previous years?

New Speaker—It gave us as Aboriginal parents an avenue to get together and try and get our kids to school. We grew up in an era when we did not have any support at all. I grew up in a town camp. It was up to me to get myself to school. We did not have buses picking us up or anything. I do not know whether when we went to school we starved, because we were too small to understand. But now, you can get any kids, but if the kids do not have any food at least they know that they will come to school and have a feed here when they get to school.

CHAIR—So your ASPA programs would pay for the bus, and you had a nutrition or breakfast program, did you?

New Speaker—Here at Ross Park we just had lunch; we did not have a breakfast program. I think the bus that is operated through Anzac Hill belongs to Anzac Hill High School. But in our new concept plan we will probably put in to get a bus to go around and pick these children up to get them to school.

CHAIR—If my colleague Senator Kim Carr were here I am sure he would ask the question I am about to ask for him, because he has asked it all week. We have a new way of operating now from the federal government. It is a whole-of-government approach which talks about shared responsibility agreements and mutual obligation. The ASPA committees have been renamed; they are now an incentive scheme, really. How do you feel about this new world of Indigenous affairs in terms of whether there is mutual obligation on the part of the government? Do you believe this new change is an effective one?

New Speaker—I could not really comment on that, because of where I work. I just think that if the government is real about getting kids to school any little help that they can get would be appreciated, I am sure.

CHAIR—We have a situation in Mulan, where we have a shared responsibility agreement with the community, and now the federal government says, ‘You do this and we will give you something in return.’ You have just told me that parents now have no avenue to have any input. We have heard one speaker say that he feels that the partnership is not secure any more. Do you feel it is a policy that is for the better?

New Speaker—What probably upsets a lot of us is that we do not really know what is happening. When we had the ASPA committees we knew what was happening. With this new thing I do not know whether anyone has got any money to spend. We put in our concept plans when we were supposed to but I have not heard anything back about whether we are getting funding.

Senator TIERNEY—I can put a few facts on the record about what is being spent. There has actually been an increase in money. You have had a program that has been running about 20 years and obviously everyone has got used to that and is very comfortable with that. Now we have come to a major change. It is always going to be very disruptive and bumpy when you start to change something. The government is sincerely trying to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children. If you look at all the figures, they are probably the group in Australia that needs the most assistance. There is a limit to money in any area of government and if we are putting money in, and particularly if we are putting in an increase in money—I will go through that increase in a minute—you want it to be spent effectively in terms of improving educational outcomes.

I will briefly go through the increase in funding. The overall Indigenous package is \$381 million, which is a 22 per cent increase over four years. So there is more money going into the system. The trick is going to be to use that money more effectively. For IEDA there is \$281 million, which is an eight per cent increase. There is \$179 million for tutorial assistance, including \$105 million for in-class assistance. There is \$102 million for the whole-of-school intervention, and that includes \$62 million for parent-school partnerships and \$7 million for homework centres. There is a 16 per cent increase in IESIP. There is more money in the system for the education of Aboriginal children. We sincerely hope that with this new partnership arrangement we can work out better ways of delivering better educational outcomes for Indigenous children with the increase in money.

This is a very narrowly focused inquiry. Five years ago this committee did a very broad ranging inquiry into Indigenous education right around Australia. We saw some absolutely glaring needs, particularly in the area of improving attendance at schools and a range of educational outcomes. All the ministers, state and federal, were doing a similar report at the same time, and they came up with the same sorts of conclusions. We sincerely hope that this increased funding will lead to better educational outcomes. When you end a 20-year scheme and you start another one that is totally different in its concept, obviously it is going to be bumpy. I want to assure you that when it settles down, when you put your concept plans in and get your programs accepted, there will be more money into the future. This plan is over four years at the moment and I am sure it will continue beyond that. It is at a rough point at this time but that will change over the next few months, and quickly, one would hope.

CHAIR—Senator Tierney might be right in some instances but do not forget that the money he has mentioned is over a four year period.

Senator TIERNEY—I have said that—four years—and it is an increase.

CHAIR—Built into that money are automatic CPI increases. There is no growth funding in there. There are only automatic increases that you would normally expect each year with funding anyway.

Senator TIERNEY—Sorry, just to correct that, a 22 per cent increase over four years is a lot more than CPI.

CHAIR—And I have just said that NT DEET told us on Tuesday—

Senator TIERNEY—I am quoting official government figures from the minister.

CHAIR—Thank you, Senator Tierney.

Senator TIERNEY—Do not mislead the group, please.

CHAIR—Tutorial assistance here in the Northern Territory, as they know, will go from \$5 million to \$3.7 million.

Senator TIERNEY—You keep quoting that figure but not these other figures. The reason I put that on the record—

CHAIR—Please, Senator Tierney, we have somebody here who needs to speak.

New Speaker—We have a lot of people here that have come from schools. Schools are busy places. People need to have the opportunity to have their say here. I know your time here is limited. There are a lot of people sitting here who would like to say something. Could we move a bit more quickly and listen to some of the things people have to say here, because they have made a real effort to be here today and I would hate them to miss out. Could we do that, please?

New Speaker—When we were talking about the concept plans they said that whether or not you get any money depended on the concept plan. Thank you.

New Speaker—I would just like to read a brief paragraph from the Northern Territory Education Act 2004. Under ‘Minister may provide for education of children’ it states:

Children whose educational progress will, by reason of some special factor, other than a physical or mental handicap, in relation to the children, suffer unless the children have access to special educational arrangements.

I am from the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre. I am a retired teacher, now I am a bus driver and, when the funds come in, a tutor. The bus driver has an extremely important role: to get the kids to Irrkerlantye—a totally Indigenous education outlet. Most come from town camp; some come from housing in town. But it is a struggle to get the kids to school. At this stage at the school I read ‘teacher burnout’ because there is no tutoring available and the teachers have to carry the whole load. English is a second language for these children, so obviously education is not easy for them. I am just wondering whether there is a time line. The staff would like to know when the funding might actually start to filter through. Is there a time when funding might start?

CHAIR—That question might best be directed to Senator Tierney, because I do not have answers to that here.

New Speaker—He has been talking about percentage increases, but I think people here are anxious to know when the ball is going to start rolling for 2005.

Senator TIERNEY—Your Northern Territory Chief Minister has not signed the funding agreement yet.

New Speaker—I probably can understand why.

Senator TIERNEY—Until that happens no money can flow from that. You have also to go through the planning process, concept plans and more detailed plans first, so there is no absolute point in time. It depends on those processes being finished. Let us hope they are finished as quickly as possible.

New Speaker—Please take into account, as I said, that I am reading ‘teacher burnout’ down where I am. I have been through it and I can see the signs there—and we are in week 6 of the first term. Thank you.

Senator TIERNEY—I appreciate that.

New Speaker—I am from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College. I am just wondering what we are supposed to do in the meantime, when we have students who need help now. Some institutions are in a position where they can support some of these students. I am making the same point that the previous speaker made—that is, we really do need to know what is going on and we need to know now, because we are already halfway through first term. It is very difficult to do any planning for this year. It is not fair to these students to let them sit in limbo. That is the main issue.

CHAIR—Are you talking about the new ASPA regime or the tutorial assistance, or both?

New Speaker—It is the tutorial funding that I am mainly concerned about, but other issues would be relevant as well.

CHAIR—Has your school had any communication from DEST in relation to the time line for the ASPA funding?

New Speaker—At a meeting yesterday we heard about the funding for years 10, 11 and 12, and we asked, ‘What about everybody else?’ We did not get much further than that. Thank you.

New Speaker—I am with the Department of Education, Science and Training. As a point of clarification on the Catholic systemic schools, I thought it might be useful to point out that the Catholic system will be delivering ITAS. DEST are in negotiations with the Catholic system. When an agreement is signed, the Catholic system will implement its ITAS in-class tuition program.

New Speaker—I am the Principal of Gillen Primary School, Alice Springs. Gillen Primary School has around 280 kids. The Indigenous population in the school is close to 80 per cent, which makes Gillen one of the largest Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory. The school takes in a lot of kids from Alice Springs, which we refer to as the gap area. Also attending Gillen are kids from the eight camps in town and 16 or 17 kids from St Mary’s, which runs a rural program for kids who come from far away communities.

Blowing our own bag, Gillen have done fairly well over the last few years to be a leader in the Territory and Australia in implementing the accelerated literacy program. I think the Northern Territory has received a fair bit of money for that. I will speak about the old ASPA—and then get onto the ATAS tutoring in a minute—and the income support that program gave to our school. We also have an Indigenous bridging unit at Gillen and, for the last five years, we have run a

school in the town camp, which has been addressing problems associated with petrol sniffing. With a couple of preschools, our income from ASPA was about \$40,000. Our school community is extremely poor and the rate of school fee payment is about eight per cent, which is not much. So the ASPA money was really important to us.

We use our support programs to assist Indigenous students who go to school, and their needs are extremely high in terms of the profile of our school—and I think I also speak for other people in town. Since ASPA started in the early nineties, I have had running battles with DEST about sandwiches. DEST say that an emergency sandwich should not be given on the second day, only the first day. I vehemently attacked that process. How can you get a kid to school and not give them something to eat in the morning, something to eat at lunchtime and maybe even something to eat at recess? Whether it is a vegemite or Nutella sandwich, it is still better than nothing. We have a bus run which picks up kids from around town. We also put a lot of money towards measures that will build self-esteem in our students. We provide sporting uniforms to enable students to attend functions, for example, with visiting artists.

We have also had a successful Indigenous music program, which ASSPA has funded in the past. The ex-chairperson of our ASSPA committee, John Carne, has come along. We have pages and pages of things that ASSPA supplemented in our school. DEST thinks a lot of those are not worth while, but we need that funding to continue programs and to support 200 Indigenous kids on a regular basis. That might sound extremely paternalistic, but without that sort of funding we are going to have trouble surviving and providing programs that are extras to what we believe is a pretty good, solid literacy, numeracy and values education at our school.

On the ATAS tutoring, I am not quite sure of this year's figures, but 60 per cent of our Indigenous kids have second-language status—they speak languages other than English. In lots of cases kids coming from preschool to our transition class have extremely limited English. That tutorial process was picked up when they were five and it has run right through with every kid in the school for seven years. You have heard it before, but why wait five years to see another level of failure because you are not picking kids up at that stage?

I will make some comments on the present system. Not much money has hit the ground. Probably the most appalling thing I find is that we are putting in concept plans to people in DEST who were originally administrators. They had guidelines. They were not bad at telling us we could not spend money. Now, I can see this decision-making process being so far removed from anyone with an educational understanding or background that it is appalling. It is said that DEST gets the concept plans and they go into the bowels of somewhere, but the ICC bloke from here is suggested as the person who is going to make the decisions on who gets the money. How far away can you get from the grassroots?

I think that is where ASSPA was really strong. We made lots of decisions that were not bad. Some money might have been spent on outcomes that were not wholly educational but, in terms of the community in the school, people had a sense of responsibility about administering money and getting programs going within our schools. I hope what is coming up will do as much work with that as the opportunities we had with ASSPA. I might leave it there, but there is a lot more to say.

CHAIR—You have picked up on three key areas we have been hearing about this week. The most crucial is the last point you made. We were at Elcho Island yesterday where, of course, they had heard about their concept plan. A number of aspects of their concept plan have been knocked back. They were saying to us yesterday, ‘As Aboriginal parents we sat around and we worked out what was important for this school and what the priorities were, and now someone out there is saying to us that that doesn’t matter—that they’re not going to give that the tick.’ Do you find that that is one of the problems with this new regime—that Aboriginal parents have been disempowered and that the decision making has been taken away from them and put in an office somewhere in Darwin, Canberra or Alice Springs?

New Speaker—I think the term ‘partnerships’ is fairly inappropriate. I really think it has been destructed. It is bad; it is poor. Regarding Senator Tierney’s conceptualisation of where we are going to be in four years, he has more faith than I have. I do not really see a great direction being provided at the moment. Our group down here is shifting from day to day. What is happening? We do not know until Darwin tells us. It is very disconcerting and pretty scary. On the other side of that, apart from the SAISO and IESIP money our school also had access to other considerable funds which gave it the opportunity to have a crack at something a bit different.

CHAIR—The other thing I want to ask you about is nutrition. It has been fairly controversial. I have asked about it in Senate estimates and been assured by people like Tony Greer that where providing sandwiches—let us be blunt about it—could be linked to an educational outcome, you get the tick. We know of some places where it has got the tick. We know of places like Kalkaringi, for example, where it has not. You are a professional educationalist. Is there a clear link between providing Indigenous kids with nutrition through the day and educational outcomes?

New Speaker—Miss out on a few meals at parliament and see how you go!

CHAIR—Sometimes in this game you have to ask a question that you already know the answer to. We are trying to collect evidence here.

New Speaker—You know the nature of the welfare system: people might get money on a Thursday, it can be blown in various ways by Thursday afternoon or Friday and you have another 13 days to get through.

Senator TIERNEY—I think Senator Crossin is trying to get the concept onto the *Hansard* record.

CHAIR—That is right. We are trying to gather evidence here to support our case because we believe there is a link. If you could help, that would be good.

New Speaker—I think it is fairly well substantiated around the world that people with a good amount of food in their tummies perform better in education. But there are other things which suggest that they do not have food because their families just have not organised things so that they have three meals every day.

CHAIR—I know there were a few other people here who wanted to comment.

New Speaker—My name is Bev O’Callaghan and I am the AIEW here at Ross Park. I have been involved in the ASSPA committee since the first day it started. When my kids went to school, I was one of those parents who used to just dump their kids at the school gate, go off to work and not have anything to do with it. I put up with what the school and the teachers said and all of that sort of stuff. If I did not like anything I just used to ignore it because I did not think I had the guts to go to the school and say anything to them. But, since the ASSPA committee started, I have gotten to know the teachers and school staff. Since the start of the ASSPA committee, every year it just got stronger and stronger. Now there is nothing—it has just been chopped off.

I would hate to be a parent involved in a primary school now. I was grabbed into the ASSPA committee when my kids were at primary school and I was gradually introduced to the school system. If it were not for an ASSPA committee I would not be involved in a school now. I would not have chucked my job in and come to work at a school. I would not have even stepped into a school, not even to have a row with teachers. I think the parents now have just lost interest in the whole school system because they have no real ownership of anything at the school. Why should they come here? They will come here and have a row with the teachers, but as to any sort of decision making there is just no avenue for them. They are not ones who sit in on school councils at night-time or after school and have their say. They like to have their own little group and have their say with the school rep there. They feel there is no real purpose for them in coming to school anymore.

CHAIR—So you would say to us that having an ASSPA committee that has responsibilities for deciding where the funding is going to go in their school actually assists parents in their development and understanding of the school system?

New Speaker—I think the parents feel proud to have been able to make these decisions on their own. All our parents were involved in the concept plan, the various workshops and all of that type of thing. It has taken so long for everything to go through. We had big workshops and we were all in agreement with what we had put into the concept plan. It was a lot of hard work; a lot of time went into it. It is really disheartening now for those parents because we put our plans in and all we got was a letter of receipt saying, ‘We’ve got your plan.’ There is just nothing. I have no reason now to call a parent and say, ‘Listen, let’s have a get-together and talk about things.’ There is nothing to talk about because there is no plan happening. As you all know, if your plan is approved you get an application and all of that sort of stuff. But the parents are so disheartened at the moment.

The same with the homework centre: parents used to sit down in the homework centre and try to help their kids so that maybe they would be able to help their kids at home too, but now there is no homework centre. We had 40-odd kids in there three times a week. Also, with the emergency food, we are relying on the goodwill of staff members to bring in emergency food for these kids. You could say, ‘Contact the parent,’ because the parent needs to know that these kids are getting the food. That parent may not know. But, then again, if you contact the parent that kid might get into trouble for telling us that they are hungry or the parent will start keeping the kid at home because there is no food in the house and they are shamed—they do not want people to know about it.

The tutoring is really valuable. I have a daughter who was at university and she was part of that tutoring—she accepted the tutoring. I do not think she would have got where she is now without the tutoring. I have seen the kids from town at the school. They confide in the tutors. They treat the tutors as though they are their mentors. They confide in them about delicate issues—stuff they would not tell mum and dad—or things like that. Tutors really pick up a lot.

CHAIR—Thank you.

New Speaker—My name is Sally Axten. I am an AIEW at Braitling Primary School. I would like to support what everybody else has said here, because our school is going through the same thing as well. But there are a few things we would like to know. What will happen to students who are irregular attendees? What happens when they miss out on the MAP testing and they are the ones who need tutoring? Do they miss out completely just because they did not attend school that day and missed out on the MAP testing?

CHAIR—As opposed to sitting the test and failing it?

New Speaker—That is right.

CHAIR—Do not forget, the legislation just generates the funding. Once you get the funding in your school—

New Speaker—When do we find out when we will get tutors for those kids who failed last year?

CHAIR—Let me explain to people what happens. Legislation went through in December last year which opens the gate for the funding. Funding cannot be released from the Commonwealth unless a legal agreement is signed between the Commonwealth, the states and the territories. We had evidence on Tuesday that the Northern Territory education department received that agreement and met for the first time with the Commonwealth on 28 January. But I understand that Sid Stirling has made a decision that in the meantime the Northern Territory government will release funds and recoup that funding back from the Commonwealth. Because of the crisis that is happening, the NT government has only just realised that. I do not know what the time line is.

New Speaker—Education is a very important part of everybody's life. The schools have been on holiday for six weeks. I do not think the departments have been, so I just wonder what has happened.

CHAIR—I do not know. I am not here representing the Northern Territory government, the Commonwealth and DEST.

New Speaker—Where is the priority?

CHAIR—I think this is all part of the evidence that we are collecting—that since the act has been passed the administrative process has been particularly slow and frustrating.

New Speaker—I have had a number of parents come up to me and ask what is happening to the tutoring in the schools. They are saying, ‘My child was getting tutored and now they are getting nothing.’ Their child may not be right down the bottom but may be just balancing above there, and they want to know what is going to happen. Will their child just stay there because they are not getting any help, just because they have missed something that the teacher has said? It is really hard for the teachers as well, because a lot of these teachers are teaching classes of up to 28 kids and they cannot concentrate on one or two kids that are left behind.

CHAIR—Are you at the same school?

New Speaker—No, I would like to follow on from that with a problem. My name is Sharon Donnellan. I am from Charles Darwin University—I lecture there. I have got a child who comes here to Ross Park. Following on from what Sally said about the problems with tutoring, my child who is in year 2 is one of the oldest kids in that class. She struggles big time, and she has had tutoring most of her life. This year, because there is no money there to fund tutoring, what has happened is that she is struggling big time. She is not finishing the work that is required while she is here at school, so what is happening is that I have made an agreement with the teacher: whatever work she does not finish she brings home and I work on it with her at home. So it is time consuming on my part. Previously, a tutor has helped her with it. She is a child that cannot afford to get further behind than she already is.

New Speaker—I would like to add something about absences. In the last lot of home visits that I have done a lot of parents have been saying, ‘We cannot send our kids to school because we have got no food.’ It is a big shame job for them to be sending their kids to school with no food. They do not want to be relying on the school to organise lunch for them, so they just do not send them. When we had the emergency lunches they were quite happy to send their kids to school because they knew that there would be something there.

CHAIR—Thanks.

New Speaker—I am Linda Warner from Living Waters and I want to talk about two things. With regard to ATAS tutoring, the government has just brought in that children can start school at 4½ years old. Any educator knows that these are the prime years—children learn best in these early years. If we are taking away the tutoring for the children in these early years and waiting until they get to year 4 before any of them are identified as requiring tutoring we will have missed the whole ball game. It will already be too late—these children will be behind. In the past they have had the tutoring right from the word go. They have been supported in the classroom so the teachers are not having to do it just by themselves and they have even been able to attain benchmarks. In our school we do not have a great Aboriginal population but our Indigenous children have passed benchmarks, and I would put that down to the fact that they have had fantastic ATAS tutoring up until now. These children have only just passed their benchmarks but they have been lucky that they have been able to get there. I do not think that they would have got that if they had not had that tutoring up until now. It has been cut off; nothing has happened this year. We are seeing the signs—these children are struggling. The parents are struggling because they cannot help them at home—they do not have those resources. That is what I want to say with regard to the tutoring.

Also, I would like to speak on the fact that we have gone cold turkey this year with regard to funding and having to put in concept plans. Nothing has hit most schools yet as far as funding goes. Any good leader knows that when you want to introduce a new concept or plan you do it through a transitional phase. There has been no transitional phase here. Up till the end of last year we had something in support of schools that worked but that has just been taken away and the schools are struggling. You have a look at every single principal and ASSPA committee member here and you will see we all show the signs that it is not working this year. The fact that we have to do concept plans is another issue, because you are involving Indigenous parents yet they do not have the educational background to be able to formulate these plans. That means we are doing that with them—there is the partnership with the schools; yes, I understand that—but it is time consuming, and we are all very busy people. I think it has taken us something like six hours to sit down and work out a plan, what with meetings with parents as well as getting the plan together and then sending it off—and then waiting. We are still waiting.

New Speaker—I am a parent of two kids who come to Ross Park. They identify as Aboriginal. I have been involved in the ASSPA committee here over the last few years. I want to talk about the homework centre and alert you to one of the implications of the changes so far. It is week 6 and there is no homework centre. The homework centre has run previously from week 2 to the second last week whereby kids—not only Aboriginal kids but mostly Aboriginal kids—can go to the homework centre three days a week. It is a fact—everyone knows this—that kids who do well at school have at-home support of their education. The extent that Aboriginal kids get that varies depending on the situation, but the homework centre equalises that in terms of showing the kids that other people, the Aboriginal people that are involved, do care. It is really important. There is the interim period and we think there is a rosy period ahead once it is all bedded down but the implication of the system that is set up is really that the weight of the administrative load will crush the will and ability of the people to get together and actually meet the requirements. Come on, you have got to be honest about that. It is a heavy burden just to get hold of the same money that used to come through before.

CHAIR—There are implications of the concept plan and funding. We have heard from schools that have put in a request for more funding than they got under ASSPA. Some schools may get more than they got in the past but the implication of that is that some schools might also get less than they have had in the past.

New Speaker—Who makes all the decisions on that?

CHAIR—That is in the hands of DEST now.

New Speaker—I am here wearing several hats. I am the grandmother and guardian of a grandchild who is Indigenous. I am a tutor. I have been involved with ASSPA. I am also someone who has actually written to the committee and lodged a submission. Most of my concerns have been expressed in that written thing. First of all, as a grandmother, I have a child who has been tutored from grade 4. She is now in grade 9. According to all the tutoring things, she is actually beginning to achieve. She is very focused; she knows what she wants. But officially tutoring is being withdrawn. It is not because the school is not doing that, but it is school money, not DEST money, that is paying for it at the moment. She is receiving help. I know that I can help her because I have that ability, but parents are not necessarily good tutors. Parents carry lots of baggage. I am on my second generation—I am bringing up my second

family—and I know that I carry lots of baggage and that I am not the best person to tutor my own child. I think that goes for most parents in this room: we are not the best people to do that.

We also talked about nutrition. I tutored at three schools last year. At one of the three schools I was almost exclusively with a group of children who caught a bus at six in the morning. They did not get up six; they got on the bus at six. Even if there had been food at school, can you go from half past five in the morning until one o'clock without a meal? You need something. The nutrition program that was put on for them was not great—it was not a full fry-up—but there was toast and cornflakes, and the children were old enough to get their own breakfast. There was something for them to eat so that, when bottoms were put on seats, the children were wide awake and alert—and that, to me, is an academic outcome.

I tutored and still do tutor at another school—again, with moneys found from the school—where children are beginning school at 12. They have not been to school, so where are they in the MAP testing? They are off the whole thing. They have never been MAP tested because they have never been to school. But the teachers who are dealing with them know where they are. They know what the kids can do. It seems to me that if you put it in terms of a test, which is wise for part of it, you also need input from the people who work hands-on with the children.

At the third place where I tutored last year—I am not there this year—I worked with adults who had been to school, who had realised that their education was lacking and missing and who had gone back to school. That, to me, is an academic outcome—just to feel comfortable enough to say: 'All right. I'm grown up. I'm 30. I need a better education. I can go to school, because school isn't intimidating.' That, to me, is an academic outcome. Those outcomes probably are not ones that you can measure by a MAP test or by a matriculation but, rather, by the fact that you have parents who can come into school and feel comfortable. I have lived in the Territory long enough to know that that has not always been the case and still is not the case with many families.

New Speaker—My name is Josie Douglas. I am an Aboriginal parent of children who attend Ross Park Primary School. Firstly, I would like to say that, even though there has been an increase in money, it would seem that accessing this money has become a lot more difficult. That burden has been placed back onto the schools and parents. It seems to me to be an access issue. Even though there is an increase, the benefits will not be flowing back into the schools and to the Aboriginal students and the parents because of the access issue. With these changes, the support to mainstream schools to support Aboriginal kids is being eroded, and these changes are also taking away assistance to Aboriginal parents.

Moving to the ASSPA issue, parents have a formal link into school, into classrooms, to teachers and into the running of the school through the ASSPA committees. The ASSPA committee is a platform for Aboriginal parents, and it gives them a voice. Out of ASSPA come the ASSPA lunches, and you can equate those to attendance as well. It might seem unbelievable to people that kids do not go to school because they do not have any lunch, but it is a reality. If parents do not have food to give their kids for lunch, they tell their kids: 'Go and have an ASSPA lunch today.' So you can equate ASSPA lunch to attendance—kids turning up to school. Once they get there that is half the job done, so ASSPA lunches are really important. Also, through ASSPA, things are done from the ground up, and you can get achievements in Aboriginal education from the ground up. 'From the ground up' means through ASSPA and through

Aboriginal parents being involved. I think that all of the answers and all of the things that are working within Aboriginal affairs have come from Aboriginal people, from the ground up. I hope that the Senate committee can take that away and take that into account.

The homework centres are extremely valuable because, as well as the extra tutorial assistance that Aboriginal kids are receiving, they also get the kids into the habit of study—it is a whole different culture of education. Providing the habit of study is one of the really important things about homework centres. Kids take that habit with them into high school and to university, if that is the path that they choose. As Aboriginal parents, we all have aspirations for our children. We can realise those aspirations through the school, working with the school and the ASSPA committee. Ross Park had a brilliant ASSPA committee. Sharon and Pat have been long-time members of that. These changes seem to be taking away progress that has been made.

CHAIR—Josie, if it is not going to be called ASSPA but is in the form of, say, an Aboriginal parents' committee of some sort at the school, can you see a role for that under the new funding regime or do you think it has been diminished in some way?

New Speaker—As long as it is not token. ASSPA had funds. My understanding is that they had a budget. Schools take notice of budgets because money is so tight. If Aboriginal parents have some money that they can allocate towards different programs, schools sit up and take notice of that committee. If that is taken away and you have an Aboriginal parents' committee that is just token, why have one at all? It has to be real and it has to have some power and some voice. ASSPA had a budget and could organise special events during NAIDOC Week—certainly Ross Park does; I can speak as a parent of kids that go here—and they also gave out academic achievement awards during NAIDOC Week. So it all goes back to education and academic achievement. There is a whole range of other different programs and support mechanisms. If you are going to have something token, do not have it at all.

New Speaker—My name is Venya Clarke. I have two children who attend Bradshaw Primary School. Bradshaw had 69 students receiving the ATAS support. Given the changes, we will be eligible to employ tutors for 12 students who did not meet national benchmark standards. We also had a successful ASSPA committee. I have been involved as a committee member for the last two years. I attended school assemblies on Wednesdays. They were really successful on the incentive awards. In NAIDOC Week there was also good participation from parents. The cultural programs and excursions during the NAIDOC Week are always really successful. Non-Indigenous students are involved as well, wanting to know about Aboriginal culture. Now that the ASSPA committee has gone it has created a barrier between the school and Indigenous parents. Having the ASSPA committee gave Indigenous parents confidence in making decisions about the programs that were provided.

CHAIR—You say that barriers have now been set up. Can you expand on that a bit? Do you feel that people do not feel comfortable about coming and getting involved or that there is no reason to do so?

New Speaker—Parents had the confidence to go to school because, meeting at the ASSPA committee, you would know each other's faces. Now, a barrier has been created for Indigenous parents even going to the school. It is like what Auntie Bev O'Callaghan said before when she

talked about dropping her children off. That is what it is going to be like now—just dropping your kids off to school and taking off to work.

New Speaker—I am Johnny Carne from Gillen Primary School. I have been the ASSPA chairperson for three years. Pat summed it all up about pride of the students in seeing their parents at school. This has an impact on behaviour and attendance, which has an impact on their education. Centralian College shows how important the tutors are by using their prize money to keep them going. Emergency lunches at our school are just hanging on by a thread. The school is kindly helping in running the program for now, but for how long we do not know. Parents are losing their voice, after coming out of their shells and meeting each other for the first time even though they have lived in the same town for years and years. How are they going to speak to the school council when we were just getting them to speak to the ASSPA committee? That is all.

CHAIR—Why did you get involved in the ASSPA committee? Has it been a good experience for you?

New Speaker—Yes, it has. I knew it would have an impact on the kids' education, and I know how important that is. It has an impact on their education.

CHAIR—Has it impacted on your kids' education?

New Speaker—Yes, on my kids' education, as well as that of all the other kids there.

CHAIR—In what way?

New Speaker—They come to school with empty bellies and have a feed. There are tutors there to help them in the classroom. They are not just sitting down and staring off into space.

CHAIR—So because you have been involved that has encouraged your kids to get involved in school too?

New Speaker—Yes, but also because I say they have to go to school. But, yes, the ASSPA committee has been helpful with lots of kids at the school, even some non-Indigenous ones. Yes, I think so.

CHAIR—Thank you.

New Speaker—My name is Stephanie Mackee-Schneider. I am a non-Indigenous parent at the school. I just felt there was a need for a non-Indigenous parent to say something just to remind you, and for the record, that what we had at this school was a win-win situation for everybody. When those Indigenous kids succeed we all succeed. The town is better off. It is a better community. It is also better for the teachers so it is better for the non-Indigenous kids as well. The other thing I want to do is express my outrage that we had a situation here where we had a government policy that was not very expensive, that was 100 per cent successful, and you have just dumped it. I think there should be an inquiry into that. I cannot believe you have done that. How many other programs can you point at like that? It was working. It was one of those dreams, the kids were all succeeding—and you have just thrown it away. I just find that absolutely outrageous.

The other thing I want to say is that looking into the future you can see this mutual obligation thing coming up, and I guess that is another battle or whatever that has to be worked at. But what disturbs the parents of this school is: are we going to have a situation where kids are punished or disadvantaged for who their parents are or for their parents' ability to articulate things and to cope? You do not know their circumstances; you do not know what they are struggling against. If they cannot come up with the goods, are their kids going to be left out at some point? That is an issue that I would like to be thought about for the future. Thank you.

CHAIR—Can I ask a general question. The background to this is that DEST undertook a review of the IEDA programs, of which ASSPA was one. They told me in estimates last year that there are 3,800 ASSPA committees in this country. They randomly selected 400 of those and sent them a survey about what was good or bad in the program. They also sent it to state and territory departments and other education providers. They got 62 responses back. Ten of those were from ASSPA committees—so 10 out of the 400, out of 3,800, responded—and the other 52 responses were from other providers or state or territory governments. So can I ask the people here: was there any contact with you in 2003 when this was being reviewed? Did you go to forums DEST held or did you receive any paperwork from DEST?

New Speaker—Nothing.

New Speaker—I had one come to me but it was in week 10, and week 10 is in December. I did not have time to do it nor did anybody else.

CHAIR—Just to put it in some context for you: it is on the basis of that consultation that these changes have been made.

New Speaker—My name is Carmen McLean. I am the Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker at Sadadeen Primary School. I find with the changes to the PSP we are trying to get the parents to join up as a subcommittee with the school council. They do not feel comfortable, so we have had no interest at all. We sent the paperwork out last week. I feel that ownership has been taken away from the Indigenous parents and they do not feel comfortable in being part of that subcommittee. At Sadadeen we have a high percentage of Indigenous students. I am lucky because the school is continuing a bus run which goes into Hidden Valley and to Sadadeen. Our attendance is good. We have an alternative pathway classroom from transition to grade 6.

We offer a breakfast and lunch program only because we approached Brumbies to help us out. We do not have any other funding. We rely on other organisations to help us get these children to school. Their attendance is good only because they know they come and get a hot breakfast and a lunch. It is a shame that a lot of these programs have been stopped. With the ATAS tutoring especially, we found the children had high self-esteem because they were working one on one and they felt comfortable. Their attendance was high and they just felt great coming to the school and approaching teachers and whoever was there. Parents felt good about coming in, but now they just drop off the kids and take off. They do not even come and say hello or see what is going on. As a parent I have been involved with ASSPA for 23 years. One of the parents who started off at St Phillips finished it last year and I am ashamed to see it has gone the way it has because I feel that the responsibility has been taken away from us.

CHAIR—Were there some situations with the tutoring where you might have had one tutor to a number of kids rather than one to one?

New Speaker—Yes, we did, and the self-esteem that came up in those children was great. They learnt, they looked forward to coming to school and it just showed the difference in these children. I am going to speak specially about this because we have a different clientele at my school with the town camp children. To get those children on the bus and to school and attending is an effort itself every day. It is a shame to see that it has gone the way it has.

New Speaker—My name is Lorna Anderson. I am a GP but I am also a mother to two Indigenous kids. If you look more broadly than this, not just at education, Bob Boughton had a big study a couple of years ago where they assessed the link between education and health. The outcome was very interesting because the kids that had not been educated at all, who had mothers who had not had any education at all, and the ones that had had a very good education—I cannot remember which year exactly but it was up in the senior years—had much better health outcomes than the kids in the middle who had mothers that had had a bit of education. They think the reason for that is their self-esteem. They had been through the white education system which basically put their self-esteem down, and therefore they did not access health services and had a worse health outcome. So you have to look a lot broader.

With regard to what is happening now, I have a son in year 5 now. He was in year 3 and he had a MAP test. He failed it. He had education last year—he had special tutoring. This year, there is nothing. Do I have to wait until next year before he can get tutoring? He has already missed a year. So here you have a kid that gets tutoring and gets confident and then the next year there is nothing—he falls down and cannot keep up with the other kids. We have a good kid here that we are setting up for failure and maybe a bad health outcome. That is what we have to look at much more broadly. That this could happen is a disgrace.

CHAIR—Do you have that research?

New Speaker—Bob Boughton did it.

CHAIR—Thank you.

New Speaker—I am Matt Skoss. I am a senior teacher at Alice Springs High School. I am currently on six months long service leave. I started my career there in 1987, so I have been there a long time. I would like to comment on the value of that intervention of ATAS tutoring. I have seen many Indigenous kids just having their confidence increased by having that personal attention either one on one or in a small group, particularly in mathematics and language. It is a real pleasure to see these kids track through into some tertiary pathways and then come back into our community. Many of the kids that grow up here actually choose to return to this community, where their family are. Picking up on a point that Annette Jameison made about the sudden cessation of the funding for tutors, it is really hard in regional and remote localities, particularly in Alice Springs—you cannot just pull tutors out of fresh air. So when the funding does not come through, quite often people who have had a long association with the schools have had to take up other employment opportunities because of the lack of tenure. We need to invest in the relationships between these paraprofessional staff and schools. There is a huge body of evidence about the very special role that paraprofessional staff play in our schools today. There is a lot of

research—just put it into Google and you will find out about the value of these people. We need to look at the long-term partnerships.

With respect to ASSPA committees, the evidence that I am getting in the hat that I am wearing as a sort of regional representative of COSGO—the Council of School Government Organisations—is that some people are now just choosing to disengage, because they feel they have been disenfranchised; they feel they do not have a voice. The bureaucratic responses need to look at that social aspect of the value of getting people into the school. I went with my wife to Sadadeen Primary ASSPA evening last year at the Memo Club. She was talking to one of the grandmothers. She was speaking in Pitjantjatjara to this lady and they found out they had all these people that they knew in common. This little kid was just beaming with pride that someone could talk with his family in their first language. It is really important that we look at the human capital, the social capital, and not just the fiscal aspects of it. Thank you.

New Speaker—I certainly agree with all that has been said this morning, but what worries me is observing the Indigenous people in our school—the ASSPA people, the ladies and gentlemen coming from the camps, who are very shy people—becoming confident and then, all of a sudden, they are disempowered.

CHAIR—Thank you. Ann wants to tell us something that she forgot to mention in her presentation.

New Speaker—There has been talk about homework centres. They are absolutely essential. I wonder if the committee is aware that a very high proportion of Indigenous students cannot do homework because of the situation at home. You lend a child a reading book and you never see it again, and it is under your name at the library so you have to pay for it. For many of our Indigenous students there is nowhere they can do homework. You might be able to get over that with tutoring and extra help with reading at a young level, but by the time they get to high school they have got to have places in which to do homework and research. A high proportion of Indigenous homes would not have computers and the ambience for homework.

The other thing which I would like to go back to concerns the little group I worked with who got up at half past five in the morning to catch a bus to attend. They were in year 6. They were transition students. They were happy. Why? Because they knew they had support. They knew they had someone who cared for them and not just for the whole class, who was prepared to put in the time and effort to put them in a position where they could access going into the eisteddfod, being on stage in the school concert—all those things that a school does that are not just to do with education. They came as often as they could; that was not all the time by a long chalk. These transition level grade 6 students got up at half past five in the morning to come to school. Not many people from generic society would do that.

CHAIR—Does anyone else want to say anything?

New Speaker—My name is Vince Jeisman. I work for local member Warren Snowdon. For over 20 years I was a school teacher in various areas across the Northern Territory. I want a bit of clarification on the issue of students that have not done any MAP testing. It has been estimated that upwards of 3,000 post primary years students are not attending school. What happens when these kids—I saw this, and Matt can attest to this—appear at a suburban high

school, an urban educational facility or even a local school out bush and want to have some education? What access do they have to any assistance if they have not done a MAP test?

CHAIR—My understanding—and Alan might assist me here—is this: the formula will now be generated based on the number of kids who sit the test and fail it. In the Northern Territory last year 1,666 students sat the years 3, 5 and 7 test and did not achieve it. So 1,666 times X dollars would be the \$3.71 million that the Northern Territory gets this year for tutorial assistance. NT DEET will now be managing that program. That means—Alan might help me here but I think this is right—that it is not about the number of kids who could have sat the test; it is about the number of kids who sat and failed. So if you have out there 10,000 kids who never sat the test at all they are not even in the formula. Say those children happen to then turn up at school. Once schools get their allocation of money for tutors, any child is eligible to have tutorial assistance. It is not necessarily the kids who failed year 3 who get the assistance in the school; it is the kids who failed the test who generate the formula used to work out the money. But if you have a system whereby it was \$5 million and now it is \$3.71 million this year, to me that says either fewer kids get assistance or the same number of kids get assistance but for a shorter period of time. Alan might be able to tweak the edges of that but I am pretty sure that is the way it is.

New Speaker—I will make some minor clarification. The only time students are assessed, there is publicly available information and any student can achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes is through the formal multilevel assessment program that is run in the Northern Territory. There are other programs run in every other state and territory. A judgment is made from the results of those assessment processes as to whether students can achieve the minimum benchmark for literacy and numeracy in schooling in years 3, 5 and 7. When that publicly available information is provided, this program operates in response to that for any child who does not meet one of those benchmarks. There are benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy. If they meet two and miss one, they are in. If they meet one and miss two, they are in. If they do not meet any of them, they are in.

Any student who does not reach one of the benchmarks at that year level is added to the student number, which Trish has said is 1,666 across the Territory. That includes students who were assessed in or exempted from the process; it does not include the students who did not sit the MAP process. The estimate is that somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent of Northern Territory education department school students do not sit the MAP test. If they sat the test and were assessed as not reaching the benchmark, they would also be included in the number. But until they are actually assessed there is no way to make the judgment. The number is then multiplied by 32 weeks, because that is about the average amount of time for tutoring in any particular year, and by 2.5 hours, which is far in excess of the amount of tutoring that most kids have had in the last four or five years. It has been an average of about 1.4 hours. Then that is multiplied by a \$30 figure.

CHAIR—That is where you get the \$3.71 million for the Territory this year?

New Speaker—Yes.

CHAIR—But it was \$5 million.

New Speaker—The system then gets to use those funds to apply tutoring to students. The first priority clearly is students who have not been able to reach the benchmark and also students who are assessed as being at risk of not being able to reach the benchmark. In the Northern Territory there is a Northern Territory Curriculum Framework. Students are assessed against that framework. Schools make a judgment about where students fit against that curriculum framework. If students are assessed as being at risk of not reaching the appropriate year level within the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework, they can also receive tutoring within the context of the total bucket of money, as Senator Crossin has pointed out.

CHAIR—For your information, this committee has received a submission from Amanbidji School, up Kalkaringi way. Reg had 13 kids who sat the year 3 test last year and 11 passed. When he sends his numbers in, only two students in that school technically generate money for further assistance. His submission to us is that, without that assistance for all 13, he will struggle to make sure those 11 students reach the next benchmark.

New Speaker—My name is Liz Bovos and I am Assistant Principal at Sadadeen Primary School. There are a couple of anomalies. I understand that we have a number of children in the Northern Territory who do not sit the MAP test, as Alan just pointed out, but at least we have a system-wide understanding that there is an intention that everybody does that. We have a very transient population in Alice Springs. In the other states it is not compulsory. Children do not have to sit the benchmark test—it is a parent decision. We are getting a lot of children who are in year 6 perhaps this year and who are working at a transition or year 1 level whose parents elected for them not to do the MAP test last year. So there is an anomaly. I am interested to know how other states are handling that.

The other thing I have to say is that unless I am misinformed—and I know this information would not worry the primary school representatives but it would worry the high school representatives—the year 7s have only two benchmarks to be compared. These are reading and mathematics. That is because nationally there has been no agreement on the writing benchmarks. That limits the schools' opportunity to access the funding.

CHAIR—Thanks for that information. Alan, would you know what happens in other states or is that something this committee might need to find out and get back to Sadadeen on?

New Speaker—I would prefer that you do that as I do not recall—

CHAIR—All right, we will do that. That is crucial evidence for us, particularly if we go to Queensland or New South Wales and find that parents can opt in or opt out of the test. That is something crucial that we all need to check.

New Speaker—It is certainly the case in South Australia.

CHAIR—Thank you. I will now wrap up today's session. In doing so, I want to acknowledge the fact that you have given up your time to come today. I should have acknowledged at the start of this session the traditional owners of this country and the fact that we are able to participate in this on their land. Unfortunately, I do that belatedly. I want to thank you all for giving up your time to provide us with evidence. If, as you go away today, you think you forgot to mention that or you should have said this, then please write to us and add any additional thoughts. When you

walk out the door today that is not the end of the process: you can still provide comments through my office or Vince's office or directly to the committee at Parliament House, because we are more than happy to receive any further thoughts or comments that you have on this situation. I want to say on behalf of the committee that we really appreciate the fact that you have given up so much of your time. That has been very valuable. We hope we can produce for you a very strong report that represents the views you have given us today. Thank you very much for coming along.

Committee adjourned at 12.22 p.m.