

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-2011**

Outcome 2 - Schools

DEEWR Question No.EW0644_11

Senator Siewert asked on 21/10/2010, Hansard page 41.

Question

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE UNDER INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Senator SIEWERT—I want to touch on an issue around school attendance under Indigenous education, and that is the issue of hearing. I want to get an understanding of what approaches you are taking, audits of classrooms for sound fields, whether all children—I am obviously focusing on northern Australia, in particular—should be screened as they start school. I am looking at this as a barrier to education. Mr Goodwin—The first observation we would make on that is that the responsibility for that sort of screening rests very clearly with the education providers—with the states and the Catholics and independents. I can tell you that the Commonwealth funded a very effective project up in the Kimberley which you maybe aware of—the sound field amplification project. I do not have figures with me but at best guess I think around 25 schools, or all of the schools in the Kimberley region, were involved in that project. It was very well received and deemed to be a very effective project. We are looking at the future for that sort of approach, and certainly will be disseminating the results to the relevant education providers to inform their decision making in the future. Senator SIEWERT—Are you able to provide those results? Ms Wall—We will go and gather the more national activities on this. There is a lot of work being done. The NT is rolling this out, I think, into all their classrooms. Senator SIEWERT—Last time I asked the NT, they could not tell me. They had literally started the audit of the classrooms when this committee inquiry was there, so they could not tell me. Ms Wall—All right. We will work with our colleagues in the states and come back with a picture of what is happening across the country.

Answer

State and Territory education providers have primary responsibility for the delivery of education services and the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students differ across, and within, each of these jurisdictions.

The Australian Government funds the National Curriculum Services to deliver the *What Works* project. The project delivers professional development workshops to teachers in all states and territories across Australia which aim at ensuring teaching focuses on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait students. The project's most recent Core Issues publication focused on health issues for Aboriginal students - *Education and Student Health: the big picture*. It included a focus on hearing problems for Aboriginal children with tips for teachers and links to sources and resources. The paper was developed with the assistance of Associate Profs Garth Alperstein and Maria Egan , University of Notre Dame Australia, School of Medicine, Sydney.

There are a number of initiatives across jurisdictions which support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who suffer from conductive hearing loss. Some of these activities include:

Western Australia

Conductive Hearing Loss Strategy

The Department of Education, Western Australia offers professional development and resource materials on Conductive Hearing Loss and Otitis Media.

The “Do You Hear What I Hear Resource Kit” has been developed to raise community awareness, knowledge and understanding of Otitis Media and Conductive hearing Loss and how it reduces the impact on student learning. Currently available in Western Australian District Education Offices, the kit will help primary school teachers, parents and members of the community recognise and assist children whose learning abilities have been impaired with recurring Otitis Media.

Kimberley region of WA

Acknowledging the links between hearing and early literacy acquisition, in 2009 the Australian Government provided funding of \$1.3 million to support the Kimberley Sound Amplification Project. The cross sectoral pilot project has provided sound amplification equipment for all 458 classrooms in 43 Kimberley schools in the Government, Catholic and independent sectors. The project is in response to the evidence that on any one day in a Kimberley classroom, up to 65% of Aboriginal students can experience intermittent hearing loss. Feedback provided to the WA Department of Education indicates that teachers are reporting noticeable improvements in student engagement in the classroom.

Teacher professional development provided instruction in the use of the equipment and also focused on aural and personal hygiene and nutrition. The professional development was led by the WA Department of Education teacher who has deaf education training as well as experience in working in remote schools. Teachers have been very supportive of the training content and in-class support. Feedback on the training indicated that of the total 287 teacher responses, overall, 198 “Strongly Agreed” that the information was useful, supportive, improved teacher understanding of hearing loss, and that the presentation was well delivered. Of the remaining 89 responses, 78 “Agreed”.

Northern Territory

Under the SmarterSchools and Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnerships, funding provided has supported the Northern Territory Department of Education install Sound Field Systems in targeted remote schools.

In addition, with funding provided under the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership, the Northern Territory Department of Education is establishing Territory-wide conductive hearing coordination to ensure schools have access to appropriate levels of professional development to support students. This initiative has enhanced services provided to support students with conductive hearing loss. To date, 37 Closing the Gap schools have accessed services, such as professional learning programs for classroom teachers, special education teachers and assistant teachers that focus on the provision of advice about improving classroom acoustics,

and the provision of support in the development of action plans for individuals and groups of students who are diagnosed with Otitis Media (middle ear disease) and Conductive Hearing Loss.

Queensland

Closing the Gap Indigenous Education Strategy: Deadly Ears, Deadly Kids, Deadly Communities initiative.

The Deadly Ears, Deadly Kids, Deadly Communities program is a Queensland State Government initiative that targets the prevention and management of ear disease and its associated impacts. The program has compiled a comprehensive strategy that recommends actions across health, housing, education, employment, municipal services, disability services, community services and numerous other domains associated with ear health.

Other initiatives:

- The *Improving Eye and Ear Health Services for Indigenous Australians for Better Education and Employment Outcomes* measure that provides eye and ear health services for Indigenous Australians. The ear health components of the measure include hearing health promotion, training of health workers in ear health and hearing, maintenance and purchase of equipment for ear health screening, and specialist services including ear surgery.
- Australian Hearing Outreach program that provides hearing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to the age of 21 years. Australian Hearing Outreach works closely in partnership with most Indigenous Community controlled health services. Services are also delivered through mainstream government health and education services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Australian Hearing services include:

- hearing tests
- special support for babies and children
- programs for schools where many children have hearing problems
- information about how to seek help in local communities
- ear health meetings and workshops with community representatives
- ear healthcare training for health workers in community.

In 2009/2010 Australian Hearing outreach audiologists visited sites in 117 remote areas.