



## THE SENATE

### SENATE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT REFERENCES COMMITTEE

#### Answers to questions taken on notice

#### Public Hearing

Wednesday 22 February 2023, Canberra

#### Answer from MissingSchool

#### Question (pg. 23):

**Senator PAYMAN:** In your opening statement you mentioned Owen's case and how the telecommunication robot assisted him. What are some of the things that can be implemented to mitigate 'school can't' and things that parents and teachers can incorporate, such as a peer mentoring program? What are some things that would assist?

**Ms Gilmour:** .....Our recommendations through our policy paper developed in 2020—that was also through the Churchill foundation—and released in 2021 made recommendations to government. The first was to see this cohort of students in 'school can't' in school isolation to become a priority equity cohort in the national school reforms—I want to put an asterisk on that; could someone please remind me to come back on it?

#### Answer:

Key policy recommendation: this cohort of students be recognised as a Priority Equity Cohort in the National School Reforms: MissingSchool presented its policy paper to staff from the Productivity Commission in 2021, making the above recommendation specifically in relation to 'school can't' in a health condition context. Despite its platform on wellbeing, the Final Report "Review of the National School Reform Agreement" 2022 has no reference to students experiencing 'school can't' or chronic medical conditions (only mental illness). This is a problematic oversight given the scope of the cohort and characteristics, and pandemic trailing effects (long covid, health safeguarding) leading to significant school absence.

**Question (pg. 26):**

**Senator Allman-Payne:** I have one final question, because I'm interested in this idea of the robot technology. I was talking to a parent last week whose child has been a 'school can't' for over a year and a half and has now just joined what's essentially a private provider, and I think that in itself has issues around equity. But it's essentially an online school, and the child is really enjoying it. They're building relationships with the teacher and other students who are part of that online school. Are you seeing advantages with this robot in a classroom, for example, versus students who are attending in a different setting?

**Ms Gilmour:** .....This committee will be asked to work for greater investments in mental health provisions and services. How do we measure that? How does that investment pay off if we're not seeing it in dividends to that individual student in terms of their attainment and attendance at school, their future career, their health and wellbeing? We know that school isolation—we can send more information on this—causes a whole host of issues that are problematic and can persist into adulthood.....

**Answer:**

The Commonwealth Department of Education is providing grant funding to MissingSchool through the Emerging Priorities Program - DE 22/23 1.5 Early learning and Schools Support (Education Support). Grant Term: 2-Nov-2022 to 22-Dec-2023. Value (AUD): \$429,660.00 (GST inclusive where applicable). The Program supports initiatives to improve education outcomes of young Australians, particularly disadvantaged students and those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to contribute to social cohesion. The objective of the (Emerging Priorities Program) grant opportunity is to fund projects that assist school communities to respond to emerging priorities in school education, including recovery from COVID-19. The intended outcomes of the grant opportunity is for improved:

- educational outcomes for school students;
- engagement of school students and their families with school education; and
- wellbeing of school leaders, teacher and school students.

MissingSchool's grant funding is to run Sick Kids Seen&Heard - a Pilot to Scale School Services for Seriously Sick and Absent Students. It will help schools adopt telepresence technology including school robots, train teachers, and support vulnerable students and their parents/carers in real-time.

Educational animations will be produced for peers and siblings of sick children. The Pilot will also join forces with children's illness groups and health professionals to assist schools and families with critical illness information designed in a way to support the student's learning journey and social- emotional wellbeing.