

**THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH
OF AUSTRALIA**

TRUANCY AND EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL

**REPORT OF THE INQUIRY INTO
TRUANCY AND EXCLUSION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE FROM SCHOOL**

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Employment, Education and Training

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

37th Parliament

Chair	<i>Mr Eric Fitzgibbon MP</i>
Deputy Chair	Mr Bob Charles MP
Members	Hon Dick Adams, MP Mr John Bradford, MP Mr Bob Chynoweth, MP Mr Petro Georgiou, MP* Mr Alan Griffin, MP Mr Paul Neville, MP Mr Roger Price, MP* Mr Harry Quick, MP Mr Michael Ronaldson, MP Mr Rod Sawford, MP Mrs Silvia Smith, MP Mr Barry Wakelin, MP
Committee Secretariat	John Cummins Lorraine Ball Veronica Barbeler Lorraine Hendy Lorraine Liersch Sian Chadwick

- * Mr Georgiou and Mr Price were appointed as members of the Committee for the Inquiry into Truancy and Exclusion from School

TERMS OF REFERENCE

That the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquire into and report on:

- the incidence of young people under 15 years of age who are not exercising their right to education;
- the various policies and practices on exclusion which currently exist within school systems;
- availability of information about policies, practices and appeals mechanisms against exclusion policies;
- the causes of truancy and behaviour which leads to exclusion from school;
- how the incidence of truancy and exclusion from school may be related to criminal activity, poverty and homelessness;
- availability, adequacy and nature of support resources and services for young people who are not attending school, are at risk of not attending, including those who are in juvenile detention centres and provide examples of best practice models of service delivery; and
- such other matters that the Committee considers relevant to the issue of non-attendance at school by young people under 15 years of age.

OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following chapters contain a discussion of the key issues derived from an examination of the submissions to the Inquiry into Truancy and Exclusion from School conducted by the Committee and from the transcripts from the public hearings. The report attempts to address all of the issues raised in the Terms of Reference except that of provisions for young people in juvenile detention centres which are currently being examined by the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into Employment and Training in Correctional Institutions. It deals briefly with the issue of resourcing and the relationship between resources and the range of preventative measures suggested as solutions to the problem of alienation.

The main difficulty in discussing the issue of alienation from education is that there has to date, been no uniform, national statistical measure of the number of young people under the legal school-leaving age who 'go missing' from school for whatever reason. Some individual schools and some systems regularly record meaningful data on absenteeism and others have acknowledged the need to do so. The perception is that the number of young people who absent themselves from school, and who 'disappear' because of the effects of formal and informal exclusions is growing and the anecdotal evidence seems to support this, but any attempt to remedy any unacceptable situation must be based on a thorough identification of the problem, of its size, nature and causes.

'The key issue is that truancy is not being monitored effectively, and until this is done, any attempt to deal with the issue is limited to information gained by individuals from individual schools or from anecdotal evidence. Solutions or even effective debate is severely curtailed in such circumstances'.¹

The analysis clearly indicates that there is considerable agreement among the key players, education providers, teachers, parents, workers with young people and other community workers, that a situation exists where young people are removing themselves from school, or are being removed, that this affects their life chances and that the situation, although not clearly quantified at this stage, is serious enough to demand urgent remedial attention.

Causes of exclusion from school include a wide range of possible explanations from learning difficulties, personal development and behavioural problems, low socio-economic or dysfunctional family background, parental lack of interest, lack of school support structures and welfare provisions, inappropriate and inflexible curriculum and rigid school structures.

Suggestions about solutions are equally wide ranging, but all of the evidence to the inquiry indicates that there is agreement that the problem of young people becoming alienated from school and the benefits of education belongs to the entire community, to the young people themselves, to governments which provide funds and set

¹ Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch, Transcript, p. 525.

guidelines, to the schools, teachers, the parents and to the community and that it must be addressed by adequately resourced, integrated, coordinated programs and services developed in partnership with all of these key players.

Three basic positions about roles and responsibilities have emerged from the inquiry.

State and Territory government responses indicate that adequate funds and appropriate guidelines are being provided to schools to enable them to buy the kinds of services needed to meet local demands and to manage their affairs in an efficient and safe environment. Many principals and teachers who spoke to the Committee do not agree with this and argue that there are inadequacies in the current resourcing climate which prevent them from meeting local demands. They maintain that responsibility for the welfare of students does not belong entirely to the school. They know what constitutes a good school environment but are unable to cater for all student needs because of sometimes conflicting demands from parents, students, administrative agencies and because of inadequate resources.

Community organisations responding to youth and family welfare needs such as advice and referrals on housing, health, income support, and conflict resolution, agree with the view of the principals and teachers. They increasingly find themselves responsible for the educational and quasi-educational needs of their clients, a role which traditionally belongs to the school but which schools are now having some difficulty filling. This puts more demands on their restricted welfare resources which have to be diverted from other kinds of support.

Government, schools and community representatives agree that education, welfare and justice issues for young people should be addressed by integrated programs and services delivered through inter-agency cooperative and coordinated mechanisms which ensure that there are no wasteful duplications and that no one falls through the safety net.

Children and young people who chronically truant or are excluded from school are severely educationally disadvantaged. The causes of truancy and exclusion, taken individually are serious problems which require urgent remedial action. When an individual experiences several of these causal factors, the likelihood of that individual's marginalisation is greatly increased.

This alienation of young people needs to be addressed by all the agencies and influences in their lives, and in particular within the context of the National Youth Policy endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory Youth Ministers. The Youth Ministers recognise the need for better coordination of youth policy development and programs and service delivery across agencies including those responsible for education, health, welfare, housing and justice.

In conducting this inquiry into truancy and exclusion from school, the Committee has also given attention to community and welfare services and the coordination mechanisms encompassing the education and community sectors. The Committee's recommendations reflect this approach.

The Committee recommends that:

1. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs request the Statistics Taskforce of the Council to examine and advise on the feasibility of including the collection of national data on the incidence of truancy, formal and informal exclusion, and expulsion in the National School Statistics Collection, and that this data be disaggregated by primary and secondary school sectors. (Paragraph 2.42)
2. The Department of Employment, Education and Training evaluate the Transient and Mobile Students (TAMS) Program, and develop in conjunction with the States and Territories a national system for monitoring the transfer of students between schools. (Paragraph 2.45)
3. Each State and Territory ensure that:
 - a) school disciplinary legislation, policy and procedures include a precise and consistent statement of the grounds and procedures for each category of exclusion of students from school; and
 - b) that clear and accurate information be developed for students and parents, and training materials for schools on procedures for school suspensions, exclusion and expulsion, including mechanisms of appeal. (Paragraph 3.31)
4. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs request the Curriculum Taskforce to evaluate the family studies units, to consider the feasibility of making them freely available to all schools, and to consider the modification of family studies units for younger students. (Paragraph 4.21)
5. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training increase the number of social workers employed in the AUSTUDY assessment and mediation referral program to ensure that every young person applying for the AUSTUDY Student Homeless Rate has the opportunity to seek family reconciliation. (Paragraph 4.26)
6. The Commonwealth Government extend the Adolescent and Family Therapy Mediation Program so that it is available to all young people in dispute with their families. (Paragraph 4.27)
7. Commonwealth and State/Territory governments provide more resources to community welfare organisations to provide a wide range of accessible appropriate programs to deal with family matters in an holistic way. (Paragraph 4.28)

8. State/Territory governments increase the number of professionally and appropriately trained home-liaison officers to ensure that families and schools work together to assist their young people. (Paragraph 4. 29)
- 9a) The Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with State/Territory Ministers examine and resolve any identified problems with the work of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation; and
- 9b) In order to provide more effective vocational options for more young people, revise the guidelines for the Australian Student Traineeship to include at risk young people in Years 9 and 10. (paragraph 4.43)
10. Subject to the evaluation of the Education Counselling for Young People Program, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training reintroduce the program and that best practice models be funded in schools, targeting young people who have been disconnected from the school system by suspension, exclusion or truancy or are at risk of being part of this group. (Paragraph 4.50)
11. Subject to evaluation, the STAR program be extended beyond 1996 for a further four years, that it be expanded to include primary school target groups and that it adopt best practice models, particularly those involving coordination with community welfare agencies. (Paragraph 4.54)
12. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training consider expanding the scope of the Children in Residential Institutions Grants to make more funds available to substitute care agencies to enable them to provide the increasing number of necessary educational and quasi-educational services for young people in their care. (Paragraph 4.106)
13. The Minister for Employment, Education and Training, in consultation with States and Territories implement the recommendations of the Children in Residential Care Research Project *Getting an Education in CARE* in relation to:
 - a) improving the data collection;
 - b) further research into the needs of children-in-care particularly in relation to those involved in truancy, exclusion and suspension;
 - c) an interdepartmental inquiry into, and clarification of, the roles and responsibilities of the welfare and education sectors;
 - d) more effective intervention at primary level of schooling to reduce the numbers with special needs at secondary level. (Paragraph 4.107)

14. In the development of the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs ensure that the key objectives identified by the Schools Council in the report, Meeting the Educational needs of Aboriginal Adolescents, for the education of Aboriginal students be met. These objectives relate to teacher skills, meeting students' needs, improved communication, attractive school environments, careers and personal development programs, recruitment of Aboriginal secondary teachers and further research on identification of needs. (Paragraph 4.124)
15. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs give urgent consideration to the provision of intervention and support practices for under fifteen year-olds who have left school or are at risk, with a view to the undertaking of research into the current policies and practices in terms of the principles identified by this inquiry, and the use of best practice models. The research to be used as a basis for the development of an agreed national policy on provision for these students. The research should take into account the comments made to this inquiry, particularly funding mechanisms, including source, adequacy, and time limits. (Paragraph 5.111)

CHAPTER 1

INQUIRY INTO TRUANCY AND EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL

BACKGROUND

1.1 Australia ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, thereby making a commitment to implementing Article 28 concerning children, defined by the UN as young people, aged 0 - 18 years.

1.2 Article 28 states:

State Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- a. Make primary education compulsory and available to all;
- b. Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
- c. Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
- d. Make education and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
- e. Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and reduction of drop-out rates.

1.3 Ratification of the Convention carries with it the requirement to report to the United Nations on the implementation. At the time of this Report, Australia's response is still in preparation and will not be submitted to the United Nations until late 1995.

1.4 The education outcomes described in this report to the United Nations will present a very healthy picture. During the last decade, there have been some outstanding achievements in Australian education. There has been a dramatic rise in retention rates, improvements in equity outcomes and an increase in programs and services designed to create and maintain flexible systems meeting the needs of all students.

1.5 The challenge now, according to the evidence of this inquiry is to maintain this level of achievement and to effect further improvement in order to meet the requirements of the future, but in the context of current structural changes to

education systems, and budget constraints causing concern within the education community.

1.6 As at June 1994, there were 2 803 383 young people in the 5-15 years age group and 3 053 851 aged 5-16 years. These are the years in which young people are required by law to be in school, and these are the young people who are the subject of this inquiry.

1.7 During the past decade, school retention rates to year 12 have risen dramatically, from 34.8 per cent in 1981, to a peak of 77.1 in 1992 and then to 74.6 per cent in 1994. Commonwealth, State and Territory Government policies based on the need to better prepare the workforce to meet the needs of structural changes in the economy were a major factor in this change. The provision of information about the benefits of education, targeted funds and direct assistance such as AUSTUDY and ABSTUDY to encourage people to stay at school have been successful strategies in achieving these increased retention rates.

1.8 Basic structural changes in the labour market, including the disappearance of unskilled jobs traditionally filled by young school leavers, increasing demands by employers for older, qualified/trained employees, the lack of teenage career paths and replacement of full-time jobs by part-time jobs have also contributed to the rise in retention rates. The marginal decline in retention rates since 1992 is 'partly attributable to the larger number of alternative routes to employment now available to young people and the improved labour market'.¹

1.9 A comparison of retention rates for various groups of young people however, indicates that students from low socio-economic backgrounds and from rural and remote communities are trailing their higher socio-economic background, urban peers.

Estimated Year 12 Completion Rates by Socio-economic Status and Home Location, 1989-94						
	1989	1990	1991(r)	1992(r)	1993(r)	1994(p)
Low SES	53	53	64	64	65	63
High SES	72	70	80	77	78	79
Urban	62	63	71	70	71	71
Rural	58	60	68	67	66	64
Remote	47	47	55	58	58	58
Total	60	61	70	69	69	69

¹ Department of Employment, Education and Training, Annual Report 1994-95, AGPS, Canberra, p. 80.

1.10 Although these improvements in retention rates are achievements of which Australia can be proud, there is a growing concern for the apparently increasingly large numbers of young people who are for various reasons missing out on the benefits of education and possibly on a better future. These are the young people, the invisible ones, who are not even completing Year 10, who are becoming disconnected from education before the age of 15 or 16 when it is legal for them to leave school.

1.11 It is not known how many of these young people there are. There is no uniform, aggregated data on the extent of school truancy, dropping out, or informal exclusion from school. The extent of truancy and exclusion is explored in more detail in Chapter 2 of this report.

1.12 The social and economic cost to these young people themselves and to the Australian community is measured in the numbers who become long-term unemployed, homeless, caught in a poverty trap, and dependent on welfare and in the individual and community cost of those who become involved in the juvenile justice system. It cannot be established that all early school leavers will fail to become skilled, independent members of society, but there is ample research evidence to indicate that these are the young people most at risk of not achieving this transition to responsible adulthood and citizenship.

1.13 In discussing the long-term effects on young people's lives of educational disadvantage the National Strategy for Equity in Schooling² in quoting the Australian Longitudinal Survey 1991, says that compared with young people who have stayed on to complete year 12 or its equivalent, early school leavers were:

- twice as likely to come from a low socioeconomic background;
- two and a half times more likely to be unemployed;
- two to four times more likely to be in low-skilled or unskilled jobs;
- five to six times more likely to be neither in the labour force nor undertaking study - perhaps doing nothing at all.

1.14 Early school leavers are those young people who leave school either before or on completion of Year 10. Truants and students who have been suspended, excluded and expelled are part of this group whose life chances are adversely affected by an unsatisfactory education.

1.15 Community and professional organisations expressed the urgent need 'to bring this disturbing problem out into the open'.³ Even though it has not been firmly established just how many young people are involved, it is essential that we know

² Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, (MCEETYA), *National Strategy for Equity in Schooling*, 1994, p. 5.

³ EDUCARE, Submission, p. S557.

more about them in order to develop policies and strategies to counteract an apparently worsening trend towards school alienation.

1.16 'The nation needs all the talent and skill of the population to support economic growth in today's highly competitive environment. We are not tapping the full extent of young people's potential contribution to society when significant numbers of them are not participating in, or receiving the benefits of, effective education'.⁴

POLICY CONTEXT

1.17 Under the Australian federal system of government, responsibility for primary and secondary education rests with the State and Territory Governments which provide the bulk of the total funding for government schools. States and Territories also have responsibility for policies concerning structure, curriculum, accreditation, assessment and attendance. Non-government school authorities also maintain independent responsibility for their education systems and individual schools. All *State and Territory policies on attendance are based on legislation regarding the compulsory years of schooling, until the age of 15 years, except in Tasmania where it is 16 years.*

1.18 Although the Commonwealth Government is not directly involved with the management of schools, it contributes to total expenditure on schools. This includes a direct input of more than \$3 billion annually for specific purposes including programs to reduce inequalities of resourcing, improve access for all young people, particularly the socially, economically or geographically disadvantaged, to improve the quality of education and promote the Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in Australia agreed by all Governments. Although States and Territories are responsible for education of indigenous people, the Commonwealth is also responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and this is reflected in *specific funding for the improvement of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy agreed to by, and a joint responsibility of, all Australian governments. It also provides direct assistance to students by way of AUSTUDY, ABSTUDY and Assistance to Isolated Children.*

1.19 Commonwealth, State and Territory agreement on the right of all Australian young people to an education is reflected also in the National Youth Policy, endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which provides an agreed policy framework for developing programs and services for young people.⁵ The ministers agreed:

To ensure that the present and future educational needs of all young people are met equitably through the delivery of high quality and relevant educational opportunities.

⁴ MCEETYA, *National Strategy for Education in Schooling*, 1994, p. 3.

⁵ MCEETYA, *National Youth Policy*, 1993, p. 12.

To promote, through cooperative partnerships between educators and the community:

- the development of a range of options through government and non-government schools, community based education programs; and
- post secondary school provisions which increase educational opportunities and enable young people to reach their full potential.

RELATED INQUIRIES AND RESEARCH

1.20 Several reports of inquiries and surveys undertaken during the past few years are highly relevant to this inquiry. All of them have been concerned with a group of young people who share at least some of the following characteristics: early school leaving, homelessness, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, alienation, criminal activity, substance abuse, physical and emotional abuse and welfare dependency. They include:

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Our Homeless Children*, Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children, 1989.

David MacKenzie and Chris Chamberlain, *The National Census of Homeless School Students*, 1994.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*, 1995.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Literacy Challenge*, A Report on Strategies for Early Intervention for Literacy and Learning for Australian Children, December, 1992.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Sticks and Stones*, Report on Violence in Australian Schools, March, 1994.

1.21 The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report *Our Homeless Children*, (the Burdekin Report) indicated that 'the proportion of young people among the homeless population grew rapidly during the 1970s.... that the number of homeless young people has continued to grow throughout the 1980s,....and that the average age of the homeless population is decreasing'.⁶ An estimated 41414 15 - 24 year olds were homeless in 1988, and 8521 young people aged 12 to 15 years were homeless. The report links homelessness to family poverty, social isolation, unemployment, and inability to participate in educational activities.⁷ It goes on to say that the majority of homeless children leave home and school simultaneously, and

⁶ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, 1989, pp. 67-68.

⁷ *ibid*, p. 100.

consequently have 'poor academic records and few skills which would assist them to obtain even unskilled employment in a competitive labour market. These unskilled jobs, however, are rapidly disappearing from the labour market.

1.22 The discussion on the school as a factor in homelessness identifies as critical factors, the lack of a supportive school environment, student-teacher conflict, and inappropriate curricula, to which young people respond by truanting or behaving in a way which leads to suspension and formal or informal exclusion. Conflict at school, accompanied by conflict at home often leads to a young person leaving both.

1.23 When the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs produced *A Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness* (the Morris Report) in May 1995, it made clear that in spite of the recommendations of the Burdekin report, the number of homeless young people 'has doubled between 1991 and 1994'.⁸ One of the themes of this report is the positive role which schools can play in providing a stable environment for young people whose family lives are disintegrating.

1.24 Without claiming a causal connection or suggesting which of the two occurs first, that Report firmly establishes the relationship between early school leaving and homelessness and in Recommendation No. 61, recommends a national collection of information about the number of young people who fail to progress to secondary school and about the number of young people who leave school before the compulsory school leaving age.

1.25 The National Census of Homeless School Students was also concerned with the link between homelessness and early school leaving. MacKenzie and Chamberlain estimated that over a year 25000 to 30000 students experience homelessness and that most of them (up to three quarters) do not complete the school year and are more likely eventually to drop out of the system completely.

1.26 Literacy is consistently identified as the critical factor in school achievement and the failure to learn to read during the first few years of primary schooling can lead to cumulative academic failure, behavioural problems and ultimately, dropping out of school. The Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Literacy Challenge*, examined the range and effectiveness of identification of children at risk of developing literacy problems at any early age, the range of intervention strategies available and the role of Commonwealth funding in promoting literacy development.

1.27 The report confirmed that unless children learn the basics of reading and writing, listening and using spoken language by the end of Year 3, they will probably be disadvantaged for the rest of their lives.⁹

1.28 In reaffirming the necessity for early identification of the problem, early intervention and remedial measures, the report says:

⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *A Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*, AGPS, 1995, p. 34.

⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *The Literacy Challenge*, AGPS, 1992, p. 1.

The development of English skills is fundamental to the quality of life and opportunities for members of our society. The Australian Language and Literacy Policy states that apart from its obvious importance to the individual Australian's personal, social and cultural development, proficiency in English is central to the education, training and skill formation necessary to produce a more dynamic and internationally competitive Australian economy. If Australia is to provide a more flexible and highly skilled workforce, capable of maximising its productivity and innovation, then it is essential for the literacy, numeracy, and English language skills of adults and youth to be improved. There is a strong relationship between low levels of literacy and high levels of unemployment and social disadvantage.¹⁰

1.29 In examining the impact of violence in schools on student performance and educational outcomes for students, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training report on violence in Australian schools, *Sticks and Stones*, concluded that violence 'resulted in low self esteem, truancy, illness, stress, tiredness, disruptive behaviour, lack of concentration, and an inability to form relationships. It also reduced a student's ability to achieve academically and socially'.¹¹

1.30 Teachers' evidence to that report consistently linked violent and antisocial behaviour with poor academic achievement and low self esteem.

1.31 The conclusion from all of this evidence is that young people who are at risk of leaving school before the legal leaving age unfortunately share some or all of the characteristics examined in these reports. The at risk indicators are: homelessness, illiteracy, low socio-economic status, abuse (as perpetrator and/or victim), dysfunctional family background, academic failure, substance abuse, physical, social and intellectual disability.

1.32 Risk indicators such as homelessness and early school leaving must be addressed to prevent further deterioration in the lifestyle of the young people concerned. The long-term consequences for these young people are likely to be unemployment, poverty, poor health, and criminal activity. This is a cost to the individual but there are also direct and indirect costs to society in providing health care, accommodation, income support and the costs of detention and incarceration. The benefits of preventing the alienation of young people from society are substantial. 'The Australian community as a whole would benefit both from the reintegration of these young people into social life and from their enhanced productivity'.¹²

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 1.

¹¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Sticks and Stones*, AGPS, 1994, p. 17.

¹² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, 1989, p. 81.

CHAPTER 2

EXTENT OF SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE

2.1 For the purposes of this inquiry the Committee considers that non-attendance at school encompasses truancy, school refusal, school withdrawal and early leaving, as well as school disciplinary categories of suspension and exclusion (both formal and informal) and expulsion.

2.2 Home schooling of school age children by parents or carers is recognised by State education authorities subject to certain conditions being met. The Committee has not included home schooling in this inquiry into school non-attendance. References to non-attendance at school, or of parents failing to enrol their children at school, do not apply to children receiving home schooling.

2.3 A national inquiry into school non-attendance, including an analysis of the extent and pattern of categories of non-attendance, requires consistency in defining and measuring these categories. The Committee considers that such an analysis is hindered by two factors, the lack of comparable aggregated data on truancy, school refusal, school withdrawal and early leaving, and the different definitions of the school disciplinary provisions used within each State education system.

CATEGORIES OF SCHOOL NON-ATTENDANCE

2.4 As a category of non-attendance, school truancy received considerable attention in submissions to the inquiry. For the purpose of this inquiry, school truancy is taken to mean the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, although it can occur with parental knowledge and sometimes consent. Fractional truancy occurs where students regularly absent themselves from school for part of a day. Chronic truants are those children who are absent without reason for twenty percent or more of school time.

2.5 School refusers (sometimes referred to as school phobics) are those children who refuse to attend school even in the face of persuasion and punishment from parents, and the possibility of school discipline measures.

2.6 The category of school withdrawal is those children whose parents keep them away from school, either on a regular basis or for long periods, for reasons related to the needs and priorities of the parent. This group of children also includes those who have not been enrolled at school by their parents.

2.7 Children who leave early or 'drop out' of school, are perhaps the most problematic group. These children become completely disconnected from the school system.

EXTENT OF NON-ATTENDANCE

2.8 In order to report on the dimensions of non-attendance, and particularly the extent of truancy, amongst children and young people of compulsory school age, the *Committee sought aggregated school attendance data from State education authorities.*

2.9 Each State and Territory Government requires State schools to collect and maintain student attendance statistics, including data on unexplained absences. With the exception of New South Wales, State and Territories do not consolidate these school attendance records into aggregated data collections. The New South Wales Department of School Education aggregates student absence information which is used to target resources and monitor programs within the Department of School Education, however, it is not made public.¹

2.10 Consequently, there is no reliable time series data on a State, Territory or national basis which would enable an analysis of the extent and patterns of truancy, and would indicate whether there has been any change in the incidence of truancy. Similarly, the lack of aggregated and comprehensive information hinders analysis of whether particular groups of students might be at greater risk of truanting, and the subsequent development of targeted strategies to reduce truancy.

2.11 Several State education departments advised of some survey work that had been undertaken in recent years on school absenteeism.

2.12 The Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts conducted a state-wide survey of school attendance over a single week in 1994. The survey found that nineteen percent of all students were absent for one or more days in the survey period. On any one day, between 6.0 and 7.7 percent of all students were absent, an absenteeism rate considered by the Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts to be relatively unchanged since the 1970s. One percent of students were absent for all five days covered by the survey. There was a marked increase in absenteeism in the later years of primary school and early high school, with a higher absenteeism rate for girls than boys in all years except Years 5 and 7.²

2.13 The Queensland Department of Education advised that surveys of a number of metropolitan secondary schools in 1991 indicated that up to ten percent of students were absent on any given day, including those absent with legitimate reason. The department also stressed that:

Comprehensive, accurate information concerning the extent of school non-attendance is difficult to obtain (due to) problems of definition and measurement.³

¹ New South Wales Department of School Education, Correspondence, 23 November 1995.

² Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts, Transcript, p. 7.

³ Queensland Department of Education, Submission, p. S1103.

2.14 The Committee is cognisant that these estimates are based on sample surveys, and include those children who are absent for acceptable reasons.

2.15 The South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services has estimated that over the past six years an average of eight percent of the total student population was absent from school each day including those absent for acceptable reason. The department also advised that non-attendance rates were considerably higher for Aboriginal children, especially in remote areas.⁴

2.16 It has been estimated that at least 11,000 students truant daily from schools in New South Wales.⁵

2.17 The ACT Department of Education and Training does not yet have a systematic approach to truancy and has only very recently started to consider collecting truancy data on an ACT-wide basis.⁶ Nevertheless, the department considers that the level of truancy in the ACT is low and occurs predominantly amongst secondary school students.⁷

2.18 The Victorian Directorate of School Education was unable to provide an estimate of truancy in that State.⁸ The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals reported significant truancy in that State.⁹

2.19 Territory-wide statistics on truancy were not available from the Northern Territory Department of Education.

2.20 The Darwin and Rural Workers with Youth Network estimated that at least one percent of the school population in the Northern Territory were chronic truants, and that the incidence is increasing in the Darwin area.¹⁰ Absenteeism amongst Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory can be as high as 65 percent in some schools.¹¹

INADEQUACY OF SCHOOL DATA COLLECTIONS

2.21 The Committee notes that the inadequacy of existing school attendance data has been considered in a number of States.

2.22 In its 1992 report on children and young people at risk, the Western Australian Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Youth Affairs highlighted the lack of adequate data on school truancy in that State. The Select Committee recommended

⁴ South Australian Government, Submission, p. S663.

⁵ NSW Department of School Education, Submission, Attachment K.

⁶ ACT Department of Education and Training, Transcript, p. 396-397.

⁷ ACT Department of Education and Training, Transcript, p. 394.

⁸ Victorian Directorate of School Education, Transcript, p. 610.

⁹ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Submission, p. S327.

¹⁰ Darwin and Rural Workers with Youth Network, Submission, p. S169.

¹¹ Northern Territory Department of Education, Submission, p. S926.

that the Ministry of Education and Youth Services establish a central tracking mechanism for non-school attenders including chronic truants.¹²

2.23 The conclusions of the Select Committee regarding the adequacy of programs to combat truancy in Western Australian schools are addressed in chapter 5 of this report.

2.24 During the truancy inquiry the Committee was advised that an attendance data base had now been developed for use in Western Australian schools, although data was available only at the school and district level. The Department of Education advised that it did not use this available information to compile a state-wide aggregated data base, and considered that:

such statistics would not be meaningful in terms of addressing the issue of truancy.¹³

2.25 It has been estimated that up to 8,000 students truant daily from Western Australian schools.¹⁴

2.26 A Select Committee of the House of Assembly of South Australia reported in 1992 that without a systematic collection of data on unjustifiable school absenteeism in that State it was unable to estimate the extent of truancy. The Education Department had provided the Select Committee with its estimate that non-attendance levels represented 6.8 percent of primary school enrolments and 9.8 percent of secondary school enrolments, of which some absences would be for acceptable reasons.¹⁵ The Department for Family and Community Services advised the Select Committee that an estimated 3,000 students were truanting daily, and that in some locations daily absenteeism rates averaged 15 to 20 percent of students.¹⁶

2.27 The South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services has since introduced a more detailed school roll book as a transition measure until a proposed electronic attendance data collection system is implemented. Some detailed data is now being collected on the patterns of non-attendance amongst categories of students.¹⁷

2.28 Commencing in 1996, Victorian schools will be required to provide attendance data in their annual report. The electronic attendance recording system used in schools is being updated to enable access to statewide data on a regular basis, and to include a more efficient student transfer tracking system.¹⁸

¹² Western Australia Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Youth Affairs, Final Report 1992, p.61-3.

¹³ Western Australia Department of Education, Transcript, p.506-7.

¹⁴ Q. Beresford, *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol 12, No. 4, 1993, p. 18

¹⁵ *Interim Report of the Select Committee on the Juvenile Justice System*, p.40.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p.41.

¹⁷ South Australia Department for Education and Children's Services, Transcript, p.260.

¹⁸ Victoria Directorate of School Education, Correspondence, 5 December 1995.

SUSPENSION, EXCLUSION AND EXPULSION FROM SCHOOL

2.29 Submissions to the inquiry considered that the use of school suspensions had increased, and that school discipline policies are being used as a mechanism for streamlining the exit of some students from schools.¹⁹ The Committee sought from State education departments information on suspensions and expulsions from State schools in order to assess whether there has been any significant change in the incidence of school exclusions.

2.30 A number of States provided the Committee with some limited statistical data on school suspensions.

2.31 There were from 200 to 1000 suspensions a month in Queensland schools in 1994. A further 872 students were suspended in 1994 with a recommendation for exclusion made by the school principal, and of these students forty percent were aged under 15 years. Nearly half of those students recommended for exclusion were subsequently excluded. Thirteen percent of students excluded from Queensland schools in 1994 were primary school students.²⁰

2.32 During 1994, 1137 students of compulsory school age, including primary school students, were suspended from Tasmanian schools for a total of 5780 days.²¹

2.33 There were 1630 suspensions in Western Australia schools during Term 3 in 1994.²² Data on total school suspensions in 1994 was not provided.

2.34 Between 1992 and 1994, 1164 students were suspended from Northern Territory schools, accounting for nearly four percent of students enrolled over that period.²³

2.35 Suspensions from New South Wales schools have increased by fifty percent since 1994.²⁴

2.36 Suspensions data was not available for Victoria. Over the school year to August 1995 there had been 54 students expelled from their school of enrolment under the new student code of conduct procedures which delegate to school principals the authority to expel students.²⁵

2.37 Suspensions and exclusions data was not made available for the Australian Capital Territory or South Australia.

2.38 The Committee considers that this State and Territory data underestimates the real incidence of school non-attendance. Existing school attendance data collections

¹⁹ Burnside, Submission, p. S615.

²⁰ Queensland Department of Education, Submission, p. S1105.

²¹ Tasmanian Government, Submission, p. S150.

²² Western Australian Government, Submission, Appendix 2.

²³ Northern Territory Department of Education, Submission, p. S928.

²⁴ New South Wales Department of School Education, Submission, p. S1088.

²⁵ Victorian Directorate of School Education, Transcript, pp. 613, 632.

record formal suspensions, exclusions and expulsions and do not identify the extent of 'informal exclusions', chronic truancy, and those children and young people who have 'dropped out' from school completely. Further, there are no consistent definitions among the State and Territory school systems of disciplinary practices of suspension, exclusion, expulsion or prohibition, which further erodes the comparability of the data.

CONCLUSION

2.39 Given the inadequacy of the quantitative data available, the Committee was unable to estimate the incidence of school truancy, exclusion from school, 'informal suspensions' or the discouragement of students from attending school by school staff.

2.40 The Committee is concerned at the lack of reliable data, and consequently that the dimension of the problem of school non-attendance amongst children and young people in Australia is unknown.

2.41 This matter was also discussed by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs in its *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*. The Community Affairs Committee recommended that the Commonwealth, in conjunction with the States and Territories, report to the Parliament by the end of 1996 on the number of young people who fail to progress to secondary school, and those who leave school before the compulsory school leaving age.²⁶

2.42 This Committee endorses that recommendation, and recommends that:

the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs request the Statistics Taskforce of the Council to examine and advise on the feasibility of including the collection of national data on the incidence of truancy, formal and informal exclusion, and expulsion in the National School Statistics Collection, and that this data be disaggregated by primary and secondary school sectors.

2.43 The Committee is concerned that the existing systems for collecting attendance data are particularly inadequate regarding transient students. Reliance on a transfer process which places the responsibility for monitoring students transferring between schools on attendance counsellors²⁷ is inadequate, particularly for highly mobile groups and children of families moving interstate. Schools need a mechanism linked to the data collection system which enables school staff to promptly identify and take action when transferring students fail to enrol.

2.44 The Committee was advised of a computer program which had been developed by schools in the far north of South Australia where there is a high degree of family mobility. The Transient and Mobile Students (TAMS) Program was developed to monitor the transfer of students over a wide geographic area.

²⁶ House of Representative Standing Committee on Community Affairs, Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness, Recommendation 61.

²⁷ South Australian Government, Submission, p. S674.

2.45 The Committee recommends that:

The Department of Employment, Education and Training evaluate the Transient and Mobile Students (TAMS) Program, and develop in conjunction with the States and Territories a national system for monitoring the transfer of students between schools.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

3.1 This chapter provides an overview of the various disciplinary policies and practices, both official and informal, within school systems. The availability of information about these policies and practices is also assessed, particularly with regard to appeal mechanisms. Evidence to the inquiry reveals disparity between official school disciplinary policies, and the informal practices which occur.

LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS FOR SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

3.2 Legislative provisions concerning school disciplinary policy and procedures are generally stated in broad terms, and need to be examined in conjunction with any accompanying regulations and guidelines to gain an understanding of the school discipline process in each State and Territory. This is particularly relevant when assessing the grounds for exclusion of students.

3.3 The National Children's and Youth Law Centre has reviewed State and Territory legislative provisions and disciplinary policy regarding the grounds and procedure for exclusion of students from State schools in Australia (See appendices 5 and 6).

3.4 The Committee notes that with the exception of New South Wales, State and Territory education legislation does not make provision for the right of children to an education.¹

SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY POLICY

3.5 As part of the devolution of school management, schools have greater autonomy to develop their own codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures within the broad policy established by the relative State education department. Individual school policies are expected to be consistent with the departmental policy and guidelines.

3.6 The interpretation and implementation of that broad policy by schools and school staff received considerable comment over the course of this inquiry.

Categories of Exclusion of Students from School

3.7 There is significant variation in the school disciplinary policy and procedures of each State and Territory, particularly with regard to definitions of categories of discipline, and appeal and review mechanisms.

¹ National Children's and Youth Law Centre, Submission, p. S508.

3.8 As an illustration, the term 'suspension' generally refers to the temporary withdrawal of a student, but can range from five days in South Australia to one month in the Northern Territory.

3.9 The term 'exclusion' can be a general reference to all categories of withdrawal of students, or to specific conditions of withdrawal from school. The term 'exclusion' refers to long-term suspension in Tasmania and South Australia, for example, and to the placement of a student in an alternative school in New South Wales.

3.10 'Expulsion' can refer to the withdrawal of a student from the school of enrolment (in, for example, the Northern Territory) or from all State schools (in New South Wales).

3.11 The Tasmanian *Education Act 1994* includes provision for the additional category of prohibition, being the permanent full-time withdrawal of the right of a student to attend any State school. In Tasmania the expulsion of a student refers to the exclusion of a student from a particular State school.

3.12 Figure 1 provides an overview of these categories of exclusion from school.

Authority to Suspend, Exclude and Expel Students

3.13 There is general consistency across States and Territories with regard to delegated authority to exclude students from school. School principals have the authority to suspend students, to exclude them where that category does not refer to permanent withdrawal of a student from school, and to make recommendations for the expulsion of students.

3.14 The authority to expel a student (and to prohibit a student in Tasmania), is held by the Ministers' delegate, usually the Secretary or Director-General of the State education department.

3.15 An exception to this arrangement is Victoria, where under the student code of conduct procedures introduced in 1995, school principals are delegated the authority to expel students.

Grounds for Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion of Students

3.16 The legislative grounds under which students can be excluded from school have been criticised as vague and subjective, using imprecise criteria such as 'conduct and behaviour not conducive to the good order and proper management of the school' or 'behaved in an unacceptable manner'. It has been argued that this ambiguity results in the inconsistent application of school disciplinary policy, and that the specific circumstances for disciplinary action need to be more clearly defined.²

² National Children's and Youth Law Centre, Submission, p. S510.

Figure 1. Categories of Exclusion of Students from School, by State and Territory

WESTERN AUSTRALIA	
In-school Suspension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal of a student from classes for up to 10 days without suspending them from the school
Suspension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary removal of a student from the school of enrolment • Where a student has been suspended for 30 days or more in a year, the principal is required to refer the matter to an exclusion panel
Exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The removal of a student from attending a particular school or all schools for a fixed period of time
VICTORIA	
Suspension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exclusion of a student from a particular school for a maximum of ten school days at any one time, and a maximum of twenty school days in a school year • A further period of suspension, up to a maximum of ten days, may be used pending the principal's decision whether to expel a student
Expulsion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The permanent exclusion of a student from the student's school, on the authority of the principal • The Director of School Education must ensure that an expelled student, aged less than 15 years is enrolled in another school, which may include directing a principal of another state school to enrol the student • Following the expulsion of any student, the principal is required to provide a written report to the Director of School Education including recommendations on whether any further action is required at local, regional or State level • On the basis of this report, the Director of School Education may exclude the student from any state school
NORTHERN TERRITORY	
Suspension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exclusion of a student from the school of enrolment for a maximum period of one month • Suspended students may not attend another State school during the period of suspension
Expulsion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion on a permanent basis from the school of enrolment
QUEENSLAND	
Suspension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibiting a student from attending a State school for a maximum of 5 days on the authority of the principal
Expulsion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibiting a student from attending any specified or all State schools, either for a determined period or permanently

TASMANIA

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Suspension | • The temporary withdrawal (full-time or part-time) of a student's right to attend school for up to 2 weeks, on the authority of the principal |
| Exclusion | • The temporary withdrawal (full-time or part-time) for more than two weeks of a student's right to attend school, on the authority of the Secretary's delegate |
| Expulsion | • The full-time withdrawal of a student's right to attend a particular <i>State school, on the authority of the Secretary's delegate</i> |
| Prohibition | • Permanent full-time withdrawal of a student's right to attend any State school, on the authority of the Secretary |

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Suspension | • The temporary removal of a student from school, initially for a period of up to 5 days |
| Exclusion | • The removal of a student from school for 4-10 weeks, or for the remainder of the term or semester |
| Expulsion | • The exclusion of a student aged 15 years and over from all government schools for 1-5 years by decision of the Associate Director-General of Education |

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Suspension | • The exclusion of a student from the school of enrolment for up to .. days, on the authority of the principal |
| Expulsion | • The exclusion of a student on a permanent basis from the school of enrolment |

NEW SOUTH WALES

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Short Suspension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary removal of a student for up to 4 days • Principals may not impose more than 2 short suspensions each year |
| Long Suspension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary removal of a student for 5 days or more • May be followed by principal's recommendation for expulsion of the student |
| Exclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of student from the school of enrolment and placement in an alternative school • Where an alternative schooling placement cannot be arranged, a return to the student's school or expulsion are the only options |
| Expulsion | • Exclusion of a student from all State schools |

3.17 The discretionary judgement required of school staff in interpreting legislative grounds for suspension has been cited in support of the establishment of independent appeal mechanisms.

APPEALS MECHANISMS

3.18 The provision of specified mechanisms or processes for students and families to appeal against disciplinary decisions varies across the States and Territories. Moreover, the availability of material providing detailed and clear information regarding existing appeal mechanisms varies considerably.

3.19 There is no right of appeal to an authority within State education departments against the decision of a principal to suspend a student from school. While provision is generally made in State and Territory legislation or guidelines for a meeting to be held with parents during the period of suspension, the purpose of these meetings is to discuss further action rather than review the principal's decision to suspend the student.

3.20 Generally there is some mechanism for appeal against a principals' recommendation that a student be expelled (or prohibited in Tasmania). A number of States make some provision for parents to request a review of the decision to expel a student after the expulsion has taken place. Whereas several States have in place detailed and clear guidelines as to how students and parents can lodge appeals and requests for review, this is not universal. The lack of clear and consistent guidelines, or the limited availability of such guidelines, has been widely criticised during this inquiry.

3.21 Students and parents can appeal to the Ombudsman in their State or Territory against a decision of suspension or exclusion. The decision by a school principal to formally suspend or exclude a student is an administrative decision and must be made according to Ministerially approved policy and guidelines. State and Territory Ombudsmen have the power to investigate administrative decisions, including school disciplinary action, which have failed to comply with legal requirements or have breached natural justice principles.

3.22 The Interim Discipline Guidelines to the Tasmanian *Education Act* 1994 state that the exercise of authority to take disciplinary action under that legislation is a legally accountable act and appeals may be made to the Ombudsman. Generally, however, there is little or no reference made in education department policy documents that school disciplinary action is an administrative decision subject to appeal to a statutory body. Evidence to the Committee indicates that students and parents are unaware of this avenue of appeal, or may be unwilling to take this action.

3.23 The lack of appeal provisions against suspension appears to be predicated on the basis that suspension is to be used as an action of last resort when other disciplinary options have been exhausted and the students' parents or carers are aware of the situation. The case for suspension is based in these instances, then, on a body of evidence over a period of time.

3.24 Where suspension is used more readily than as a last resort, the lack of a mechanism for students and parents to challenge the decision to suspend increases the possibility of students being excluded from school without a case being fully established.

3.25 There is considerable evidence to this inquiry that suspension is being used without fully exploring other means of dealing with the situation, rather than as a last resort. This raises the issue of natural justice in school disciplinary policies and proceedings.

Natural Justice

3.26 Common law principles of natural justice require that a person subject to a decision maker or decision making body is dealt with fairly. The natural justice principle of a fair hearing requires that the individual have full opportunity to answer any allegations, dispute any facts and to present their case before the person or body deciding the matter, and may include the right to have someone assist in presenting that case.

3.27 The test of a fair hearing includes the requirement that a person be given sufficient prior notice and details of the case made against them. Natural justice requires also that the person or tribunal hearing the matter has a duty to be unbiased.

3.28 These principles of natural justice have been developed to ensure that a person who is subject to the judgement of a decision maker or decision making body will receive a fair hearing, and that any decision will be made in a fair and unbiased manner.³ There is evidence that these natural justice principles are not universally observed or applied in school disciplinary procedures.⁴

3.29 The Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales proposed that school disciplinary practices need to include the following features⁵ to reflect natural justice principles:

- Students and their parents should receive adequate notice of the impending decision to take disciplinary action, and be provided with a copy of the administrative procedures, including appeals processes, upon which the decision will be made;
- The criteria upon which a disciplinary decision is based should be identical for all students in similar circumstances;
- Students and their parents should be informed in writing of the details of the matter for which disciplinary action is being considered, before the decision is implemented; and

³ National Children's and Youth Law Centre, *School Exclusions: student perspectives in the process*, p. 10.

⁴ Youth Advocacy Centre, Submission, p. S355.

⁵ Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales, Submission, p. S636.

- Students and parents should be allowed to respond before the disciplinary action takes place.

3.30 The Committee considers that natural justice is critical to school discipline policies, which should provide procedural protections to all students, and that natural justice principles should be incorporated in school disciplinary matters.

3.31 The Committee recommends that:

Each State and Territory ensure that,

- a) school disciplinary legislation, policy and procedures include a precise and consistent statement of the grounds and procedures for each category of exclusion of students from school; and**
- b) that clear and accurate information be developed for students and parents, and training materials for schools on procedures for school suspensions, exclusion and expulsion, including mechanisms of appeal.**

IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINARY POLICIES

3.32 A great deal of concern was expressed by representatives of community organisations about the implementation of policies of suspension, exclusion and expulsion and the use of informal' exclusions by schools to 'move on' difficult students. Some of these school practices are considered to contribute to the alienation of young people from school and their subsequent truancy and 'dropping out' behaviour.⁶

3.33 The evidence from Burnside⁷ summarises comments made to the inquiry by community organisations that,

Welfare discipline policies were developed to assist and support students with various problems. The implementation however has seen this policy used as a mechanism for removing students from the school. Implementation of policy is up to the individual school. Without proper monitoring, training and resourcing, policy implementation can be inconsistent and contrary to the original intention.

Informal Exclusion of Students

3.34 An informal exclusion occurs when students are simply told that they are no longer welcome at school and it is suggested that their parents enrol them elsewhere. This practice serves two purposes. It saves the student and family from the embarrassment of formal disciplinary proceedings and the school from the necessity of having to institute these proceedings. The result is frequently that the

⁶ Q. Beresford, op cit., p. 15.

⁷ Burnside, Submission, p. S615.

student's rights to an assessment, a hearing and to appeal mechanisms, are waived as it is mistakenly perceived that she/he has been expelled. Much of the evidence points to an alarming use of this practice.

3.35 Alternatively, parents may be encouraged by school staff to apply for their school age child to be exempted from the requirement to be enrolled at a school, rather than the school taking disciplinary action. The Interim Enrolment and Attendance Guidelines to the Tasmanian *Education Act* 1994 recognise that this encouragement can occur and specify that,

The use of exemption as a way of removing difficult students from school is improper.⁸ Parents should never be encouraged to make or coerced into making an application for exemption as an alternative to a school's initiating disciplinary processes.⁹

3.36 Rolling suspensions are another example of informal exclusions, whereby students are suspended and shortly after returning to school they receive a further period of suspension. Rolling suspensions reduce considerably the student's chances of successfully reintegrating into their school.

Awareness and Understanding of Disciplinary Policy and Processes

3.37 All schools are required to have a discipline policy and behaviour management guidelines. The availability, accessibility and the extent to which students, parents and advocates use this information are not clear. While the practice in some schools is to inform parents at the time of enrolment of students of the behavioural management policies of the school and the disciplinary practices followed, it is widely acknowledged to be an area about which parents, workers with young people and providers of alternative education services know little and are somewhat confused.

3.38 The information made available to students and their families regarding these appeal and review processes varies from a brief statement that a submission may be made to the Minister's delegate to a detailed set of procedures.

3.39 The National Children's and Youth Law Centre is critical of the fact that guidelines can be drawn up without adequate consultation with students, parents or parent associations,

As they are not subject to the political scrutiny to which primary legislation is subjected, regulations and policy documents can institutionalise unfair or unclear procedures.

3.40 The National Children's and Youth Law Centre points out that policy documents and guidelines can provide conflicting advice. The Centre quotes the example of New South Wales where there are four sources of directives on violent or threatening behaviour, namely an act of Parliament, a discipline code prepared by

⁸ Interim Enrolment and Attendance Guidelines to the Tasmanian *Education Act* 1994, p. 16.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 18.

the Department of School Education, a memorandum to principals, and guidelines issued in 1994. The Centre considers that the 1994 guidelines go beyond the powers of the Education Reform Act and the result is confusion and, often, conflict.

With these varying directives there is a lack of certainty on the part of school principals, students and parents and a lack of consistency in practice.

Furthermore, there is a lack of training for school principals and Departmental officers in fair and correct procedures for excluding students. *It is the Centre's experience that different schools handle exclusions in very different ways.*¹⁰

3.41 There is a need for clear policies and guidelines regarding exclusion, appeals mechanisms and possible alternatives and measures to ensure that students, parents and community workers are well informed about these policies and practices.

3.42 Other concerns raised about the use of suspension and exclusion procedures are that a suspension is often the beginning of long periods of absence by students, (sometimes ending in a complete 'dropping out') and an inability to keep pace with the learning of their peers.¹¹ It is claimed that students who are placed on suspension are frequently not given homework to complete and this is particularly difficult in cases of long suspensions.

3.43 Formally or informally excluded students are not being assisted by their schools to find an alternative placement and when they approach another school are frequently refused enrolment. This can occur because some schools are reluctant to accept students who have been asked to leave another school, or because the school considers that it has no special facilities to meet the students needs.

CONCLUSION

3.44 There was considerable evidence to the inquiry that schools require the means to impose sufficient discipline to ensure a safe environment for learning and teaching.

3.45 Suspension and exclusion policies are mechanisms for imposing discipline in the interests of all students and teachers. The objective is to provide time out from a difficult situation for both students and teachers, a breathing space in which to assess the matter and to develop a strategy for dealing with the situation which takes into account the interests of the student and the school community.

3.46 The Committee has heard extensive evidence that school disciplinary policies are being used for other purposes.

¹⁰ op cit., p. S513.

¹¹ Burnside, Submission, p. S612.

3.47 Given that the outcome of school disciplinary processes can significantly affect the educational outcome and future of the student in question, all parties and the broader community have a responsibility to make the disciplinary process fair, open and accountable.

3.48 The Committee considers that a school disciplinary system which lacks procedural protections and due process for the child or young person is a system that is itself not accountable. Such a system is inconsistent with the principle underlying school disciplinary policies that students must be responsible and accountable for their actions.

CHAPTER 4

CAUSES OF TRUANCY AND BEHAVIOUR WHICH LEADS TO EXCLUSION AND LINKAGES TO CRIMINAL ACTIVITY, POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

4.1 There is a general perception that the problem of truancy is on the increase, and that drop-out rates are rising, but that there is no universal, single cause of truancy or of unacceptable behaviour which leads to exclusion from school. Truancy is the result of multiple negative and cumulative influences originating from the individual, the family, the school and the community and is therefore a broad social issue which needs to be addressed by comprehensive social policies. All of the evidence confirms that while the problems of exclusion and non-attendance have long been part of the school environment and although schools and systems have in place programs and services to overcome these problems, there is no accurate measure of the success of these programs or of the size of the population concerned. One submission states that non-attendance:

represents a significant wastage of student talent, school energy and ultimately community resources. Australia cannot afford to risk the development of a large alienated permanent underclass of young people with all the tragic and costly social costs which go with it.¹

4.2 Aspects of a person's personal and family experience which can lead to non-attendance at school include:

- transiency and mobility;
- lack of parental interest, support, recognition of the value of education;
- low socio-economic status;
- culture and cultural expectations;
- unemployment;
- family dysfunction;
- substance abuse;
- abuse of/by individual family members;
- learning difficulties and underachievement (particularly illiteracy)
- boredom and lack of motivation for learning;
- homelessness;
- disadvantage;
- isolation and inability to make friends;
- low self esteem and inappropriate anger responses.

4.3 The ages ten to sixteen represent the most momentous changes in the physical, and hence emotional and psychological aspects of human experience. It is the period when children begin the process of maturation to adulthood. These years

¹ Confidential Submission.

are characterised by the concept of youth culture, with its emphasis on music and ever changing fashions in clothing, food, demeanour, enthusiasms for friendships and peer group influences. *The demands on time are considerable for many young people, given their wide range of activities, interests, and commitments and concerns. Sometimes the demands of the school are a responsibility to be evaded, ignored or compromised.*²

4.4 While it is often apparent that some young people do not attend school because of conflicting interest, the Committee was advised that the non-attender presented an image of an unhappy, unpopular or non-conforming person. The characteristics of these young people include physical, mental and emotional handicaps, learning difficulties, low achievement, development delays, poor self image, personality conflicts, lack of maturation, disregard for the value of education, and school phobia.³

4.5 Absenteeism was also linked to low socio-economic status, low parental achievement, and families with problems of domestic violence, child abuse, drug and alcohol abuse and mental illness.⁴

4.6 Particular emphasis was placed on poor academic achievement, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Failure to gain adequate literacy skills in the first years of schooling can lead to learning difficulties for the remainder of the young person's schooling. Lack of literacy skills and the failure of schools to overcome this, was cited as a major contributor to truancy or expulsion in many of the submissions to the inquiry. One community organisation, for example, estimated that more than 50 per cent of their clients would have a reading age of less than 12 years. These young people were not able to read a paper, complete a job application or benefit form, could not read instructions on a medicine packet or complete a bank deposit form.⁵

4.7 Another community organisation referred to studies which found that sixty percent of high school students from disadvantaged families were illiterate and unable to deal adequately with the reading material required of them at high school level. This level of frustration and embarrassment was claimed to be a strong trigger for truanting behaviour.⁶

4.8 These learning difficulties are often apparent in the first years of school, but frequently are not identified, much less addressed. By late primary school, and into high school, after enduring years of criticism, failure, alienation and rejection, many students are angry and resentful, have given up all hope of ever being understood. A solution for them is to truant and drop out, and often a solution for the school is to expel them.

² National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET), Schools Council, *The Middle Years*, AGPS, 1992

³ Queensland Department of Education, Submission, S1107.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. S1107.

⁵ Youthtrek, Submission, p. S719.

⁶ The Smith Family, Submission, p. S814.

4.9 During the inquiry, a number of discussion forums with young people themselves were held whenever possible. They referred most frequently to problems coping with school, to boredom with school, inability to cope with specific learning, bullying or violence, conflict, a desire to challenge the system and to peer pressure.

4.10 One young person graphically described her experience of school and family problems to the Inquiry. She had become a chronic truant and eventually dropped out of school because she 'was having a lot of family problems at home'.

My brother used to physically abuse me. I used to go to school and I would not tell anyone because I was so ashamed of it. My friends took me to see the student welfare coordinator. I had bruises and I showed them to her. She turned to me and said, "He is only mucking around; go home." I went home and ended up copping cracked ribs.

If you are getting abused at home, the place where you spend the next amount of time is school. If you go to school and constantly get picked on, you get depressed and think, "I go home and get beat up; I go to school and get verbally beat up. What is the point? I may as well be on the streets or somewhere else."

I ended up in crime, drugs and everything else.⁷

4.11 In evidence submitted to the inquiry, the family and the school were seen as two of the major sources of the causes of truancy and behaviour leading to exclusion from school. Other evidence suggests that truancy is a product of a society where high unemployment, inadequate incomes and lack of community support for families and individuals prevail.

FAMILY

4.12 Responsibility for the care of young people and the protection of their rights is primarily with the family, and the quality of the care provided by the family is critical to successful transition from childhood to adulthood. Unfortunately, there are many families who cannot or will not, care for their children and the evidence from teachers' organisations, community groups and representatives of the justice system indicates that there is a significant link between dysfunctional family background and truancy and unacceptable behaviour.

4.13 There is a significant relationship between early school leaving and family socioeconomic disadvantage. Unemployment, low income and dependency on welfare affects the family's ability to provide sufficient support to encourage a student to stay at school. The cost of books, uniforms, equipment, excursions, lunches, transport, study space, for one or more students is frequently beyond the family's budget and a young person may opt out of school rather than be embarrassed or disciplined for failure to comply with requirements. 'Poverty contributes in a major way to family instability when, for example, unemployment

⁷ Ardoch Youth Foundation, Transcript, p. 519.

affects the family'.⁸ The Committee is concerned that young people are educationally disadvantaged because of family poverty and stress that this disadvantage must be addressed.

4.14 Family environmental and psychological factors also impact on a young person's attitude to school. Burnside,⁹ a welfare agency of the Uniting Church which provides services to socially disadvantaged children, young people and families in New South Wales and the ACT, advised that damaged family relationships, sibling rivalry, parental disunity, transience, cultural conflict, violence and abuse frequently appear in the life history of young people involved in the Burnside programs. Other community organisations confirmed the essential role of the family in providing a nurturing, supportive environment for their young people, in encouraging a positive attitude to the benefits of education and taking responsibility for ensuring that they attend school. Factors which are most damaging to family life were identified as: family conflict, poverty, single parent, blended families, neglect of physical and psychological well-being, lack of supportive care and concern, lack of communication, alcohol and substance abuse, emotional, physical and sexual abuse, stress and damaged relationships. Frequently, children in such family environments have low self-esteem and fail to develop appropriate strategies to deal with anger and other problems.

4.15 All States and Territories place mandatory responsibility for enrolment in school on parents or guardians, except where exemptions are allowed for a variety of reasons. There was some evidence to suggest that parents are not sufficiently held to account for unexplained absences and that the penalties for non-compliance should be more rigorously imposed.¹⁰

4.16 The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals¹¹ in particular referred to the frustration of being unable to deal with the situation of parent condoned absenteeism. The Association stated that:

....they are absolutely sick of a parent keeping a kid at home for a month and there is nothing they can do. There is no sanction that they apply against it. Many times the kid has been kept home simply to help in a family business or to do some work with the parent or the kid does not want to attend the school. It is chronic that on the days when there is sport and physical education at school, a very significant number of students are allowed to stay home.

We should introduce a welfare support officer who is able to operate some sanctions. For example, if a young person is taken before the Children's Court, which is very likely if they have been truant because the statistics show very clearly the link to crime, we would like to see the magistrate who is sitting in the Children's Court ask for a school

⁸ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, 1989, P. 74.

⁹ Burnside, Submission, p. S607.

¹⁰ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript, p. 573.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 579.

report, but it is never done. What has happened at school is never taken into consideration at all.

4.17 There was some support for the concept of making parents more accountable for absenteeism, by fining them or deducting benefits, but most organisations however, believed that, rather than punishing parents, more support should be provided to families in their caring and nurturing roles, not only in terms of financial assistance, but in terms of the provision of programs which provide for the development of parenting and relationship skills, negotiation and problem solving.

4.18 1994 was the International Year of the Family and the most significant of outcomes of the year's activities are the family studies in schools curriculum units project, the Agenda for Families and the Justice Statement which includes provisions for family assistance.

4.19 The family studies project to be funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training and managed by the Curriculum Development Corporation will:

- investigate the historical development of family patterns and structures;
- examine the gender distribution of the various roles in families;
- explore the relationship between family structure and the participation of men and women in economic, political, social and community life; and
- explore issues and problems related to family life and investigate the role of government in relation to these issues.

4.20 The studies are intended for students from years 6 to 12. When the curriculum development is completed in 1996, the units will be sold by the Corporation to education systems and to individual schools which wish to purchase them. They will therefore not be freely available to all schools and to all students. The Committee considers that family studies including parenting, personal relationship and conflict management skills should be taught in all schools and that the process of acquisition of these skills should begin at the primary school level.

4.21 The Committee recommends that:

the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs request the Curriculum Taskforce to evaluate the family studies units, to consider the feasibility of making them freely available to all schools, and to consider the modification of family studies units for younger students.

4.22 During consultations by the National Council for the International Year of the Family, the Council members were asked to address the issues of family stress from internal factors such as domestic violence and marriage breakdown to external pressures from low income or lack of employment. Child abuse and neglect also received wide publicity during the International Year of the Family. People spoke of

the need for counselling and mediation services, particularly in rural and remote areas. Families want programs to educate family members in building and maintaining strong relationships and in particular, programs which address direct issues of families with adolescents.

4.23 The International Year of the Family consultations found strong public support for government assistance to families to recognise their responsibilities for caring for children. The Commonwealth Government has responded by providing more financial assistance, particularly for families with special needs, in the 1995/96 Budget, and made a commitment to increase resources to strengthen families through better education and understanding of good relationships.

4.24 An allocation of \$24 million over four years will be made available through existing family support services to address problems of family violence, and specialist children and youth lawyers will be appointed as advocates. A reference will be given to the Australian Law Reform Commission to examine issues concerning children and the legal process.

4.25 There are two Commonwealth family mediation services relevant to families with adolescents, the Adolescent Family Therapy and Mediation Program and under AUSTUDY a pilot program to test whether family mediation can assist in minimising family breakdown leading to student homelessness and risk of dropping out of education. These programs are offered through community organisations.

4.26 The Committee recommends that:

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training increase the number of social workers employed in the AUSTUDY assessment and mediation referral program to ensure that every young person applying for the AUSTUDY Student Homeless Rate has the opportunity to seek family reconciliation.

4.27 The Committee recommends that:

The Commonwealth Government extend the Adolescent and Family Therapy Mediation Program so that it is available to all young people in dispute with their families.

4.28 The Committee recommends that:

Commonwealth and State/Territory governments provide more resources to community welfare organisations to provide a wide range of accessible appropriate programs to deal with family matters in an holistic way.

4.29 The Committee recommends that:

State/Territory governments increase the number of professionally and appropriately trained home-liaison officers to ensure that families and schools work together to assist their young people.

SCHOOL

4.30 The formal educational and training needs of young people are the responsibility of the school, in partnership with parents. The evidence suggests that most people agree that when this partnership does not exist or breaks down, then the student most at risk of deviating from the accepted pattern of school responsibilities will do so. It also suggests that most people consider that the school can and should exert sufficient influence on the at risk student to keep that young person in school and on the path to independent adulthood. Schools, however, do not operate in a vacuum and cannot, within their current level of resources, be made responsible for all of society's problems; they are a part of a community of families, welfare organisations and government agencies in health, social security and justice which together must own the responsibility for education.

4.31 For the majority of children, the school is the first and most important social institution with which young people have contact outside the family. At school, the child learns how to interact with others and the rules of social behaviour, and education plays a vital role in establishing for the individual, a permanent, healthy membership of society. When a student fails in this process or is failed by it, the consequences for the individual and society are often damaging and expensive.

4.32 The National Inquiry into Homeless Children ¹²was told that schools "do not cater very well for the kids that do not fall into that middle bunch" that is, the majority of students with no family or learning problems, and that consequently the 'difficult' students respond by truanting, which can ultimately lead to homelessness due to conflict in the home, early school leaving and resultant unemployment, and frustration and alienation.

4.33 In evidence provided to the inquiry, the major part of the discussion was given to the role of the school in assisting young people at risk to maintain their places in education and most suggested that schools have, in fact, been failing these young people for a variety of reasons. The most frequently identified reason referred to resourcing. The Committee was advised that there have been reductions and redirections of resources in all education systems. One witness stated that:

In truancy terms, most of our states at one time or another have had specific officers whose role has emerged over time to be much more than simply a note taker around statistics but to look at bringing together community resources and school resources, particularly in

¹² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, 1989, p. 272.

terms of counselling and referral. You will find in most states that those resources are no longer there.¹³

4.34 EDUCARE, a group of educational professionals who work with welfare agencies in Victoria, particularly those who care for young people in care, advised that:

School Support Centres ...have been disbanded and the staff transferred into the schools. These centres contained specialist staff such as psychologists and special education teachers who had the expertise to provide assistance and support to the classroom teacher in *devising and implementing strategies and programs to meet the needs of the student with difficulties*. Whilst some of the specialist staff are still in schools, their caseloads are so great that effective support cannot be given to all students and teachers desperately in need of it.¹⁴

4.35 On the other hand, some principals told the Committee that the new arrangements for support services enabled them to be more flexible and to seek support when necessary.

4.36 Some principals were positive about recent government structural changes to education systems, saying that devolution of budget decision-making and accountability and competition enabled them to be sufficiently flexible to respond to local needs and to focus on excellence of outcomes. Other witnesses, particularly *teachers and community organisations held a contrary view. They said that the practice of devolution without central authority requirements for welfare policies and standards results in inequity among students. Competition and a focus on excellence of outcomes (particularly academic) means that less able or difficult students are weeded out. The trend to provide music, drama, art, physical education and vocational education courses to attract and keep better students, means that there are less funds for remedial and support services for those who need them. Their argument is not that the concept of devolution is fundamentally flawed, but that in practice it should be accompanied by sufficient resources, guaranteed by the central authority, to ensure that choices which advantage some but severely disadvantage others do not have to be made.*

4.37 Secondary schools which were historically developed as preparation schools for those *proceeding to university or tertiary education, traditionally have concentrated on the subject matter of the curriculum rather than the development needs of students. They have been organised on a subject or discipline approach and have certified and classified students according to their mastering of these subjects.*¹⁵ Inappropriate, inflexible curricula designed for students who are destined for university or further education are an alienating factor for students who can see no relevance to 'real life' in the courses offered. Some of these students frequently have unaddressed literacy and numeracy problems and would benefit from remedial

¹³ Australian Education Union, Transcript, p. 522.

¹⁴ EDUCARE, Submission, p. S561.

¹⁵ NBEET, Schools Council, *Five to Fifteen*, AGPS, 1993, p. 15.

programs and vocationally-oriented courses which would prepare them for specific job training.

4.38 The issue of the importance of providing curriculum alternatives, in the form of more effective vocational options within schools for all students, particularly for those who are at risk of early school leaving was frequently raised. Constant reference was made, particularly by young people to the boredom, disruptive behaviour and rejection which resulted from rigid academic curricula which are pointless for some students, irrelevant to their current and intended lifestyles and too difficult for others. They want, and teachers, parents and youth workers agree, a curriculum which prepares them for work in the real world. Familiarity with some aspects of this world, including the basics of the principles of the work ethic, would assist some of these young people into employment. Schools, however, cannot stretch their existing resources to meet these demands without abandoning other courses and programs. There is acknowledgment that an academic education is not suitable for all young people in the senior years of secondary education and innovative programs have been developed for Years 11 and 12 students. The Committee was told that it should be acknowledged that younger people in Years 9 and 10 also need vocational education options or some may drop out of the system.

4.39 The Committee considers that there should be secure, on-going mechanisms for funding programs and courses which integrate vocational education and industry links into the school system.

4.40 Initiatives under Working Nation have been introduced to directly fund schools to implement school-work options. Although these initiatives refer to years 11 and 12 students, the evidence suggests that the concept should apply to younger students in years 9 and 10. Experience in the real world of work and curriculum with more vocational content would provide alternatives for young people for whom school is 'irrelevant' and who consequently engage in disruptive behaviour or truant. The work experience initiative is approved by the Australian Education Union, but does not, however, have the universal agreement of the education profession. The Australian Secondary Principals' Association has called for more consultation with the government, saying the initiative has some positive aspects but is premature. It is clear that again, the major issue of concern is that of resourcing.

4.41 Principals told the Committee that they are becoming increasingly concerned that they believe they are being expected to implement a range of good ideas and social welfare programs, while their schools are being stripped of resources as governments compete with each other to achieve the lowest common denominator education funding.¹⁶

4.42 To support the Australian Vocational Training System, the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) was established to develop opportunities for senior secondary students to gain workplace experience and vocational skills before they leave school. Currently, the ASTF is developing a network of regional training brokers to develop school-industry programs for senior secondary students by

¹⁶ Principals call for talks over work experience plan, AAP, 10 November 1995.

providing advice, support and funding. The outcome of these arrangements is that young people will be able to begin vocational education and training while still at school, providing them with greater choice and flexibility during their senior years. The Committee supports the Australian Vocational Training System and the concept of the school-industry programs, but understands that progress of the development of these programs has to date been slower than expected, partly because funding has been difficult to obtain. It is essential that these vocational education options are provided with the necessary, easily accessible resources to enable their introduction into schools as soon as possible.

4.43 The Committee recommends that:

- a) **the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in consultation with State/Territory Ministers examine and resolve any identified problems with the work of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation; and**
- b) **in order to provide more effective vocational options for more young people, revise the guidelines for the Australian Student Traineeship to include at risk young people in Years 9 and 10.**

4.44 Schools which fail to provide a supportive environment which recognises that young people are not an homogeneous group, fail some of their students. These are the ones who truant, are excluded and eventually drop out. Although the focus of their work is homelessness, MacKenzie and Chamberlain¹⁷ stress the importance of schools as sites for intervention for children at risk.

4.45 The correlation between homelessness, truancy and early school leaving is so high that the model school scenario developed by MacKenzie and Chamberlain is appropriate for addressing all welfare problems. The model described is of a school with an 'holistic philosophy of education' and 'strong commitment to academic goals', which encourages young people to aspire to higher education but maintains an overall concern for the welfare for the students. The school is certain that 'monitoring truancy has enabled (them) to identify students who were at risk of leaving their family'. This 'ideal' school is aware of students of risk. It has a well developed pastoral care program, with courses on building relationships and other issues concerned with personal development. There is a reliable, responsible, informed school counsellor who has developed strong links with the community, who knows about and how to access outside resources needed to meet the needs of young people in trouble, such as housing, income support, health, psychological counselling and assessment.

4.46 *Except in a very few instances, the evidence indicates that provisions for the welfare of students, early identification of at risk young people, counselling, support,*

¹⁷ D MacKenzie and C Chamberlain, *The National Census of Homeless School Students, Paper Presented at the International Year of the Family National Conference, Adelaide, November, 1994, pp. 16-19.*

referrals to appropriate other agencies/assistance, and appropriate training for teachers in welfare issues have seriously declined during the last few years. Some have argued that resources must be restored so that schools are able to provide for the needs of all their students; others have argued that it is not just a matter of 'throwing money at the problem' but a question of the effective use of resources which the school already has. Another view is that

instead of all the resources having to be in the school structure, the main thing is for the school to be open to the resources coming into the school so that we can look at a whole range of options that can go where they are needed rather than have a model that has to have one of this, one of that and one of the other thing.¹⁸

4.47 The Education Counselling for Young People Program is a Commonwealth funded program introduced in 1993 to improve the educational participation and outcomes of secondary students who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and who are at risk of not completing secondary schooling. The program is delivered by sponsoring agencies and provides counselling services to students and their families and financial assistance towards educational costs .

4.48 The 1994-95 allocation for the Program was \$1.8 million to allow for an increased number of projects for students at risk, particularly in rural areas. One project in Queensland was designed specifically to return young people who have been truanting, suspended or excluded from mainstream education to the education process through engaging them in developing a Personal History, and another provided education support for chronic school non-attenders in an environment acceptable to their learning capabilities and social structure. Other models include homework outreach centres, alternative education programs for non-attenders, individual tutoring, vocational training packages for 14 - 15 year-old school refusers, and external/distance education.

4.49 The Education Counselling for Young People Program was completed in June 1995, but is currently being evaluated as part of an overall evaluation of programs administered by the Youth Bureau in the Department of Employment, Education and Training.

4.50 The Committee recommends that:

subject to the evaluation of the Education Counselling for Young People Program, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training reintroduce the program and that best practice models be funded in schools, targeting young people who have been disconnected from the school system by suspension, exclusion or truancy or are at risk of being part of this group.

4.51 The transition from primary to secondary school can be traumatic for many students. Many teachers of young adolescents report that their students' learning is

¹⁸ Kildonan Child and Family Services, Transcript, p. 553.

inhibited by the fragmentation of the curriculum of the middle school into a large number of subject-based units. In some systems, the resulting fragmentation of the content of the curriculum into a large number of separate 'subjects' and 'units' is accompanied by an equally large number of different teachers specialising in the teaching of these separate subjects, even in units within subjects.

4.52 While most students leaving primary school have been accustomed to a more unified curriculum taught by one or a small number of teachers, it is not unusual for them to be confronted, in secondary school, by a much larger number of teachers in the course of each week, as well as by a much larger number of curriculum subject or units, each with its particular 'discourse' or 'language'. This situation greatly contributes to the transition problems of students leaving primary school, including problems of regression in learning.¹⁹ Many students cannot cope, drop out and are lost to the education system.

4.53 The Students at Risk (STAR) program is a component of the National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS) and is a Commonwealth initiative for government and non-government schools which is aimed at identifying students most at risk of not completing secondary school and assisting them to remain within the system. Young people who are at risk of leaving, or who have already left and whose achievement or behaviour is affected by family dysfunction, homelessness, truancy, violence and abuse are the target group. The focus has been on lower secondary students. Projects are school-based but are encouraged to involve local community health, welfare, and housing agencies and businesses. The allocation for 1995 is \$7.077 million and will be maintained until the end of 1996, when the program is due to complete. A 1992 evaluation established the effectiveness of the program as an early intervention strategy.

4.54 The Committee recommends that:

subject to evaluation, the STAR program be extended beyond 1996 for a further four years, that it be expanded to include primary school target groups and that it adopt best practice models, particularly those involving coordination with community welfare agencies.

4.55 In addition to curriculum, remedial learning programs, welfare and pastoral care, other important factors which influence student behaviour in the school setting which were identified are the structure and the size of the school. Structure should be flexible enough to allow for a variety of learning situations to allow for individual needs, and particularly in the first year of secondary school, to facilitate the transition from the primary school model of one teacher per class for one year to the secondary model of a home room teacher and different specialist teachers. The size of the school and of classes affects teacher and student behaviour. An optimum size is one which enables staff and students to be well known to one another. This contributes to the sense of belonging and a caring environment and enables teachers to give more individual attention to individual students.

¹⁹ NBEET, Schools Council, *Five to Fifteen*, AGPS, 1993, p. 15.

4.56 A summary of school factors identified by the evidence as contributing to the inability or unwillingness of young people, particularly those experiencing other personal or family problems, to remain in school include irrelevant curriculum, lack of pastoral care, inadequate transition support and poor school culture.

4.57 The Committee found in its inquiry into violence in schools, that schools which involved parents, students and teachers in the development and implementation of behaviour policies and supporting programs, and which looked to the community for support, appeared to experience the greatest success in managing student behaviour.

4.58 The Committee found that successful schools provided effective learning environments through the introduction of a school wide approach in which students felt secure and had a sense of belonging. Such an ethos was developed when principals and other senior school personnel demonstrated highly developed leadership skills. They were leaders who recognised that student behaviour could be changed and encouraged and supported teachers and school personnel to effect that change. The Committee found that the management of student behaviour was not a matter of control, discipline, sanction and the addition of greater punitive school policy. It was about providing students with understanding, support and intervention and the provision of educational alternatives for those students who needed specialised teaching and counselling²⁰.

4.59 The Committee observed the implementation of the concept of the supportive school environment in many schools which were visited during the inquiry into violence in schools. Such an environment was characterised by:

- the provision of a caring environment;
- the establishment of firm behaviour limits where students' rights and responsibilities are clearly stated;
- the implementation of fair and consistent sanctions when rules are transgressed;
- monitoring of children's behaviour both in the classroom and in the playground;
- the adoption of a method of mediating poor student behaviour;
- staff training in mediation.

²⁰ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Sticks and Stones*, Report on Violence in Australian Schools, AGPS, 1994, pp. 2-4.

COMMUNITY/FAMILY/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

4.60 Generally, the purpose of community welfare organisations is to provide direct support to the most disadvantaged members of the community, particularly to families and young people. Some are contracted directly by Commonwealth State/Territory Governments to provide a variety of services, some operate completely independently of government, but provide special services such as family support, parent education, out-of-home-care, youth services and educational support from a variety of resources including accessing government funds on a project basis.

4.61 Community organisations were concerned with the apparent rise in incidence of young people in trouble in school, changing school environments, the use of exclusions and suspension policies and practices and the increasing resource difficulties they are experiencing.

4.62 One large peak body representing non-government agencies delivering community support services, summed up its members' observations on the apparent rise of non-attendance at school:

...non-government agencies have observed a significant and growing incidence of non-attendance at school. Students are facing increasing difficulty accessing educational programs where their needs extend beyond mainstream curriculum and they cannot be accommodated by traditional school structures. These young people are commonly disadvantaged by learning difficulties, challenging and sometimes violent behaviour and family breakdown.²¹

Changing School Environments

4.63 Without exception all of the community organisations commented on the apparent changing roles of schools and the effects of this on young people at risk and on the roles and functions of community welfare groups. The change to the school environment has been referred to as the introduction of the 'market model', where the provision of resources is dependent on the number of students enrolled and the school community has to generate supplementary funding.

4.64 The welfare organisation view is that, with the decentralisation of administrative and management responsibilities which is occurring throughout the country, the devolution of expenditure decision-making, and the competitive nature of the school environment to attract the better students, schools are less able to provide for the needs of students at risk, those with remedial learning needs and those engaging in high risk behaviour. Funds are more likely to be spent on enrichment programs for more able students because they are more likely to show a return, particularly in academic terms, attract more desirable students and thereby *attract more funding from the central authority. Not all the Committee members agreed with this view.*

²¹ Children's Welfare Association of Victoria Inc., Submission, p. S966.

4.65 In this new environment, parents are increasingly expected to contribute financially to schools. Some families are unable and others unwilling to contribute to a system which is provided from the public purse and the consequences for the young people from these families are embarrassment, humiliation and negative attitudes to school. Schools where the breach of strict uniform codes is accompanied by punishment or prohibition from attendance at sports and other school events, or where the failure to pay the extra costs of excursions, visits or camps means exclusion from these activities, are not comfortable environments for students from families which can not or do not provide for these expenses.

4.66 The Committee noted that the trend to administrative and management decentralisation is in direct contrast to the trend to centralisation in curriculum matters and national agreements on standards and outcomes.

4.67 The comments on this trend in the public school systems are summarised by the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia.²²

Increasingly, schools are being asked to address significant social issues and to operate more as a business providing services in competition with other similar service providers. The fact that the needs of non-attenders are not recognised or adequately addressed is not surprising. Schools simply do not have the resources or the flexibility to address individual need.

The new competitive school is not in business to meet the needs of those experiencing the most problems.

4.68 An organisation of State Secondary Principals confirmed the difficulties which schools genuinely trying to meet the needs of their population are experiencing over program decisions. The problem is that when there are insufficient funds to satisfy all competing needs, principals have difficulty in deciding the allocation of these funds. These competing demands include enrichment programs for better students, remedial programs for at risk students, vocational courses for Years 11 and 12 and special transition assistance for Years 7 to 10.

They are in a bind. On the one hand, we are trying to do our best to keep those students (i.e. the at risk students) and keep them on track. On the other hand, while we have a private school just down the road, unless we are seen to be doing something to help better students as well, we are losing the better students.

Our schools are attemptingto provide at year 11 and 12 programs in the area of vocational education. ...We are being funded as a secondary school for programs which are resembling TAFE 1 and 2 and tertiary 1 and 2.

²² Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia, Submission, p. S562.

Our difficulty is resourcing. ...if you are running a year nine class in history or geography, it costs you about \$3.40 per student period to run it. If you are running a class at year 11 and 12 in one of the vocational education programs, it would cost you about \$28.30 per student period to run. That is the level of difference in costs that you are incurring.²³

4.69 The trend to place schools under local management is based on the principles of providing more flexibility for schools to respond to the local environment, to offer the kind of education best suited to local needs and to offer increased choice for parents and students. This autonomy is counter-balanced by a trend towards the development of a centralised and standardised curriculum and standards framework which should ensure that all young people receive a quality education.

4.70 While commentators agree that this is, in principle, a good model they also point out that there is a growing trend for the media to indulge in 'league tables' publicity of schools with the best academic achievement. The losers under this model of education are the young people in need of intervention and prevention programs, those at risk of leaving before, or at the completion of Year 10 when choices have to be made about the distribution of scarce resources. The Committee was told that:

changes in discipline regulations which give individual school principals the power to expel have exacerbated the tendency to discard students who present difficulties, or who could be seen to detract from the image of a school...²⁴

Resource Difficulties

4.71 Community organisations claim that there are insufficient alternatives for these students. Although some systems make use of distance education, which is not an entirely satisfactory solution for those without high levels of motivation or parental support, and alternative learning centres, many of these young people find their way into community organisations and this is causing major problems for these organisations whose role is primarily to provide welfare services for young people and their families.

4.72 Increasingly, community organisations say they are being required to provide alternative educational programs and services, involving a diversion of their resources from welfare to education. They are 'expected to assume responsibility for the personal and social impact of educational exclusion on the lives of young people and their families', and 'expected to meet the deficits of an educational system decimated by massive reduction of the education budget and diminishing resources in schools'. Welfare organisations claim that they cannot be expected to meet these education deficits without the accompanying educational funds to do so. They recommend that closer links between school, families and community must be

²³ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript, pp. 575-577.

²⁴ Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc., Submission, p. 655.

formed so that assistance to young people in trouble becomes truly a community responsibility. Cooperation and collaboration between the adequately and appropriately resourced education and welfare systems will provide the mechanism to an holistic approach to problem solving.

4.73 Schools and welfare organisations are experiencing the complex problems caused by increased demands on stretched resources.

EFFECTS OF DROPPING OUT

4.74 While no hard statistical data is available regarding the long-term effects of alienation and exclusion on the lives of young people who leave school before the legal leaving age, there is little doubt that there is a strong correlation between early leaving and criminal activity, poverty, unemployment and homelessness. One magistrate advised the Committee that:

there is a link between under-achievement at school, early school leaving, problems with literacy and a young person's background in terms of problems at home and criminal offences. In other words, there is a clear link between a young person's family problems and the commission of crimes as an adolescent and later as an adult.

What I can tell you from my experience is that there is a very clear and definite link between educational achievement, truancy and all those other school problems, and court appearances, whether it be in relation to a protection application or juvenile crime.²⁵

CRIME

4.75 The South Australian government advised that pupils who fail, or behave disruptively at school, or who persistently truant are more likely to offend than those who do not. The government stressed however, that while most offenders had a history of truancy, most truants were not offenders. In 1992, the South Australian Parliamentary Select Committee on Juvenile Justice was told that most school aged repeat offenders were also truants and that a Family and Community Services review of twenty-five recidivist juvenile offenders undertaken in June 1992, showed that all had a background of truancy.²⁶

4.76 Of particular relevance is a recent initiative of the Western Australia Police who were concerned that many daytime offences, such as household burglary and vehicle thefts, involve children of school age. Anti-Theft/Truancy Units were developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Local Government and the Department of Community Services to identify crime patterns, identify 'at risk' groups such as absentees and develop joint programs to provide a preventive as well as a reactive service.

²⁵ Gregory Levine, Senior Magistrate, Children's Court of Victoria, Transcript, p. 590.

²⁶ Attachment to South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services, Submission, p. S47.

4.77 Statistical information gained from an inter-agency program developed by Western Australian government agencies suggest that school absenteeism is an indicator of problems that often lead to involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour generally. Data from the Alternative Education Programs indicates that many of the students referred to them have an offending record, have not been attending school for some time and are involved in substance abuse. Evidence from the Western Australian Select Committee Inquiry into Youth Affairs was that over 80 per cent of young people of compulsory school age who appeared five or more times in court had not been in school for over a year²⁷.

4.78 The interim report of the Queensland Corrective Services Commission Young Offenders Advisory Committee shows that the educational achievement levels of the majority of young offenders in Queensland fall well below the achievement level of their non-offending peers. For instance:

35 per cent of offenders left school at or below Year 9;

57 per cent of offenders reached Year 10;

5 per cent of offenders reached Year 11;

3 per cent of offenders reached Year 12.

4.79 These results indicate that 92 percent of the young offenders studied had left school at Year 10 or before.

4.80 Many repeat or recidivist offenders are under school leaving age and are known as "street kids". They do not attend school and for a variety of reasons have nowhere permanent to live. Most Juvenile Aid Bureau officers are aware of such juvenile offenders.²⁸

4.81 The North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service Inc which provides legal advice and representation of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory told the Committee that for young people, there is a significant relationship between not attending school and involvement with the criminal justice system. About 50% of the juvenile offenders, some as young as eleven years old, represented by the Service are not attending school at the time they come before the court and have not been attending for some time. Of the juvenile offenders who become recidivists and end up in detention, approximately 90 per cent are not receiving an education and have not been for some time. Many of these young people continue to offend as adults.

4.82 Youth workers in New South Wales reported that truanting young people become involved with crime as a result of having nothing else to do with their time. Youth workers who deal with young offenders say that they often have histories of truancy and school expulsion. The Youth Justice Coalition found that truancy, assault at school and vandalism were experiences common to young offenders. Research in Orange, New South Wales established that 46 percent of the early

²⁷ Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition, Submission, p. S419.

²⁸ Queensland Department of Education, Submission, p. S1097.

school leavers surveyed had been involved in the juvenile justice system. Of those who had been suspended from school, 72 per cent had been involved in the juvenile justice system.²⁹

4.83 In 1992, the Northern Territory Youth Policy Strategy Working Group, of the Sub-Committee on Public Safety and Social Development presented its report on Juvenile Crime Prevention. Following a review of research available, and after liaising with agencies including Education, Health, Welfare and Corrections, a profile of young offenders was created.³⁰

4.84 What became evident from their research was the complexity of the lives of young people and their families. However, common characteristics shared by young offenders included the following:

- unstable family background, ie. marital breakdown;
- residential and school changes;
- unemployed and alcoholic caregivers;
- poverty;
- physical and emotional child abuse and neglect;
- truancy and negative school experiences;
- repeated legal prosecution for minor offences, often resulting in periods of detention;
- foster family placement breakdown; and
- homelessness.

POVERTY

4.85 In Australian society, poverty is generally related to unemployment and subsequent reliance on welfare. The relationship between educational achievement and employment status has been well documented. People with a lower level of educational achievement are more likely to be unemployed than those with a higher level of attainment. Unemployment rates are generally much higher for those with a primary, lower secondary or upper secondary education than for those with a university or post-secondary education. This correlation is common in all developed countries.

4.86 In 1992, the overall rate of unemployment in OECD countries was on average, 7.6 per cent for 25 to 64 year-olds. The corresponding rate for 25 to 34

²⁹ Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition, Submission, p. S419.

³⁰ Northern Territory Department of Education, Submission, p. S933.

year-olds was 9.6 per cent. The average unemployment rate for 25 to 34 year-olds with lower secondary education was 14.8 per cent, 2.5 times the rate for the university educated in the same age group.

4.87 In Australia in 1992, the total unemployment rate was 8.8 per cent, 11.2 per cent for those with lower secondary education, 8.9 per cent for those with upper secondary education, 5.7 per cent for those with post-secondary education and 4.4 per cent for those with university education. In the 25 to 34 years group, the corresponding figures were 10 per cent, 14.7 per cent, 8.7 per cent, 5.8 per cent and 3.7 per cent.³¹

4.88 The OECD points out³² that a number of OECD member countries now have about 90 per cent of an age cohort retention rate to upper secondary school (Australia had 74.6 per cent in 1994). Those who do not continue to upper secondary school generally have lower rates of participation in the labour force and significantly higher rates of unemployment. After five years, early leavers still have higher rates of unemployment than the total labour force. All the data indicates that there is not much use for people with low education achievement levels.

4.89 The following table compares Australian and OECD unemployment rates and educational achievement.

Relationship between Educational Achievement and Unemployment Rate, Australia and the OECD, 1992					
(%)					
Unemployment Rate		Maximum Educational Achievement			
	Total Rate	Up to Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Tertiary (Non-University)	University
25-64 years	8.8	11.2	8.9	5.7	4.4
OECD mean	7.6	10.5	7.2	4.9	3.8
25-34 years	10.0	14.7	8.7	5.8	3.7
OECD mean	9.6	14.8	8.7	6.0	5.9

Source: OECD/CERI Education at a Glance 1995.

³¹ OECD/CERI Education at a Glance, OECD Indicators, 1995.

³² *ibid.*, p. 247.

HOMELESSNESS

4.90 Although one witness said that schools responding to a request for information for an integrated response to the inquiry made no mention of criminal activity or homelessness as a cause of truancy or exclusion, and that while there may be cases of such connections, 'it is an insignificant factor in our schools for students under 15 years of age'³³, there is so much other evidence to the contrary that the relationship must be acknowledged. Students who are homeless because of family breakdown or because of reluctance or inability to remain in the family home cannot concentrate on attending school while they are living on the streets or in other unsuitable or unstable accommodation. Other more basic demands like food and shelter have to be attended to first. Unfortunately truancy or other related school infringements exacerbate fragile family situations and the complex sequence of absenteeism and homelessness frequently occurs. Difficulties at school are both a cause and consequence of truancy and homelessness.

4.91 The MacKenzie and Chamberlain census of all Australian secondary schools in 1994 to ascertain the numbers of school students who were homeless demonstrated that most homeless teenagers have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school, and that many young people who become homeless typically drop out of school. Although many teenagers attempt to remain at school for some months before they give up their studies, the authors estimate that between two-thirds and three-quarters do not complete the school year. Since they estimated the homeless secondary student population to be approximately 11000 during the census week, this means that between about 7260 and 8250 of these young homeless students will leave school prematurely. Similarly, Darwin (*Queensland's Homeless*, The Queensland Council of Social Services, 1991) reported that only 36.7 per cent of homeless youth in Australia completed Year 9 and 28 per cent completed Year 10. Only 4 per cent continued to Years 11 and 12, with none completing tertiary studies. The data supports the argument that policies aimed at early intervention for homeless young people should focus primarily on schools.

4.92 Information from DEET is that these estimates are confirmed by data from the Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET) pilot program which was funded by the Department of Housing and Regional Development to provide assistance to young unemployed people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. An evaluation of JPET showed that the majority of JPET clients had already left school (88.3 per cent), although their average age was 16.9 years, with 92 per cent of the clients in the age range of 15-19 years. Of those clients who were not enrolled in school at the time of presentation to JPET, the majority had left school before completing Year 10 (70.4 per cent). Only 19.6 per cent had completed Year 10; 4 per cent had completed Year 11 and 6.1 per cent had completed Year 12 (compared with 98.3 per cent of all students completing Year 10 and 77 per cent completing Year 12).

³³ Catholic Education Office, South Australia, Submission, p. S303.

4.93 By far the most common reason for JPET clients leaving school was the existence of family or personal problems (31.6 per cent). The next most common reason was the lack of stable accommodation (17 per cent). However, nearly 10 per cent had been expelled or asked to leave school. While family disruption and physical or sexual abuse were key reasons for the young person leaving home, thus precipitating their premature school leaving, a number of JPET clients indicated that school exclusion and/or expulsion were also reasons for their leaving home.³⁴

4.94 JPET Clients Reasons for leaving school were (per cent):

• No stable accommodation	17.0
• Family/personal problems	31.6
• Problems with teachers or students	11.4
• Couldn't cope with work	6.9
• Disliked structure/system	9.1
• Financial	2.7
• Expelled/asked to leave	9.9
• Other	11.3

4.95 The Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland³⁵ both refer to the particular vulnerability to homelessness as a result of educational difficulties of young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, including refugees and unattached minors. Parents' restrictions on some school activities, different cultural values, family pressures regarding friendships and careers, racism at school, and difficulties with language sometimes present major barriers to educational achievement.

4.96 The *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*³⁶ examined the situation of homeless students in great detail, reaffirming the evidence of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report and the MacKenzie and Chamberlain survey on the size of the affected population, and confirmed that Commonwealth and State governments are not responding adequately to these homeless young people. This report identified the lack of a consistent, national, integrated approach which includes community organisations, the establishment of national standards and the adoption of best practice models in the area of student welfare and pastoral care, as the critical factors in this failure to prevent a total breakdown in young people's school and family lives.

³⁴ Bullin, Phylard and Lloyd, *Closing the Gaps: An Evaluation of the J.P.E.T. Pilot Program for Homeless Youth*, March 1995, p. 18.

³⁵ Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Submission, p. S854 and Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, Submission, p. S255.

³⁶ House of Representatives Sanding Committee on Community Affairs, *Aspects of Youth Homelessness*, AGPS, 1995.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

4.97 Two groups of young people have been identified as being more vulnerable than others to the dangers of truancy and exclusion from school. These are children in care, whether temporary or long-term, including those living in shelters, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Children in Care

The children who reside in residential care and other forms of out-of-home care are some of the most disadvantaged children in our community. Many of these children are victims of abuse and neglect. Their families are victims of our social inequities and experience poverty and disadvantage, which is often passed on from generation to generation. Education is a significant institution in our community and for the majority is the doorway to opportunity, self improvement and future lifestyle choices.³⁷

Unfortunately, there is no funding available for educational support positions in residential care services. This situation needs to change as young people in out of home care are often multifariously disadvantaged students.³⁸

4.98 Funds to support children in residential care come from the Intervention Support Sub-Component (more than \$17.9 million in 1995) of the Commonwealth National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS), which also provides for children with disabilities and students whose needs are so great that they need assistance in addition to that received from the Schools Support Sub-Component.

4.99 Intervention Support Sub-Component funding is allocated to each State on the basis of school enrolments and the State's share of the 0-18 age population. Each education authority is responsible for the distribution of its share of the funding, based on the advice of state advisory committees, with representation from parent, teacher and non-school organisations. The Commonwealth does not directly influence any decisions about who receives funding, nor how much funding they receive.

4.100 In 1994, the NEPS Victorian State Advisory Committee commissioned a review of the program guidelines and grants process for funding children in residential care, an outcome of which was the development of the 1995 Children in Residential Care Kit for grant applicants. Phase two of the project, auspiced by the Kildonan Children and Family Services organisation, analysed school attendance data for children in residential care.

³⁷ Jo Cavanagh, *Getting an Education in Care*, Children in Residential Care Research Project Evaluation Report, March 1995.

³⁸ St Vincent's Adolescent Care, Submission, p. S548.

4.101 While this study of the educational needs of children in residential care,³⁹ was based on Victorian information, it has national relevance for informing program funding decisions.

4.102 The research by Cavanagh into the educational needs of children in care established that:

- more than half of the sample population of children in care are below average in literacy, numeracy levels, personal development, social skills, emotional and behavioural development, have a diagnosed disability (physical, behavioural, social and intellectual) and many have multiple disabilities;
- almost half have frequent episodes of truancy, exclusion and suspension;
- less than 10 per cent of them receive additional education support, in spite of the significant indicators of special educational needs;
- males and adolescents are consistently the largest groups in below average development and made up most of the extended absences and non-attenders .

4.103 Another characteristic of children in care, the one which underpins all of their other problems, is their high rate of mobility and lack of stable accommodation and family support.

4.104 Problems identified by all government and non-government agencies which provide out-of-home care for young people are:

- Finding school placements in their local areas for young people on their programs. In fact 'it is an almost impossible task'.⁴⁰ Schools generally do not welcome these 'unstable' students and claim that:

the enrolment list for the term/year is full;

there are insufficient resources to meet their needs;

student would not 'fit in' with the curriculum or with other students;

students who are below average in the pre-enrolment academic tests may fall further behind and become behavioural problems.

³⁹ Jo Cavanagh, *Getting an Education in Care*.

⁴⁰ Burnside, Submission, p. S607.

- Students making the transition from home situation to care have little or no support within schools or from regional support services;
- Some schools are no longer required to have a welfare policy and therefore no welfare coordinator;
- Demands for exclusion, expulsion and refusal of entry to dislocated students often come from parent organisations;
- More frequently, 14 and 15 year-olds are getting exemptions from school but they have no access to TAFE, labour market programs or benefits;
- Children in care are often in a Catch 22 situation - schools require them to be in a stable home placement before they will enrol them and long term residential placements require them to be in a stable school situation before they are accepted.

4.105 Evidence from the Christian Brothers Welfare Commission⁴¹ also confirms that 'the relationship between child protection intervention, educational non-achievement and exclusion and juvenile crime is a common pattern in young people in care.'

4.106 The Committee recommends that:

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training consider expanding the scope of the Children in Residential Institutions Grants to make more funds available to substitute care agencies to enable them to provide the increasing number of necessary educational and quasi-educational services for young people in their care.

4.107 The Committee recommends that:

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training, in consultation with States and Territories implement the recommendations of the Children in Residential Care Research Project *Getting an Education in CARE* in relation to:

- a) improving the data collection;
- b) further research into the needs of children-in-care particularly in relation to those involved in truancy, exclusion and suspension;

⁴¹ Christian Brothers Child, Youth and Family Services, Submission, p. S755.

- c) an interdepartmental inquiry into and clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the welfare and education sectors;
- d) more effective intervention at primary level of schooling to reduce the numbers with special needs at secondary level.

Indigenous Young People

4.108 According to the 1991 census there are 37,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the 10 to 15 years age group. Two-thirds live in towns of more than 1,000 population, (one quarter of these in capital cities), the other one-third live in rural and remote communities. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is increasing and more than half are under 20 years of age. More than 40 per cent of all indigenous people in 1991 were less than 15 years of age, and 15 per cent were under 5 years.

4.109 No national school attendance data is available. Participation and attendance rates are, however, generally lower for young Aboriginal students than for the population as a whole, the absenteeism rate increasing as the student moves into secondary school.

4.110 Much importance has been attached to the need for young people to complete secondary education and then proceed to further education and/or training and governments have put considerable resources into achieving these outcomes. The message about the need for education and training in order to secure appropriate employment has obviously been well received by the 74.6 per cent of young Australians who completed Year 12 in 1994, but it is clear that for indigenous Australians the current incentives to complete secondary education are insufficient. More adequate, appropriate and acceptable support programs must be available to them. Unless they are assisted at school level these young people will be even less able to compete for employment.

4.111 Two recent reports, the *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, and *Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents*, NBEET, April 1995, addressed the educational needs and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Both concluded that indigenous people are not achieving educational outcomes equal with other Australians.

4.112 Although the 1994 *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* which examined the progress against the goals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy found that educational outcomes for them had improved since the adoption of the Aboriginal Education Policy in 1900, it concluded that 'indigenous people remain Australia's most educationally disadvantaged group'.⁴²

⁴² DEET, Annual Report 1994-95, AGPS, 1995, p. 31.

4.113 The National Review reported the following data underpinning the fact that significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students do not complete the compulsory Years 8 or 9. Secondary school enrolments tend to reach a peak in Year 8 and then fall rather rapidly. Since 1986 there has been a fairly consistent loss of between 8 per cent and 10 per cent of students between mid Year 8 and mid Year 9; that pattern does not appear to be improving. In most years since 1986, about 20 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who started secondary school have not completed Year 9 and in excess of 25 per cent have not made it to the end of Year 10. The decline in Years 8 and 9 is most marked for indigenous males, while the major decline for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women occurs a year later between Year 10 and Year 11.

4.114 The Committee noted the very disturbing fact that the current apparent Year 12 retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is just over 25 per cent. Despite the improvements in the last decade in Year 12 retention rates for all Australian students, which have included slow increases in the rate for indigenous students, the Year 12 retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which reached 14.4 per cent in 1989, is now only what it was for all Australian students more than twenty years ago.

4.115 The table below illustrates the progression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through secondary school and the decline in their participation in Year 9 (especially for males) and Year 10.

School Retention Rates (%)					
	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Other Australian Students	100	100	98.3	85.8	76.2
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Females	100	97.1	78.1	46.2	29.0
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Males	100	82.7	64.7	38.2	22.5

Source: DEET, Submission, p. S1028.

4.116 These figures represent average retention rates only, and it should be noted that in some areas rates are in fact much lower. It is apparent that the most alarming drop out rates of indigenous students occurs at the completion of Year 10. The Committee suggests that this should be the subject of a separate investigation to identify and address the causes.

4.117 The key to early intervention, prevention and remedial measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students is to follow a diversity of approaches including the provision of separate schools if appropriate, alternative learning

programs, culturally appropriate curriculum and school structure and the employment of Aboriginal teachers, teachers' aides and liaison officers.

4.118 In spite of progress during the past five years, the Committee was told that issues which remain to be addressed include:

- education systems do not cater for different cultural backgrounds and value systems ;
- problems of access for people in remote communities and for the young people from remote communities who are placed in an urban setting for educational reasons;
- language/literacy needs of indigenous young people;
- entrenched poverty and welfare dependence;
- the effects of health problems on education;
- inappropriate school structures and teaching styles for indigenous students who need a less structured and more personal approach to learning;
- need for a broader, more flexible curriculum to include such areas as Aboriginal studies, performing arts, vocational courses, music, sport, excursions and camps;
- lack of parental support and appreciation of value of education;
- adequate processes for following up truancy among indigenous young people;
- apparent discrimination against indigenous people in employment is a disincentive for staying at school;
- lack of family/school accountability for absenteeism.

4.119 The Review concluded that the critical issues in the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Policy are the continuing Commonwealth support funding, coordination of education services delivery, information about the range of programs available and stronger links between education and health and welfare programs.

4.120 To address these issues, the MCEETYA established in November 1994, an Aboriginal Education Taskforce to develop a national strategy to improve education outcomes for indigenous people.

4.121 The Commonwealth announced its intention to provide additional program funding over the next four years provided the States/Territories also provide additional funding over the period 1996 to 1999. In May this year Commonwealth and State/Territory Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the Aboriginal Education Policy and to improve Aboriginal educational outcomes by using current

resources more effectively as well as trying to increase the financial input. Ministers are currently negotiating these financial arrangements.

4.122 There is no lack of information about the needs of indigenous students and the shortcomings of existing educational provisions for them. The Ministerial Council has adopted a national approach to address these shortcomings, an approach recommended by all the submissions referring to Aboriginal education.

4.123 The Committee notes that the Aboriginal Education Taskforce appointed by MCEETYA is required to develop a National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, to be presented to Ministers in late 1995. The Strategy will include action on the National Review recommendations which are directed to State and Territory governments.

4.124 The Committee recommends that:

in the development of the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs ensure that the key objectives identified by the Schools Council in the report, Meeting the Educational needs of Aboriginal Adolescents, for the education of Aboriginal students be met. These objectives relate to teacher skills, meeting students' needs, improved communication, attractive school environments, careers and personal development programs, recruitment of Aboriginal secondary teachers and further research on identification of needs.

CHAPTER 5

SUPPORT SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

5.1 The Committee was asked to examine the availability, adequacy and nature of support services for young people who are not attending school on a regular basis, who are in danger of becoming chronic truants, and who are engaging in behaviour which would lead to suspension and exclusion.

5.2 The evidence indicated that there is, in fact, a wide range of support services and alternative programs provided by Commonwealth/State/Territory governments, non-government schools and community organisations, but there are contrary views about the adequacy and appropriateness of these services. While government education departments argue that programs are adequate and accessible even in a climate of dramatic changes to funding mechanisms, and subsequent re-allocation of resources for such services, some principals', teachers' and parents' associations, and community organisations argue that the quantity and quality of support, particularly of welfare services has seriously deteriorated during the past few years.

5.3 Given the complex inter-play of family and peer relationships, the perceived uncertainty of their future, personal development, social, health and employment issues, which are typical of the state of adolescence, inappropriate behaviour in school is often a symptom of alienation from a system of schooling which many young people find is failing to meet all their needs. While schools have an important role to play in the adolescent development process, it is nevertheless, unrealistic to expect that schools alone can provide solutions to problems which have their origins in the wider society.

5.4 It is clear that individual schools cannot be made entirely responsible for the implementation and maintenance of remedial and support services which require the engagement of a wide range of specialists, remedial teachers, psychologists, counsellors and social workers. Schools must have the support of the central funding agency to enable them to buy the kinds of services needed and the support of the community to be able to deliver integrated programs to all young people in need.

5.5 It is essential for schools to develop and maintain close links with the range of agencies involved with young people, not only to ensure that limited resources are effectively utilised, but also to ensure that there is coordination in delivery of services to achieve the best educational outcomes for students.

5.6 They are also responsible for the development of a school environment that meets the educational, social, personal, welfare and vocational needs of all young people, as well as the provision of intervention programs for those experiencing difficulties.

COMMONWEALTH ROLE

Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET)

5.7 Under the federal system of government, responsibility for school education is shared between the States and Territories and the Commonwealth. The States have constitutional responsibility for primary and secondary education, and major responsibility for funding for schools. The States and Territories are responsible for policies in the areas of attendance, school and teacher registration, student enrolment, curriculum content, course accreditation and student assessment. They also have responsibility for the enforcement of State and Territory legislation making education for young people under 15 years of age (or 16 years in Tasmania) mandatory.

5.8 DEET advised that the Commonwealth's role in school level education is derived from its commitment to and support for all young people and their development. Its aim is to ensure that every child is prepared for full participation in the community, to the benefit of the individual and society.

5.9 The Commonwealth's General Recurrent Grant Program and Capital Grants Program provide supplementary funds to government and non-government school authorities. In addition, the Commonwealth provides considerable funding to support the achievement of agreed priorities for schooling and the provision of specific programs for disadvantaged students, for addressing literacy and numeracy needs and for improving the general quality of schooling. One of the major priorities of supplementary assistance during the last ten years has been the achievement of higher Year 12 retention rates. In 1995, the Commonwealth expects to provide funding for government and non-government schools of over \$2456.5 million under the General Recurrent Grants Program and over \$312.7 million under the Capital Grants Program. In addition, the Commonwealth is responsible, by arrangement with a State or Territory, for administering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters which were previously the responsibility of State and Territory departments and authorities. The Commonwealth also supports education through direct assistance to students by way of AUSTUDY (\$1.471 billion in 1994/95), ABSTUDY (\$114.3 million in 1994/95) and Assistance to Isolated Children (\$23.7 million in 1994/95).

5.10 The Commonwealth has implemented a range of specific and targeted programs which are intended to encourage and enable the participation of all young people in education. The National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS) was established in 1993. It provides a framework for equity programs and targets students whose educational experience is affected by factors such as poverty, low socio-economic background, being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, non-English speaking background, geographic isolation, poor literacy and numeracy skills, family breakdown, drugs, violence and abuse. Components of NEPS include the Disadvantaged Schools Program, Gender Equity Program and the Students at Risk Program. Allocation of funds to programs is determined by the State, Territory and non-government education authorities, subject to agreement with the Commonwealth on targets and outcomes.

5.11 The Commonwealth supports a wide range of other programs and projects targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, homeless or at risk young people, which attempt to deal with the factors identified as contributing to non-attendance. These programs include the Gender and Violence Project, the Connections-Student Welfare and Learning Project, the Streetwise Comics Project, Teaching Pro-social Behaviours to Adolescents Project, Education Counselling for Young People, the Rural Youth Information Service, the Middle Years of Schooling Project and the information and advice offered through Youth Access Centres.

5.12 As with the General Recurrent Grant and Capital Grants Programs, these programs are targeted at the wider school and out-of-school population of young people and are not directed specifically at those under the age of 15 years.

5.13 DEET advised that the Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training has recently endorsed the implementation of the *Homeless and at Risk Youth Action Package* which addresses the problems of homeless or at risk young people. Young people who have already left home will be assisted and encouraged to access all relevant services and programs and their housing, health, education, training and income support needs will be addressed. Other projects aimed at preventing young people from becoming homeless will be based in schools where intervention programs involving relevant community and government organisations and the family will address such issues as truancy, learning difficulties and anti-social behaviour.

5.14 The links between poor behaviour and non-attendance and levels of literacy and numeracy skills were clearly identified during the inquiry. The Commonwealth has made efforts to ensure the best possible education outcomes for students in the primary years of schooling through programs to raise literacy and numeracy skills, essential factors in the achievement of successful educational outcomes of students in their secondary school careers. These programs include the Literacy and Learning National, Early Literacy and STAR components of NEPS, the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy component of AESIP, and the National School Literacy Survey.

5.15 The Students at Risk (STAR) program is a component of the National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS) and is a Commonwealth initiative for government and non-government schools which is aimed at identifying students most at risk of not completing secondary school and assisting them to remain within the system. Young people who are risk of leaving, or who have already left and whose achievement or behaviour is affected by family dysfunction, homelessness, truancy, violence and abuse are the target group. The focus has been on lower secondary students. Projects are school-based but are encouraged to involve local community health, welfare, housing agencies and business. The allocation for 1995 is \$7.077 million which level will be maintained until the end of 1996, when the program is due to conclude. A 1992 evaluation established the effectiveness of the program as an early intervention strategy.

Department of Social Security (DSS)

5.16 The role of the DSS as far as the focus of this inquiry is concerned is to provide financial assistance and non-payment related support mechanisms for young people, generally from the age of sixteen. Income support is generally not available to persons aged under sixteen. There are some payments which are made to those who are aged fifteen and are above the school leaving age for the State or Territory in which they live, or in cases where a formal exemption from attending school is granted in respect of the person by the education authority of that State or Territory. These include the Youth Training Allowance, Job Search Allowance and Sickness Allowance.

5.17 The only payments available to persons aged under fifteen years of age are Special Benefit, Sole Parent Pension and Carer Pension. Special Benefit is paid to young people aged under fifteen, in cases where they have no other means of support. Sole Parent Pension is paid to single persons who have a dependent child or a child whom they are maintaining. The Carer Pension is paid to people who provide full time care for a pensioner or beneficiary who is severely handicapped.

5.18 Payments are made by DSS to under fifteen year olds only after referral to the State or Territory department of family or community services and exploration of other options for support. Only when the young person has no other form of support, is in hardship, and is able to live independently will Special Benefit be paid.

5.19 The Department also provides non-payment support services to young people in need of government assistance. Social work services are provided for assessment of and assistance to all young people under eighteen years who request Special Benefit payments because of homelessness. The social worker assesses whether the applicant should be referred to the State/Territory authority, under the agreed Youth Protocol arrangements, and provides appropriate referrals to accommodation, health and personal support agencies and provide advice on how to return to education if this is necessary.

5.20 Community Service Officers provide specific outreach services to homeless clients and community agencies servicing homeless and at risk people. Youth Services Units were established in 1994 to provide DSS services to young people under eighteen years of age in an environment more acceptable to young people. Specialist case management is offered to those most in need of educational, labour market, job search, housing and general welfare assistance.

5.21 Jobs, Education and Training (JET) is designed to assist sole parent pensioners into employment and teenage sole parents are especially targeted.

5.22 In April 1955, DSS conducted a sample survey of Independent Homeless Special Benefit recipients aged under fifteen years and established that there were only 283 who were currently under fifteen, or who were under fifteen at the time of the grant. Sixty-nine per cent were in education at the time of application.

5.23 The programs and services provided by State and Territory government agencies are discussed in the following sections. The descriptions of support services and programs are drawn from information provided by State and Territory education departments.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

5.24 All State/Territory systems provide professional support for young people on in-school issues and some services include school-family relationships. A wide range of psychologists, school counsellors, teacher welfare officers, attendance officers and home school personnel are employed in various specialist roles throughout the country.

5.25 Support services personnel typically include:

- home-school liaison and attendance officers whose role is to form a link between family, student and school, to inform parents of difficulties arising from school particularly attendance problems and to foster cooperation in resolution of problems;
- itinerant support teachers advise and assist teachers in behaviour management;
- educational psychologists identify learning and behavioural problems and assist teachers to develop an appropriate response;
- social workers and school welfare officers make the necessary referrals to other support agencies and work with the family and the student on issues which impact on school behaviour and performance;
- school counsellors and guidance officers provide a range of support services to teachers and students including advice on personal and career issues, referrals, crisis intervention, development of effective learning programs to meet remedial, and learning difficulty needs, and work experience programs;
- school-based community police officers focus on attendance and related problems and where they exist, form part of the school-home liaison team; and
- special education teachers provide specific programs for students with learning/language disorders.

5.26 In some systems, support services are school-based, in others they are systems or regionally-based. There are no clear indications about which of these two models is the most effective and efficient. What is clear is that in most States and Territories changes to the structure and delivery of support services are causing considerable concern to those involved with the welfare of students.

5.27 Details of State and Territory professional support services are at Appendix 7.

PARENTAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT

5.28 Parents and families are a significant influence on their children's attitudes. Schools and parents therefore must develop a partnership for ensuring successful education outcomes for children. The Committee accepts the views of education authorities that school attendance is not a 'school problem' alone and the best avenue to achieving purposeful schooling is to be found in a partnership between the families and the school. The professional support services described above are generally directly available to families as well as to students and teachers.

5.29 Parental involvement is seen as essential by all education systems and provisions are made to include families in educational/welfare issues concerning their children.

5.30 The Northern Territory, for instance, has based its education policy on the following principles:

- education begins in the home and continues throughout life in the home, the school and the community;
- parents have a unique knowledge of their own children;
- parents have a right to be involved in their children's education and to be informed about their children's learning;
- parents have the right to participate in educational decision-making processes at all levels if they wish to do so;
- the learning outcomes of students are enhanced when parents and schools work together. Together parents and teachers have talents, interests and skills which enrich the lives and education of students.¹

5.31 This policy represents the system's commitment to the rights of parents to participate in their children's education at a wide range of levels. It outlines roles and responsibilities of all those involved in education in promoting parent participation. The policy provides a framework within which schools may develop their own parent policies and a range of good practice ideas drawn from what happens in Territory schools.

5.32 The Northern Territory Department of Education's Parent Liaison Officer program provides a range of training programs to parents and teachers in schools in such areas as: parent participation, decision making, roles and responsibilities of school councils and conflict resolution.

5.33 Most other systems also have non-attendance counsellors or home school liaison officers who meet with students and parents in their homes to discuss school attendance matters and liaise between homes and schools to assist in the resolution

¹ Northern Territory Department of Education, Submission, p. S951.

of any problems. In New South Wales, for instance, if problems of a family or other nature are identified, families are assisted with referral to community agencies. Where a serious welfare problem has occurred, the home school liaison officer and Department of Community Services personnel work together, if appropriate, towards a solution to the problem and the return of the student to school.

5.34 With the process of devolution of education responsibilities to schools and school councils, it was argued that greater opportunities have been provided for parental involvement in school management and the development of policies and programs which reflect the specific need of the students in the areas in which they are located. This right to greater involvement in school decision-making needs to be accompanied with more information and responsibility sharing between the school professionals and parents.

CURRICULUM AND ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS

5.35 Alternative education programs and the provision of flexible curriculum options are a feature of all Australian education systems. The models range from separate but in-school alternatives, out-of-school units, remedial learning opportunities, behaviour modification activities, distance education, work experience and schools-industry link programs. Descriptions of State and Territory curriculum activities and alternative program models are in Appendix 7.

PROGRAMS FOR INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE

5.36 Most of the programs previously described also target Aboriginal students. In addition, many programs have been designed by governments specifically to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people. These programs are described in Appendix 7.

COORDINATION OF SERVICE DELIVERY

5.37 The Committee found in its previous inquiry into violence in schools that a coordinated approach involving families, schools and their communities and community and government service providers was essential if resources were to be effectively used and positive educational outcomes were to be achieved.² Evidence given to the present inquiry confirms these findings.

5.38 The need to coordinate and integrate services delivery is recognised by all State and Territory authorities. The Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts told the Committee that in the past, guidance officers, social workers and special education officers conducted their case load work independently of one another and that there was no communication, coordination or consultation about clients or services provided.

² House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, *Sticks and Stones*, AGPS, 1994.

5.39 In order to prevent "having half a dozen different social workers from different agencies all dealing with the same student",³ the Department of Education and the Arts has established a student support service to coordinate all support services. The service brings together guidance officers, social workers, special education support teachers, behaviour management support staff, speech pathologists, and curriculum officers under a district manager. The services of school nurses are also included in the structure, although they are employed by the Department of Community and Health Services. The aim is to improve the coordination of available support resources to ensure a cohesive and coordinated service to students and their parents.

5.40 Schools and parents in Tasmania now have a single point of reference for any problems associated with students and their families. The Committee was advised that resources can now be used efficiently, in accordance with priorities of need, and without unnecessary duplication. Interdepartmental liaison is improving as officers of other Departments relate to the simpler management structure.⁴

5.41 The Western Australian Government has initiated programs which emphasise interagency program development involving the Education Department, the Department for Community Development, the Juvenile Justice Division of the Ministry of Justice and the Health Department. The Education Department and the Department of Community Development have developed the Alternative Education Initiative which provides a range of integrated, coordinated educational support strategies.⁵

5.42 Victoria has developed the Extra Edge program in 18 schools which coordinates and where appropriate, Co-locates local government and non-government support services at the school. A protocol has been developed between the Victoria Police and the Directorate of School Education to ensure on-going communication and cooperation between these two departments with responsibilities for young people.⁶

5.43 The Queensland Department of Education's action plan includes the establishment of links with other agencies with shared responsibilities in student behaviour management. The Department advised that strong links had been established with the Departments of Health, Justice, and Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs and the Police Service to address a range of issues relating to young people.⁷

5.44 The South Australian Government advised that it has developed an integrated approach to non attendance. The approach focuses on shared responsibility and interagency collaboration at school and community levels. The government has developed an interagency referral process which provides a "one stop shop". Six

³ Department of Education and the Arts, Tasmania, Submission, p. S101.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. S101.

⁵ Department of Education, Western Australia, Submission, p. S1055.

⁶ Victorian Government, Submission, p. S1004.

⁷ Queensland Department of Education, Submission, p. S1093.

Interagency Referral Managers provide an information and referral service to assist students with a variety of difficulties including poor attendance.

5.45 While the States and Territories are making concerted efforts to ensure that services are delivered in a coordinated manner it is apparent, particularly from evidence provided by community organisations, that the problem of an uncoordinated approach still exists.

5.46 One submission commented that many young people who truant and are excluded from school were well known to a number of community service agencies. Sometimes five or six agencies had contact with them and/or their families. This resulted in:

... a protracted drain on the public purse, through crises response, health care, welfare, DSS benefits of various kinds...⁸

5.47 Christian Brothers Child, Youth and Family Services, in its submission, commented that government departments must provide service in an integrated way which allows for the overlap between welfare and education, health and education welfare and health. This reflects the comments from all of the community organisations and teachers and parents' representatives.

ADEQUACY OF SUPPORT SERVICES

5.48 Schools are generally highly organised social structures. They are catering to the needs of hundreds, sometimes thousands of young people, staff, parents and the community. Increasingly, schools are being asked to address significant social issues and to operate more as a business providing services in competition with other similar services providers. Evidence from some parents, teachers, principals and community organisations disputes the level and range of services claimed by State education departments. The fact that the needs of non-attenders are not recognised or adequately addressed is not surprising. Schools simply do not have the resources or the flexibility to address individual need. They do however provide a wide range of support services and alternative programs. There is no evidence that any one model is better than another, that any one would qualify for 'best practice'. What is important is that programs and services should be designed to suit educational needs not a budget.

5.49 Unless governments are prepared to resource the needs of young people who are not coping with the modern school, it is unrealistic to expect schools to allocate significant time and resources to that small minority of students who do not cope well in the school.

5.50 Schools will respond if they are supported. The goal for all responses to non-attendance is the provision of meaningful and relevant educational opportunities. Where students are failing to cope, schools need to be able to respond with appropriate programs and support. This kind of flexibility is often resource intensive -

⁸ Darwin and Rural Workers with Youth Network, Submission, p. S174.

staff time, meetings to discuss an individual student's needs, special learning materials, increased supervision and support, etc. Although increased standardisation within the school system has limited flexibility, schools are responding to their own pressures and cannot be held fully accountable for failing to meet the needs of all students.

5.51 The new competitive school is not in business to meet the needs of those experiencing the most problems.⁹

5.52 Increasingly schools have been forced to use 'time out' programs in an attempt to contain students with challenging behaviours. We see that there is great advantage to inter-agency collaboration and to positive use of community based programs. However, there is a risk that these programs will be used in a 'punitive' manner or in the management of crisis situations instead of being an integrated part of preventative and intervention support strategies. This limits the potential of such programs for intervention and prevention.

5.53 The Committee was told there are insufficient services which provide support for young people not attending or 'at risk' of not attending school. For example, the New South Wales Department of School Education has no alternative for most of the young people suspended/excluded from the schooling system. It does provide a limited number of schools for Special Purposes but these are inappropriate for the majority of students.

5.54 The New South Wales Department of School Education has set up Tutorial Centres in an attempt to provide a workable solution to 'unmanageable students'. These centres require students to attend just one and a half hours per day and make use of the Sydney Secondary Distance Education Centre (correspondence school). For some students this is an excellent alternative, but for young people with no home support, the system is inadequate. Because of limited funding, particularly funding for educational support, most welfare agencies are unable to provide supervision throughout the day, prohibiting young people from taking advantage of this alternative.

5.55 The availability of these centres is limited. Firstly, there are few centres and too many young people in need. The procedures for enrolment are lengthy and require recommendation by a psychologist. The young people often object to these intrusions, or simply lose motivation because it takes too long to get into the program.¹⁰

5.56 Limited support within the school system can restrict a school's capacity to support students in need. In New South Wales the move to integration of disabled students, including behaviour disordered and children with learning difficulties is highlighting the limited integration funding and support services. These students need one-to-one support, and this demand on classroom teachers creates a situation of inequity for other students and teacher stress.

⁹ Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia, Submission, p. S652.

¹⁰ High Street Youth Health Service, Submission, p. S395.

5.57 In today's socio-economic climate given the lack of community support services, primary schools rely heavily on the commitment of school counsellors. In acknowledging their dedication to the task of supporting students, the Association of School Psychologists Australia believes that a marked reduction in counsellor - student ratio is essential - a ration of 1 :500 is recommended.¹¹

5.58 In New South Wales one of the Department of School Education's strategies to address non-attendance has been to establish a Home-School Liaison Officer Program. The intention behind such a title is one that the New South Wales Council of Social Services would support - to provide links between the home and school as a means of supporting students to stay at school, to interact with the school and to assist the school to take account of the needs of those families in its policies and curricula.

5.59 However, as it has been set up, the program is not able to address the full range of issues involved. Individually, home/school liaison officers display commitment, ingenuity, and involvement in dealing with the students drawn to their attention. Their activities range from providing breakfast programs to camping trips to establishing alternative learning centres.

5.60 There are, however, only 96 Home-School Liaison officers across the State plus supervisors in each region. Moreover, they are not all based in schools (there are over 2000 schools in New South Wales) but may be located at resource centres or regional offices. They tend to work alone, in isolation from each other, from the schools from which their charges emanate, and from the communities they serve. Their impact on the ways in which schools relate to truanting students is minimal and their work with students is easily undermined. Clearly home/school liaison officers are dedicated but too thin on the ground to make a lasting impact on the system and to undertake long-term preventative work. The same situation applies for school counsellors.¹²

5.61 While the Home -School Liaison Officer program in New South Wales has grown from 30 positions in 1986 to ninety six, in the same period there was a concomitant attrition in the rate of recruitment of school counsellors. Yet it is school counsellors whom the children can consult, and who can have an impact on school policies and teacher development.

5.62 The Home-School Liaison program and its officers:

- are attached to regional office, not to schools
- have two-year tenure (with a possible extension to three years)
- have only a three-week training period
- are reactive, not pro-active, in their response

¹¹ New South Wales Primary Principals' Association, Submission, p. S371.

¹² Council of Social Services, New South Wales, Submission, p. S308.

- are not easily accessible to students
- do not offer a comprehensive (multi-skilled) service.

5.63 Arguably, greater impact on school attendance could be brought to bear if the counsellor-student ratio continued to be improved until every school with an enrolment over 500 had at least a full-time school counsellor, trained as a teacher and a qualified psychologist.

5.64 At the moment in New South Wales, the main drawback for school counsellors (aside from their large caseloads, which will reduce in the future), is their lack of status in the school system, and thus the difficulties which confront them when trying to achieve systems change.¹³

5.65 Principals are very aware of the impact of budget cuts in the welfare area. There is a concern that valuable services have disappeared or have been eroded.

5.66 While those states which have made recent decisions to close school support centres and relocate the staff into schools have been criticised by community groups and unions, those states that provide support on a system or regional basis have also been criticised. Each of these models has advantages and disadvantages.

5.67 Teaching Units have long waiting lists. Some students may not make it through the waiting period and end up without a school, although it is a requirement that students have a host school whilst attending the Unit.

5.68 The alternative school system in New South Wales has lost several schools, resulting in lengthy waiting lists, again the result being that some students are left out of the education system. It is important to remember that these schools are the only possibility for some students to receive an education.

5.69 At present the Queensland Department of Education policy states that all or some of the school's behaviour management practices must be exhausted before exclusion can be viewed as a option. Schools seem to be reluctant to refer young people to community support and counselling agencies, preferring to keep the matter within the confines of the school until it is "too late".

5.70 The Committee strongly supports behaviour management programs with community input and support and the improved coordination and cooperation between school and community.

5.71 The Queensland Department of Education has no formal support mechanisms in place for excluded students. This appears to be true of all education systems. Once excluded, many students do not attempt to recommence their studies. Alternatively, excluded students are often denied access to another school, because of their "reputation". Where students do recommence studies at another school, it is possible that they may face an exclusion cycle if attempts are not made to redress past behaviour.

¹³ School Psychologists Australia Inc., Submission, p. S265.

5.72 Community organisations agree that informal departmental policy to refer excluded students to the school of Distance Education is not sufficient although this is a practice used also by other states. This school was not set up for the purpose and is not suitable for excluded students in all cases. The Department should inform students of alternative education programs and must provide intensive support for young people, especially those under the compulsory attendance age, to encourage further education.¹⁴

5.73 In Victoria, school support centres have been closed and support staff have been relocated in schools. The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals told the Committee that support centres had a short but vigorous life (1987-1993). When they were closed, schools perceived a fragmentation and decline in the availability of support. Resources in the form of guidance officers, consultants and others were returned to school bases. Co-ordinated by the newly formed 'District Liaison Principals', the services are still provided but are generally agreed to be spread more thinly. The Principals Association believes that many trusted and capable people have left the services, some setting up private consultancies. Whether 'outsourcing' these essential services is really working is as yet an unresolved matter.¹⁵

5.74 Most of the Victorian community associations consider that the structural changes and the changes in the delivery of school support services in Victoria have had a major impact on students, especially those at risk of truancy or expulsion. Existing staff were split up and relocated to various schools throughout the State and in their view, the expertise and experience to assist at risk students is not so readily accessible.

5.75 Victorian government officials however, argued that the services to schools in the state have not been affected by any of the budget reductions. Officials advised the Committee that services to students had increased over the last two years.

5.76 What has changed is the allocation of resources and responsibility for decisions about their use. Previously they were in school support centres under the control of a regional general manager. The Committee was advised that support centres were not always able to provide the necessary services. For example, if specialist services were unable to be employed, such as speech therapy or social workers in country areas, then those services were not provided through the school support centre. Victorian officials stated that:

Now we have taken the total amount of budget for student services. The people we have employed are placed in schools under the direction of the principals of the district. So the principals of the district who have responsibility for students in that area allocate the tasks.

Our information from reviews including principals who are on these review groups have said that now the service is more immediate, it is

¹⁴ Youth Advocacy Centre Inc., Submission, p. S304.

¹⁵ Victoria Association of State Secondary Principals, Submission, p. S331.

more timely and it is more appropriate. Also, if they are unable to employ directly the student services, then they are able to use the money to hire private consultants on private contracts. So the criticism that has been coming through some of the other submissions before this hearing indicates that, because there has been a restructuring of those activities, former networks may no longer be in place and that it has taken some time after any restructuring for those networks and linkages to be rebuilt, and they are being rebuilt.

5.77 The Committee was advised by government representatives that three-year longitudinal research on principals' perceptions with Schools of the Future has indicated that principals are now starting to appreciate those services, and the flexibility that they are able to exercise as a group of principals servicing a population of students in a particular district. Officials consider the criticism that there has been a reduction of services as being unfounded. The Minister has guaranteed that 70 percent of all support dollars for students must be in qualified student services, that is, in speech therapy, in counselling, in social welfare.¹⁶

5.78 It appears that the Victorian policy of locating support staff in schools is not inherently wrong. What is of considerable concern, however, to community groups and teachers is that without a central Directorate of School Education policy relating to schools' responsibilities to the at risk student, a policy requiring an appropriate welfare program, adequate resources may not be allocated to employ these staff.

5.79 In 1992 the Western Australia Legislative Assembly established a Select Committee on Youth Affairs to inquire into the needs and problems facing young people. The Committee reported on youth at risk, structural changes, health, welfare, education, law, employment and training, leisure and recreation.¹⁷

5.80 In addressing truancy and juvenile crime, the Committee acknowledged that 'substantial evidence was given ... about the connection between truancy and/or drop out and subsequent involvement in juvenile crime'.¹⁸ The connection was attributed to:

- unresolved social problems impeding learning, especially in the early years;
- failure to keep pace with lessons leading to poor self-esteem and negative self-labelling;
- alienation from school accompanied by feeling of hopelessness which are then directed at wider society through antisocial acts.

5.81 Examining the adequacy of the existing programs for truancy and non-attendance, the Select Committee concluded that:

¹⁶ Victorian Government, Transcript, pp. 608-609.

¹⁷ Western Australia Legislative Assembly, Select Committee on Youth Affairs, Final Report, State Print, 1992.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 62.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that programs to deal with truancy are under-resourced with the result of a significant number of young people being left to their own devices.

It is widely acknowledged that the number of welfare and social workers is inadequate to deal with the number of truants.

There is a lack of clear legislative responsibility and policy. Truancy is currently not being dealt with as either, (or both), a serious education or welfare issue. Consequently there has been a lack of concerted action from the Ministry of Education and the Department for Community, Family and Children's Services.

5.82 Recommendations by the Select Committee for schools to take a more responsive approach to the social and educational needs of truants, suspended and expelled students, and the need for improved inter-agency integrated programs for truants and other non-attenders do not appear to have been implemented.

5.83 Concern was also raised about another group of young people who legally leave school early but remain in a limbo situation. It would appear that many more young people around the age of 14 or 15 are being exempted from school for various reasons. This age bracket does not have access to training and other services that are available to 16 year olds. They have very limited access to benefits, employment programs, TAFE or even Skillshare courses. Many have left or been forced out of school with little skills in being able to access the field of education or training. Some have not even reached Year 8 level. There are a limited number of services for these young people.¹⁹

5.84 The Youth Training Initiative has made young people 15 years of age eligible for DEET programs and services and case management through Employment Assistance Australia and Employment Services Regulatory Authority. However, this service which provides the job seeker with personalised support in his/her search for work, is not available to young people under 15 years of age even if there is a school exemption.

RESOURCES

5.85 The issue of resources was raised so frequently in evidence and it is such a critical issue in the discussion of adequacy of support services that it warrants a separate discussion. Predominantly, the argument made was that Australian schools are currently under-resourced, that there have been dramatic recent reductions in resources, in some States/Territories more than others and that schools cannot combine the roles of education and welfare without adequate human and financial resources to provide for the needs of all students and still survive in an increasingly competitive system. Another argument made by the Australian Secondary Principals' Association²⁰ was that in an effort to comply with Commonwealth policies,

¹⁹ Kildonan Child and Family Services, Submission, p. S502.

²⁰ Australian Secondary Principals Association, Transcript, p. 577.

particularly in the areas of the provision of vocational education, schools have to find more of their own resources, or re-direct them from other sections of the school to pay for the more expensive vocationally oriented courses.

5.86 The evidence did not indicate that there is a general belief that problems could be solved simply by providing more money. While it was claimed that there must be adequate funds, it was also acknowledged that it is more important that financial resources be used efficiently and be accompanied by adequate professional training and information sharing and consultation with the community.

5.87 The question of resources takes on even more significance in the current climate of the trend to competitive schooling where the fundamental relationship between the central funding agency and the schools has basically changed. Schools are now required to use marketing practices to attract students, particularly academically successful ones, to secure funding based on the number of enrolments and to expend these funds on a fee for service basis.

5.88 Allowing schools autonomy in deciding how most effectively to distribute funds and resources is based on the principle of providing flexibility to meet local needs. It does not, however, ensure that schools are able to meet all the needs of all of their students and also fails to guarantee equity of access to these funds and resources by a range of students with sometimes conflicting demands. Most of the evidence taken claims that young people in need of remedial literacy and numeracy education and of welfare support because of the unwillingness or inability of families to support them, are the ones who are missing out.

5.89 In November 1993 the Federal Government commissioned two separate reviews which will have implications for resource levels in Australian schools. The Industry Commission was asked to define benchmarks for comparing the efficiency of our State and Territory education systems. The Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training was asked to review the effectiveness of Commonwealth recurrent resources available to government primary schools. The Schools Council reported in August 1995 and in *Resources and Accountability: Commonwealth Funding Scenarios for Government Primary Schools 1996-2000*, presented three scenarios for funding over the next four years, all assuming that the level of resources available should increase significantly. These options are still under consideration.

5.90 In a paper entitled *Policy Implications of the Industry Commission's Review of Commonwealth and State Services Provision and the Schools Council's Review of Primary Schools Resources*, Ann Morrow, Chair of the NBEET Schools Council says:

The problem with market-based policies is that they fly in the face of economic theories that universal education and training is a necessary prerequisite for the development of a country's human resources. While market policies in education might be temporarily advantageous to an elite, they are inconsistent with the goal of raising the skills level of the whole population.'

5.91 While there is no conclusive evidence about the relationship between expenditure on, and outcomes of, education, a reduction or increase in expenditure on education cannot be justified simply on the grounds of comparison with other systems.

5.92 There is insufficient data to categorically establish the links between expenditure and outcomes. This cannot be used as an argument for increasing the amount of expenditure on education, nor can it be justified as an argument for decreasing it. The real issue about funds for education is how efficiently and effectively they are expended.

5.93 On the other hand, there is no evidence that Australia is spending too much on schooling. On the contrary, by international standards we could almost be judged to be not spending enough. For example, according to OECD comparisons, Australia ranks 13 out of 16 countries in its level of expenditure on schooling as a percentage of GDP. At the same time, Australia has one of the youngest populations in the OECD. Only five OECD countries have a younger age structure than Australia. Australia also has the second highest proportion of the 5-29 year-old age group enrolled in education; 63 per cent compared to an OECD average of 54 per cent.

5.94 The table below compares Australian expenditure on education with other OECD countries.

Expenditure on Education as a percentage of GDP, by source of funds, Australia and OECD, 1992						
	Total Education		Primary & Secondary		Tertiary	
	Public*	Public & private	Public*	Public & private	Public*	Public & private
OECD MEAN	5.8	6.5	3.7	4.1	1.4	1.7
OECD TOTAL	5.1	6.5	3.5	4.0	1.1	1.9
AUSTRALIA	5.5	6.2	3.0	N/A	1.9	2.3

* Includes subsidies to the private sector.

Source: OECD/CERI Education at a Glance, OECD Indicators, 1995.

5.95 Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that total outlays on education in Australia (including government, private, and benefit payments for education related

services) rose by 3.0 per cent in 1993/94, but fell as a percentage of GDP from 6.0 per cent to 5.8 per cent.²¹

5.96 Total government outlay (including payments to the private sector) rose by 3.0% but fell slightly as a percentage of GDP from 5.3 percent to 5.2 percent. The increase reflected a 6.7 percent increase in Commonwealth grants to the States and Territories, mainly for tertiary education. Outlays by State/Territory and local government increased by only 0.2 per cent reflecting lower growth in spending on primary and secondary education.

Selected Outlays on Education, by government sector.				
\$MILLION				
	Pre-school & Special	Primary & Secondary	Tertiary	Total Outlay
COMMONWEALTH	146	3633	5869	9877
STATE/TERRITORY/LOCAL	986	8456	2032	12256
TOTAL GOVERNMENT	1132	12083	7900	22125

Source: ABS Expenditure on Education Australia, 1993-94.

5.97 The two significant issues in the arguments about funding are that expenditure by State/Territory governments has decreased, while spending by the Commonwealth on education has increased and that schools are currently finding themselves unable to provide all the programs and services to meet all student needs and are increasingly expected to generate revenue from their own efforts.

5.98 Statistical data gathered by the Australian Education Union (AEU)²² shows that Commonwealth real per student outlays for government schools has increased by 20 per cent from 1988 to 1994 while State/Territory Government real per student outlays decreased by 1 percent over the same period. The Commonwealth has increased its total, government and non-government real per student outlay by 43 per cent since 1983-84 while the states have increased their real per student spending by only 5 per cent.²³

5.99 The AEU said that:

The most compelling lesson about Commonwealth-State funding of government schools to arise over the last decade is not just the growing involvement of the Commonwealth, but the obvious lack of will

²¹ ABS Expenditure on Education in Australia 1993-94.

²² Creating an Education Nation for the Year 2000 - a discussion paper by the Australian Education Union, November 1995, p. 24.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 26.

on the part of the States to substantially increase per student funding in line with changing national demands on our schools.

5.100 The statistical data indicates that there has been a relative decline in inputs to education by State and Territory governments. It is clear from all of the evidence taken that it is feared and considered very likely that the reduction of inputs will lead to a gradual erosion of schools education. 'In addition, concern has been expressed in many quarters....that the decline in funding for schools education will translate into a decline in the skill level of the workforce and a decline in Australia's economic competitiveness.'²⁴

5.101 Whatever the results of the exploration of ways in which the data on school performance can be used to clarify the links between expenditure and educational outcomes, the current state of levels of, and policy on, funding is causing considerable concern to educators, parents and the community. In a recent report on school reorganisation, the Victorian Auditor-General said that disadvantaged students are bearing the brunt of the State Government's education changes, and 'that a fall in the number of remedial, student welfare and career education programs offered by schools was of concern'.²⁵

5.102 In two recent reports, *Review of the Level of Commonwealth Government Recurrent Funding to Government Primary Schools: Report on the Consultations*, August 1995 and *Resources and Accountability - Commonwealth Funding Scenarios for Government Primary Schools 1996 - 2000*, August 1995, The Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training examined the issue of disparity of funding between primary and secondary schools. This was raised also in evidence from principals' and teachers' associations.

5.103 Currently, governments in Australia spend \$3965 per primary student compared to \$5649 per secondary student.²⁶ Arguments for increasing the primary school share of the funds have been put forward on the basis of research which indicates that strong grounds exist for believing that a highly effective use of resources would be to target students in the early years of schooling and to focus on improved literacy teaching for all students and intensive intervention programs for those identified as at risk with the aim of significantly reducing the proportion of students with literacy problems.²⁷

5.104 After examining all the arguments for increased funding for the early years of education, acknowledging that 'there is a link between achievement in early schooling and, in particular, achievement in literacy and educational outcomes, the Schools council concluded that:

²⁴ National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Schools Council, *Review of the Level of Commonwealth Government Recurrent Funding to Government Primary Schools*, August 1995, p. 15.

²⁵ Victorian Audit-General, Sunday Age, October 15, 1995.

²⁶ National Board of Employment, Education and Training, School Council, *Resources and Accountability: Commonwealth Funding Scenarios for Government Primary School 1996-2000*, August 1995 p. xii.

²⁷ NBEET, op. cit., p. 15.

...the real issue is not whether there should be parity between primary and secondary schools but what level of resources are required for primary schools to provide a quality education.

and

the issue of primary-secondary relativities remains an area worthy of further investigation, especially of the ways in which primary and secondary schools actually allocate funds between year levels and determine educational needs of students at different stages of schooling.²⁸

5.105 The three strategies developed by the Schools Council are aimed at providing mechanisms for ensuring a secure resource base for all government primary schools through to the 21st Century and for meeting the literacy needs of all Australian students at the primary level. The strategies offer three different models for improvement in three key areas, resource levels, educational accountability, and literacy outcomes in schools. These strategies have yet to be examined by the Commonwealth Government.

5.106 The AEU has called for a new national strategy for our schooling systems, 'based on a new national consensus and an honest sharing of national effort'.²⁹

We need an injection of \$1 billion more into primary schools to start to bring them up to the OECD average. We need special attention to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and new technologies. But if we are to get better value for our money, we need much more than resources. We need a national public education charter establishing our rights and responsibilities in education, and tying funding to outcomes, using national performance benchmarks to monitor the improvements in our schooling systems.

Above all, we need genuine national commitment. School level education is falling between Commonwealth and State governments. State funding is in a mess and our government school systems, and their more than two million students are the losers. For parents and students, it doesn't really matter who funds their education, providing it is done properly. We need a new Federal/State deal on funding, and a national plan, based on a schools advisory council that includes every Australian government.

5.107 While the debate about financial resourcing of education in Australia continues and undoubtedly will never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, it is essential that the views of all the key players, all levels of government, teachers and parents be taken into account. The AEU has proposed a national model of 50/50

²⁸ NBEET, *Review of the Level of Commonwealth Recurrent Funding to Government Primary Schools*, p. 17.

²⁹ Creating an Education Nation for the Year 2000 - a discussion paper by the Australian Education Union, November 1995, p. 51.

Commonwealth/State funding, measurement and accountability for nationally agreed goals. This was the only organisation to promote a specific model, while other evidence referred consistently to inadequate resources.

5.108 It is important to note, however, that representatives of government tended to suggest that, while there is room for improvement in the quality and quantity of support services already provided, generally, systems and schools were doing all that could be done to assist students with special needs within the constraint of current resourcing levels.

5.109 On the other hand, representatives of teachers' organisations, unions, parents' organisations and community groups all identified the need for improvement in the availability and adequacy of support services. All claimed that the basic problem is one of resourcing, while others suggested that the critical issue is not so much the amount of human and financial resources allocated but the efficiency of their use.

5.110 The Committee was able to examine a number of schools and services during the inquiry and from this was able to identify principles of good service delivery models. These include:

- flexibility of structure, environment, and curriculum content to suit the special needs of non-mainstream students;
- involvement and cooperation with parents, the welfare community and other relevant government agencies;
- focus on teaching the young person not the subject.

5.111 The Committee recommends that:

the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs give urgent consideration to the provision of intervention and support practices for under fifteen year-olds who have left school or are at risk with a view to the undertaking of research into the current policies and practices in terms of the principles identified by this inquiry, and the use of best practice models. The research to be used as a basis for the development of an agreed national policy on provision for these students. The research should take into account the comments made to this Inquiry, particularly funding mechanisms, including source, adequacy, and time limits.

Eric Fitzgibbon, MP
Chairman

December 1995

APPENDIX 1

CONDUCT OF THE INQUIRY

On 30 January 1995, the Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, the Hon Ross Free MP wrote to the Committee referring an inquiry into the effects of truancy and exclusion from school on young people's lives.

In his referral, the Minister stated that organisations involved with the welfare of young people had expressed some concern to him about the detrimental effect on the future of large numbers of young people under fifteen years of age who are not attending school. The Minister said that although exclusion, suspension, expulsion and truancy from school potentially have such detrimental effects on young people, very little is known about official policies and practices in regard to these issues and that there is a serious lack of support and/or alternative programs for the students concerned.

The Committee agreed on 2 February 1995, to inquire into and report on the effects of truancy and exclusion from school on young people's lives.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were advertised on 11 February 1995. Invitations to provide submissions were made to Commonwealth departments and agencies, state premiers and territory chief ministers, peak councils, professional organisations, unions, parents' organisations, community and welfare groups and youth organisations.

The Committee received 162 submissions. A list of these is included at Appendix 2.

The Committee undertook a program of public hearings and visits around Australia. Hearings were held in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Canberra, Darwin, Alice Springs and Port Augusta. Witnesses included government agency representatives, school principals, teachers, parents, welfare workers, legal advisers and young people. A list of the witnesses attending these public hearings is at Appendix 4.

The Committee conducted inspections of alternative education programs specifically for truant, expelled and suspended students and school refusers.

Discussions were held with young people at a number of youth forums. Community forums were held in Hobart and Alice Springs.

APPENDIX 2

SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

SCHOOLS

Berengarra School, MULGRAVE, VIC
Bridport Primary School, BRIDPORT, TAS
Bunbury Catholic College, BUNBURY, WA
Endeavour High School, CARINGBAH, NSW
Gateshead High School, (Jasper Program), GATESHEAD, NSW
Geeveston District High School, GEEVESTON, TAS
Hamilton Secondary School, MITCHELL PARK, SA
Holsworthy Public School, HOLSWORTHY, NSW
Invermay Primary School, LAUNCESTON, TAS
Kingston Primary School, KINGSTON, TAS
Lyneham High School, LYNEHAM, ACT
Mount St Joseph Milperra Ltd, MILPERRA, NSW
Ocean Reef Senior High School, OCEAN REEF, WA
Perth Modern School, SUBIACO, WA
Quorn Area School, QUORN, SA
Richlands State High School, INALA, QLD
St Clare's School, EAST PERTH, WA
Tintern Anglican Girls Grammar School, RINGWOOD EAST, VIC
Tumby Bay Area School, TUMBY BAY, SA
West Ulverstone Primary, ULVERSTONE, TAS
Yirara College, ALICE SPRINGS, NT

INDIVIDUALS

Bruce, Robinson & Associates, NORTH PARRAMATTA, NSW
Dr A Jago, MILDURA, VIC
Chris Murphy, BUNYIP, VIC
Ms Jen Barnard, COTTESLOE, WA
Ms Jann Clarke, MIRRABOOKA, WA
Ms Karen Court, MURWILLUMBAH, NSW
Mrs Dorothy Horton, DEVONPORT, TAS
Mr David Huggonson, CURTIN, ACT
Mr Bill Jardine, BOLWARRA, NSW
Ms C Leishman, NORTH ROCKHAMPTON, QLD
Ms Anne Lewis, SAUNDERS BEACH, QLD
Ms N Medancic, WESTWOOD, QLD
Ms Chris Miedzyblocki, SCARBOROUGH, WA
Mr Barry Robertson, WESTON, ACT
Mr Jeffrey Seth, IPSWICH, QLD
Mr Andrew T Slattery, CAVES BEACH, NSW

Mr Ron Twigg,
Ms Doreen West OAM, MERMAID WATERS, QLD
S L Wright, WINGHAM, NSW

STATE/TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, CANBERRA, ACT
Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, BELCONNEN, ACT
Commonwealth Department of Social Security, WODEN, ACT
Cross Cultural Support Section, Queensland Police Service, TOWNSVILLE, QLD
New South Wales Department of School Education, SYDNEY, NSW
Northern Territory Department of Correctional Services, ALICE SPRINGS, NT
Northern Territory Department of Education, DARWIN, NT
The Hon J Kennett, Premier of Victoria, MELBOURNE, VIC
Hon D Hamill MLA, Queensland Minister of Education, BRISBANE, QLD
South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services, ADELAIDE, SA
Hon R Groom MHA, Premier of Tasmania, HOBART, TAS
The Cabinet Office New South Wales, SYDNEY, NSW
Hon N Moore MLC, Western Australian Minister of Education, PERTH, WA

YOUTH

Adolescent Counselling Team, Boomerang Road Cottage, THE ENTRANCE, NSW
Ardoch Youth Foundation, BALACLAVA, VIC
Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition (AYPAC), DICKSON, ACT
Church Network for Youth Justice, SOUTH BRISBANE, QLD
Christian Brothers Child, Youth and Family Services, PARKVILLE, VIC
Darwin and Rural Workers With Youth Network, DARWIN, NT
Family and Youth Support Services of Wyong Shire Inc. , WYONG, NSW
Grassmere Youth Services, NARRE WARREN, VIC
Gold Coast Child and Youth Guidance Centre, BURLEIGH HEADS, QLD
High Street Youth Health Service, PARRAMATTA, NSW
L.A.S.A. Youth Centre, The Salvation Army, WARAMANGA, ACT
National Children's & Youth Law Centre, SYDNEY, NSW
Oakleigh Youth Resource Centre, OAKLEIGH, VIC
Port Augusta Youth Workers Network, PORT AUGUSTA, SA
St Kilda Theos Youth Outreach, ST KILDA, VIC
St Vincent's, Marist Brothers' Adolescent Care, WESTMEAD, NSW
Student Welfare Co-ordinators, Nunawading and Waverly District, VERMONT, VIC
Wanneroo Youth Accommodation Service Inc., BELDON, WA
Waverley Emergency Adolescent Care Inc., GLEN WAVERLEY, VIC
Westcourt Youth Centre, KIRWAN, QLD
Woden Youth Centre, WODEN, ACT
Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, FORTITUDE VALLEY, QLD
Youth Co-ordinating Committee Area North East, MIDLAND, WA

Youth Extension Services Inc., GLEN WAVERLY, VIC
Youthtrek, ROCKHAMPTON, QLD

COMMUNITY GROUPS/COUNCILS

Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia, WODEN, ACT
Australian Centre for Equity through Education, DARLINGHURST, NSW
Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc., HUGHES, ACT
Australian Parents Council, NORTH SYDNEY, NSW
Ballina/Byron JPET (Job Placement & Employment Training), BALLINA, NSW
Barnardos Australia, SYDNEY SOUTH, NSW
Bramwell House Women's and Children's Shelter,
Centacare, Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, DANGAR, NSW
Coober Pedy Community Development Committee, COOBER PEDY, SA
Community Legal & Welfare Service, WOOLLOOWIN, QLD
Council of Social Services of NSW, SURREY HILLS, NSW
Educare, COLLINGWOOD, VIC
Kaata-Wangkinyiny Regional Council, PERTH, WA
Karawara Community Project Inc., KARAWARA, WA
Kildonan Child and Family Services, COLLINGWOOD, VIC
Met. West Secondary Principals Council, PARRAMATTA, NSW
New South Wales (AECG) Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.,
STANMORE, NSW
North Australia Aboriginal Legal Aid Service inc. (NAALAS), DARWIN, NT
North East Regional Youth Council, MIDLAND, WA
School Psychologists Australia, CHELTENHAM, VIC
South Australian Council of Social Services, ADELAIDE, SA
SPELD Qld Inc., ANNERLEY, QLD
Stretch-A-Family Inc., STANMORE, NSW
Tangentyere Council, ALICE SPRINGS, NT
The National Council of Women of Tasmania, HOBART, TAS
The Salvation Army, INGLE FARM, SA
The Salvation Army, ROCKHAMPTON, QLD
The Smith Family, CAMPERDOWN, NSW
West Heidelberg Community Legal Service Inc., WEST HEIDELBERG, VIC
Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, ADELAIDE, SA

UNIONS/ASSOCIATIONS /ORGANISATIONS

Australian Association for Adolescent Health, DARLINGHURST, NSW
Australian Early Childhood Association of Tasmania, SANDY BAY, TAS
Australian Education Union, Victorian Branch Welfare Committee, MELBOURNE,
VIC
Australian Secondary Principals Association, NORTH MELBOURNE, VIC
Catholic Primary Principals Association, ATTADALE, WA
Children's Welfare Association of Victoria Inc., COLLINGWOOD, VIC

Home Schooling Association, UPPER CABOOLTURE, QLD
Northern Territory Principals' Association, DARWIN, NT
NSW Federation of Parents & Citizens Association, EAST SYDNEY, NSW
NSW Primary Principals' Association, TOONGABBIE, NSW
NSW Teachers Federation, SYDNEY, NSW
Parents Rights and Support Group (TAS) Inc., DEVONPORT, TAS
Queensland Teachers Union, SPRING HILL, QLD
R.I.F.T (Repair Independent Family Ties Association Australia Inc.), ARCHERFIELD, QLD
State School Teachers' Union of WA (Inc.), EAST PERTH, WA
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., MELBOURNE, VIC
Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, MELBOURNE, VIC
The Tasmanian Council of State School P & C Association, HOBART, TAS
Welfare Teachers Association of Victoria, HEIDELBERG, VIC

EDUCATION CENTRES

Aboriginal and Islander Alternative Education Unit, RAPID CREEK, NT
Bayside School Support Centre, TOOMBUL, QLD
Burnside, NORTH PARRAMATTA, NSW
Centre Education Programme Inc., WOODRIDGE, QLD
Eddy's Annexe (Alternate Education Project), WOLLONGONG, NSW
Future Employment Opportunities Inc. (Early School Leavers Group), EAGLEHAWK, VIC
Future Zone, Job Placement Employment Training (JPET), TOWNSVILLE, QLD
Gosford Education and Training Services, ETTALONG, NSW
Home School Support Programme, Rockhampton District, ROCKHAMPTON, QLD
Job Placement Employment Training (JPET), PENRITH, NSW
Parkerville Children's Home (Inc.), PARKERVILLE, WA
Whitfords District Education Office, EAST PERTH, WA

CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE

Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, MANUKA, ACT
Catholic Education Office of South Australia, THEBARTON, SA
Catholic Education Office of Victoria, MELBOURNE, VIC
Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, LEEDERVILLE, WA
Diocesan Catholic Education Commission, WAGGA WAGGA, NSW
Queensland Catholic Education Commission, BRISBANE, QLD
Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission, HOBART, TAS

TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Regency Institute Port Adelaide Campus, PORT ADELAIDE, SA
Capricornia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Tertiary Education Centre, Central
Queensland University, NORTH ROCKHAMPTON, QLD

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF EXHIBITS

1. HOBART, 3 April 1995 - material provided by Mr Ross Park:
 - Disruptive Student Program;
 - Youth Interagency Group Newsletter;
 - Copy of Submission by Clarence Plains Community Centre for Nomination for the March & McLennon - Community Development Award;
 - Pilot Project, Strengthening the School - Community Progress Report;
 - What other schools are doing?; and
 - Proposal re Clarence Plains 1995, The Provision of Course for Student at Risk.
2. HOBART, 3 April 1995 - Statistics provided by Bridgewater High School.
3. ADELAIDE, 1 May 1995 - provided by Glenys Oakey, Salisbury Youth Annexe Newsletter.
4. ADELAIDE, 1 May 1995 - provided at public hearing a document titled *Some Key Ideas from the Summary of the Junior Secondary Review*.
5. ADELAIDE, 1 May 1995 - provided by Dimitri Calantzis, *Support School Environment*, Cross-cultural tensions and student interaction in school.
6. PORT AUGUSTA, 2 May 1995 - provided by Colleen Hutchison, *Kick Start*, Job Skills 2000 Partnership.
7. SYDNEY, 25 May 1995 - provided by John Ludbrook from National Childrens' & Youth Law Centre the following documents:
 - Research Notes by Jackie Taylor for the public hearing;
 - Brochure on National Childrens' & Youth Law Centre; and
 - Publications order form.
8. SYDNEY, 25 May 1995 - provided by Dr Trevor Cairney, *Literacy & Youth*, Investigating Literacy in Correctional Institutions.
9. SYDNEY, 25 May 1995 - provided by Dr Trevor Cairney, brochures on *Effective Partners in Secondary Literacy Learning*.

10. SYDNEY, 25 May 1995 - provided by Dr Trevor Cairney, folder on *Effective Partners in Secondary Literacy Learning*.
11. SYDNEY, 25 May 1995 - provided by the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW, Documents titled *Alternative Educational Programs*.
12. SYDNEY, 25 May 1995 - provided by Elizabeth Orr from the Smith Family a brochure titled *Introducing the Smith Family's Edu-cate School Assistance Plan*.
13. SYDNEY, 25 May 1995 - provided by Elizabeth Orr from the Smith Family two blue folders containing the policies of the Smith Family titled EXHIBIT A.
14. PORT AUGUSTA, 2 May 1995 - provided at Community Forum:
 - Development a Strategy for Youth in Port Augusta 1994, *Workshop Report*;
 - Issues Surrounding Retention Rates in Aboriginal Youth People, *A Personal Perspective*; and
 - Youth Strategy Action Grant, Port Augusta, *Final Report*.
15. CANBERRA, 29 June 1995 - provided by ACT Department of Education and Training:
 - Kambah High School, General Handbook 1994;
 - Department of Education and Training, Annual Management Report 1993-94;
 - ACT Schools Authority Suspension Report;
 - Suspension and Exclusion of Students: Policy and Mandatory Procedures;
 - Management of Student Behaviour: Policy and Implementation Guidelines;
 - Giralang Primary School, Giralang Student Management;
 - Student Management Policy;
 - Kambah High School, Staff Information Book, 1995;
 - Kambah High School, a user manual for the Glasser Discipline System; and
 - Lyneham High School, Information Handbook, 1995.
16. MELBOURNE, 1 August 1995 - provided by Kildonan Child and Family Services:

- Letter from Ms Angela Mukhopadhyay, Office of Standards in Education, Bristol, United Kingdom to Jo Cavanagh.
 - Care has an 'E' for Education, Children in residential care (CIRC) Research Project Report.
17. MELBOURNE, 1 August 1995 - WEAC, Fax to Regional Manager, DSE, Eastern Region and Principal, Brandon Park Secondary College from Grant Holland, Social Worker.
18. MELBOURNE, 1 August 1995 - provided by the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals:
- ASPA
 - A presentation to The Hon Ross Free concerning CURRENT and EMERGING TRENDS in Australian Government Secondary Schools.
19. MELBOURNE, 2 August 1995 - provided by the Directorate of School Education:
- Guidelines for developing the Student Code of Conduct
20. MELBOURNE, 2 August 1995 - provided by Future Employment Opportunities (Early School Leavers Group):
- Students at Education Risk, Identification and current alternative Programs in Bendigo and Victoria
21. MELBOURNE, 2 August 1995 - provided by Christian Brothers Child, Youth and Family Services:
- St Augustine's Education Centre, A Secondary Program for Students Experiencing Severe Difficulty with Schooling, Program Relationships
 - Leaving School Early, Why do some young people choose to leave school early?, What forces are at play when making such a (momentous) decision?, A discussion paper developed by members of the Barwon Adolescent Task Force Inc.
22. MELBOURNE, 2 August 1995 - provided by Children's Welfare Association of Victoria:
- Table of Exclusions
23. MELBOURNE, 2 August 1995 - provided by Victorian Secondary Principals Association:
- Speaking notes, "A Presentation to The Hon Ross Free, Minister for School, Vocational Education & Training" concerning CURRENT and EMERGING TRENDS in Australian Government Secondary Schools.

24. BRISBANE, 4 September 1995 - provided by Queensland Department of Education:
 - Draft - Goals and Strategic Action Areas.
25. BRISBANE, 4 September 1995 - provided by Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Association:
 - The New Agenda, Maintaining School Discipline, A Plan to Keep Schools free from disruption, Rebuilding Community Values.
26. DARWIN, 6 September 1995 - provided by Northern Territory Principals Association:
 - Katherine High School - Young Aboriginal Student Access Program
27. DARWIN, 6 September 1995 - provided by Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations:
 - Case studies.

APPENDIX 4

LIST OF WITNESSES

PUBLIC HEARINGS, YOUTH FORUMS AND INSPECTIONS

Hobart, 3 April 1995

Public hearings

Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts

Mr Graham Harrington
Deputy Secretary

Ms Alison Jacob
Director
Educational Planning

Australian Education Union

Ms Patricia Moran
Secondary College Officer/Women's Officer

Ms Robin Hull
Research Officer

Tasmanian Council of State School Parents and Friends Association

Mrs Carla Rainbird
Secretary

Mr Grant Herring
Executive Officer

Forum

Miss Sharon Andrews

Ms Deborah Brewer Eiszelle
Coordinator
Housing Young People's Outreach

Ms Christine Dibley
GIA Worker
Migrant Resource Centre (Sth Inc.)

Mrs Shirley Foster
Board Member, Tasmanian Council of Social Services and
National Vice-President, Early Childhood Association

Miss Jane Hemsley
Teacher, E.S.L. Program
Newtown Primary School

Ms Marianne Holford
Coordinator, Job Placement
Employment and Training Program
Colony 47 Young Peoples Programs

Mr Barry Johnson
Manager
Devonport Youth Accommodation Services Inc.

Ms Kathryn Lord
Coordinator
Stepping Stone (Tas.) Inc.

Ms Katrina Marino
Project Officer
Migrant Resource Centre (Sth Inc.)

Mr Ross Park
Youth Development Officer
Glenorchy City Council

Mr Leslie Whittle
Youthcare Coordinator
Anglicare Tasmania

Mrs Debra Wilkinson
Koori Support Worker
Annie Kenney Young Womens Refuge

Adelaide, 1 May 1995

Public hearing

South Australian Department for Family and Community Services

Mr Leith Carpenter
Executive Director
Field Services

South Australian Department for Education and Children's Services

Ms Sandra Fueleop
Director, Programs

Ms Margaret Ford
Project Manager
Inter-agency Crime Prevention Attendance
Child Protection

Dr Paul Hughes
Coordinator
Aboriginal Education

Ms Wendy Johnson
Regional Services Manager (North East Metro)

Ms Lynne Symons
Principal
Bowden-Brompton Community School

Mr Phillip Wilkins
Principal
Paralowie R-12 School

South Australia Police Department

Inspector William Prior
Officer in Charge
Metro North-East Division

Salvation Army Ingle Farm Youth Accommodation Services

Mr Mark Groote
Residential Care Worker

Mr Andrew Moore
Youth Worker

Ms Jacqueline Triemer
Senior Youth Worker

Salisbury Youth Annex and Paralowie House

Mrs Glenys Oakey
Manager

South Australian Council of Social Service

Mr Mark Henley
Executive Director

Mr Noel Holmes
Consultant and Principal, Magill Education Centre

Ethnic Communities Council of South Australia Inc.

Mr Dimitri Calantzis
Access and Equity Officer

Youth Affairs Council of South Australia

Mr Thomas Easling
Vice-President

Mr Kym Davey
Executive Officer

Ms Mary-Rose Alfonsi

Port Augusta, 2 May 1995

Forum

Ms Mary Cusack

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Mr Andrew Thomas
Regional Chairperson

Ms Krystina Green
Deputy Regional Manager

Davenport Community Council

Mr Malcolm McKenzie
Youth Coordinator

Department of Employment, Education and Training

Mr Joseph Hull

Youth Advisory Committee, Port Pirie City Council

Mr Gareth Sharp
Member

Ms Rosie Weldon
Youth Project Officer
and Port Pirie Crime Prevention

South Australia Department for Family and Community Services

Mrs Jacqueline Crawford
Youth Worker

Mr Mark McKenzie
Youth Worker

South Australia Department for Education and Children's Services

Mr Graham Davis
District Superintendent

Mr Don Tanner
Aboriginal Education Worker
Student Behaviour Manager/Attendance

Port Augusta Youth Network

Mr Roger Hooper
Member

Port Augusta Youth Activity Services

Mr Edwin Lles
Coordinator

Sydney, 25 May 1995

Public hearings

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales

Mrs Edna McGill
Member of Executive

Ms Beverly Baker
Publicity Officer

Mr Warren Johnson
Executive Officer

Mr Damien Anderson
Research Officer

National Children's and Youth Law Centre

Mr Robert Ludbrook
Director

Ms Jackie Taylor
Researcher and Social Work Student from University of NSW

New South Wales Teachers Federation

Ms Sally Edsall
Research Officer

Ms Denise Fairservice
Research Officer

Professor Trevor Cairney
Dean of Education, University of Western Sydney

The Smith Family

Ms Elizabeth Orr

Canberra, 22 June 1995

Public hearings

Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition

Mr Julian Pocock
Executive Officer

Ms Carol Croce
Policy Officer

Woden Youth Centre

Ms Kim Sattler
Coordinator

Canberra, 29 June 1995

Public hearings

ACT Department of Education and Training

Mr Allan Hird
Executive Director
School Programs Branch

Mr Paul Fennell
Director
Student Support Services

Australian Council of State School Organisations

Ms Beverly Baker
Vice President

Dr John Martino
Policy Analyst

Department of Employment, Education and Training

Ms Mary Lovett
First Assistant Secretary
Student, Aboriginal Education and Youth Division

Ms Frances Davies
Assistant Secretary
Youth Bureau
Student, Aboriginal Education and Youth Division

Ms Veronica Barbeler
Director
Youth Policy, Youth Bureau

Ms Linda Collings
Director
Equity Section, Targeted Programs Branch
Schools and Curriculum Division

Perth, 24 July 1995

Public hearings

Education Department of Western Australia

Mr David Axworthy
Manager
Student Support Branch

Mrs Meredyth Crossing
Acting Director
Student Services

Ministry of Justice

Ms Anne Gilmour
Manager
Education Services
Juvenile Justice Division

Katta-Wangkinyiny Regional Council

Mr Arthur Slatter
Deputy Chairperson

Ms Glenys Collard
Regional Councillor

Parkerville Children's Home

Ms Jennifer Brodie
Education Officer

Mr Graeme Jarred
Social Worker

Ms Wendy Radcliffe
Education Officer

St Clare's School

Sister Geraldine Mitchell
Principal

Mrs Caroline Edwards
Social Studies/English Teacher

Mrs Marion Nairn
English/Science/Maths Teacher

Miss Lesley Ure
Teacher/Social Worker

State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia

Ms Morag Whitney
Senior Vice-President

Ms Joy Barrett
Occupational and Safety Officer

Melbourne, 1 August 1995

Public hearings

Ardoch Youth Foundation

Ms Kathy Hilton
Director

Mr John Byrne
Member

Mr Brian Derum
Member

Mr Keith Muller
Member

Ms Jan Osmotherly
Member

Ms Lisa Thompson
Student

Australian Education Union

Ms Sharan Burrow
Federal President

Mr Michael Butler
Chairperson of the AEU Welfare Working Party

Mr Steve Halliwell
Industrial Organiser

Children's Court of Victoria

Mr Gregory Levine
Senior Magistrate

Kildonan Child and Family Services

Ms Sherrie Coote
Director

Mrs Joanne Cavanagh
Consultant

Mrs Gloria Meadows
Education Consultant

Mr David Morrell
Manager
Client Services

Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals

Mr Duncan Stalker
President

Dr Jack Howe
Convenor
Student Services Committee

Mr Doug Smith
Committee Member

Australian Secondary Principals Association

Mr Peter Martin
Executive Officer

Melbourne, 2 August 1995

Public hearings

Children's Welfare Association of Victoria

Mr Michael Girolami
Board Member, (Education Portfolio)

Ms Carol Russell
Chief Executive Officer

Christian Brothers Child, Youth and Family Services

Brother Peter Flint
Director
St Augustine's Education Centre

Mr Paul Linossier
Chief Executive Officer

Ms Andree Brown
Director of NewStreet and STASworks

Mrs Joanne Cavanagh
Client Services Director

Department of Health and Community Services Victoria

Ms Penny Armytage
Assistant Director
Protection and Care

Dr Gillian Parmenter
Assistant Director
Children's and Family Services
Primary Care Division

Department of Justice

Mr David Butten
Senior Policy Adviser (Crime Prevention)
Policy and Strategic Development Division

Directorate of School Education

Mr Frank Peck
Executive General Manager

Mr Bob Maguire
Group Manager
School and Community Support Branch

Ms Colleen Murphy
Senior Project Officer
Student Welfare Support

Mr Graeme Schaeche
Group Manager
Student Welfare Support Branch

Future Employment Opportunities (Early School Leavers Group)

Ms Carolyn Bartlett
Member

Ms Helen Cameron
Parent and TAFE Representative

Miss Nicole Ellerton
Young Jobseekers' Officer

Ms Julie Flynn
Voluntary Member

Mr Dene Milner
Students at Risk Coordinator

Mr John Pearce
Student Welfare Coordinator

Mr Steve Tyzzer

Office of Youth Affairs

Mr Peter Jones
Acting Strategic Planning Manager

Ms Christine Kotur
Acting Director

Brisbane, 4 September 1995

Public hearing

Queensland Catholic Education Commission

Mr Dan Bolton
Member of Secretariat-Equity

Mr Garry Everett
Assistant Director/Executive Secretary

Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc.

Mrs Nancy Coll
Vice-President

Mr Bruce Kimball
Executive Officer

Queensland Department of Education

Ms Buffy Lavery
Acting Senior Policy Officer
Supportive School Environment

Ms Suzanne MacQueen
Senior Policy Officer
Regional and Community Relations Unit

Youth Affairs Network of Queensland

Ms Penny Carr
Policy and Research Officer

Ms Susan Ferguson
Project Officer
NESB Youth Issues

Mr Benjamin Thomson

Darwin, 5 September 1995

Public hearings

Darwin and Rural Workers with Youth Network

Mr Ian O'Reilly
Convenor

Mrs Anne Hoskings

Brother Barry Sullivan

Mr Paul Terawsky
Youth Worker

Mrs Vanessa Whitty
Youth Worker

North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Services

Ms Jennifer Hardy
Policy Solicitor

Darwin, 6 September 1995

Public hearings

Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

Mr Phillip De La Cruz
Executive Officer

Mrs Veronica Johns
Council Member

Mr John Reid
Council Member

Mr Frank Spry
Council Member

Mrs Maria Stephens
Council Member

Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisation

Mr Steve Carter
Senior Vice President

Mr Chandra Seneviratne
Treasurer

Northern Territory Department of Education

Mr Christopher Makepeace
Director
Schools Policy

Mr Brian Chase
Project Officer
Schools Policy Branch

Mrs Lenore Dembski
Director
Aboriginal Development Unit

Ms Sandy Healey
Senior Education Officer
Behaviour Management

Mrs Shirley-Ann Hooper
Assistant Principal
Student Welfare
Sanderson High School

Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services

Assistant Commissioner Robin Chalker
Northern Command

Acting Sergeant Scott Mitchell
Coordinator of School Based Police and
DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education)

Northern Territory Principals Association

Ms Victoria Stokes
President

Mr John Glasby
Principal, Katherine High School

Appendix 5 Legislation table: Summary of grounds and procedure for exclusion in Australia

NEW SOUTH WALES *Education Reform Act 1990*

<i>Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion</i>	Not stated.
<i>Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?</i>	s35(3) The Minister may, on the recommendation of the Director-General of School Education, expel a child of any age from a government school. The Director-General of School Education may suspend any child from a government school. s34(4) The Minister may refuse the admission of a child to all or any government schools if: (a) the child has been expelled from any government school;
<i>What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	Not stated.
<i>What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	Not stated.
<i>Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?</i>	Not stated.
<i>Whose obligation to ensure education?</i>	s4 (d) the principal responsibility of the State in the education of children is the provision of public education.

<i>Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion</i>	Not stated.
<i>Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?</i>	Not stated.
<i>What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	Not stated.
<i>What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	Not stated.
<i>Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?</i>	Not stated.
<i>Whose obligation to ensure education?</i>	Not stated.

TASMANIA *Education Act 1994*

Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion	Not stated.
Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?	s37 The principal of a State school, if satisfied that a student has behaved in an unacceptable manner, may - (a) suspend the student full-time or part-time from that school for a period of 2 weeks or less; or s38(1) If the principal of a State school is of the opinion that the behaviour of a student justified a suspension of more than 2 weeks, the principal may refer the matter to the Secretary.
What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?	s36(1) A student at a State school is to behave in a manner acceptable to the principal. (2) Behaviour which is not acceptable in a State school includes behaviour which - (a) constitutes refusal to participate in the education programme; or (b) constitutes disobedience of instructions which regulate the conduct of students; or (c) is likely to impede significantly the learning of the other students of that school; or (d) is likely to be detrimental to the health, safety or welfare of the staff or other students of that school; or (e) causes or is likely to cause damage; or (f) is likely to bring that school into disrepute.
What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?	s37 The principal of a State school, if satisfied that a student has behaved in an unacceptable manner, may - (a) suspend the student full-time or part-time from that school for a period of 2 weeks or less; s38(1) If the principal of a State school is of the opinion that the behaviour of a student justifies a suspension of more than 2 weeks, the principal may refer the matter to the Secretary. (2) The Secretary, if satisfied that the behaviour of a student justifies it, may - (a) suspend the student full-time or part-time from attending the school for a period 2 weeks or less; or (b) exclude the student full-time or part-time from attending the school for a period exceeding 2 weeks; or (c) expel the student from the school; or (d) prohibit the student from enrolling at any State school.
Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?	s38(4) The parent of a student or a student may apply to the Secretary for a periodic review of the exclusion, expulsion or prohibition.
Whose obligation to ensure education?	Not stated.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA *Education Act 1928 and Education Act Regulations 1960*

Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion	Not stated.
Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?	<p>s20G (1) Prescribed person (Principal) may suspend child and may recommend to Minister that child be excluded.</p> <p>ss21 & 22 Principal may exclude child</p> <p>r35(1) Subject to subregulation (2), the principal of a school may, pursuant to section 20G of the Act, suspend a child from attendance at that school for a period not exceeding 10 days.</p> <p>r35A(1) Where a period of suspension imposed pursuant to section 20G of the Act will result in a child being suspended for a total of 30 days or more in any school year, whether in one or more schools, the principal imposing that period of suspension shall recommend to the Minister that the child be excluded from attending the school of which he is principal.</p>
What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?	<p>s20G (suspension) The conduct and behaviour of a child is not conducive to the good order and proper management of the school</p> <p>s21 (exclusion) A child who is suffering from an offensive or infectious disease or who is habitually of unclean habits</p> <p>s22(1) (exclusion) A child who in any manner disobeys a lawful direction of a teacher, or fails to comply with any administrative instruction relating to infectious or other diseases, may be excluded from a school by the principal of the school.(2) A child so excluded under this regulation or under regulation 21 shall be reported immediately to the chief executive officer.</p>
What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?	<p>r35(3) Where a principal of a school suspends a child from attendance at that school he shall -</p> <p>(a) give notice in writing of the suspension to the child;</p> <p>(b) forward, by means independent of the child, a copy of the notice referred to in paragraph (a) to a parent of the child; and</p> <p>(c) forthwith report the suspension to an officer of the department holding a position not lower than Superintendent.</p> <p>(4) The notice referred to in subregulation (3)(a) shall contain the following information -</p> <p>(a) the term of the suspension; and</p> <p>(b) short reasons for the suspension.</p>
Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?	Not stated.
Whose obligation to ensure education?	Not stated.

<p>Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion</p>	<p>s24.(1) In this section, "suspend" means prohibit from attending a State educational institution for a period of time as specified pursuant to this section. s25(1) In this section and in section 24, "exclude" means prohibit from attendance at any number of or all State educational institutions as specified by the Director-General pursuant to this section for a period determined by the Director-General, with the approval of the Minister first had and obtained.</p>
<p>Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?</p>	<p>s24(2) A principal or other person in charge of a State educational institution may suspend a student from that State educational institution for up to and including five (5) days which shall be nominated by the principal or other person in charge, but immediately on doing so he shall notify the Executive Director for the region in question and the student himself and, if the student is under the age of 18 years, a parent of the student, of his action and his reasons thereof. s25(2) The Director-General shall consider expeditiously the circumstances of a case of exclusion and, with the approval of the Minister, may order the exclusion of a student from a State school: (a) for a period determined by the Director-General; or (b) permanently; (continues next page)</p>
<p>What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</p>	<p>Suspension of Students: Not stated. Exclusion of Students: s25(2) [...] when the Director-General is satisfied that the student is guilty of disobedience, misconduct or other conduct prejudicial to the good order and discipline of a State educational institution or State educational institutions.</p>
<p>What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</p>	<p>s24(4) If the principal or other person in charge of a State educational institution is of the opinion that a student should be excluded pursuant to section 25, he shall include with his advice to the Executive Director of the region in question pursuant to subsection (2) a recommendation to that effect and reasons therefor. s24(5) If the Executive Director is of the opinion, whether on a recommendation made pursuant to subsection (4) or otherwise, that the student should be excluded to section 25, he shall: (a) notify the Director-General promptly of his opinion and therein set out the circumstances in respect of the matter in question; (b) extend the suspension until a determination has been made pursuant to section 25 and immediately notify the principal or other person in charge and the student himself and, if the student is under the age of 18 years, a parent of the student, of his action and his reasons therefor in which case the student shall be suspended for that period. s25(3) Immediately on ordering such exclusion, [s25(2)] the Director-General shall [also] notify the regional director of the region in question.</p>
<p>Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?</p>	<p>s24(6) The student or his parent may, upon receipt of or being made aware of a notification of his or his child's extended suspension under subsection (5)(b), make a submission to the Director-General setting out the reasons why the student should not be excluded pursuant to section 25. s25(4) The student or his parent may upon receipt of or being made aware of an order in respect of such exclusion make submission to the Director-General setting out the reasons why the student should not be so excluded.</p>

<i>Whose obligation to ensure education?</i>	Not stated.
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VICTORIA *Education Act 1958, and Education Regulations 1988*

<i>Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion</i>	s25(1) In this section "exclude" means suspend or expel.
<i>Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?</i>	s25(2) The principal or head teacher of a State school may, in accordance with any Order made by the Minister under sub-section (7), exclude a pupil from that school. s25(6) The Director may, in accordance with any Order made by the Minister under sub-section (7), prohibit a pupil expelled from a State school from attending any other State school.
<i>What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	r5.7 A student may, by order of the Chief Executive given with the approval of the Minister, be excluded from a State School where the student- (a) behaves in a way as to constitute a danger to the physical and emotional health of any staff member or student; or (b) consistently and deliberately fails to comply with any lawful order of a principal or teacher; or (c) is in such condition as to be offensive to, or dangerous to, the health of any staff member or any student; or (d) consistently and deliberately behaves in a manner that interferes with the education opportunities of other students.
<i>What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	Not stated.
<i>Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?</i>	s25(3) A pupil expelled from a State school under sub-section (2) may, in accordance with any Order made by the Minister under sub-section (7), appeal to the Director against his or her expulsion.
<i>Whose obligation to ensure education?</i>	s25(4) Subject to any action taken by the Director under sub-section (6), a pupil of school age who has been expelled from a State school must, in accordance with any Order made by the Minister under sub-section (7), be afforded an opportunity of continuing his or her education while he or she is of school age.

<i>Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion</i>	Not stated.
<i>Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?</i>	<p>§27(1) ... the head teacher may suspend the person from attendance at the school.</p> <p>§28(1) ... the Minister may expel a child from the school at which the child is enrolled.</p>
<i>What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	<p>Suspension of students: §27(1) Where the head teacher of a Government school at which a person is enrolled is of the opinion that the person should be suspended from attendance at the school because the presence of the person at school would, in the head teacher's opinion, be injurious to the health or moral welfare of other persons enrolled at the school, by reason of the person's insolence, repeated disobedience, immoral conduct or serious breach of discipline, the head teacher may suspend the person from attendance at the school.</p> <p>Expulsion of students: §28(1) Where the Minister considers it necessary in the interests of other children attending a Government school, the Minister may expel a child from the school at which the child is enrolled.</p>
<i>What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	<p>Suspension of students: §27(3) Where the head teacher of a Government school has suspended a child under sub-section (1), he shall immediately furnish notice, in a form approved by the Secretary, of the suspension and a full report of the circumstances to a parent who has the actual custody of the child and to the Minister. §27(3A) Where the head teacher of a Government school has suspended a person, other than a child, under subsection(1), the head teacher shall immediately furnish notice, in a form approved by the Secretary, of the suspension and a full report of the circumstances to the person and to the Minister. §27(4) A suspension under this section shall remain in force for the period, not exceeding one month, specified in the notice referred to in subsection (3) or (3A), as the case may be, or until the Minister decides whether, in the case of a child, the child shall be expelled under section 28, whichever is the earlier.</p> <p>Expulsion of students: §28(2) The Minister may, at any time, review an expulsion made under sub-section (1) and, where his is of the opinion that the child should be no longer expelled from the school referred to in that sub-section, he may terminate the expulsion. §28(3) As soon as practicable after an expulsion or termination of expulsion under this section, the Minister shall inform or cause to be informed in writing a parent who has the actual custody of the child of that expulsion or termination of expulsion. §29A. Where a child has been expelled from a Government school, a parent of the child shall not, without the permission of the Minister, enrol the child at a Government school, except at the educational institution known as the Northern Territory Secondary Correspondence School or at a school of the air.</p>

<i>Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?</i>	Not stated.
<i>Whose obligation to ensure education?</i>	Not stated.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA *Education Act 1972 and Regulations*

<i>Definition of suspension, exclusion and expulsion</i>	Not stated.
<i>Who has the power to suspend, expel or exclude students from school?</i>	r124B(1) The head teacher of a Government school may suspend a student from attendance at the school ... r124C(1) The head teacher of a Government school may exclude a student from attendance at the school ... r124D(1) The responsible officer may, on the recommendation of the head teacher of a Government school at which a student who is above compulsory school age is enrolled, expel the student ...
<i>What are the grounds for suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</i>	Suspension of students: r124B(1)(a) the student has threatened or perpetrated violence; or (b) the student has acted in a manner that threatens the good order of the school or the safety or well being of a student or member of staff of the school; or (c) the student has interfered with the ability of a teacher to instruct students or of a student to benefit from that instruction; or (d) the student shows persistent and wilful inattention or indifference to school work; or (e) the student has acted illegally. Exclusion of students: r124C(1) - same as (a), (b), (c) & (e) above. Expulsion of students: r124D(1) - same as (a), (b) & (e) above. plus: and the seriousness of the student's behaviour is such that the expulsion of the student is warranted. (continues)

<p>What procedures are used in implementing suspension, exclusion and expulsion?</p>	<p>Suspension of students: r124B(3) The head teacher must notify the parents of the student or, where the student is an adult, the student in writing that the student has been suspended from the school.</p> <p>Exclusion of students: r124C(3) Where a head teacher proposes to exclude a student from attendance at a school, the head teacher must first suspend the student from the school for a period of not more than five consecutive school days. (4) The head teacher must notify the parents of the student or, where the student is an adult, the student in writing that the student has been suspended from the school and that the head teacher proposes to exclude the student from attending the school.</p> <p>Expulsion of students: r124D(3) Where a head teacher proposes to recommend to the responsible officer that a student be expelled, the head teacher must first suspend the student from the school for a period of not more than four weeks. (4) The head teacher must notify in writing the parents of a student or, where the student is an adult, the student - (a) that the student has been suspended from the school; and (b) that the head teacher proposes to recommend that the student be expelled; and (c) of the right under subregulation(5) to make representations to the head teacher in relation to the suspension or expulsion of the student. (5) The head teacher must afford the parents of a student or, where the student is an adult, the student a reasonable opportunity to make representations to the head teacher in relation to the suspension or expulsion of the student. (9) The responsible officer must notify the parents of a student or, where the student is an adult, the student in writing that the student has been expelled and of the right to appeal against the exclusion. (continues)</p>
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<p><i>Is there an opportunity for student or parent to object to it?</i></p>	<p><i>Suspension of students:</i> r124B(4) The head teacher must during the period of a student's suspension under this regulation hold a meeting to which the student, the student's parents and any other relevant person nominated by the head teacher are invited to negotiate a plan for the improvement of the student's behaviour and learning and, if appropriate, the early termination of the student's suspension.</p> <p><i>Exclusion of students:</i> r124C(5) The head teacher must before excluding the student from the school, hold a meeting to which the student, the student's parents and any other relevant person nominated by the head teacher are invited to assist the head teacher to decide - ... (6) The head teacher must notify the parents of the student or where the student is an adult, the student in (continues on next page)</p>
<p><i>Whose obligation to ensure education?</i></p>	<p>Not stated.</p>

Source: National Children's and Youth Law Centre, *School Exclusions: Student Perspectives on the Process*, Appendix A, August 1995.

Appendix 6 Policy Table: Summary of grounds and procedure for exclusion in Australia

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY	
Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	A principal has the power to suspend and recommend the transfer of students.
What are the grounds for suspension?	A student can be suspended and/or recommended transfer to another school for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ behaviour disruptive to the student's own learning and /or other student's learning, ▪ aggressive behaviour, ▪ drug related behaviour, ▪ other behaviours believed to warrant action.
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	Same as for suspension.
What is the procedure for suspension?	A principal can suspend a student for a period not exceeding 5 school days. The suspension period begins the following day as the student should not leave until the end of the school day.
What is the procedure for expulsion/exclusion?	A student can be compulsorily transferred to another school (if under 15 years), or excluded from the school (if 15 years or over). A principal can recommend that a student be excluded from school. The Executive Director, School Programs will consult the Chief Education Officer, who will make a decision within 5 working days.
Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	The principal must give the student a fair hearing under the procedures of natural justice and to reply to allegations of misconduct before a decision is reached.
Is there a right of appeal / review?	Yes, a parent or student may lodge an appeal in writing within 7 days. In addition, the principal must advise the student, parents/guardian of the appeal provisions.
Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	No, the appeal is heard by various members of the Department. For compulsory transfer, exclusion or an extension of a suspension the Executive Director (Schools) will make a decision within 5 working days.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	Yes, schools must inform their Executive Director, (Schools).
Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	Not stated.

NEW SOUTH WALES

NEW PROCEDURES ON SUSPENSION, EXCLUSION AND EXPULSION OF STUDENTS 9 FEB 1994

Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	The principal can impose a short suspension of up to 4 school days or a long suspension for an indefinite period. A principal can exclude a student from a particular school or recommend to the Minister for Education that a student be expelled.
What are the grounds for suspension?	A student may be suspended for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • behaviour which is repellent, contemptuous or offensive, • persistent disobedience to comply with instructions or consistently defiant behaviour, • violent behaviour towards a teacher or another student, or • disruptive behaviour, harassment or distraction of other students or staff, • bringing illegal drugs or weapons to school.
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	A student can be excluded from a school where a long suspension has not resolved the problem. Expulsion may be recommended following violent behaviour or the bringing of weapons to school.
What is the procedure for suspension?	Students of any age may be suspended. The principal must inform the student of the precise grounds upon which suspension is being considered. The principal must notify the student's parents in writing. The principal should convene a meeting of personnel involved in the welfare and guidance of the student, including the parents to discuss appropriate action in the interests of the student and the school. The principal also records action taken in the suspension register. In urgent circumstances where violence has occurred, or where for some other reason the safety of students or staff is considered to be at risk, the principal will immediately suspend the student pending determination of the appropriate action to be taken.
What is the procedure for expulsion/exclusion?	Students of any age may be excluded or expelled. Exclusion from a school can take place when a long suspension has not resolved the problem, and it is considered that the student might develop self-discipline and cooperative behaviour in a suitable alternative school. In cases where the principal recommends expulsion, the student will be immediately suspended pending the Minister's decision. Prior to recommending expulsion the principal will notify the student and the parents in writing of his or her intention, giving reasons for the action and allowing 4 school days for the student or parents to respond. The principal also forwards a submission through the director of schools to the assistant director-general (region). The assistant director-general will consider any response within 14 days and made a decision at the expiration of 14 days.
Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	The principal must inform the student of the precise grounds upon which suspension is being considered and give the student an opportunity to express his or her view of the incident. The principal must notify the student's parents in writing. The principal should convene a meeting of personnel involved in the welfare and guidance of the student, including the parents to discuss appropriate action in the interests of the student and the school.
Is there a right of appeal / review?	Where a principal recommends expulsion, he or she must forward a submission through the director of schools to the assistant director-general (region), who then provides the student and parents with a copy of this submission indicating that any further response must be made within 14 days to the assistant director-general (region). At the expiration of the 14 days, any response will be considered before making a decision whether to support the principal's recommendations.

NEW SOUTH WALES CONTINUED
NEW PROCEDURES ON SUSPENSION, EXCLUSION AND EXPULSION OF STUDENTS 9 FEB 1994

Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	No.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	Each school is to maintain a suspension and exclusion register. Details are to be provided to the Assistant Director-General (Region) at the end of each term. A nil return is required where appropriate.
Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	Not stated.

VICTORIA
GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING THE STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT 6 DEC 1994

Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	A principal has the power to suspend and expel students.
What are the grounds for suspension?	<p>A student may be suspended whilst attending school, travelling directly to or from school or engaged in any school activity away from the school, including travel organised by the school if the student does any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • behaves in such a way as to constitute a danger to the health of any staff member or student, • commits an act of significant violence or causes significant damage to property or is involved in theft of property, • possesses, uses or assists others to use illegal drugs or substances, • fails to comply with any reasonable instruction of a teacher or principal, • consistently behaves in a manner that interferes with the educational opportunities of another student, • behaves in a way which threatens the good order of the school's program or facility, • engages in discriminatory behaviour or harassment towards another person. <p>In addition, if the student is 15 years of age or older, the principal suspend a student if the student deliberately and consistently fails to take advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the school.</p>
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	Grounds for expulsion as the same as outlined in the grounds for suspension. The student's behaviour must also be of such magnitude that the principle deems a suspension inadequate to deal with that behaviour.
What is the procedure for suspension?	The principal should arrange a meeting with the student's parent(s) when considering suspension. If the student is to be suspended the principal must provide a notice of suspension to the parent. A student can be suspended for up to 10 school days at any one time, but not more than 20 school days per year. However, this may be extended pending the principal's decision to expel a student.
What is the procedure for exclusion / expulsion?	The principal must give the student and parent an opportunity to be heard, prior to expelling a student, which may include a meeting with the parent. The principal, however, may suspend the student pending decision to expel the student. The principal must provide the parent of the student with a notice of expulsion and details of the review and appeal process.

Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	Yes, the principal should arrange a meeting with the student's parent when considering suspension. If the principal does suspend a student, the parent can request a Suspension Conference. When considering expulsion, the principal may consider a meeting with the parent.
Is there a right of appeal / review?	A parent can request that an expulsion be reviewed by an Expulsion Review Panel. Where an expulsion has been endorsed by the Expulsion Review Panel, a parent can appeal against the act of expulsion to the Director of School Education. If a student lives independently from parents then the student can appeal.
Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	No, the Expulsion Review Panel must be formed by the school council president and is composed of 2 or 3 members, who must be approved by the school council, none of whom has a direct interest in the case.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	The principal must notify the Director of School Education of an expulsion. For a suspension, the principal must provide the president of the school council with a copy of the notice of suspension.
Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	For students above school age who have been excluded, the school has no further responsibility for the education of the student other than providing information about continuing educational options. For students less than 15 years of age, the Director of School Education must ensure that the student is enrolled in another school.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	A principal has the power to suspend a student and make a recommendation to the Minister of Education to permanently exclude a student.
What are the grounds for suspension?	When all efforts to contain the behaviour of a disruptive student have failed, principals are authorised to suspend or exclude a student. In addition, if the conduct and behaviour of a child is not conducive to the good order and proper management of the school the person may suspend the child from attendance.
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	A person holding or acting in a prescribed class of position can suspend a child from attending a school and may also recommend to the Minister that the child be excluded from attending that school. A principal may also refer a student with no record of suspension to an exclusion panel if a gross violation threatens the good order of the school or the safety of students and teachers.
What is the procedure for suspension?	A principal may suspend a student for up to 10 days without seeking the approval of the Ministry. The principal is required to give notice to the student of the suspension and copies to the student's parent/guardian and the District Superintendent. If a suspension will result in a student accumulating 30 or more days of suspension in a school year, whether in one or more schools, the principal shall recommend that the student be excluded from attending the school.
What is the procedure for exclusion / expulsion?	A principal who recommends the exclusion of a student from a school is required to give a written notification of this recommendation to the student and to send copies by independent means to the student's parent(s) or guardian(s) and the relevant District Superintendent. Principals are authorised to recommend exclusion in cases where there was no previous suspension, where a gross breach of discipline threatens the good order of the school or the safety of student and staff. A student recommended for exclusion from a school is suspended from that school for up to a maximum of 15 school days pending the Minister's determination on the Student Exclusion Review Panel Report.

Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	After a principal has provided written notification to the student and to the student's parents of an intended exclusion, the principal will notify the District superintendent, who will arrange for the establishment of a Student Exclusion Review Panel. A senior employee of the Ministry of Education, who acts as the executive officer should ensure that the student and his or her parent(s) are invited to attend. The student's parents will be given the opportunity to address the panel and to respond to questions put by Panel members.
Is there a right of appeal / review?	After a principal has provided written notification to the student and his or her parents of an intended exclusion, the principal will notify the District Superintendent, who will arrange for the establishment of a Student Exclusion Review Panel. The executive officer of the panel must ensure that the student and his or her parents are invited to attend and advised of the form of the meeting.
Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	No, the principal recommending exclusion and the District Superintendent will select the community member of the Panel from nominations normally made by the principal. The other two members of the panel are selected by the District Superintendent.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	A principal's recommendation to exclude a student from a particular school is subject to review and confirmation by the Panel. Consequently the Panel shall advise the Minister as to whether the recommendation to exclude the student from school is confirmed or otherwise.
Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	The Panel, in its report, may include suggestions for the future education of the student.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA	
Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	A principal or delegate can suspend, exclude or expel a student.
What are the grounds for suspension?	<p>A student can be suspended for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • threatened or perpetrated violence, • interfering with the rights of other students to learn and teachers to teach, • persistent and wilful inattention or indifference to school work, • acting illegally, <p>The following are additions currently in draft form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acting in a manner which threatens the good order of the school by persistently refusing to accept the school's Behaviour Code, • acting in a manner which threatens the safety or well being of a student or member of staff through sexual or racist harassment, verbal abuse or bullying.
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	A student can be excluded or expelled from school for the same reasons as suspension, but usually for more severe or frequent unacceptable behaviour.

What is the procedure for suspension?	This is currently in draft form. The principal checks student file for previous suspensions. The principal contacts a parent to arrange for the student to be collected from school as soon as possible. The student and parents are given a copy of the 'Notice of Suspension from School'. A conference time is arranged with relevant personnel and a conference is conducted within the next 5 school days. Details of the incident and conference are recorded on a 'Record of Suspension from School' proforma and copies are sent to the student and caregiver and placed in the student's file.
What is the procedure for exclusion / expulsion?	This is currently in draft form. Exclusion from a school means that the student does not attend that school for a period of time ranging from 4 to 10 weeks, or for the remainder of the term. Expulsion from a single school removes a student from enrolment at a particular school for up to 3 semesters. A student may be expelled from all Department for Education & Children's Services facilities for a period of 1 to 5 years. The principal checks student file for previous suspensions or exclusions. The principal contacts a parent to arrange for the student to be collected from school as soon as possible. The student and parents are given a copy of the 'Notice of Intention to Exclude from School'. This must be hand delivered or sent by certified mail. The principal contacts the Interagency Referral Manager and student services personnel involved. A conference time is arranged with relevant personnel and a conference is conducted within the next 5 school days. The principal uses the information presented at the conference to determine whether to exclude the student. Details are recorded on a 'Record of Exclusion from School' proforma and copies are sent to the Interagency Referral Manager, student and caregiver and placed in the student's file. The process for expulsion is similar.
Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	Upon suspension, a conference time is arranged with relevant personnel and a conference is conducted within the next 5 school days. At the conference a 'Student Development Plan' is formed with student, relevant school personnel and parents. Details of the incident and conference are recorded on a 'Record of Suspension from School' proforma and copies are sent to the student and caregiver and placed in the student's file. A return to class must involve a re-entry process which is documented and placed in the student's file. A similar conference is also held in the case of a student who is being excluded or expelled.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA CONTINUED

Is there a right of appeal / review?	An appeal against exclusion or expulsion may be activated by a student, parent or another adult acting as an advocate at the family's request. An appeal against an exclusion may be lodged with the District Superintendent of Education within 5 school days as part of the expulsion review. An appeal against an expulsion may be lodged with the Minister for Education and Children's Services within 10 school days. There is no right of appeal for suspension.
Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	No.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	Not stated explicitly, but the Executive Director, School Operations, Minister for Education and Children's Services and the District Superintendent of Education are involved in the event of an appeal against a decision to exclude or expel.
Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	A student under 15 who is excluded will be required to complete an alternative education program which may be at another school, through the Open Access College, at a withdrawal centre, by home schooling, a work program or a combination of these. Students aged 15 years and over who have been excluded or expelled are responsible for their own education program.

TASMANIA

Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	This is currently in draft form. A principal or acting principal may suspend a student for up to 10 school days. If a principal recommends suspension for a longer period, or if the student has been suspended 3 times in any one school year, they must refer the matter to the Secretary (delegated to the District Superintendent) who then decides whether the student be excluded for an indefinite period, expelled from the school or prohibited from enrolling at any State school.
What are the grounds for suspension?	This includes instances where the student is travelling to and from school; involved in school activities; wearing the school uniform; participating in inter-school events or representing the school. A student can be suspended for behaviour which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • constitutes refusal to participate in the education programme; or • constitutes disobedience of instructions which regulate the conduct of students; or • is likely to impede significantly the learning of the other students of that school; or • is likely to be detrimental to the health, safety or welfare of the staff or other students of that school; or • causes or is likely to cause damage; or • is likely to bring that school into disrepute.
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	Same as for suspension.
What is the procedure for suspension?	The principal should write immediately to the student's parents and ensure delivery of the letter. The letter should contain details of the suspension, the parents responsibilities and a request for a conference with the parent at the school. The principal should write a report on the day the student is suspended. Copies of the report and letter should be placed on the school suspension file; placed on the student's file and sent to the Manager of the District Support Service.
What is the procedure for exclusion / expulsion?	
Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	If the student is suspended or excluded, the student's parent(s)/caregiver may attend a parental conference at the school. In the event of an expulsion or prohibition being recommended, the principal should offer to meet the student's parents to discuss the process and the reasons.
Is there a right of appeal / review?	The student and/or the student's parents have the right to ask the District Superintendent to review an exclusion. A request to review a decision may not be made more than once a month. A decision will be provided within 5 school days. An appeal can be made to the Secretary to periodically review a decision to expel or prohibit a student. A suspension is not subject to review but the student's parents may appeal to the Ombudsman.
Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	Only if the student's parent(s) appeal to the Ombudsman.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	Yes, if the student has been suspended 3 times in any one school year, they must refer the matter to the Secretary (delegated to the District Superintendent) who then decides whether the student be excluded for an indefinite period, expelled from the school or prohibited from enrolling at any State school.

Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	Not stated.
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NORTHERN TERRITORY	
Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	This is currently in draft form. The Head teacher has the power to suspend a child from attendance at school. The Minister has the power to expel a student.
What are the grounds for suspension?	A student can be suspended for the reason that the presence of the child at school would, in the Head Teacher's opinion, be injurious to the health or moral welfare of other children attending the school, by reason of the child's insolence, repeated disobedience, immoral conduct or serious breach of discipline.
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	For students under 15 years: A student can be recommended to be expelled if a Head Teacher believes that a student's behaviour warrants expulsion. For students 15 years and over: A student who has been suspended on one other occasion in the school year and is to be suspended again, or is currently suspended and the physical safety of other students and staff is believed to be at risk is to be warned in writing, by the Principal that further misbehaviour may lead to expulsion. If unsatisfactory behaviour continues after the warning, the Principal may recommend to the Superintendent that the student be expelled.
What is the procedure for suspension?	A suspension may be for a maximum period of 1 month, including holiday periods. When a student is suspended, the Head Teacher shall immediately furnish notice in accordance with Attachment A to the parent who has actual custody of the student and then the Superintendent. On receipt of the notice, the Superintendent will immediately forward the notice to the Assistant Secretary, Operations South Division, or the Deputy Secretary, Schools Policy & Operations North (as appropriate) with a copy to the Director, Secretariat Branch, who in turn shall inform the Minister.
What is the procedure for exclusion / expulsion?	For students under 15 years: If a Head Teacher believes that a student's behaviour warrants expulsion he/she should suspend the student for 1 month, notify the parents in writing of the suspension and that he/she will be seeking expulsion, provide full documentation to the Superintendent with responsibility for the school. The Secretary of the Department will advise the Minister for Education within 14 days of the commencement date of the suspension. For students 15 years and over: If unsatisfactory behaviour continues after a warning, in writing, the Principal may recommend to the Superintendent in writing that a case be put before the Minister for Education for the student's expulsion. After consideration, the Superintendent may either recommend expulsion to the Minister for Education or advise the Principal of his reasons for rejecting the application. Where the Superintendent recommends expulsion, he/she will write to the parent/guardian and the student notifying that the expulsion is to be recommended, that expulsion precludes the student from enrolling at any other Northern Territory Government school, the reasons for the decision and that an appeal against the recommendation, by the parent/guardian or the student, must be made within 14 days.
Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	Not stated.

NORTHERN TERRITORY CONTINUED	
Is there a right of appeal / review?	An appeal against the recommendation to be expelled may be made by the parent/guardian or the student, within 14 days of the date of advice of the recommendation, to the Assistant Secretary South or Deputy Secretary, Schools Policy & Operations North, as appropriate.
Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	No, the appeal must be made to the Assistant Secretary South or Deputy Secretary, Schools Policy & Operations North, as appropriate.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	Yes.
Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	Not stated.

QUEENSLAND	
Who can suspend, exclude and expel?	Principals may suspend a student for up to and including 5 days and may also recommend to the regional director that the student be excluded from attendance.
What are the grounds for suspension?	Not stated explicitly, but guidelines refer to Education (General Provisions) Act 1989.
What are the grounds for exclusion / expulsion?	Not stated explicitly, but guidelines refer to Education (General Provisions) Act 1989.
What is the procedure for suspension?	Principals may suspend a student for up to and including 5 days. The regional director, the student, and the parent are to be informed of this action and the reasons thereof. The regional director is required to confirm or lift the period of suspension. The principal, the student and the parent are to be notified of his decision.
What is the procedure for exclusion / expulsion?	Principals may suspend a student for up to and including 5 days and recommend to the regional director that the student be excluded from attendance. The regional director, the student and the parent are to be informed of this action and the reasons therefor. The regional director is required to form an opinion relative to the recommendation for exclusion from attendance. The Director-General is to be notified that the recommendation for exclusion is being investigated. The principal, the student and the parent are to be notified of the processes of investigation. The regional director is required to notify the student and the parent of the student's extended suspension and of the right to make a submission to the Director-General setting out why the student should not be excluded. It is important that the regional director acts quickly to notify the student and the parent of the extended suspension where the original suspension was less than 5 days. Following investigation the regional director is required to inform the Director-General of his decision. The Director-General is required to consider the recommendation for exclusion from attendance at any or all State educational institutions for a period of time or permanently; the regional director, the principal, the student and the parent are to be notified of the decision.

Is there an opportunity for student or parent to be heard?	Those people interviewed (parents, students, school personnel, others) should be informed of the investigation into a recommendation for exclusion and this investigation does not constitute a formal hearing. It provides an opportunity for those interviewed to present their points of view. No legal representation is permitted at such interviews; however parents or students who feel less able to present a case may ask a friend or knowledgeable person to assist them in the interview.
Is there a right of appeal / review?	The Director-General is required to inform the student and the parent of the right to make a submission setting out why the student should not be excluded.
Is there an independent person or tribunal involved?	No, the Director-General is required to consider such a submission (see above) and to confirm, remove or vary the order for exclusion. In addition, the regional director and/or the officer appointed to conduct the investigation into a recommendation for exclusion act on behalf of the Director-General in the collection, collation and interpretation of information.
Is it mandatory to inform the Department of Education?	Yes.
Whose obligation is it to ensure education after suspension, expulsion or exclusion?	Not stated.

Source: Nation Children's and Youth Law Centre, *School Exclusions: Student Perspectives on the Process*, Appendix A, August 1995.

APPENDIX 7

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE STATE GOVERNMENTS

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

New South Wales

The Committee was advised that a major New South Wales Department of School Education initiative to address non-attendance at school is the Home School Liaison Program. This program was piloted in 1986 and implemented across the state during 1987-1988. The program employs 96 field officers, of whom 11 support Aboriginal communities and 10 provide support to the diverse cultural communities within New South Wales.

Home school liaison officers are experienced teachers who have a demonstrated interest in student welfare. They are aware of how schools are run and are experienced in working with young people. Every officer attends an intensive orientation program which prepares them for the role they are to fulfil. Upon successful completion of this program, the officers are authorised as attendance officers in accordance with the provisions of the *Education Reform Act 1990*.

Home school liaison officers regularly visit every government school in the state. They monitor school attendance registers at least once each school term and identify students whose school attendance is unsatisfactory. Schools then refer the identified students to the home school liaison officer, whose role it is to consult the family and make appropriate referrals to a community agency or to negotiate a return to school with appropriate support for remedial learning or behaviour modification.

Itinerant support teachers whose expertise is in behaviour management are available to all schools. In recent years there has been a marked improved effort to focus on welfare with the employment of additional school counsellors (200 in 1994/1995) and other specialised staff.

Victoria

Support Services staff, formally located in school support centres are now based in schools to ensure immediate and continuous access to these services. These support professionals include educational psychologists and social workers who assist schools in responding to more serious and chronic attendance problems. A Support Services Review Group was established in 1994 to monitor the delivery of student support services. Clusters of schools now share resources for these services and District Liaison Principals monitor access to them.

Queensland

Sixty-seven teaching staff are employed statewide to work directly with students experiencing difficulties with behaviour, their teachers and their families.

Three hundred and seventy-four guidance officers work in both primary and secondary schools. Guidance officers currently offer counselling services to students, parents, teachers, schools and other sections of the community and have as a major focus, students with special needs. In addition to direct services by guidance personnel, all Queensland schools have established care, support, welfare structures which involve teachers assuming responsibilities in these areas for groups of students. Key personnel from secondary schools are receiving inservice training focusing on the guidance and counselling role of all teachers.

Over 600 learning support teachers in primary and secondary schools offer additional support to students who are experiencing difficulty with learning.

Special Needs Support Groups operate in 66 of the 170 Queensland government secondary schools. They offer tutorial assistance to students, support for parents and inservice training for teachers within the school program.

South Australia

Attendance officers (formerly called truancy officers) have always been an integral part of monitoring attendance requirements under the Education Act. Their role has changed recently to complement those of the 13 additional student attendance counsellors and 7 Aboriginal attendance officers appointed in 1993.

The provision of 70 student counsellors in primary schools assists the school community to assess needs and to develop, implement and evaluate whole school programs. These programs provide a whole school approach to the management of student behaviour and provide the school community with a preventative and developmental counselling service which includes crisis intervention counselling and support to staff in the implementation of effective learning programs at class and school level.

Every high school has at least one counsellor who offers student welfare services in a variety of ways: career counselling, arranging work programs, family support, adapting programs for students' needs and liaison with other agencies.

Western Australia

The Education Department employs 16 school welfare officers who have statutory responsibilities to ensure attendance. In addition 14 social workers are attached to schools.

Currently 16.5 full-time equivalent education officers are employed by the Department of Community Development for the Home School Support Program program. This program provides academic, social and emotional support within an educational context for vulnerable, disadvantaged children and their families. The program is available only to children who are clients of the Department for Community Development.

The Northern Territory

Schools across the Northern Territory have access to a variety of in-school resources and services and non schools-based consultancy support services to assist them in the management of issues of non-attendance.

School counsellors provide a range of services which include personal and career counselling. Most, if not all, counsellors have some professional training but are selected generally for their ability to establish appropriate relationships with all students, particularly those at risk.

All Government high schools are provided with home liaison officers who establish and maintain vital links between the home and the school. Often there is little interaction between the two, particularly when the a child is having difficulties. The home liaison officer assists in following up on absenteeism in school and attempts to assess the reasons for these and, where appropriate deal with them. In conjunction with other members of the team they will also follow up and support young students who are not attending school.

All Northern Territory Government high schools are provided with a school registered nurse.

Each high school has also been provided with a school based community police officer and they are often involved in supporting students with attendance difficulties. They are also called upon to provide a personal counselling service.

Special Education teachers and assistants provide programs for students with significant learning/language disorders. All Northern Territory Government high schools are allocated additional Specialist staff to provide for the differentiated curriculum requirements of a large number of students with disabilities of various descriptions.

In addition to school based resources the Northern Territory Department of Education provides support services on a system wide basis through the Student Services Section. Schools usually have exhausted "in-house" resources before seeking assistance from the Section. Appropriately trained teacher psychologists are based in Student Services in Darwin, and in most regional offices throughout the Northern Territory. Staff are available to conduct a range of intellectual and personal assessments for a variety of special needs clients, many of whom will have school attendance problems and to provide counselling of students, teachers or parents.

The Australian Capital Territory

The ACT Department advised that the system employs approximately 50 full-time and 20 part-time counsellors for 96 schools. Counsellors are allocated to schools on a pro rata basis. Normally high schools and senior colleges each have a full-time counsellor.

CURRICULUM AND ALTERNATIVE SETTINGS

New South Wales

Within the curriculum key learning area of personal development, health and physical education, integrated learning experiences relating to social skills and personal development are provided for students from Kindergarten to Year 12. These learning experiences encourage the development of specific skills in communication, personal awareness, interpersonal relationships, problem solving, conflict resolution, life management and the awareness of community resources.

Specific support is provided within special education units for students with conduct and behaviour disorders and students assessed as emotionally disturbed. Students enrolled in support units or specialised classes have often been suspended from schools for inappropriate behaviour. The units provide appropriate educational opportunities and support. Campbell House, for example, has been established at Glenfield to cater specifically for conduct disordered students who have experienced multiple school suspensions.

Within local areas, some small units have been established to meet the needs of students who are experiencing difficulty attending school. Examples of these programs are the Bathurst Alternative Transition Unit, The North Gong Unit at Wollongong, the Jasper program at Gateshead High School and the Park Road Centre at Nowra. The aim of the programs is to return students to mainstream schools or, if this is not possible, to provide access to a TAFE course or a course offered by the Commonwealth Employment Scheme.

A feature of all of these models is that a long term follow up program has been found to be essential to reinforce the personal skills of cooperation and the building of positive relationships which have been learnt during out-of-school program participation. Transference of the new skills into the old environment is often difficult for students and they need support in maintaining these skills.

Victoria

The Victorian Directorate of School Education operates alternative programs for students experiencing difficulty with mainstream schooling. These include:

- community schools which provide ongoing schooling for secondary students who may have difficulty adjusting to the procedures of mainstream schools;
- special education units for limited term referral for students with behavioural problems;
- medical centres which provide limited term schooling for students with psychiatric problems;

- teaching units, usually attached to mainstream schools, offering students from nearby schools specialised teaching for a limited term to overcome educational and behavioural problems;
- community based residential units providing educational support for residents in protective care.

The Distance Education Centre provides schooling by correspondence to isolated young people, but the facility is also available to students who, because of extreme behavioural problems, usually involving physical threats to the safety of other people, need to be excluded from other schools.

Two Koori Open Door Education campuses were introduced in 1995 to meet the special needs of Koori students, and have already reported significant improvement in attendance.

Professional development programs for teachers are held regularly to provide teachers with the skills to identify and develop strategies for teaching students with learning disabilities and associated problems.

Alternative curriculum structures that enable flexible work and study arrangements and ensure curriculum is relevant to the student are also available in Victoria. Attendance is increased when school curriculum is geared towards the needs of the students and access is given to broad programs. The pathways for students ensure that the curriculum is engaging and relevant to students and therefore maximises their attendance.

Students are able to gain dual recognition of TAFE subjects with the Victorian VCE. This broadens the range of options within VCE curriculum and emphasises increasing opportunities for students to undertake appropriate mixes of general and vocational education.

In the area of literacy, the Directorate of School Education proposes to develop and extend early literacy intervention programs including Reading Recovery. These programs will be targeted at the students experiencing the least success in achieving literacy in the early years. An implementation plan and budget will be developed so all schools can participate in literacy intervention programs within the next three years.

Queensland

The Queensland Department of Education acknowledged that schools have a major responsibility for responding to the needs of students at risk of school absenteeism. This responsibility encompasses the development of positively oriented, preventive school practices that meet the educational, social, personal, welfare and vocational needs of all young people, as well as provision of early intervention programs for those experiencing difficulties. Clearly the provision of appropriate learning experiences is an important consideration when identifying good practice for meeting the needs of students who are at risk.

To meet the changing needs of all students a range of initiatives has been introduced within the following framework of:

- excellence in learning and teaching;
- a respected curriculum;
- social justice;
- productive partnerships;
- responsible school management;
- strategic management.

The current government initiative to increase the number of alternative programs available to students will enhance the range of options available to students at risk of not completing schooling, either through choice or through suspension or exclusion, or who are failing to achieve satisfactory outcomes from schooling. The aim of these programs is to:

- maintain and retain students' participation in school;
- be based on effective learning and teaching principles;
- focus on the context rather than solely on changing the behaviour of individual students;
- increase students' options and their access to the academic and social curriculum;
- be continuously and rigorously reviewed;
- contribute to the development of regional and statewide benchmarks for best practice;
- acknowledge and address the impact of race, culture, class and gender and the impact of racism and sexism on behaviour; and
- be consistent with Department of Education policies and guidelines.

In addition to a number of recently introduced initiatives on behaviour management, anti-violence, drug education and vocational education, the Department provides school-based support personnel, school enhancement programs, interdepartmental links, special needs supports groups, guidance services, early intervention and alternative programs.

Twenty-four school based projects have been funded in 1995, to assist young people experiencing difficulties with mainstream education. The projects range from wilderness camps, work transition programs for "at risk" students, to a music program combining recreation and skills development aimed at 10 -16 year olds.

This gives students opportunities to undertake more appropriate activities as an alternative to offending behaviour.

Twenty specially selected state primary, special and secondary schools across Queensland are participating in three to five year pilot programs which focus on curriculum renewal and support, more flexible school organisation and effective community participation. The current project areas are Hughenden, Thursday Island, Inala, Logan and Townsville.

The Queensland government advised that best practice may be simple and inexpensive or complex and sometimes costly. The benchmark is the improved outcomes for students. The following were provided as examples of best practice in a variety of areas:

Sunset State School, North Western Region The school caters mainly for students of Aboriginal background. Enrolment at the beginning of 1995 school year was 360, at the end of February 1995 - 469, August 1995 - 479. The school uses Aboriginal Education Workers to contact by telephone or in person, the parents of children who do not attend at the beginning of the school year. Once at school the truancy rates of these students is fairly low (5-10), though some children (up to 10) regularly truant. The school provides second-hand clothing and stationery to these children.

Youth Interagency Support Team (Capricornia Region) The Youth Interagency Support Team aims to ensure an effective and coordinated response to the needs of youth who display behaviour(s) or experience difficulties which seriously prejudice their participation in mainstream education. Team members consist of representatives from the Departments of Education, Family and Community Services, the Queensland Police Service and Community Welfare Agencies.

School and Community Programs for Behaviour Management in a Supportive School Environment (Northern Area, South Coast Region) provide a range of programs and support services to schools. These include programs which support parents and students - Management of Young Children Program (MYCP) and Parents as Tutors of Children (PATCH); Behaviour Adjustment Team interventions for the classroom or whole school; a short term withdrawal program for adolescents (Marsden Adolescent Behaviour Project) and inservice training for school community members.

Northern Challenge Project (Northern Region). The Northern Challenge Project aims to develop students' behavioural competence in social interaction, gradually rechanneling the bulk of their energies away from destructive cycles of interaction and into managing experiences that give them happiness. The program incorporates both a wilderness component and a two year follow up process.

The Management of Young Children Program (MYCP) is a family intervention program for the parents of young, behaviourally difficult children in the age range 2 to 7 years. The program is centre-based and staffed by a team of professionals and parents on a part-time basis. The families are referred by a variety of sources: themselves, teachers, child guidance clinics, psychologists and therapists. The behaviours presented include rule breaking, refusal to follow requests, tantrums, avoidance, aggression towards parents and attention demanding. Currently there are 19 MYCP centres in Queensland. The establishment of centres is in response to an expressed need by school personnel and the community. At all centres the waiting lists are long.

Other recent initiatives of the Queensland government in the areas of literacy and family support include:

- a new diagnostic net administered to all Year 2 students to identify those children with literacy and numeracy problems;
- a statewide test of literacy and numeracy administered to all Year 6 students to check their progress halfway through their schooling.

Increasingly more vocational options are being provided by schools to comply with government policies on links between school and work. The development of alternatives which focus on the convergence of general and vocational education in the senior secondary curriculum are currently being undertaken and many schools offer practical, vocationally-oriented subjects in Years 9 and 10 to complement the more traditional academic subjects in order to meet the full range of student needs. Work Experience Programs are included in the curriculum for students in Years 10, 11 or 12. These programs are supervised to ensure the safety and welfare of students and employers are protected by legislative and insurance provisions.

Many schools offer community service programs in which students gain practical experience assisting in hospitals, aged persons' homes, child care centres and facilities for disabled persons.

South Australia

The South Australian Government submission referred to the 1992 report of the South Australian Parliamentary Select Committee on Juvenile Justice which made several recommendations relating to truancy. Acting on these recommendations, the Government has introduced several initiatives to address the problems of truancy and alienation.

These include the introduction of a wide range of school and community based and interagency programs. School based programs are based on the principle of early identification and early intervention and include the employment of student counsellors, attendance officers, Aboriginal attendance officers and 'hot spot' attendance counsellors who actively seek out absentees in shopping and amusement arcades.

Other school based programs include:

- homework centres;
- specific programs for Aboriginal students;
- literacy improvement through the 'Cornerstones Project';
- *street surveys of young people in city shopping centres to find out why they are not at school;*
- success oriented high school projects which provide a wider range of curriculum options for students in difficulties;
- work experience;
- units for pregnant girls;
- transition and middle school focus on special needs of young adolescents;
- introduction of a Roll Book for more accurate data collection.

Interagency initiatives are recognised as essential support to school based programs for young people experiencing difficulties. Protocols and agreements have been developed with the Department of Family and Community Services, the Courts Authority, the Department of Employment, Training and Further Education, and the South Australian police for counselling, referrals, joint prevention measures and employment programs. Interagency Referral Managers provide a 'one stop shop', information and referral service directing young people to appropriate assistance.

In responding to the needs of young people in residential settings in South Australia, *the Commonwealth funding program for children in residential care has been highly successful.* This funding has provided tutoring for young people within this high risk group to address their educational needs and therefore reduce the risk of truancy or exclusion.

The Department of Employment Training and Further Education will introduce a new initiative, under Kickstart for Youth. A sub-program of Kickstart for Youth, which has a focus on 13 to 15 year olds who are not succeeding in mainstream education and training, is currently being developed jointly by the Department of Employment, Training and Further Education and the Department of Education and Children's Services in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training. It targets those who are at risk of truanting, offending, and leaving school early.

To address deficiencies in literacy and basic skills, a new four year initiative (the Cornerstones Project) aims to achieve high levels of literacy in young children. This program is based on the concern that disruptive and antisocial behaviour in later years of schooling is directly related to educational incompetence. The program specifically targets preschool centres, schools and teachers of students 4 - 8 years

old. There will be early identification of students with learning difficulties, the development of effective intervention strategies, the improvement of the quality of teaching in early years and information to assist schools to best co-ordinate and access available services and programs.

For students who are deficient in basic skills because of protracted non-attendance, some schools offer new start programs especially in literacy, numeracy and school appropriate behaviour.

Western Australia

The Education Department, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Community Development are working together to develop consistent mechanisms to support students at risk and to keep them within the education system.

The Alternative Education Initiative is a joint program of the Education Department and the Department for Community Development. Students are selected to participate because of their lack of involvement in schooling, their involvement with the Justice System, Community Development or Police and are considered to be extremely at risk of not completing their education.

The program targets young people aged 12 to 15 years who are alienated from school, society and often from their families. They are chronic truants, offenders or at risk of offending, and their behaviour and learning have been adversely affected by circumstances such as homelessness, abuse, family dysfunction, neglect or substance abuse. The aim is to increase the young person's participation in education, training, the workforce and society, by concentrating on developing appropriate social behaviours, improving academic skills and assisting students to resolve non-educational problems so they can re-enter mainstream services.

A range of integrated, co-ordinated, educational support strategies are developed across each of the four targeted metropolitan areas. The strategies include consultation with school staff, direct support for the students and their teachers in mainstream classes and programs, and withdrawal intervention programs.

Each of the four programs within the Alternative Education Initiatives has taken a different approach depending on the needs of the students and the existing services in the area. These are:

Wandarri Program. The participating schools are Armadale Senior High School, Cecil Andrews Senior High School and Kelmscott Senior High School. *Wandarri* is an off campus program staffed by a teacher/co-ordinator (psychologist), a teacher, an Aboriginal education worker and a youth support worker. The program can accommodate 12 students. In addition, each of the three participating schools has a teacher working to prevent students from dropping out of school by improving their literacy and numeracy skills and social behaviour. These "contact" teachers also support students making the transition from *Wandarri* back into mainstream schooling;

Alternative Learning Initiative Program. This program operates from the Lockridge Youth Centre and is staffed by a teacher/ co-ordinator, an Aboriginal education worker and a youth support worker. The program has close links to the Bayswater Youth Options Program and local high schools and can accommodate 8 to 10 students;

Anstey Alternative Learning Initiative Program. This program is located at Port Kennedy Camp School and is staffed by a teacher/ co-ordinator and a group worker. The program can accommodate up to 8 students. A full time co-ordinator oversees both the Anstey and Bibra Lake Alternative Programs and a school psychologist also works with both programs;

CARE Program. This program is located at Girrawheen Senior High School and is staffed by a teacher/coordinator and a teacher's aide. Students who have dropped out of school ease back into the system by participating in programs individually tailored to their needs. Balga Senior High School employs a teacher/coordinator who actively seeks out students and links them in with existing programs or negotiates a flexible program to address their needs.

Tasmania

In 1994, in each of the seven education districts the Department of Education and the Arts established a student support service to coordinate services within the region. It brings together guidance officers, social workers, special education support teachers, behaviour management support staff, speech pathologists, school and curriculum officers under a district manager to ensure a cohesive and coordinated support service to students and their parents.

All districts have staffing and funding allocations for the provision of alternative out-of-school programs for students who are unable or unwilling to attend mainstream schools. In addition to normal service provision, each district is given \$50,000 per annum for use with students who have behavioural difficulties or require some special provision. In addition, districts have special education funding which may be allocated to students whose behaviour is of serious concern, and a per capita allocation of funding from the Commonwealth Students At Risk Program. Funding may be used to employ tutors, provide transport to community programs, and provide professional development to staff in schools.

A multi-disciplinary group, coordinated by the district support service assesses the needs of students in alternative programs. An individual educational plan is established for each student and a staff member (usually a member of the district support service) has responsibility for coordinating and supervising the program. The aim of each program is to return the student to mainstream education, whenever this is a realistic option.

An alternative program may include:

- part-time attendance at school;
- part-time tutoring on a one-to-one basis, either at the student's home or at a tutorial centre;
- attendance at the district support school for tutoring or for other activities;
- counselling by the school guidance officer, or counselling at another agency;
- provision of teaching through the School of Distance Education (with the addition of tutor support);
- work experience;
- participation in youth training programs or adult education courses; and
- community placement in a business or voluntary agency.

The School of Distance Education also provides an alternative source of educational programs for students who are unable or unwilling to attend mainstream school. The needs of individual students are assessed upon enrolment. All students are enrolled with a teacher who has specific responsibility for the student by:

- the provision of suitable learning materials;
- regular telephone contact;
- personal visits to the student's home; and
- attending seminars and groups sessions in various parts of the State.

The School of Distance Education has an additional program for students at risk *which involves allocation of a tutor to work individually with students in their homes or at a central site, such as a shelter.*

The Department of Education and the Arts has previously operated several special units for students whose behaviour is of serious concern, or who are chronic school refusers. These two groups of students have different needs and cannot easily be combined in a single program.

However, the Department considers that these kinds of out-of-school units are inappropriate and less effective than other services, and the trend is for them to adopt the broader role of learning centres. Staff provide an outreach program to schools, and support students in a variety of settings, rather than simply enrolling a small number of students at one unit, effectively reaching a larger number of needy students.

The Department of Education and the Arts is presently developing curriculum materials designed to help teachers better cater for mixed ability student groups.

Increased flexibility and innovation of teaching programs should lead to less student alienation from schooling. Officers of the Department of Education and the Arts have recently been involved with discussions with officers in other States to make program development for lower ability secondary students, a national priority.

PROGRAMS FOR INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE

New South Wales

The Home School Liaison Program employs 11 field officers to support Aboriginal communities.

At Bourke, "Gully Gunya", a program for long term non-attending Aboriginal students from 12 to 18 years of age, has been established. The program provides remedial literacy and numeracy, self-esteem through a cultural awareness program and relevant cultural activities.

Garule Wali is a centre established in co-operation with Walgett High School. The program caters for Aboriginal and some non-Aboriginal students from Years 7 to 10 who have behaviour and attendance problems. Behaviour modification, social skills, self management, Aboriginal studies and practical skills are taught.

Victoria

Two Koori Open Door Education Campuses were introduced in 1995. These campuses have been very successful in meeting the unique needs of Koori students. The schools have reported significant improvement in the area of the attendance of their school population.

Queensland

Forty-five Indigenous Education Workers are employed in schools to provide a link between home and school. They are Aboriginal or Islander people and serve as Community Education Counsellors (in secondary schools). In primary schools, 1600 hours of teacher aide time is provided for the employment of Aboriginal/Islander teacher aides.

The Sunset State School, North Western Region, caters mainly for students of Aboriginal background. Enrolment at the beginning of 1995 school year was 360, and at the end of February 1995 - 469, August 1995 - 479. The school uses the Aboriginal Education Workers to contact the parents of children who do not attend at the beginning of the school year by telephone or in person. Once at school the truancy rates of these students is fairly low (5-10), though some children (up to 10) regularly truant. The school provides second-hand clothing and stationery to these children.

South Australia

The South Australian government advised that there have been numerous initiatives designed to encourage greater participation by Aboriginal children in the education

system. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy agreed by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments in 1990 to address the significant gaps in education participation by Indigenous young people, focuses on the active participation of Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody drafted specific recommendations relating to improvements in the system of delivering education to Aboriginal children and highlights the need to provide support to cultural and social factors as a primary principle in addressing juvenile truancy. In response to this, the South Australian government has introduced programs which specifically target Aboriginal students. They include:

Aboriginal Education Workers. This specific occupational role was created to provide Aboriginal children with para-professional support within the classroom setting. They are an important link between the school and families. Specialist Aboriginal Education Workers assist Attendance Counsellors in addressing truancy matters together with family involvement. Their contribution to school attendance is viewed as positive and significant. Unfortunately, schools often put all of the responsibility for attendance on these staff when it should be addressed as a whole school issue. This causes conflict between the Aboriginal Education Workers and the community.

Homework centres. Schools with large numbers of Aboriginal Children receive Commonwealth funding to provide homework centres which provide students with a work space and teacher support after hours.

Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness. Two hundred and seventy one committees have been established to encourage Aboriginal families to participate in the education system. Each committee has a parent representative, an Aboriginal Education Worker and a school principal. Commonwealth funds are provided to enable families to engage in cultural activities.

Anangu Coordinator. Anangu coordinators have been placed in schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments to serve a dual management role with principals. They assist in liaison between the school and the community. The South Australian government claims that this program has significantly reduced non attendance.

Aboriginal Education Resource Teachers. Resource teachers are located around the State work with Aboriginal Education Workers to ensure schooling for Aboriginal children is a positive learning experience.

Western Australia

Aboriginal students in Western Australia have access to all the support services aimed at monitoring or returning students to full-time schooling. In particular, the Youth at Risk program which incorporates the Commonwealth funded Students at Risk (STAR) program gives priority to a number of high risk groups including

Aboriginal students. The purpose of Youth at Risk is to increase the system's capacity to improve the participation and retention rates of young people at risk of not completing secondary schooling.

Aboriginal Education Workers are employed under the Alternative Education Initiative Program to work with indigenous young people in a range of integrated, coordinated educational support strategies which include consultation with school staff, direct support for students and teachers in mainstream classrooms, and withdrawal intervention programs.

The Northern Territory

The Northern Territory government advised that, consistent with Recommendation 72 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginals in Custody, significant initiatives and programs have been implemented to promote attendance and combat truancy. They reflect the overall Aboriginal Education Policy ideals of the Northern Territory Department of Education which is to provide support in collaboration with appropriate Aboriginal organisations. Such support addresses the cultural and social factors identified as influencing truancy and includes the encouragement and participation of all Aboriginal children in compulsory schooling. Some of these are:

Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness. In urban and rural schools Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Groups help students to cope with school and informs parents about the educational system. ASSPA representatives are also on each School Council. Currently there are 168 schools with ASSPA Committees.

Education Liaison Officers (ELO's). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Liaison Officers are employed on a full and part-time basis to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in school activities, and to facilitate improved home/school relationships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students thus providing a stronger link between students' homes and their schools.

Assistant Teacher Employment. Northern Territory schools employ Aboriginal staff to provide assistance to classroom teachers and to be role models for students in the classroom.

English as a Second Language Advisory Staff. A team of English as a Second Language advisers are assigned to visit rural schools. They visit these schools on a regular basis to advise staff on all curriculum matters. They demonstrate methods of teaching and provide in service training to staff on the latest curriculum development.

Primary Assessment Program. The primary assessment program monitors the academic progress of Aboriginal students and provides the criteria for assessing writing of these students. Booklets of Moderated writing in different genres are published regularly.

4.1.1. *Curriculum.* Special programs such as the Implementing the Common Curriculum in Aboriginal Schools project which develops culturally appropriate curriculum material are being regularly written and revised by specialised teams. These programs provide for the different learning styles of Aboriginal children and currently focus on English and Maths. In bilingual schools, teacher linguists provide appropriate materials for students.

Secondary Retention Support Program. The program has provided a bridge for at risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from a generally unsatisfactory and unsatisfying school experience into vocational training, while at the same time clarifying personal and vocational goals.

Health Programs. Officers are provided by the Department to assist teachers of students who have hearing impairment. This program includes the development of a range of strategies and activities to assist teachers in their management of hearing impaired students.

IMPARJA Television and CAAMA Radio. Commonwealth funding has been used to pay for television and radio advertisements which emphasise the need for Aboriginal students to attend school. These advertisements appear to have been very effective.

Tertiary Aspirations for Aboriginal Students. Commencing in year 8, this program has a specific focus, to encourage Aboriginal students to continue with formal secondary studies and to enrol in those subjects more likely to secure their entry into tertiary education programs. Coordinators employed under this program will, in consultation with parents, school communities and students, identify Aboriginal students in their early years of secondary education who have the potential to succeed at secondary school and proceed to tertiary study.

Parents as Teachers. Programs such as the Parents as Teachers Program assist parents in accessing education and facilitate the development of effective community/home/school networks.



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