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SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Education of students with disabilities

MONDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2002

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SENATE
EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Monday, 9 September 2002

Members: Senator George Campbell (*Chair*), Senator Tierney (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Barnett, Carr, Crossin and Stott Despoja

Substitute members: Senator Allison for Senator Stott Despoja

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Boswell, Buckland, Chapman, Cherry, Jacinta Collins, Coonan, Denman, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Forshaw, Harradine Harris, Hutchins, Johnston, Knowles, Lees, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Mason, McGauran, Murphy, Nettle, Payne, Sherry, Watson and Webber

Senators in attendance: Senator Carr (*Subcommittee Chair*) and Senators Allison and Tierney

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The education of students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, throughout all levels and sectors of education, with particular reference to:

- a) whether current policies and programs for students with disabilities are adequate to meet their education needs, including, but not limited to:
 - i) the criteria used to define disability and to differentiate between levels of handicap,
 - ii) the accuracy with which students' disability related needs are being assessed,
 - iii) the particular needs of students with disabilities from low socio-economic, non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds and from rural and remote areas,
 - iv) the effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs,
 - v) access to and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors,
 - vi) the nature, extent and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students,
 - vii) teacher training and professional development, and;
 - viii) the legal implications and resource demands of current Commonwealth and state and territory legislation
- b) what the proper role of the Commonwealth and states and territories should be in supporting the education of students with disabilities.

WITNESSES

BETTERMAN, Ms Cynthia Felicia, Member, Special Needs Education Network.....	511
BICKFORD, Ms Francine, Coordinator, Special Education, Catholic Education South Australia	523
BRAYBON, Ms Yvonne, Committee member representing non-government organisations providing support for people with disabilities, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities.....	536
CROSER, Mr Jeff, Principal, Cabra Dominican College, Catholic Education South Australia.....	523
DALEFIELD, Mr Richard, Deputy Chairperson, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities	536
HUPPATZ, Mr Brian Charles, Senior Education Adviser, Curriculum, Catholic Education South Australia.....	523
McCOLL, Ms Margaret, Executive Officer, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities.....	536

PAGE, Ms Stephanie, Executive Director, Student and Professional Services, Department of Education and Children’s Services	548
PAYNE, Ms Eda, Committee member nominated by the South Australian Minister for Education and Children’s Services, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities.....	536
SPARGO, Ms Tricia, Committee member, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities	536
TAYLOR-NEUMANN, Mrs Lorraine Vivienne Nayano, Convener, Special Needs Education Network	511
WINTER, Ms Patricia Margaret, Assistant Director, Disability and Professional Services, Department of Education and Children’s Services	548

Subcommittee met at 1.34 p.m.**TAYLOR-NEUMANN, Mrs Lorraine Vivienne Nayano, Convener, Special Needs Education Network****BETTERMAN, Ms Cynthia Felicia, Member, Special Needs Education Network**

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Subcommittee. On 13 March 2002, the Senate asked this committee to inquire into the education of students with disabilities. The inquiry will include learning disabilities throughout all levels and sectors of education with particular reference to whether current policies and programs for students with disabilities are adequate to meet their educational needs.

Before we commence today's evidence, I wish to state for the record that all witnesses appearing before this Senate committee are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to their evidence. Parliamentary privilege refers to special rights and immunities attached to the parliament or its members and others necessary for the discharge of parliamentary functions without obstruction or fear of prosecution. Any act by any person which disadvantages a witness on account of evidence given before the Senate or any of its committees is a breach of privilege.

I welcome all observers to this hearing and representatives from the Special Needs Education Network. The committee has before it submission No. 42. Are there any corrections or changes you wish to make?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I saw the submission just a short time ago; I presume it is as we wrote it.

CHAIR—It is the same one. We do not edit them or change them in any way.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Then I do not think so, no.

CHAIR—So you are happy with the submission as you submitted it.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—As we sent it, yes.

CHAIR—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although the committee would also consider any request for all or part of your evidence to be given in camera. However, I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I was going to make a brief summary of our submission but I have been assured that you have all carefully read that, so I would like to hand over to Cynthia, who will make a statement highlighting the issues raised in our submission.

Ms Betterman—Thank you. I have distributed a paper that summarises the issues that I am going to talk to. The first issue relates to a lack of resources. I have given some dot points specifying the lack of resources, and it certainly relates to South Australia. There are not enough special support officers, there is a lack of early intervention, a lack of specialist services—and I have given some examples—a lack of support for students with special needs to support in extra curricular activities and a lack of teacher training.

The second issue I have highlighted is suspensions. This is an iniquitous way of dealing with students' difficult behaviour. I realise that it does often relate to occupational health and safety issues, but much of the behaviour is not wilful. It rewards the student and in most cases punishes the parent. What we have found is that schools are using suspensions as evidence to put in submissions for more resources. The third issue is around transitions. We find that there needs to be greater collaboration between the educational institutions and the disability sector, or any other support service, which assists people with disabilities to leave school and move either into the workforce or into some other post school options. There are protocols for moving on from school but what we are finding is that those protocols are, at times, not heard of by the school and in some cases certainly not adhered to.

We have found that there is a lack of communication within the education system itself and this has also impacted on students with disabilities. For example, an excellent resource that I have mentioned in this paper, the *Fair and Reasonable* kit, relates to the Disability Discrimination Act—some schools have not even heard of this. The other is rite of passage where students with disabilities are obliged to change schools because of the unavailability of certain resources or teaching facilities in a school. So they may start off at a mainstream school, have an assessment and find they then need to go to a special school or a school that has a special unit. That school may go to an intermediate stage so that then they have to change schools again. Often students with disabilities need to change schools more often than they would need to if they did not have a disability.

The fourth issue is around negotiated education plans. The specific issues are timing, the lack of review and the fact that the plans are often not implemented. The fifth point is the attitude towards parents. Often there is a lack of communication with parents, a disregard for parents' knowledge of their own child, particularly how to deal with their specific disabilities, and inflexibility. This is often around meeting times or giving adequate notice of meetings. We find that parents, at times, are labelled as aggressive or difficult when really all they are attempting to do is resolve issues around their child who has a learning difficulty. In conclusion, a document called *Schooling options for students with disabilities in South Australia* was released in March 2001 and it indicated that the school ethos is the most important factor for families who have a student with a disability or learning difficulty. In my submission I have defined the school ethos.

Senator TIERNEY—Through this inquiry we have had from different parent groups different attitudes to the whole direction towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Could you provide, in a nutshell, the view of your association and how you see the inclusive movement developing in South Australia?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—In general we would support inclusion. However, inclusion can be a dangerous option because it often means a reduction in funding. We are often assured that if a

child is in a special class or a special facility the same sort of funding will still be available but the child will be in an inclusive environment. That may operate in the first year or two but generally those funds disappear and are not applied to the children who otherwise, if they had been in an isolated circumstance, would have had that funding available to them.

Ms Betterman—We would also support inclusion. However, there are many aspects of inclusion and, at times, parents have said that their children have learnt more by being in a special class that is located within a mainstream school. They would welcome their child being included in the social aspects of schooling in all sorts of activities. We support inclusion, but there need to be choices for parents because for some families accessing a special school has resulted in better learning outcomes for their child. That is weighing up the fact that they are then segregated, which is certainly something that we could not support. Most parents do not support that. They like their children to be included with other children.

Senator TIERNEY—Is there much opportunity for that mix in South Australia, where you might have a special unit in a school? When we were in Tasmania recently we were told that they did not have special units but that other states do—what happens in South Australia? Do you have special units in mainstream schools?

Ms Betterman—What we find is that parents prefer that model. They certainly prefer it to a special school which is completely segregated. Having a special unit within the school does provide a better option. A lot of parents prefer that their child is in the classroom, but for their child to learn in that environment they often need quite intense support by way of a special support officer. That can often be as high as almost one-to-one for the majority of the hours at school, which is quite costly. For a lot of parents that would be the ideal—where their child is in a mainstream classroom but has that extra support by way of an SSO.

Senator TIERNEY—If a parent wants to exercise that option, what chance have they got in South Australia?

Ms Betterman—Not a lot.

Senator TIERNEY—Why is that?

Ms Betterman—Because the resources are not there for that.

Senator TIERNEY—When you say ‘resources’, do you mean there are not enough special units in a mainstream school?

Ms Betterman—There are not enough of those. Certainly, if it is to be full inclusion in a mainstream class, the resources for SSOs are not there. Students are fortunate if they can access a few hours a week of a special support officer.

Senator TIERNEY—Which reminds me of something you said, Mrs Taylor-Neumann. You were indicating that if a child moves from a special school into the mainstream, the resources are there initially and then they disappear.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—That is right.

Senator TIERNEY—Could you explain that a bit further?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I am not talking so much about the sorts of children who would be in special schools. Many years ago, when I started teaching, there were special classes in regular schools. In the high school where I was teaching, I taught in a special class that was not for children who had intellectual handicaps but for children who did not fit into the mainstream very well at all. Mostly these days we would say they have ADHD or other minor learning and behaviour disorders. So there were special classes specially funded for those students. I am not saying that was a great model. However, under the theme of inclusion those classes disappeared and we were assured that the money that used to go to providing those special classes would go to funding support for those kids in regular classrooms, and it did not.

Senator TIERNEY—There is no support at all?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—There is no funded support for children with ADHD in regular classrooms in South Australia; the support is only at the discretion of the school.

Senator TIERNEY—What about a child who does not have ADHD but has an intellectual disability?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—It depends on how severe that is, but a child could be, say, up to three years behind in reading achievement and not qualify for extra support.

Senator TIERNEY—What about children who in the past would have been in a special school but who are now in the mainstream? Are those children receiving special support in the mainstream classroom?

Ms Betterman—Yes, they generally would be receiving support.

Senator TIERNEY—In what form is that support?

Ms Betterman—Again, it is mainly through SSOs, the support workers. There may be special activities that they would attend rather than doing the mainstream curriculum. That may change according to their needs, but most of the support is through the SSOs.

Senator TIERNEY—And in South Australia how are the SSOs trained to do this work with children with disabilities?

Ms Betterman—That is an area I mentioned in my paper—there is a lack of training.

Senator TIERNEY—When you say ‘lack of training’, is there any training? What qualifications do these people have to assist children with disabilities?

Ms Betterman—I am not sure about that.

Senator TIERNEY—One of the things we are finding—and I suspect will be given in evidence from schools today—is that in a special school people are highly trained, the ratios are

quite small and the assistance is intense. Admittedly those are high-need children, but then when we move to a lower level of need, particularly when it is inclusive, it seems that the support disappears and teachers who—we have discovered across the country—are not particularly well trained in any of this are left to their own devices.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes, pretty much.

Senator TIERNEY—We are finding this a rather curious anomaly in the system. Would you care to comment on that from the South Australian experience?

Ms Betterman—From our experience with teachers, the specialist training around disability is not mandatory—it is up to the teachers whether they pursue that or not. As you have already pointed out, teachers in special schools do have that special expertise, whereas in the mainstream schools they may not necessarily have that, nor are they obliged to pursue extra training to acquire that sort of expertise.

Senator TIERNEY—So when your association puts these views to the government, what do they say about the fact that they have a policy of inclusive education but they are not providing sufficient resources or training for teachers? I assume you put those points to them.

Ms Betterman—Yes, certainly. Apart from being a member of the Special Needs Education Network, I am executive officer of Parent Advocacy. Parent Advocacy has been quite active in working with the training institutions, including Flinders University, in pushing for more teaching training around these specialist areas of disability.

Senator TIERNEY—Is it mandatory in South Australia for all pre-service teachers to have some training in this area? It is in New South Wales so I am wondering what it is in South Australia.

Ms Betterman—It is minimal.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I do not have absolute current knowledge, but I know that 18 months ago a friend of mine did a teaching training course in which there was one lecture on special needs.

Senator TIERNEY—Bad luck if you missed the lecture.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—During that lecture there was one mention of children with ADHD. Given the rate of ADHD, any teacher can expect to have two or more students in their regular classroom with that condition. That was the only provision unless the teacher trainees chose to do extra subjects in special needs.

Senator TIERNEY—So it could be an elective?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes. It was an elective but as part of the mainstream subjects there was only one lecture on it.

Senator TIERNEY—Thank you.

Senator ALLISON—Could you expand on the section in your submission about early intervention and support for parents at home. You say that services to support management of children's behaviour at home are few and far between and that short-term support, when available, is usually six to 12 weeks. Would you like to suggest to the committee what areas of support are most in need amongst parent groups and particularly what you would like to see made available to parents?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—As you may have gathered, I am very interested in ADHD, behaviour disorders and support for parenting of children who are more difficult in their behaviour. What happens with these children with disorders that affect their behaviour is that by the time they reach school their original behaviour difficulties have been compounded because of the stress on the parents. A lot of people say that it is poor parenting that causes children to have behaviour problems, but in fact it is often the other way around. You give birth to a baby who is wakeful, difficult to soothe and so on. That baby quickly becomes a small child who is difficult to handle. Because the child is difficult to handle they challenge you as a parent. Parents find themselves doing things with their children, like hitting or yelling or those sorts of things, that they would not otherwise do. Also, if you have a difficult child, it is very difficult to get respite from that child. We know of cases where children have virtually been expelled from preschool because of their behaviour. It is difficult to get respite in formal care; it is difficult to get respite through relatives because they do not want to have that child either. So by the time that child gets to school their original behaviour difficulties have been compounded by all the messages about being a bad child and a nuisance to the family. The family is often under so much stress that the family itself breaks down, which compounds the child's behaviour problem.

There have been so many studies that have shown that early intervention, especially in the behaviour disorders area, can reduce expenditure in the areas of crime, education and social welfare, but of course you have to wait for those benefits. So this argument does not generally impress governments who are in for a very short term because we are talking about long-term benefits. Providing a child of two years with support means that when that child is 16 they may not be in the criminal justice system, but that is a long time to wait to see those benefits.

Senator ALLISON—Typically, what happens with the short-term support that is available—the six to 12 weeks—what is that? How does a parent access it and at what stage is it in the child's development?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Usually through Child and Youth Mental Health, but that is very difficult. There are long waiting lists. The same thing happens in social welfare. You have to have a risk of physical harm before you can get help that comes more quickly than a few months, six months or 12 months down the track, and when the support comes it is generally short term. It generally involves meeting social workers or some kind of parenting program. That is the sort of stuff that comes in. Again, we are talking about resources that mean that parents cannot get help unless they go on long waiting lists and when they get help, that help is restrained by the amount of funding available.

Ms Betterman—Within disability services, a disability is assessed and people go through Options Coordination, which is the main disability service provider in the state. They then go on a waiting list for therapy services and parenting. There is intensive parent support for families, but it is very short term; it might last for only two or three months and often parents require more support than that. As Nayano said, there is a waiting time for that.

Senator ALLISON—I invite you to expand on your submission where you say that, in respect of our terms of reference, in terms of funding the means of defining disability is inaccurate, divisive and unfair and ought to be based on need, not on diagnosis. Yours is not the first submission to have suggested that. How realistic is it to assess students individually on the basis of their need? Would you expect the level of funding required for children with disabilities to massively increase if we were to assess them on that basis?

Ms Betterman—Yes, I think the level of funding would need to increase if it was to meet the needs of students with disabilities or learning difficulties. I believe that it would increase substantially.

Senator ALLISON—Would you like to suggest to the committee which groups in particular would benefit from funding which currently do not benefit from it?

Ms Betterman—Certainly children who have autism or any of the autism spectrum disorders. I believe a lot of those families need a higher level of support in educating their sons and daughters and that relates to all forms of support. We know that a lot of parents asked for the one-to-one support at school. One of the issues is that they do not feel that their opinions as parents are valued. They can very often give helpful hints. For example, they may say to the teacher that such and such will upset their child, but the class is just not flexible enough to accommodate those special needs. The consequence of that may be that the child acts out as soon as they are exposed to the sorts of things that will upset them. The other issue is suspension. The child will act out and be suspended from school. As I said in my issues paper, that punishes the parents even further and it really does nothing for the child.

Senator ALLISON—So schools should not be entitled to suspend any students?

Ms Betterman—No, I think that they are entitled to suspend students, but it is a matter of deciding whether the behaviour has been wilful. There are issues of safety and the risks associated with behaviours of acting out. Often in terms of students with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorders, it is a matter of addressing the behaviours, not just suspending.

CHAIR—I want to return to the issue about definitions. You are suggesting that the Commonwealth should define minimum standards. Have I understood your submission correctly?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—That is what we said. Are you talking about what proper role the Commonwealth should have?

CHAIR—Yes, that is right. You are saying that they should define minimum standards for education. Aren't the DDA education standards—which, as you know, have been under discussion for five years—minimum standards?

Ms Betterman—Yes, they are.

CHAIR—Can you see any reason why they should not be adopted?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Adopted? By whom?

CHAIR—By the states. Are you familiar with what has happened there? There has been a working group established with the Commonwealth and the states. It has been working for five years now.

Ms Betterman—Yes, I am familiar with that.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes.

CHAIR—In your opinion, is there any reason why those standards should not be accepted?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—By the states? No.

Ms Betterman—No.

CHAIR—What about the argument of cost?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes, well, here we go. I think cost relates to priorities, and I will refer back to what I said earlier about the benefits of early intervention and support for families with children with difficult behaviours. Unfortunately, the cost savings of doing such a thing, and the cost savings of doing many of the things that we have been talking about, are not going to come within the term of most parliaments. They are going to be coming way down the track. It is a matter of priorities. I think governments could support, and are able to support, all sorts of children with special needs much more than they are now, and it is a matter of priority.

Ms Betterman—If I could add to that: in the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act in South Australia, there has been a special kit developed called the *Fair and Reasonable* kit. It is an excellent kit. The problem is that a lot of the schools do not know about it. There has been a real breakdown in communication between—

CHAIR—You have said that. I will put it to you another way: they know all about it and, it is argued, they use the unreasonable cost factor as a reason for discrimination. What do you say to that?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Who uses that?

CHAIR—Schools.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I would say so of some schools. But, from what we know, it is also true that schools just do not know about these training materials and—

CHAIR—Yes, but they know about the costs. It has been put to us that what is fair and reasonable is used as grounds for exemption, and that is used particularly in the non-government sector. Have you come across that?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes, we have, and it is fairly widely known that a lot of students finish up in the state system because the private system cannot accommodate their needs.

CHAIR—Cannot or will not?

Ms Betterman—I guess it boils down to ‘will not’, because they would need to raise extra funds to support the person.

CHAIR—The cost argument runs both ways, doesn’t it?

Ms Betterman—It does, yes.

CHAIR—The current state grants legislation pays something like \$24 billion a year in the current quadrennium. That is a lot of money. It may well be that that money could be spent in other ways, but if you are saying that cost is a factor, it is not a factor for just the government system. The government system currently enrolls nearly four per cent of total enrolments, whereas the non-government sector enrolls 1.5 per cent of its total enrolments.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I do not want to speak for the non-government sector, but I can see that the other issue for the non-government sector is the children who need the highest amount of support and therefore the highest cost input. Luckily, we do not have many of them. Unless you have some sort of cooperative effort—and I could imagine the Catholic system could do something like combining schools to provide a facility for a very few children—then I cannot see individual private schools providing—

CHAIR—They cannot do it. So you are saying that administrative systems, be it the Anglican system or the Catholic system—

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you think they should be required to provide more centralised services to meet these demands?

Ms Betterman—Yes, I would support that. If that is going to ultimately benefit students with disabilities, I would support that they are required to do that. Often the argument used by smaller non-government schools is that they would be putting in a lifting device or something like that for one student, whereas the state system is likely to have more students, so it is more cost effective for them.

CHAIR—Is that an excuse though?

Ms Betterman—No, it is not. Even if it is one student or 10, they are still discriminating against them by not accepting them into their school.

CHAIR—In your judgment, are students ever excluded from enrolment because of their disability?

Ms Betterman—Yes, particularly in country areas.

CHAIR—What can you tell the committee about that?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—It is done covertly and overtly. I am more sensitive to the issues of children who do not need very high support. I personally know of private schools which do not say, ‘You cannot enrol your child in our school if they have a learning difficulty,’ but these schools do say, ‘Thank you for your enrolment; that year level is full at the moment. We’ll keep your enrolment and see if there is a vacancy. Can you please send us your school reports?’ If the school reports are positive then vacancies become available and, if they are not, the vacancies are not there. Once the children are in the school, because of the lack of provision of services for dyslexia, ADHD and so on and because a lot of the more elite private schools focus on matriculation and exam results, those children are squeezed out anyway, and the families often make a ‘free’ choice to take them out of the school because there is no support for them.

CHAIR—Do you think people are counselled against sending their children to schools such as those that have been mentioned? Do schools ever counsel people about applications?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I personally have been, yes, by a private school where I wanted to enrol my son. The school said to me that he may be better off in a public school because they have more facilities for children like this.

CHAIR—How common do you think your experience is? Do you think it is just one person’s experience or do you think that it has happened to others?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—I have come across quite a few parents with the same sort of experience. Either their child was not accepted because that year level was full but other children were accepted or schools have said straight out, ‘No, we won’t take your child, but perhaps you could look at this public school or that public school because they have better facilities, and we’re just not able to provide those.’

CHAIR—There have been very few prosecutions under the DDA. Why do you think that is if, as you say, it is so common?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Because it is subtle. I think a lot of people do not realise what is actually happening, especially with this technique of saying: ‘We’re full, but we’ll let you know. Please send us a report from your school.’ That is quite effective. Also, when the school does not provide the services, the child is more and more unhappy at that school. It is very subtle; I do not think people realise.

CHAIR—Are you saying that people are forced out of the school through this process?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes. They choose to leave because the child is not happy there. The child is not achieving and is not being supported. The child feels that everyone else is an A-

level student and asks, ‘What is wrong with me?’ It is a subtle process. It is not something that would easily be taken to HREOC.

CHAIR—Do you think this explains the discrepancy in enrolments? I mentioned before the figures that the private school parents have given us—that is, the enrolment figure in private schools is 1.5 per cent compared with just on four per cent in the government sector. There are almost three times the number of students in government schools than in non-government schools. Do you think your explanation would account for that?

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Do you mean there are three times the number of special needs students?

CHAIR—Yes; three times more students in government schools than in non-government schools.

Ms Betterman—I think there certainly is a push for parents to enrol their student, particularly if they have significant disabilities or needs, in the state system. I think that parents have not acted under the Disability Discrimination Act for a number of reasons. Often parents are absolutely exhausted with their parenting role and are really tired of fighting the system—whether it is the education or the disability system—so they do not want to rock the boat. It is a matter of slotting their child in wherever they think their child is going to get the best opportunity to learn and to be accepted.

The other thing I pointed out in my issues paper is around school ethos. We often find that families—perhaps with other children going to a private school—want to then enrol their child who has a disability in the same school. The school do counsel them, talk it through, but are quite open in saying, ‘We don’t think we can cater for your child’s needs.’ There is a real dialogue with communication, and ultimately the parent has little other choice than to enrol their child in the state system.

CHAIR—In some ways, wouldn’t it be more honest to say, ‘Look, we don’t have the capacity to help you’?

Ms Betterman—That is what we are coming across: the private system are more transparent in their approach, in saying quite openly, ‘We don’t think we can cater for your child.’ I suppose the difference is that the private system are not required to take the student whereas the public system is.

CHAIR—Can I ask you to think about this, though: the discrimination act makes it illegal to refuse someone, and you are saying they are not required to take someone.

Ms Betterman—There is a clause in there about unreasonable hardship on the school.

CHAIR—Do you think that is being abused?

Ms Betterman—I certainly think it is being used.

CHAIR—My point is: I say it is more honest, but it is also a way of delaying the inevitable. Surely, sooner or later, schools have to face up to these responsibilities.

Ms Betterman—Yes. A lot of the private schools are very small and will categorically say, ‘We’re not a big school, we’re not a big system and we can’t.’

CHAIR—‘Go elsewhere.’

Ms Betterman—Yes.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—There is the other factor, too, that parents of special needs children have experienced the rejection of their children quite a lot by the time they get to school and after they have been in school for a while, and there is a reluctance to push the issue and to push their child into a school where they know they will not be welcome.

CHAIR—We have heard evidence to that effect across the country, and you can understand precisely that response. We are told that stress on parents may well be 10 times that on ordinary parents.

Mrs Taylor-Neumann—Yes, at least.

CHAIR—I have four kids, and you can see how grey I am! I can imagine what it would be like with a disabled child. Thank you very much for coming to talk to us today. It is much appreciated.

[2.16 p.m.]

BICKFORD, Ms Francine, Coordinator, Special Education, Catholic Education South Australia

CROSER, Mr Jeff, Principal, Cabra Dominican College, Catholic Education South Australia

HUPPATAZ, Mr Brian Charles, Senior Education Adviser, Curriculum, Catholic Education South Australia

CHAIR—Welcome. The subcommittee has before it submission No. 143. Are there any corrections or changes that you would like to make?

Mr Huppataz—No.

CHAIR—The subcommittee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although the subcommittee will also consider any requests for all or part of your evidence to be given in camera. However, I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Mr Huppataz—On behalf of Catholic Education I have prepared a brief opening statement. We welcome the opportunity to participate in the inquiry and commend the government on its initiative in conducting this inquiry.

CHAIR—If I could stop you there, this is a parliamentary subcommittee; it is not a government subcommittee.

Mr Huppataz—Integral to the mission of Catholic Education South Australia is the inclusion of students with disabilities in school communities and the provision of a variety of placement options. Our special education program provides a consultancy service to schools and families, and direct aid funding for individual students. Within Catholic Education South Australia there are five special education units in secondary schools and one in a primary school. In addition, there are two special schools with approximately 105 students. Eleven consultants work with schools. Two of them are located in country regions—Mount Gambier and Port Pirie. Each of the metropolitan based consultants has a country load responsibility. The consultants provide advice on placement options based on the new enrolment and support guidelines developed in 1994 and recently revised by Catholic Education South Australia. The special education consultants act as case coordinators for individual students and ascertain the support required for the students to access the curriculum and school environment. They work with school staff, families and agency personnel to monitor and review the students' progress, needs and educational outcomes. They meet with individual teachers to plan appropriate goals and to discuss how to provide an inclusive curriculum. They also organise professional development for school staff relating to disability and the specific needs of individual students.

Support for students is provided by school assistants or education support officers working with the students one-to-one in small or class groups on goals and objectives set by the class or subject teacher. The amount of support and the number of hours at a rate of \$21 per hour are worked out according to the educational needs of the students and the available funding. Many students are funded for one to three hours per week. However, those with more severe disabilities may receive up to 20 hours a week at a cost of \$16,800. Many schools also contribute to the cost of providing support to students with disabilities from their own budgets. Also, 2001 data shows that 2.51 per cent of the total student population in Catholic schools are students with disabilities—that is, 1,049 students.

Catholic Education South Australia uses the Commonwealth definition of disability. This definition is not consistent now with the definition provided in the Disability Discrimination Act, and this has serious implications in terms of the responsibilities of school sectors as outlined in the act.

Catholic Education South Australia also provides some \$81,000 for the support of other students at risk—that is, those who do not fit Commonwealth criteria but demonstrate specific learning difficulties such as borderline intellectual ability, ADD or ADHD. Further support is provided through the SAISO literacy and numeracy professional development programs and other professional development programs, such as our inclusive practice program.

The percentage of 2.51 is likely to underrepresent the reality in Catholic schools. Many families find it difficult to access a free assessment service, and there may be long waiting lists for the diagnosis of disability by suitably qualified professionals. This is a particular issue for families in country areas who do not have the same access to those professional supports. We believe that the needs of the increasing number of students with disabilities in our schools could be better met if the level of funding for students with disabilities more closely mirrored the average government school recurrent cost. I have hard copies of my introductory statement, if that would be helpful.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Regarding the figure of 2.51 per cent enrolment that you have used, is that in South Australia?

Mr Huppertz—The 2.51 per cent is the population of Catholic schools in South Australia.

CHAIR—That is a South Australian figure.

Mr Huppertz—Yes.

CHAIR—I have a letter that Monsignor Doyle has written to me, and I got the impression he was accepting the APC—Australian Parents Council—figures, which were different from that—

Mr Huppertz—Australia wide figures.

CHAIR—Australia wide figures, agreed.

Ms Bickford—Ours are slightly above the average.

CHAIR—Yes. They say 2.2 for the Catholic system across Australia.

Ms Bickford—That is right.

CHAIR—Why are you slightly above that in South Australia?

Ms Bickford—That is an interesting question in itself, and maybe Jeff can refer to that in a minute, but I will start. We have had a lot of responses from families saying that they are looking for an education for students with disabilities where pastoral care support is provided. That may be one answer, but I am sure that there are many variables as to why that is the case.

Mr Huppatz—Mr Croser is the principal of Cabra Dominican College. It has a special education unit, which is really a double unit given the number of students there. Mr Croser was previously principal of Cardijn College at Noarlunga, which also had a special education unit, so he is in a very good position to provide coalface information.

Mr Croser—Thank you very much. It might be related to the fact that, once schools get a reputation for delivering and being able to support students with special needs well—in my experience over the past 14½ years that I have been a principal—word gets around and, therefore, people seek out particular schools for students with disabilities. That certainly was the case at Noarlunga. Noarlunga is a new and developing area in the southern suburbs of Adelaide and, as a result of our commitment—due to our Catholic ethos—to support all students across the wide variety of ability levels, the fact that our school was doing that soon got around and we had increasing demand for places.

Similarly, at Cabra Dominican College, where I have been for the last nine years, the Dominican sisters started over 20 years ago acknowledging the fact that students with special needs, and particularly those students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, needed additional support to mainstreaming. In fact, they were one of the cutting-edge groups that set up what we refer to now as our St Mary's unit, which is a unit for 20 students that have these kinds of mild to moderate intellectual disabilities.

Why would a school like Cabra do that? As part of our Catholic mission and also as part of our vision statement, we say that we acknowledge the fact that students bring a variety of God given talents and a range of student abilities. In line with that, we would see our St Mary's students as simply representing a broader continuum of humanity than what might be in a school that has not got such a unit. We take a lot of time and effort to make sure that our mainstream students see the St Mary's unit students as integral to the school and, in fact, they are mainstreamed for as many of their subjects as they are capable of participating in.

CHAIR—The South Australian government submission says that the percentage of students with disabilities in the total student population enrolled in government schools is 6.11 per cent. There is a remarkable gap there—even on your figures, which are higher than the national average. Why do you think that is? We are not talking about the numbers; we are talking about percentage of enrolments.

Ms Bickford—I am not sure why there is a gap, but I would say that all of our 107 Catholic schools in South Australia have students with disabilities attending them. Those disabilities range from mild to moderate.

CHAIR—But all education systems would put that view to this committee, and have done over the years. You are saying 2.5 per cent. The government says 6.1 per cent for its system. I am trying to come to grips with why there is this large discrepancy. For the non-government and independent sector, the figure is 1.5 per cent nationally. So you are doing much better than they are in terms of meeting a percentage of student enrolments but considerably worse than the public sector. I am trying to find out what we can attribute this to.

Ms Bickford—If you look at the submission that we put in, we talked about not being able to provide early intervention programs. That might be one of the reasons why some parents of students with disabilities look at the state sector as opposed to the non-government sector in terms of speech and language classes, special classes et cetera. We only have one primary unit and five secondary units, but if you look at the state sector there are many more. We have two special schools. Facilities might be one of the reasons why parents—who might sometimes want a non-government education—actually go to state education.

CHAIR—You do not send anyone away, do you?

Mr Croser—None at all. I can speak for that quite strongly. In fact, I am surprised at those percentages. That is a revelation to me. From the parents coming to me to seek enrolment, the story I generally get is that they are seeking enrolment in a school like the one I am in—Cabra—not so much because of its Catholic ethos but more because of the Christian ethos that it has. They are hopeful that, in that kind of environment, their son or daughter may very well be more supported.

CHAIR—I understand that. The Catholic Education Commission does not discriminate on the basis of religion. I accept that. That is not the suggestion I am making to you. There are people from all religious denominations attending Catholic schools. The question goes to why there is this discrepancy. We have yet to hear a satisfactory explanation. I would have thought that by this point you would have said something about costs, which you mentioned in your submission. You are saying you want equal AGSRC funding. What percentage of AGSRC funding do you currently attract?

Mr Huppertz—The figure that we were given by our finance people was 56.2 per cent.

CHAIR—I put it to you that that figure is lower than the states grants act provides, which would be a breach of the law if that were the case. I am sure that is not what you have. I am told that, if you include state funding as well, the figure of AGSRC funding direct is 96 per cent. I am also told that, if you include the expense of the fees and various other contributions that are available to you, the figure for the Catholic education system gets up to 117 per cent of AGSRC. I want to make sure we get these figures quite precise. In 2000, the average per-student expenditure in Catholic primary schools stood at 96 per cent of AGSRC. At secondary level, student expenditure exceeded the AGSRC, amounting to 117 per cent. In the independent sector, the comparable ratios were 123 per cent for primary and 159 per cent for secondary. That

includes all the fees; it is the total expenditure available. With that level of resourcing, is it possible that you could do a little more to attract more students with disabilities?

Ms Bickford—In terms of what we offer in Catholic Education in South Australia, we have no trouble attracting families to have their students with disabilities attend our schools. With the funding and support we provide, we do the best we can with what we have available. Jeff could talk about the funding that schools put in for those students on top of the funding received from Commonwealth and state governments.

CHAIR—Yes, that is true. I do not dispute that you do put in additional resources. I am not arguing that. I am saying that, with your fees and all of the other revenues available to you, the expenditure levels are at those figures—that is, the figures I have been given; no doubt I will hear more on this topic when you have had time to look at them. Let me put it this way—it is very simple: if you take just the Commonwealth money, in the current quadrennium the Commonwealth government will be providing the Catholic Education Commission of this country with \$10.4 billion. Let me make sure you are clear about this: that is made up of 9.2 per cent in general recurrent and \$1.2 billion in SAISO, disabilities moneys and capital moneys, so that is \$10.4 billion or thereabouts, give or take a dollar. That seems to me to be a very large sum of money.

Mr Croser—I do not know about the system level, but I would indicate to you with respect to the previous question that if our Catholic schools have 117 per cent of average government resource costs expenditure, then it may very well be that parents are sending their students to schools like ours because there is an expectation of smaller class sizes and other ways in which we can generate a stronger sense of pastoral care and support.

CHAIR—Mr Croser, we both know enough about education to know that smaller class sizes has not been one of the great strengths of the Catholic education system over the years—there are many other things, but I would not say that class sizes was the thing that would attract people. If anything, I would have thought that the contrary was the case.

Mr Croser—What I was indicating was not just class sizes but other ways in which we would generate a stronger sense of pastoral care by the kinds of services we can put in place.

CHAIR—I am not having a go at Catholic Education; that is not my point. My concern is—and I will ask the independents the same question—why, given the level of public resourcing, is there such a discrepancy? The national figures are 1.5 per cent for independent schools, 2.2 per cent for Catholic schools and 3.9 per cent for government schools. In this state it is 2.5 per cent versus 6.1 per cent—government schools versus Catholic Education Commission schools. There are quite dramatic changes. The Commonwealth has provided an extremely generous package under the states grants act. My understanding is that, with indexation arrangements, by the year 2007 or 2008 the Commonwealth government will be spending more money on Catholic Education Commission schools than on universities, and you are coming to me today and suggesting that you want some more money. I am saying, ‘Do you think you could do more with what you have got?’

Mr Croser—I will answer two things. You have been talking about expenditure per student. What I think Mr Huppatz indicated earlier was income per student. That is one important point

that maybe you are overlooking with respect to the questions you are asking us. The fact is that the income from both the Commonwealth and state governments is much less than what it would be in terms of running schools had our schools been fully state funded like government schools. So the way we determine how that income is received and then supplemented by parental tuition fees et cetera is a school-by-school decision.

With respect to the reason why the government sector might have 6.6 per cent—again, this is the first time I have heard of that, and I make no apology for that, because finding out the proportion of the government's is not my area of interest—I suggest that the best answer you are going to get may come from speaking to the parents of those children about why they are choosing that sector rather than ours. We could extrapolate and guess. For example, I would like to think that the parents who send their children to schools like mine—the parents I see—are prepared to pay school fees not only because they think it is money well spent for students with no disabilities but also because they consider it a worthy investment to support the special needs of their son or daughter. I suggest that that might not be the case with all parents, and the fact that our parents have to pay tuition fees for students to come to the school may very well be a limiting factor per se in why some parents would not choose to spend that kind of money for a student with disabilities. I do not support that argument, but it may be what those parents think. It comes back to what I said at the start of my remarks—that is, instead of looking at the amount of expenditure compared to government resource costs, it could be just as productive to look at income, because I think that is going to provide the real answer to the question that you have been asking us over the last five or 10 minutes.

CHAIR—You raised the issue of definitions. The discrimination act was passed in 1992, yet no common definition seems to have been developed since that time. In the last five years, the states and the Commonwealth have been working on reaching a definition. What do you think about the draft standards that have been proposed?

Ms Bickford—I think they are going to pose lots of issues for schools. They are certainly very important in looking at how we meet our obligations to students with disabilities and the measures that we take, and I think they are going to inform our practice, but I know they are going to cost a lot more to put into practice. So I commend them but I think there are going to be great issues for all sectors.

Mr Huppertz—We do not have an issue with them, in that we are very much committed to inclusion. We would certainly like to see greater congruence between the present Commonwealth definition of disability and that described in the act. We would welcome a consistency of definition around the country and under the act.

CHAIR—‘Nationally consistent’, would be the words you are looking for.

Mr Huppertz—Yes.

CHAIR—And you would like to see it consistent across the government and non-government systems?

Mr Huppertz—Indeed.

CHAIR—You have one primary and two secondary special schools—is that right?

Ms Bickford—We have two special schools, five secondary units attached to mainstream schools and one primary school.

CHAIR—Do you know how many special schools run by the Catholic Education Commission there are in other states?

Ms Bickford—I will have to take that question on notice. I think there are 17, but I cannot tell you exactly where each of those is.

Mr Huppertz—Yes, there are 17. I am taking that figure from a response from Monsignor Tom Doyle in which he quotes a figure of 17 special schools. He then talks about economies of scale, which again could be a contributing factor.

CHAIR—I think that is a real issue.

Mr Huppertz—It certainly is.

CHAIR—The other question that has come to us again and again is the level of services provided—the debate between the inclusionists and those who say special schools ought to be provided. What is the view within your organisation about that? Obviously, you regard both models as appropriate, or else you would not have the services, but do you think the demand for special schools is increasing or lessening?

Mr Huppertz—It is difficult. As Mr Croser has said, we would encourage mainstreaming of students as much as possible, so that students have access to as broad a curriculum as possible. The reverse side of that is that teachers of, for example, year 8 and year 9 with classes of 30 will say—and I think understandably—that it is very difficult to run special programs for particular students within a class of that size. Nevertheless, that does not diminish our commitment to trying to do that as much as possible.

CHAIR—Do you think parents are demanding more access to special school settings?

Ms Bickford—I do not think they are. I think they are asking for something quite different. They are looking at the services that we might provide through a unit in a mainstream school but they actually want the students to spend most of the time in the mainstream. So they want the extra support but they want it in a different location. Mr Croser might be able to comment on that. Certainly we value and want to continue to provide different placement options for parents of students with disabilities because we do not see the mainstream as the best place for all students with disabilities. Jeff might want to comment about what parents are after in terms of unit placement.

Mr Croser—What you said is quite true. It varies from parent to parent. In our case, we have some students whose parents would simply want them to spend a larger proportion of the time in the St Marys unit and there are other that would want a higher degree of time in the mainstream, even though it may be up to us in the end to determine that in fact that may not be appropriate.

CHAIR—Do you get any sense of a trend in this matter? Is that something that you have been able to detect in your professional experience?

Mr Croser—Not so much in terms of what parents are wanting. Certainly there is a trend in my nine years for there to be an increasing number of parents who want their students placed at a place like Cabra. We have always had provision for about 20 students in our special unit. In my earlier years we would have got to 20; in my latter years we are well and truly over the 20, and that places us in a great deal of difficulty in terms of determining who can gain access to the special unit.

CHAIR—We are told by the state government that there has been a 500 per cent increase in the level of identification of students with disabilities since 1992. Would you agree with that sort of a statistic? Have you seen a remarkable growth in the level of demand?

Ms Bickford—We have certainly seen quite a growth in terms of diagnosis of disability and understanding of children's development and identifying early that a student may have difficulties with his or her learning. Often when students came into school at five years of age, an identification or diagnosis was made in the first few years of junior primary school. It seems that people are picking it up much earlier, when children are two or three years old, but that again depends on the disability. I think also that we—teachers and professionals working with students with disabilities—know a lot more about different disabilities than we knew, and that knowledge is growing all the time.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Senator ALLISON—How does the Catholic sector—and presumably this is done state by state—distribute the funding for students with disabilities as defined by the Commonwealth?

Ms Bickford—In South Australia, the funding comes in to our special education program, and we have a team of 11 consultants—8.6 positions—who work across the state, in the city and in the country. Two of those consultants are situated in country settings: one in the north of South Australia at Port Pirie and one in the south at Mount Gambier. Those consultants work with teachers to look at programming and planning for students with disabilities. We also provide direct aid support to those students, and that aid is worked out according to need.

Senator ALLISON—By aid, do you mean a teacher aid?

Ms Bickford—Yes, that is right—school assistant support. As Mr Huppertz said in his opening statement, some students might receive one to three hours funding a week, based at \$21 an hour, or some with severe disabilities might receive up to 20 hours a week. That is worked out according to need and available funding. We have two levels: consultancy—

Senator ALLISON—Do the consultants work in mainstream schools?

Ms Bickford—Yes, and they also provide support to the two special schools and to the teachers working in the units.

Senator ALLISON—What would be the level of funding for special school students?

Ms Bickford—I would need to take that question on notice and will provide that to you in writing.

Senator ALLISON—What sorts of qualifications do the consultants have? What sorts of people are they?

Ms Bickford—All the consultants have a background in teaching, and at least half of the team have a master's or are studying for a master's in special education.

Senator ALLISON—Do they do teaching themselves or do they just talk with teachers when they go around the schools?

Ms Bickford—We only have one who is currently teaching part time in a special school and is also a consultant. The others do not teach; they do the consultancy.

Senator ALLISON—So all of those students who are determined under Commonwealth definitions of 'disability' would have access to an education support officer?

Ms Bickford—Yes.

Senator ALLISON—You say you pay those officers \$21 an hour?

Ms Bickford—That is what we contribute to the schools. The schools may pay them more than that. They make a contribution as well depending on their salary structure.

Senator ALLISON—Are all the education support officers trained people?

Ms Bickford—The consultant will work with the teacher and the education support officers looking at the specific needs of the individual students, so training goes in at that level. We also look at providing professional development to staff about general areas of disability. About five years ago, Catholic Education wrote a course called 'Inclusive Practice'. There were two strands to that course—one for teaching staff and one for education support officers, to look at the sorts of issues and strategies that could be used for students with disabilities. Many of the consultants have groups for their education support officers and they plan their program according to the needs of those groups. They might meet once a term.

Senator ALLISON—Would it be fair to say that students with profound disabilities would all be in the special education units in the Catholic sector?

Ms Bickford—No, in our special schools, although in country areas we have a couple of students with very severe and complex disabilities attending mainstream schools because there is no facility there for them.

Senator ALLISON—Is it a geographical issue?

Ms Bickford—It is geographical.

Senator ALLISON—So you would expect that anyone in the Adelaide metropolitan area with a severe disability would be in the special unit?

Ms Bickford—If they have an intellectual disability; that is a criterion for entry as well. So you might have someone with cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability. Most of our students in our units have a mild to moderate intellectual disability, but we have many students with moderate to severe physical needs attending our mainstream schools. We have two special schools and the children with the most severe physical disabilities tend to go to Suneden Special School—and that is not because we would not take those students; it is just where parents have requested placement. I think the committee visited that school this morning.

Senator ALLISON—Mr Croser, can you describe how you integrate students in your school who are in the special unit. How many are there and what sort of disabilities do they have? What is the mix of the school population in respect of what sorts of subjects are taught?

Mr Croser—We have 20 students in our St Mary's unit, which is for students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. I will talk about that rather than our 30 to 40 students who have access to the learning support program, which is for those students essentially with quite an adaptive education. With respect to those in the unit, it really depends on their capabilities, as I mentioned to you before. Those who, for example, might have mild to moderate intellectual disabilities but have pretty good physical capacities enjoy their participation in the mainstream in activities like phys ed and other pastoral care activities. All students are required to attend home room activities, which is basically administration and getting to know the other students in the home class. With respect to other students, it varies; some are integrated for subjects such as art—generally what we might refer to as the hands-on subjects rather than maths and/or English, which tends to be their strongest area of weakness. So, as a result, they would spend a high proportion of time in the unit on those skills.

Senator ALLISON—Do you have students with learning disabilities, for instance, in that unit?

Mr Croser—Yes, we would have. Do you mean from the mainstream into the unit?

Senator ALLISON—Do you have students with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia and the like, in the special unit?

Mr Croser—Yes, they would do. Generally, though, if their intellectual disability is mild to moderate, that is the main criterion for their entrance into the unit. If it is simply dyslexia on its own, and there is no mild or moderate intellectual disability, they would not be in that unit—they would be part of our adaptive education program.

Senator ALLISON—What about students with autism or Asperger's syndrome?

Mr Croser—We have students with autism both in the unit and in the learning support program. Again, it depends on whether that autism is aligned with an intellectual disability. Essentially, for Commonwealth funding, we have aligned ourselves completely with the requirement to have mild to moderate intellectual disability as the No. 1 criteria for access to the unit, irrespective of any other issues they might have—physical, autism and so on.

Senator ALLISON—Is that typical of the rest of the Catholic sector?

Mr Huppertz—I think it is reasonable. We are finding that a larger number of students in mainstream are being diagnosed with forms of autism, particularly ADD and ADHD, that do have special needs. We have a behaviour management unit at Catholic Education, which works with the special education consultants. In 2002, we have allocated some \$486,000 to behaviour management. That is in addition to the special education funding. So we are working across our areas within Catholic Education, in particular around those areas.

Ms Bickford—Let me clarify something Mr Huppertz said. We have many students with Asperger's syndrome throughout our mainstream schools. Some of those may have ADD, and some may not. There are two different disabilities there.

Senator ALLISON—Is it possible for you to provide the committee with a breakdown of your 1,049 students with defined disabilities? How many are in special schools? How many are mainstreamed? How many are within units within schools? It might be useful for us to get a picture of that.

Ms Bickford—None of those 1,049 are attending special schools. I do not think they are included in that number. They are the students attending mainstream schools and units within mainstream schools. There are another 105 students who attend the two special schools. But we can give you that breakdown.

Senator ALLISON—Finally, the committee heard from a number of witnesses, when we visited special schools, that some students come back into special schools at secondary level because the differences between them and their peers are more apparent and more extreme in secondary school. Is that your experience too? If so, what is the movement between mainstreaming in private school and then segregating further down the track?

Ms Bickford—Many students with intellectual disabilities who might go to a special school sometimes start their school lives in a mainstream setting, and that is the choice of the parents. When we look at students coming into the school, we are looking to see whether we can provide for their education in that setting. Sometimes it transpires during the educational life of that student that they will need a more specialised placement when they get to secondary school, but that is not always the case. Sometimes we have a transition of students who start in mainstream and who end up going to a special school or to a unit like the one at Mr Croser's school. Mr Croser has a student in his school who started his education in a primary school mainstream setting. He is still considered a mainstream student and he does not attend the unit at his school. It depends on the individual needs of the student. What we do not see is students from special schools coming into mainstream at, say, the secondary level. Sometimes there is a transition of a couple of students from a special school into a unit, but it is very rare at that level.

Mr Croser—I support your comment that, as the students get older, there tends to be a widening gap between the capability and the capacity to participate in mainstream activities. We have noticed that, particularly at the senior secondary end. For example, our year 11 and 12 students would have increasing difficulty participating in mainstream subjects. The South Australian Certificate of Education requirements in those mainstream subjects does not prevent us from establishing new subjects—like community studies and other types of subjects, and that is

what we are doing—to provide a completely separate curriculum for those students so they can still achieve the SACE, or the South Australian Certificate of Education.

Senator ALLISON—To turn the subject to teachers, another theme in our inquiry is the under-training in the undergraduate field and the lack of postgraduate trained special ed teachers. Is that your experience too? Are they hard to come by? Would you ever consider, since you are such a significant sector, saying to universities that undergraduate courses ought to have a minimum level of training in disability?

Ms Bickford—We certainly have in terms of talking to universities about the importance of all teachers in their pre-service training having an understanding of students with disabilities and special needs, and that includes gifted and talented students, but also looking at inclusive practice, such as how to accommodate all students in the classroom irrespective of their needs in an inclusive curriculum. So, yes, we have done that.

Senator ALLISON—What have you done?

Ms Bickford—We have certainly spoken to them.

Senator ALLISON—What was their response?

Ms Bickford—They understand that. My understanding is that the Flinders University of South Australia provides a seven-week training core element.

Senator ALLISON—Is that sufficient? Are you satisfied with that?

Ms Bickford—I am not saying that that is sufficient but it is a start. I think we have to keep building on that and having dialogue and discussions about that. Certainly, each sector is also responsible for providing ongoing training for teachers once they work in a sector. Teachers have their own responsibilities too for updating their own training. We put in courses like the inclusive practice course to support teachers in inclusive curriculum, but it is an ongoing issue for us that we address. It is very necessary.

Senator ALLISON—If I can ask you more directly, are you satisfied that teachers in your sector are sufficiently trained in special education?

Ms Bickford—In all of those areas in understanding specific needs of students, there is always room for improvement, whatever we do, and we keep working on that.

Mr Huppertz—We are never totally satisfied.

CHAIR—I would like to clarify one thing: I think, Mr Huppertz, you mentioned a figure of 56 per cent of AGSRC.

Mr Huppertz—Yes, 56.2 per cent.

CHAIR—I think that may well have been the figure at the beginning of the current quadrennium but by the end of the quadrennium it will be 70 per cent—Commonwealth sourced funds alone under the states grants act. That is my understanding. Thank you very much for coming today to give evidence to the committee; it is much appreciated.

Proceedings suspended from 2.58 p.m. to 3.12 p.m.

BRAYBON, Ms Yvonne, Committee member representing non-government organisations providing support for people with disabilities, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

DALEFIELD, Mr Richard, Deputy Chairperson, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

McCOLL, Ms Margaret, Executive Officer, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

PAYNE, Ms Eda, Committee member nominated by the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

SPARGO, Ms Tricia, Committee member, Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities

CHAIR—I welcome representatives from the South Australian Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities. Do you have any comments to make on the capacities in which you appear?

Ms Braybon—In addition to my position on the ministerial advisory committee, I work with the Crippled Children's Association.

Mr Dalefield—I currently work in the accommodation support services in disability, and I am a single parent of two people with autism. That is why I am on the committee.

Ms Payne—In addition to being the minister's nominee on the committee, I am a special educator.

Ms Spargo—I am a student representative on the committee. I am also a social worker with APN Options Coordination, which is a state government disability agency that provides case management services for people with physical and neurological disabilities.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. The committee has before it submission No. 11. Are there any changes you would like to make?

Mr Dalefield—Yes, there are. On page 3, under the section titled 'Disability-related support for classroom teachers', the last dot point currently reads:

- Increased numbers of teaching assistants who have received adequate training in relation to students with disabilities.

We would like to replace the words 'have received adequate' with the words 'require additional'. That is the only change that we wish to make.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Although the committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, the committee will also consider any request for all or part of the evidence to be given in camera. However, I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Mr Dalefield—We would like to thank you for allowing us the opportunity to raise several issues relating to children and students in South Australia with disabilities. I would like to set out the principal roles of the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities, which I will refer to from now on as the committee. The committee is set up to provide advice to the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services on two main areas: firstly, the education of children and students with disabilities from birth to 21 years of age attending early intervention programs at government, independent or Catholic preschools and schools and, secondly, the allocation of Commonwealth and state special education grants to organisations involved in providing support for these children and students in early intervention programs in preschools and in schools.

The committee has representation from the three education sectors: state, Catholic and independent schools; the unions representing government and non-government teachers; a student; two parents; the South Australian Disability Services Office and disability related non-government organisations—as mentioned earlier, we have a representative from the Crippled Children's Association in that role. Representatives are nominated by their organisations and are appointed by the state minister because of their expertise in the area of students with disabilities.

Committee members have noted that the annual percentage increases for special education funding have not kept pace with the increasing number of students with disabilities needing support. In the past four years, the total amount of Commonwealth-state special education funding available in South Australia increased by an average of only 4.6 per cent per annum. That adds up to about 15.1 per cent overall. In contrast, between 1998 and 2002 the number of students with disabilities receiving support from agencies accessing this funding increased by 20 per cent. In addition, as noted in schedule 2 of our submission, 28 per cent of eligible students now registered with these organisations do not receive support as they have needs at the lower end of the spectrum and the funding is not adequate to provide for service to all students.

The issue of how to define disability is an ongoing challenge in the collection of data across Australia. As mentioned earlier, the committee allocates special education funding according to Commonwealth government guidelines. So the 20 per cent increase in student numbers of the past four years represents only students that fit within the Commonwealth's criteria. In preparing the submission we were concerned, firstly, with the small increase in Commonwealth and state special education funding and, secondly, with a number of issues that consistently arise in the committee's research projects. Primarily, these projects are conducted to provide advice to the South Australian Minister for Education and Children's Services.

I would like to highlight some of the trends in populations of students with disabilities in this state. In 1993 the South Australian Child and Youth Health Access Assistants Program was established for students with severe multiple disabilities and/or complex health needs who were moving from segregated settings to local preschools and schools. In 1993 the numbers of

students requiring support was 203; by 2001 this had risen to 517. Currently many students with a disability who meet support criteria do not have access to Child and Youth Health Access Assistants Program support because priority is given to those with invasive healthcare needs. Total student numbers have also increased over the last four years for the Autism Association; the Crippled Children's Association; the Down Syndrome Society; the Cora Barclay Centre for the deaf and hearing impaired and Townsend House, an organisation supporting people with vision and hearing impairments—as itemised in our submission.

Data provided by the Autism Association, the Crippled Children's Association, the Down Syndrome Society and the Cora Barclay Centre also suggest that between 11 and 33 per cent of clients registered with their organisations are not receiving a service due to the limited funding available. The Department of Education, Training and Employment's Preschool Support Program receives a state based special education grant. This program provides additional support to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities in South Australian preschools. Between 1999 and 2002 the number of children receiving support increased from 698 to 1,080. In 2001 the total numbers of children eligible for support represented 18 per cent of the preschool population. With the current level of funding, only 5.9 per cent can be provided with support.

I did intend to summarise some recent research projects but that is covered in our submission and, given the time, I will not do that. So I move to our conclusion. In the past few years, the number of children and students with disabilities who are eligible for support under Commonwealth and state special education funding criteria has risen steadily. Total funding has not kept pace with the increased demands for services. As a consequence, there are growing numbers who do not receive support, due to the limited funds available to service providers.

A number of reports prepared by the ministerial advisory committee have identified issues related to the provision of support for students with various levels and types of disability. The effectiveness of the committee's recommendations included in these reports depends in the first instance on increased special education funding being provided by both Commonwealth and state governments. This will require a recognition of and response to the increasing number of children and students with special needs in our preschools.

Senator TIERNEY—In our understanding, this is the only state that has a ministerial advisory council in the area of disabilities. Is that correct?

Ms McColl—There is a committee in Queensland but I am not sure that it is absolutely identical to the one in South Australia.

Senator TIERNEY—So what is the origin of this council and why is it necessary in the system?

Ms McColl—As you know, I am sure ministers can set up advisory committees on any issue. The minister for education in South Australia has three advisory committees and we are one of them. It was set up over 10 years ago as a special ed consultative committee. The minister at the time set it up, and obviously successive ministers have agreed that it is a useful committee in terms of providing advice and also allocating this funding, which is obviously done by different people in other states.

Senator TIERNEY—So what has generally been the reaction to your advice over the years? Has the minister at the time tended to take your advice?

Ms McColl—Does anyone else want to answer! The reports are received favourably and there have been instances, certainly, where some aspects of the recommendations have been acted on. A lot of our reports not only provide advice directly to the minister but also, on our request, are sent on to the CEOs of the three education sectors because a lot of our research will come up with issues related directly to schools and support provision in the schools. The minister has always supported those reports being sent to the education sectors, although I have only been in this position for five years—I do not know whether anyone else has been on the committee longer; I suspect not. In terms of our recommendations for funding, we make recommendations about which organisations should receive which amount of money and we have developed a funding process in the last four or five years—we have reviewed our funding process—and the ministers certainly have supported that.

Senator TIERNEY—So your time as a council has, I suppose, very much covered the movement towards inclusive education in the state.

Ms McColl—Precisely.

Senator TIERNEY—Could you provide us with your long-term view of how that process has developed and where you think it is heading next?

Mr Dalefield—I am happy to make a comment. We conducted research recently and got feedback from families who have made choices over the last few years as to where their son or daughter would attend school. The outcome of that research showed that there was no one definitive choice but that people wanted a choice. The committee, as I am aware, has not itself made a determination as to what would be best, feeling that it is a choice best left to families. Is that what you are asking?

Senator TIERNEY—That is part of it. I would like to pursue that point. Do parents feel that they have sufficient choice? Depending on where you land geographically, you may want access to a special school or a special unit in a comprehensive school or you might want your child in the mainstream, so what are parents saying about choice?

Mr Dalefield—I believe there is some truth in what you are saying—that there may well be a lack of choice depending on where you live in the state and also depending on what information you have to make an informed choice.

Senator TIERNEY—It has always been the case that in the more remote areas it is more difficult, but what is the trend generally in highly populated areas? Have special schools been closed in this state? Are schools tending to close down or are they tending to open up? What is the pattern here?

Mr Dalefield—I am not sure I have that information.

Ms McColl—That survey report of parents definitely showed that a lot of parents would like access to special units and special classes that are not always there in their local region. That

was certainly part of the recommendations of our report. This year, one of our projects is on special schools. We are looking at the student profile in all our special schools—that is government and non-government schools—and we are interviewing principals. I think that there is general agreement in most of the schools, and certainly in the three education sectors, that there should be a range of school settings—special classes, special units and special schools as well as mainstream settings.

Senator TIERNEY—But you are saying that parents are saying to you that there is not sufficient choice wherever they are located.

Ms McColl—That came out in our survey.

Senator TIERNEY—So when you put that to the education department—that they are not providing sufficient choice—what did they say about that?

Ms McColl—Our report did go to the education department and the other sectors. I guess it would be a good question to put to your next group.

Senator TIERNEY—We certainly will, but what have they said to you? That is what I want to know.

Ms McColl—Nothing. We do have people on our committee who are supportive of the range of settings. It is anecdotal but some people think there was a very big push for inclusion in the early years and there has been a movement back and a recognition that a specialised setting is what some students need. That is why the committee are looking at special schools this year. But we had no direct feedback from any of the sectors on whether they would be setting up more special units et cetera.

Senator TIERNEY—So when parents say they feel that, for their child, having tried it, inclusive education is not working and they want to move back, what reasons are they giving for that, broadly?

Ms McColl—Would the people who have worked in schools like to answer that?

Ms Payne—I am just thinking about this. Parents like their children to have the opportunity to move between settings. It is difficult for parents when only one setting is provided. The ideal situation is to be able to move, both for parents and for teachers—to have specialist facilities available to students with high educational needs. This is a factor for teachers also: they need access to people who have specialist training. So the ideal situation would seem to be a model that allows students to access specialist settings and mainstream settings, where specialists are available to support the teachers in the mainstream settings.

Senator TIERNEY—Does that happen in South Australia?

Ms Payne—There are some models where that happens in units in South Australia.

Senator TIERNEY—Taking the example of a school where there is no specialist unit and the children are all in the mainstream classroom, what access to specialist assistance does the teacher get in South Australia?

Ms Payne—Generally speaking, there are specialists employed in the department of education and in the non-independent sectors. Teachers have access to these specialists—they do not have access on site, but the specialists visit.

Senator TIERNEY—We find right across the country that teachers have virtually no pre-service training in handling children with disabilities and the in-service training is absolutely minuscule to nonexistent. So, in terms of duty of care, how can teachers possibly operate in this situation without high levels of support?

Ms Payne—I suppose that is our question.

Senator TIERNEY—I am glad we have got the same question. We will be asking the department the same question a little later. When you pose that question to them, what do they say about that?

Ms Payne—When we pose the question to the teachers, they say—

Senator TIERNEY—No, to the departments. We will come to the teachers in a minute.

Ms McColl—There is specialist advice available—and Yvonne might want to talk about this. The issue is the adequacy of it. There are good specialists available in the department in terms of psychology, speech therapy and support for hearing impaired students and students with visual impairments. There are also the non-government organisations that we fund to provide support as well as the Preschool Support Program which provides trained staff and support staff for kindergarten or preschool teachers. So there is a lot of expertise there, but our point, as we have said in our submission, is that there is not enough funding that allows the Crippled Children's Association to go out and see all of the students that are on their books—they have to prioritise.

Senator TIERNEY—Where we find a remarkable contrast is when we go into the special schools and find highly trained people with very good student-teacher ratios working in that situation, and then we have got this alternative model which seems to be totally under resourced. The teachers are not trained to handle it and the specialist support, in terms of the percentage of the classroom teacher's time, is not there. Even if there is support, it is frequently in the form of a teacher aide who often is not trained in this area. I would have thought the state government has major problems with duty of care in that situation.

Mr Dalefield—I have had children who have been through both special schools and mainstream schools, and I have now come to the conclusion—I did not always think this—that they gained more out of the mainstreaming, from the social development. You still have the duty of care issues, but nonetheless I felt they learnt more in that setting than they did in the special school setting. That is a personal view; others may have a different view.

Senator TIERNEY—Do you think they actually learnt more, putting the social aspect aside? I am talking about cognitive and attitudinal skills and knowledge. Do you think they were getting more in that situation?

Ms McColl—It is difficult to talk about these students as a homogenous group. There are some students with mild impairments who do brilliantly and will respond in a regular classroom. It is about what is appropriate for each child. The bulk of students with disabilities—and I would like others to corroborate this—do quite well in mainstream settings. Whether the support is yet quite adequate is open to question. We would say it probably is not.

Senator TIERNEY—Can we turn to the teachers' attitudes in all of this. Historically, there was often streaming of children within schools according to their ability levels. With the movement to inclusiveness and a more comprehensive approach, teachers within the one classroom are handling the full range, from the gifted through to those bearing levels of disability. It obviously makes the job a lot tougher. What are they saying about how this is working to provide proper educational outcomes for children at all levels of ability? What are they saying about educating in that situation?

Ms Braybon—A lot of them are indicating quite a degree of stress because of the diversity of the class groups that they have. Our organisation gives support very specifically—we are a therapy organisation, so we provide physio, occupational therapy, speech pathology for specific kids, psychological counselling if necessary and specialist paediatric rehabilitation input. It is very difficult to impose what we would see as extra things onto an already stressed schoolteacher for the reasons you have stated—there is a range of children in that room and they all have different needs. Whereas Richard in his instance would be saying that social development is extremely important for the children that he was talking about, we might talk about different things, because we work with a group of physically disabled children who have a very broad range of disabilities.

Senator TIERNEY—We heard some research evidence this morning that, just in coping with the situation, parents of children with disabilities often suffer about 10 times the stress level of parents with children who do not have disabilities. What is the situation regarding stress levels for teachers who are not trained in handling these situations? I suppose my fundamental question is: is this really workable as an educational model, given that there is insufficient support for the teachers in the classrooms? I can see how it would work, but what about support?

Ms Payne—That is what I was going to say. When there is sufficient support this model works brilliantly; it works extremely well. I have to say that teachers are a most creative group of people. They bend over backwards to ensure that the needs of all of the students in their classes are met. Sure, they are placed under enormous stress when they do not have specific training to deal with areas in which they are not competent. When the support is in place and it is adequate, it works extremely well. When it is not there, it can be very difficult for the teachers.

Senator TIERNEY—I suppose the department of education is not providing a duty of care to its own staff or to the students in this case, given that it is putting staff under such stress through a situation where they are not resourced properly.

Senator ALLISON—You make the point that funding for students with disabilities has not kept pace with the increasing numbers. Why is that? Commonwealth funding is per capita—is state funding not per capita? Can you explain why we are in this situation?

Ms McColl—I can give you the figures that show both state and Commonwealth increases, but the funding that we allocate from the Commonwealth is the special education funding that goes to non-government organisations. We are not talking about the funding that goes to the schools and the schooling sectors.

Senator ALLISON—So your role is to allocate funding for the non-government sector?

Ms McColl—Yes—to make recommendations to the minister. We believe that it has not kept pace with the number of students who are eligible for the funding. But there is a problem in that this is supplementary funding to non-government organisations—we do not fund the total cost of the program. They are charity organisations and they raise money in other ways. But still, we believe that there have been fairly minimal increases over the years. I guess it depends on what the per capita allocation is in terms of this group.

Senator ALLISON—That is the next question. You say that, if the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act definition was adopted for funding, a lot of students would be eligible for that funding. Yet that seems to me to contradict your statement that in fact 28 per cent of students are not getting support. How would it make a difference? If there is no funding for that 28 per cent of students who are within the current definition, what difference does it make if you broaden that definition?

Ms McColl—There will be a lot more that do not receive any support—I guess that would be the difference. It is about the high cost students for those organisations. Per capita is an average and, if there is a child with very high support needs that the Crippled Children's Association or the Autism Association have to support, that will eat up a lot of the funding. We have said that they prioritise and there will be some at the lower end that miss out.

CHAIR—Are you suggesting that the funding in South Australia is allocated on anything other than a priority rating? Is there any priority rating in the allocation?

Ms McColl—In our formula?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms McColl—Yes, there is, but that is in terms of allocating a bucket that is predetermined.

CHAIR—So within the various levels of disability and level of need surely there is a correlation between funding and level of need?

Ms McColl—Yes. Our funding formula has three categories for funding. But we are talking about the total allocation that we receive: the amount that comes from the Commonwealth or the state to allocate. So we allocate then in terms of need but they are saying it does not go far enough.

CHAIR—In fact, the Commonwealth funding formula under the state grants act is five times per capita for non-government schools to government schools.

Ms McColl—That is not the funding that we allocate. The funding that we allocate is for non-government organisations like the Crippled Children's Association. We are not talking about that school based funding.

CHAIR—What is the source of that money that you are making recommendations about?

Ms McColl—It comes from the Commonwealth department.

CHAIR—Under what program?

Ms McColl—It is targeted funding; it is the special education grant but it is for non-government organisations. It is a small bucket within the total of special education funding.

Senator ALLISON—So these are not non-government schools; they are the Crippled Children's Association—

Ms McColl—No, not schools. They go into schools and provide consultative support. So it is not school based funding.

CHAIR—My information is that the Commonwealth allocated \$23 million to special education non-government centre support.

Ms McColl—Is that Australia wide?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms McColl—There was a table in our submission which indicated that we got almost \$3½ million from the Commonwealth.

CHAIR—It is quite clear that we are talking at odds here. The information I have is that there is special education school support, students with disabilities funding, special education non-government centre support—

Ms McColl—That is the one that we are talking about.

CHAIR—Australia wide the figure was \$23.2 million, and South Australia only got \$3 million.

Ms McColl—Because it is a per capita allocation and the Eastern States would have many more—

CHAIR—The submission that we have from the South Australian government is that there is a higher number of students with disabilities in this state enrolled in government schools, 6.1 per cent, which is substantially higher than the national average.

Ms McColl—That is a percentage; numerically it would be less. There would be fewer students with disabilities in South Australia than there are in New South Wales or Victoria.

CHAIR—Yes, because of the population differences overall.

Mr Dalefield—Per capita funding is always based on the previous year's numbers and the last two or three years, especially in relation to the Autism Association, have seen quite a big jump in diagnoses, which will filter through.

CHAIR—The figures I was quoting were from 2000. They are the latest figures that I have.

Senator ALLISON—Is it fair to say that South Australia has a different make-up in terms of sectors for disability education? I do not know that there is an equivalent to the Crippled Children's Association, for instance, in other states—or is there?

Ms Braybon—There is, actually.

Senator ALLISON—What are they called?

Ms Braybon—The spastic societies, or what used to be called the Crippled Children's Association. But in the other states they have changed their name. South Australia is unique in that at one stage we did have two organisations that provided therapy and equipment to children with disabilities. In the early nineties there was a rationalisation of those two services because both organisations were chasing the same dollar. So the spastic centres took over some core business that we had been running as well. We passed some of the things over to them and they passed the therapy and the equipment service over to CCA. So there is one therapy and equipment agency for children with physical disabilities in South Australia whereas in the other states there are two.

Senator ALLISON—It was made clear to us on our visits this morning that the sector still relies very much on the charity dollar, including Rotary and fundraising of various sorts. How reasonable do you think that is in this day and age, with so much unmet need?

Ms Braybon—It is getting harder by the minute. The charity dollar is obviously very threatened but we cannot function without it, so we just have to keep bashing on. But I do not think it is very reasonable at all anymore.

Mr Dalefield—Since the pokies came in, it is a fact that the amounts raised by organisations have significantly reduced.

Senator ALLISON—The amounts raised by which organisations? Do you mean Rotary organisations?

Mr Dalefield—For fundraising. I can talk about the Autism Association, for example: around the same time that pokie machines were approved in this state, the amount of donations went down dramatically.

Senator ALLISON—Do you know why there is that correlation?

Mr Dalefield—We believe money has been diverted. What people used to give has gone to the pokie machines. That is the change that came in at around that time.

Senator ALLISON—You cannot make a claim for a like amount from the state government's taxes on poker machines?

Ms Braybon—To add a little bit there, the Crippled Children's Association, because we are a therapy and equipment agency, have got another little area that is becoming extremely difficult. The government will provide a certain amount of funding for equipment, but that always has to be subsidised because the cost of equipment has increased an awful lot. We are hoisted with our own petard whichever way we go, because we need to have extra money for that as well.

Ms McColl—But we are talking about non-government organisations. In your question, you said the sectors rely on the charitable dollar. If you are talking about the education sectors, the schooling sectors, I do not think—

Senator ALLISON—No, I am talking about this sector, which is non-government but not private. It is an interesting group. It is essentially a charity group, that is where its roots are, if I am not wrong.

Ms McColl—Sure.

Ms Braybon—That is true.

Senator ALLISON—I pose the question: in this day and age, how appropriate is that?

Mr Dalefield—It is significant, because I am aware that some of them are now charging families for support whereas in the past they did not do that. They are finding it very difficult to maintain the service they are providing.

Senator ALLISON—Indeed. One of the instances of unmet need and dependence on the charity sector provided to us this morning was cochlear implants. I think five were allocated but there was a need for 10, and that it is fairly typical that about half the need is funded by government and the rest is to be scratched together. Does your committee get involved in those kinds of decisions? Are they the priorities that you set?

Ms McColl—That is the Cora Barclay Centre. We certainly do allocate some Commonwealth special ed funding to the Cora Barclay Centre. That is one of the non-government organisations that get this supplementary funding.

Senator ALLISON—For cochlear implants?

Ms McColl—No. The special education funding goes to support school aged children or children who are in early intervention programs but not to actually buy the cochlear implants.

CHAIR—You mentioned the name changes of various organisations in other states. The term ‘crippled’ struck me as a bit odd for this day and age. Is there any reason why there has not been a name change here? Is it not on the agenda?

Ms Braybon—It is definitely on the agenda and has been on the agenda for a while. But we have kind of already answered the question, because the Crippled Children’s Association has been in existence since 1939, and when you pursue that charity dollar they know that name. That does not mean to say that it is not under discussion constantly. Those of us who work with them usually refer to ourselves as staff members from CCA, for very obvious reasons: we do not like it either.

CHAIR—Fair enough. Thank you very much for coming along and talking to us today.

[3.54 p.m.]

PAGE, Ms Stephanie, Executive Director, Student and Professional Services, Department of Education and Children's Services

WINTER, Ms Patricia Margaret, Assistant Director, Disability and Professional Services, Department of Education and Children's Services

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacities in which you appear?

Ms Page—One of my responsibilities is for disability services for children in children's services and in schools.

Ms Winter—My role is to develop policy frameworks for the education of children and students with disabilities and children and students with learning difficulties, and to manage the statewide specialist services for those students.

CHAIR—Thank you. The committee has before it submission No. 238. Are there any changes or corrections that you would like to make to that submission?

Ms Page—No.

CHAIR—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public although the committee will also consider any request for all or part of your evidence to be given in camera. However, I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement.

Ms Page—At the time of preparing the original submission to the inquiry, the department was called the Department of Education, Training and Employment and our submission included information about the VET sector. Our department is now called the Department of Education and Children's Services and it now covers schooling and children's services only.

The Department of Education and Children's Services has a commitment to ensuring that the educational needs of all students are met no matter what their ability, socioeconomic status, location, race or gender. There is a whole of government commitment to the principles of social inclusion and the building of social capital, and with this in mind the new government is implementing a range of strategies to ensure that all students receive the resources they deserve. The focus is to improve and increase student engagement within our schooling system. New teachers will be appointed to public schools in 2003. The government has recently announced 160 new junior primary teachers, and more funding will be devoted to professional development of teachers. There will be an increase in school support officer time in the primary years, particularly focusing on learning difficulties. An additional \$1 million was announced in the state budget. Access to information and communication technology will also be improved and these areas are of particular importance to students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties can be particularly vulnerable to disengagement from their schooling if they are frustrated by limited resources to support their needs. The new focus on social inclusion is particularly reflected in the future planning for the education of children and students with disabilities and learning difficulties. These students often have complex teaching and learning needs that require the collaborative resolution of issues and the provision of services. We are engaging in all the reforms within the social inclusion context.

The implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act has been a significant catalyst for review for us in terms of reform of policy and reform of practice. When passed, the education standards will increase the demands on the system for education provision to a wider range of students with disabilities. These legislative imperatives are driving changes in areas such as policy, classroom practice, support service delivery and professional development. Educators and administrators in South Australia have worked to ensure that our education community and the wider community have a common understanding of what the legislation means by linking its intent with other legislation—for example, the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act—so that it is congruent with the DDA and teacher and other staff health and safety; using it as the basis for disability policy development. For example, we are currently involved in a review of disability services. We are also providing information about the DDA. For example, specialist statewide services are being evaluated to ensure that their suite of programs meets the draft education standards under the DDA.

Other things we are doing include developing resources and programs to empower staff to make decisions with confidence and competence so that they can comply with the DDA—for example, mediation training for designated staff. For some time we have had a policy of individualised planning strategies—for example, the negotiated education plans that develop a logical approach to curriculum and the recommending of achievement and service delivery at the system, local and individual levels. We can talk more about the negotiated education planning process, if you are interested in that.

In working with community groups, we have proactive meetings with advocates and lobby groups. Often we will have meetings with advocates before they want to have meetings with us to see what the issues are and how to deal with them, and we have ongoing relationships with lobby groups and with umbrella organisations for lobby groups. In analysing Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission reports, we have noted findings that professional development of staff is essential—findings such as the *Finney v. Hills Grammar School* matter, which found that students should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Compliance with such significant legislation has caused an increase in demands for resources. The proposed introduction of the education standards in enrolment; participation; curriculum development, accreditation and delivery; student support services; and elimination of harassment will result in an additional cost impact. South Australia has analysed the cost impacts of this proposed subordinate legislation and predicts that cost pressures will be great in many areas, including from the increasing number of identified eligible children and students due to the extension of the definition of disability in the DDA beyond that in the current departmental policy and the introduction of what are in effect national standards where, in the past, states and territories have developed their own ideas about what not discriminating means. The DDA standards will codify exactly what that is at a national level.

The cohort of students identified with a disability will now include children requiring health care support, students with learning difficulties who are currently explicitly excluded from the Commonwealth guidelines for funding in the Commonwealth Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes program and students with emotional and behavioural disorders. Requirement of education providers to provide professional development in relation to the obligation of educators under the education standards is another cost. There will be significant initial cost and continuing cost as new teachers enter the state system. This issue will need to be addressed by pre-service training and ongoing professional development for school communities as well as the adaptation and production of curriculum support materials following the development of individual education plans for all students in the new cohort with a disability and provision of timely support services, especially to isolated areas and especially for Aboriginal students. Additional costs for technology based services and laptop computers with specialised software programs may well be required for individual students.

In relation to current policy, children and students with disabilities have physical, intellectual or sensory impairments and/or disabilities in communication and language. Our policy ensures that the provision of a range of settings, resources, services and pathways for children and students with disabilities are available. There are no residential special schools for students with disabilities in South Australia. The DECS's students with disabilities policy affirms that the neighbourhood school is the first point of contact for initial enrolment for all students. The policy also encourages parent choice and participation in the process and facilitates negotiations to determine appropriate curriculum and support services based on the educational needs of students. You would be aware that our submission outlines that, in 2000, 92.1 per cent of all students with a disability attended a local school site—either in a regular year level class or a special class or unit—and that only 7.9 per cent of students with a disability were actually in special schools.

The current levels of support for students with disabilities are based on the curriculum needs of the student. Direct support is provided to schools, usually through the global budget in the form of cash grants, and there are also special education salaries. Support is allocated to preschools through the Preschool Support Program. District support services—for example, speech pathology, guidance officers, social workers, disability consultants and so on—provide a range of services and programs to support schools and preschools to meet the needs of children and students with disabilities. Other support for children and students with disabilities include the statewide provision of transport, equipment, resources and specialist services. Targeted funding for students with disabilities supports 6.11 per cent of the school population in South Australia. Targeted funding for children with additional needs supports 5.9 per cent of the preschool population. So the figures are 6.11 per cent for schooling and 5.9 per cent for preschools.

The South Australian curriculum standards and accountability framework has been developed in consultation with special educators to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream curriculum. A negotiated education plan is documented within that framework for eligible students to ensure access, participation and achievement in the curriculum for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The development of the NEP involved key stakeholders including parents, carers, the school principal or their delegate, the student, teacher and appropriate support personnel, depending on who has been involved with the child.

I mentioned already that we are updating our students with disabilities policy. A major implementation tool of the updated policy is the proposed education needs framework. This framework will include revised eligibility criteria, an educational needs profile for equitable resource allocation and a risk management strategy to support students with short-term critical needs in schools. The total support package for school and preschool staff, according to the education needs profile of the site, will include financial and professional consultancy and increased training and development including peer, moral, technical and evaluative support.

Several other areas of policy have been part of the policy update. For example, we have been reviewing the arrangements for transport for students with disabilities and the arrangements we have in place for specialised equipment, for professional development, for students with learning difficulties and for statewide specialist services. Throughout all this change there is an emphasis on professional learning for teachers and support staff in a variety of areas—for example, knowledge of obligations under the DDA, explicit teaching for students with learning difficulties and personalised education planning.

Partnerships with community groups, parents, agencies and universities complement the services provided by the department. The support South Australia needs from the Commonwealth includes funding to address the cost pressures to implement the education standards under the DDA, including additional funding for the cohort of students with disabilities in the education standards; professional development for staff about the obligations of educators under the standards; curriculum support materials, following the development of negotiated education plans for all students with disabilities as required under the standards; support services to isolated areas, especially for Aboriginal students with disabilities; and technology based services and laptop computers with specialised software programs that will be required for individual students.

Research and collaborative national projects in the following areas could be very useful: consistent state-Commonwealth definitions for this cohort of students—they do not exist presently; evaluation of intervention programs in the early and senior secondary years; assessment tools and strategies in home languages for Aboriginal students with disabilities, as assessments are very culturally and linguistically problematic for Aboriginal students for whom English is a second language; effective inclusion of students with a mental illness; a student voice in curriculum planning; and distance technologies for learning and service delivery. Thank you for the opportunity to summarise our submission to you this afternoon.

CHAIR—Thank you. The submission has a number of strengths, particularly your advice to us about the future Commonwealth role. The obvious point that you make is on the question of funding. Could you indicate what the Commonwealth contributes to disabilities funding in this state and what the state contributes? What are the numbers?

Ms Winter—The state allocation is about \$100 million for the education of students with disabilities. That does not count all the services that would be—

CHAIR—Bus services and things like that?

Ms Winter—No, that would include that. I am talking about speech pathologists, guidance officers and social workers—the people who provide a service basically in kind to schools. This is about those larger costs to students.

CHAIR—What would the Commonwealth contribution be?

Ms Winter—From memory, I think it is about \$8 million.

Ms Page—I am sorry, I do not know the figure.

CHAIR—Could you take that on notice. We would like the total figure, including the various on-costs associated with the provision of services and the Commonwealth payments to the states for direct grant payments. I appreciate there is always an argument about general purpose and direct specified funds. I read somewhere that the number of students that identified with a disability had increased by about 500 per cent over the last 10 years or so—that is, since the Commonwealth act was introduced.

Ms Winter—That is a particular type of student. The 500 per cent increase is in the number of students with complex health needs. For instance, in 1993 there were about 20 students across the state in our sector that required invasive health care. There are now about 126 of those students. Another example is that in 1993 there were only 10 gastrostomies across the state. There are now 230 of those. That sort of support level is quite significant. What we have done in our state—we did not include this in the submission—is a significant amount of health support planning in our schools. There has been a major partnership between our department and a range of health professionals and community health groups. Particular health support planning protocols have been put in place to ensure that teachers and community health workers know what their role is, and that parents understand the difference between what is possibly the task of an educator and the task of a health support worker. I know we are unique in this state in that we provide access assistants who are funded through state and Commonwealth money. They are people who have been trained through a credentialling process by the Nurses Board of South Australia to carry out various invasive procedures. That is not a teachers' role; teachers are not expected to do it. They understand health support planning, and there has been a lot of training and development done in that area.

CHAIR—I was interested in the Commonwealth's contribution to the funding of services. If there has been this dramatic increase in particular aspects of disabilities, has the Commonwealth funding contribution increased at the same rate?

Ms Winter—No, it has not. In fact, it is quite interesting that in the Commonwealth guidelines they clearly state that they will only fund students who meet the criteria of disability and they will not fund—and they explicitly say that in the guidelines—students who have a learning difficulty that requires remedial attention. However, under the DDA, students who learn differently are very much part of the definition of 'disability'. Therein lies a significant issue.

CHAIR—Have you any indication of the percentage change in Commonwealth funding for any of these areas that you have identified? Are you able to give us any information on that? What is the gap? Has it been growing or narrowing?

Ms Winter—There has been a growing gap from the Commonwealth. If the DDA definition is as broad as that and what the Commonwealth funds is this, it is a very small percentage of a targeted program.

Ms Page—As well as the DDA having the definition of a disability as a condition or a disorder that results in learning differently—and I did not bring my copy of the act with me—it includes a definition of a condition or disorder that results in behaviour. Perhaps the committee has had brought to its attention already—and I am not sure—the very broad definition of disability under the Disability Discrimination Act. If it has not, I would be very happy to provide that definition to you.

CHAIR—I would be interested in that. You raise points about the Commonwealth act and the financial support for it, and I think those are the two questions. There is presumably some funding obligation, if the Commonwealth passes an act that empowers certain people to claim rights of antidiscrimination, flowing from that. That is equally true for states; I would have thought the same argument would apply. You have carried similar acts in this state.

Ms Winter—The South Australian Equal Opportunity Act specifically defines disability as an intellectual impairment or a physical impairment.

CHAIR—So it has a different definition?

Ms Winter—That is right.

CHAIR—If the standards that have now been discussed through MCEETYA for a long period were enacted, what would be the financial cost to South Australia? You refer to increased costs in your submission, but do you have any figures on what it would actually cost?

Ms Page—It has been difficult to estimate precisely, but we consider a conservative estimate to be around the figure of \$19.3 million. When we look at the specific standards required and the measures required—

CHAIR—Sorry—about 20 per cent increase on your current cost. Is that what you are suggesting?

Ms Page—Yes.

Ms Winter—In South Australia, we fund—as I said—that 6.11 per cent, and that is quite high in contrast to other jurisdictions across Australia. Mostly, they are three to four per cent or even lower. We include, as Stephanie explained, as well as impairment an area called communication and language. That picks up quite a number of the students who perhaps would not be included in other states.

CHAIR—So this accounts for the discrepancy in the rate of identification in the state? You work on a broader definition?

Ms Winter—Yes, we work on a broader definition and have done so for quite some years. However, the definition under the DDA broadens it again.

CHAIR—Still further?

Ms Winter—Yes.

Ms Page—It would probably, however, account for the fact that other states' estimates seem to be lower than ours in relation to the cost impact of the DDA standards.

CHAIR—It would follow.

Ms Page—I mean that other states' are greater than ours.

CHAIR—I understand the point you make. Is there a point at which you can say that equality comes with a cost and that it has to be paid? There is no argument against provision of equality of service?

Ms Page—We support the standards. We think they are a pretty good attempt. The Disability Discrimination Act basically says you should not discriminate.

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Page—It does not say what that means and, at the moment, that can be interpreted in a variety of ways and the only way that it can really be tested is in a court of law. We think the standards are a pretty good go at trying to define what 'not discriminating' means in the current situation. I have lived through about five years of negotiations over those standards, and it is—as you would be aware—very difficult to get agreement across lobby groups, interest groups and providers about that. Is your question: do we support what is in them?

CHAIR—Yes.

Ms Page—Generally we do. Our issue is that there was no regulatory impact statement ever done on the legislation itself and there has yet to be a regulatory impact statement done on the standards.

CHAIR—Can I be clear about this: at the last MCEETYA meeting, did the South Australian delegation support the standards or did you support the referral back?

Ms Page—I do not know how our minister actually voted—we have not been told that—but in the lead-up to the ministerial council meeting, the South Australian position was that the legal issues being raised at the time by other jurisdictions could be resolved by amendment to the DDA and that all that would need to be done then would be the cost impact.

CHAIR—Am I clear about this, then: you are saying that if some money were put on the table, there would not be any problem here.

Ms Page—Absolutely.

CHAIR—I like that—straight to the point. And you think about \$19 million is required for this state alone?

Ms Winter—Yes.

CHAIR—That would not all be the Commonwealth contribution, though. On the current ratios, the Commonwealth contribution would be substantially less than that, wouldn't it—or do you expect the Commonwealth to pick it all up?

Ms Page—I do not want to speak for my minister but I would imagine that the South Australian government would say that this is Commonwealth legislation. The state has—

CHAIR—I have never known a state government not to say that the Commonwealth should pay all the bills!

Ms Page—I do not speak for them. The state had legislation.

CHAIR—No, I am not going to ask you that. I am just trying to get the departmental position.

Ms Page—The Commonwealth legislation goes further than the state legislation.

CHAIR—That makes sense to me. In terms of the enrolment of students with disabilities, the discrepancy between the private and the public sectors—between the independent, the Catholic and the government systems—is stark. On the figures you have given, presumably operating on like with like, it is even more so. Catholic Education yesterday told us it was 2.5 per cent for them; you are saying it is 6.1 per cent. Both are substantially higher than the national average or a little higher in the Catholic case than their national average. For the non-government sector it is 1.5 per cent. How do you account for that discrepancy? What is your explanation?

Ms Winter—Again, where our area is different to other jurisdictions, whether or not they are in this state, is that we allocate targeted funding to an area that we call communication and language. That would pick up quite a number of—

CHAIR—I understand why you have a higher number. What I would like to know is: in the department's view, why is there such a marked discrepancy between the independent, Catholic and government school systems?

Ms Winter—I could be blunt and say choice.

CHAIR—We like bluntness in this committee. Is that the end of it?

Ms Page—I think it would be true to say as well that the level of disability might be different between the sectors. I think it would be—

CHAIR—Do you mean it is a class question?

Ms Page—No, I mean that the state government sector has a much higher percentage of students with severe and multiple disabilities than our non-government and Catholic sector colleagues.

CHAIR—That just makes the situation worse. In your assessment, why is it that there are so few students? You do take an interest in non-government schools in this state?

Ms Page—Yes, we work collaboratively on a number of things.

CHAIR—Why do they have so few students enrolled, by comparison to your sector?

Ms Winter—It may also be a funding issue, and I do not have their figures in front of me. For instance, a student with a severe multiple disability in a mainstream or special class—it does not matter where they are in our system—attracts a year level allocation of funding. That can be anything from, say, \$2,000 up to \$4,000. They also attract another \$23,000 or \$24,000 on top of that for the school to work through a whole range of topics in terms of support. They would then have access to a whole other range of support services, particularly from the Crippled Children's Association that you heard from earlier.

CHAIR—Are you saying that is not available across the sector on an equal basis?

Ms Page—No. The CCA type services are available across that. But I guess Trish's point would be that it actually costs a lot of money to cater for those students.

CHAIR—Surely that is not an explanation for why there are fewer of them. The Commonwealth provides five times the amount of money under the states grants act for students with disabilities per capita, or non-government school students to government school students. Surely that is not the factor. It may be 'a factor' but it is not 'the factor'.

Ms Winter—I still come back to the choice. We seem to have quite a good reputation in terms of the education of students with disabilities in this state as a state sector, and that is what parents have chosen.

CHAIR—Do the schools choose?

Ms Winter—Do the schools choose?

CHAIR—Parents might choose. Do schools choose not to have students with disabilities?

Ms Winter—I think in the main, yes, schools do choose. There is a high level of acceptance. There is very strong union support for the education of students with disabilities in this state. But that is not to say that it is absolutely perfect on every day of the week. There would be days when people feel very stressed about—

CHAIR—No, what I meant was: do you think that schools are discouraging students from attending?

Ms Page—One of the issues for us, and we cannot speak on behalf of the Catholics or the independents, is to ensure that our schools are welcoming of all families. When I was speaking about the social inclusion framework within which we operate, one of the things that we have done to help principals make families more welcome is a DDA kit, the *Fair and Reasonable* kit, which is a self-paced learning package for principals. It has everything they need to know about it. We know that when families front up to the front door of the school office there are many signals that they are looking for in terms of being welcomed, in terms of having confidence in how their family members might be treated in this particular place. That issue is very important but we are working very hard on it. I think that that is an element of choice for parents.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Senator ALLISON—Can I pick up on that point? Our first witnesses today, the parents network, suggested that there were some schools where they barely knew that document existed and a lot of teachers had never opened it nor knew what was inside it. What sort of efforts are you putting in place to improve that situation?

Ms Winter—Several things. We run consistently full houses for training and development sessions on those. I particularly do quite a lot of Saturday morning sessions that teachers and principals come to. We also have put that document on our negotiated education plan CD-ROM, which is available in all public libraries as well so that families can get to use it. We also have made it available to the university here, particularly Flinders University, so a lot of pre-service work is going on. But it is one of the many packages that have been available over the last couple of years.

If you think of the two major pieces of reform that have happened in South Australia in the last two years in terms of a development of a new curriculum and the development and implementation of local management, I would have to say that this was a little sideways from those two major initiatives. But certainly we do get full houses when we do implementation and training and development of that. We also have it available through our Special Education Resource Unit. They just recently did what they call SERU Links, which is a major training and development session, and there were over hundred staff at that and that went for over a day and a half. So it is quite intensive.

Senator ALLISON—So would you be confident that that document will be well known to teachers and schools throughout the state over the next 12 months, say, or is there another time frame?

Ms Winter—I think it is well known. Whether people use it is another thing.

Senator ALLISON—Okay. I will ask this question: will it be used in 12 months time?

Ms Page—Certainly, in our estimates of what we need to implement the standards we have included training in materials such as that. We need other kinds of training as well but we have included the cost. Obviously, one of the reasons we have not been able to in-service every single

principal and every single staff member is cost, as well as, to an extent, the priorities that schools themselves set—with local management in schools in South Australia now. Staff are supposed to do five days of training in their own time, so we shortened the school year by five working days. Teachers had that extra holiday, if you like, but they are expected to do five days of professional development on their own during the year and principals will, to an extent, set the priorities for that when they are doing their performance management with staff and when they are looking at what their school needs. A problem for us is whether we mandate training such as this or whether we leave it up to schools. The policies to date have been not to mandate training.

Senator ALLISON—Do you audit schools? Do you find out what is going on there and whether they are using their five days?

Ms Page—Yes, that is done.

Senator ALLISON—Going back to the DDA, I did pick up that your definition for your own purposes of students with disabilities is broader, but has the definition which includes students with disabilities in communication and language picked up students with learning disabilities, in particular?

Ms Winter—It has picked up a range of young people. It has not picked up students with learning disabilities as such, like dyslexia; however, we do have a learning difficulty support team which operate right across the state and they work very closely with schools in a training and development model. Schools negotiate for a customised service in training and development in the area of learning difficulties. Whilst they are not inside that language and communication definition, it is not that they are without any service.

Senator ALLISON—Why would a disability in communication and language not include learning disability? That sounds strange to me.

Ms Winter—It picks up a lot of children with speech disorders or with autism spectrum disorders. In the past it picked up a lot of children who had an impairment as well as complex health needs. It was picking up a range of young people. I believe that if we went in and did a really in-depth analysis of that communication and language area we would probably find that there would be young people there with a mild intellectual impairment but with a specific learning disability as well. It is where people used to say, 'This child has exceptional needs,' and we would put them in.

Senator ALLISON—Where would most of that \$20 million, which you say it would cost South Australia to pick up on the new DDA for education, be spent?

Ms Winter—I believe a lot of it would be spent on training and development and it would complement the amount of funding that has just been placed there by this new government, particularly in the area of learning difficulties. We already have a significant professional development program in this state where we have developed a partnership with Flinders University. We jointly develop and deliver courses. We have done those courses in learning difficulties already, in autism, in Down syndrome—

Senator ALLISON—This is what you are doing; what I am trying to get at is what—

Ms Winter—We would build on that, because those graduate certificates take only 20 people at time and cost around \$60,000 a pop.

Senator ALLISON—Part of this \$20 million would be for more postgraduate studies?

Ms Winter—Yes, and more in-class support for a range of those young students.

Senator ALLISON—Teachers aides?

Ms Winter—Not necessarily teachers aides; we would not make that decision. In this state we allocate funding to schools and they make the decision about whether that is used for more teacher time, highly skilled teacher aide—what we call school services officer—time, training and development for staff, the purchase of highly specialised consultancies or the purchase of highly specialised equipment.

Ms Page—I can explain how we estimated that cost.

Senator ALLISON—Yes, please.

Ms Page—This might make it more concrete for you. We looked at the standards. For example—I am randomly picking one—7.2, ‘Standards for support services’, says:

(1) The education provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that the student is able to use support services used by the students of the institution in general on the same basis as students without disabilities and without experiencing discrimination.

It goes on to give various other standards. It states the standard and then it has particular measures. We looked at each of the measures and asked, ‘To what extent do we already provide this measure? Is it for the whole of the cohort of students defined under the act and is it in current practice? If not, if some elements of that cohort are missing, how much would it cost us to provide that measure?’

It is true that the standards say that you do not necessarily have to provide all of these measures and that in fact you may have to provide things that are not in the standards. Obviously, that is the kind of comprehensive coverage you want in standards, because practice changes and knowledge changes and you want to be able to add things. But it is also true that when these standards become public families will look at these standards and ask themselves whether these measures are being provided for their student. So they will want to see whether or not they are being provided, and most of these measures are highly relevant; otherwise they would not be there. That is the methodology that we used. Does that explain it?

Senator ALLISON—Yes, but I still have some difficulty understanding this. I do not think the committee has had anyone suggest that what is being prescribed in effect by the new DDA should not be done. In other words, people are saying that in order to comply they will provide some extra services to students. No-one is saying that they should not do that.

Ms Winter—I will give you an example. One of the measures is that necessary specialised equipment is provided to support students in participating in the course of the program. In this state up until now under the policy, students with disabilities who are unable to write or unable to produce work at the same rate as their peers are given a laptop computer. These are usually students with physical impairments. By including the DDA definition of students who learn differently—and we have had two cases in this state where we have conciliated, through to HREOC, on issues of learning difficulties—it is quite clear from that experience that the cohort of students to whom we are going to have to provide specialised equipment—laptop computers—will also be the children with learning difficulties. That has been our experience, and that is the demand that we are actually trying to look at now. It is quite significant.

Senator ALLISON—There are plenty of private schools around that require laptop computers as a matter of course for kids with disabilities or otherwise.

Ms Page—Yes, and parents pay for them. We are talking about the state government paying for them.

Senator ALLISON—I understand that. You mention that in the new needs framework there would be a revision of eligibility. Can you outline, under what you expect to be the new framework, who will be eligible for funding assistance and who is currently not?

Ms Winter—We have done a significant piece of research in this area right across the nation, using a whole range of businesses and including the World Health Organisation. At the moment it is for intellectual and physical impairments—sensory and communication—and language. What we are looking at in the future will be autism spectrum disorder, because that is a growing field, an absolutely burgeoning business. There is communication impairment and intellectual impairment and mental health impairment—again a significant area. Physical health is another one and then there is sensory impairment. We have worked through exactly what the criteria should be and what the evidence should be. In terms of intellectual impairment, for instance, we have actually worked with a whole range of psychologists, both private and government, to work out which assessment tools should actually be used, and an agreement has been reached on that. If we were to look at physical health impairment, we do not argue with doctors: the medical diagnosis is allocated and that is that. So that is part of the evidence, but we also have to have the impact on learning from everyone.

I also want to talk a little bit about mental health issues and where we are finding significant issues in this area. In this state we have re-entry schools, as we call them. We have nine re-entry schools where young people, after having six months out of secondary schooling, can return to school to continue their education. That has quite often been interrupted by a disinclination to learn—it might be about socioeconomic status, absolute poverty; it could be about drug abuse.

We are finding now that young people are coming back into our schools with some Commonwealth disability allocation or with some allocation linked to furthering their education and, therefore, going on to employment. Our analysis of that, and I have worked with the principals of all those schools, is that the majority of those young people have a mental illness, usually induced by drug abuse, and that is a whole new area of work for us. It is probably the same in other states, except that they do not have them congregated in the same types of places as we do, the re-entry schools.

Senator ALLISON—What, typically, is that mental illness?

Ms Winter—It can be episodic schizophrenia, usually drug induced again; significant depression; paranoia; that sort of thing. Quite often, those young people come to class with carers that the Commonwealth have allocated for them. It is just really to give them personal support for self-regulation of their behaviour and not about learning support at all. They also would have significant mood swings, maybe have some unpredictable violence.

Senator ALLISON—Are there a lot of Indigenous students in this category? Is that where this focus is?

Ms Winter—Not that we have noticed so far.

Senator ALLISON—What about disabilities induced by petrol sniffing and the rampant social issues in some communities?

Ms Page—Those students would be unlikely to be returning to school—that is the sad thing. Those kinds of students would tend to be lost to the system.

Ms Winter—If we find them at all, they are quite often in our rural special schools, which have only 12 to 15 students in them. They may only return for a while but find it very difficult.

Senator ALLISON—There are more questions I would like to ask but I must stop.

Senator TIERNEY—Ms Page, I think you were referring to the balance between children with disabilities in special schools and mainstream settings and you gave a figure of 7.9 per cent in special schools. Is that correct?

Ms Winter—Yes.

Senator TIERNEY—So 92 per cent of children with disabilities are in mainstream settings. Is that correct?

Ms Winter—That is right. You might want to understand the structure of our mainstream settings, though.

Senator TIERNEY—Go ahead.

Ms Winter—Our mainstream settings have some special classes in them. From memory, about eight per cent of those children are enrolled in the mainstream settings but are in special classes, and you need to understand how they operate in this state in the main. They use a resource based model, which means the students would have a negotiated education plan, and they may well be in a special class for some of the time but they will be across the school for the rest of time. The same operates for units; 3.3 per cent of them are in units. The parents in this state made a very strong choice that they would rather have special units on primary and secondary school campuses with the same principal as the whole school. It is part of the whole

school, and they operate as part of the whole school as a whole school support model. The parents made that choice rather than have any more special schools built.

Senator TIERNEY—How did they express that choice?

Ms Winter—I think Yvonne Braybon alluded to it a while back. There was in the early nineties a place called the Spastic Centre of South Australia, and on that site was a school that we used to support, fund, staff, because it was our school. It was called the James A. Nelson School. When the Spastic Centre decided to removed themselves from that site, the school, of course, was part of that deconstruction. The parents were consulted about where they would prefer to go. A minority of students—and they had severe multiple disabilities—went to Regency Park School. Then we constructed, we actually built, three units on primary school sites to support those families and those students.

Senator TIERNEY—So when you say that there was a survey of parents, you are referring to that one specific site?

Ms Winter—That one specific site, but also recently in a survey in terms of working towards a disability action plan parents have said—and I think it was also said in the one the ministerial advisory committee did on special schools—that they preferred to have their students on mainstream sites with some specialised support.

Ms Page—That is not to say that many parents want their children in mainstream classes in mainstream schools as well. Patricia was referring to a choice between special schools or special units in mainstream schools.

Ms Winter—Yes.

Senator TIERNEY—Given that only 3.3 per cent are in special units and only eight per cent are in special classes and you have only 7.9 per cent left in special schools, how can parents across the whole state, given their locations, have sufficient choice?

Ms Winter—It is always a great challenge.

Senator TIERNEY—Is that code for saying that they do not have enough choice?

Ms Winter—No, not at all. I think it is a challenge because the demographics of this state are such that in the northern suburbs there would be the highest percentage of people with disabilities, including children with disabilities. Then there is a small pocket also down in the south. In the south, the parents have preferred units. For instance, Christies Beach High has a very significant unit for secondary students, but it also has a whole lot of young people with disabilities right across the whole school. That really is about parent choice.

Senator TIERNEY—I am curious about how you could have much parent choice where, on your figures, you have got 80 per cent of children with disabilities in integrated classes without a special unit in that school.

Ms Page—Are you suggesting that more parents want segregated settings than are getting them?

Senator TIERNEY—If there is to be choice, I am saying that if 80 per cent of the children are in these mainstream integrated classes and only 20 per cent are in some other arrangement, given the demographics of the state and the fact that you have got to have special facilities, it does not seem to allow much choice.

Ms Page—I would say that that sort of arrangement reflects parents' views. I am not saying that we are perfect. If anything, there is probably greater demand for mainstream than perhaps we have met to date. I would not have thought the opposite though.

Senator TIERNEY—Let us go back 10 years. How many special schools were there 10 years ago compared to now?

Ms Winter—About three have closed, and they closed by parent decision. The way you have to do that in this state is through restructure processes, which are community decisions. Additionally, there would have been Magill Special School, Piddington Special School—that was in a residential setting on the campus of Strathmont Centre—the James A. Nelson School and Minda School, on the site of the Minda Home.

Senator TIERNEY—With regard to the mainstream classrooms where teachers have children with disabilities in their classes you have mentioned what the parents were thinking, but what are the teachers' thoughts on this? It has been going about 10 or 15 years in this state, hasn't it?

Ms Winter—No, 1981

Senator TIERNEY—Twenty years?

Ms Winter—Yes, it has been around a long time in this state.

Senator TIERNEY—What has been the reaction of teachers to this situation?

Ms Winter—It is mixed. Teachers have always got a challenge in teaching. They have a diverse group of students: they might have a group of students that include Aboriginal students, they might have some students with a hearing impairment or with a physical disability or a learning difficulty. There is a whole range of needs involved.

Senator TIERNEY—If a teacher has students with disabilities, what sort of training do they receive in South Australia to handle the situation?

Ms Winter—In South Australia, Flinders University and the University of South Australia will tell you quite proudly that their training is very inclusive of a whole range of students. As I said before, we have developed a partnership with Flinders University—

Senator TIERNEY—That takes 20 teachers at a time.

Ms Winter—in graduate certificates.

Senator TIERNEY—It is a drop in the ocean, isn't it? What are the teachers receiving? I know what you are saying about inclusive pre-service. We have talked to other states about this. But in this state you do not mandate special education training.

Ms Winter—No. New South Wales is the only one to do that.

Senator TIERNEY—That is right. So students can go through a whole course without receiving any specialist training. I know what you are saying about the rest of the curriculum—I used to be a teacher educator for 20 years. If you are trying to say to me that the average lecturer who has not been trained in this area can meaningfully do this, I would be amazed.

Ms Winter—I am not trying to say that at all. I am saying that we have a partnership with Flinders University in particular, and my staff and other people from the field deliver lectures on a regular basis.

Senator TIERNEY—What percentage of the teaching force is covered or touched by any of this sort of training?

Ms Winter—Quite a significant number.

Senator TIERNEY—What do you call significant—50 per cent, 60 per cent, 80 per cent? Wouldn't it be true to say it is minuscule? In reality it is minuscule, isn't it?

Ms Winter—No. We have made quite a concerted effort to work with—

Senator TIERNEY—Let us look at your concerted effort in in-service. How many days in-service does a teacher get in this state?

Ms Winter—I do not know those stats.

Ms Page—They have to have a minimum of five days.

Senator TIERNEY—Five days to cover everything?

Ms Winter—They can have five days plus, but they must do five days as a minimum.

Senator TIERNEY—Where do they get the plus funding from, to do more days than five?

Ms Winter—From several sources. In this state we have a retraining support scheme which operates right across the state. District superintendents have roughly \$40,000 to allocate in their particular districts. I allocate that for special education plus more. We also have \$200,000-odd a year for graduate certificates. We also have \$200,000 a year for training of SSOs.

Senator TIERNEY—If we do the maths of all that, and if I am a teacher at a school and I really want to do an in-service course, how much am I going to get a year on average for special education?

Ms Winter—It depends. If you apply—

Senator TIERNEY—I have applied.

Ms Winter—You have applied for a graduate certificate?

Senator TIERNEY—No, I am not talking about a certificate. We have already established that that is minuscule. You have said that 80 per cent of these children are in mainstream classrooms, so the vast majority of teachers have to deal with that.

Ms Page—Those figures are available but we do not have the figures on training and development of staff. We could get that for you.

Senator TIERNEY—It has to cover all areas of the curriculum, doesn't it?

Ms Page—Yes.

Senator TIERNEY—You mentioned earlier that you are going to put in special training related to—

Ms Page—The introduction of the standards.

Senator TIERNEY—Yes, the standards. It struck me at the time that you were training the teachers on what the standards were, but how much training were they getting in terms of the pedagogy of teaching children that have special needs?

Ms Winter—I could give you another example. With the development of the negotiated education plan, which is our electronic tool, our CD-ROM, the personnel from 80 schools trialed that and another 100 schools, I believe, were part of giving feedback. We still have a feedback button on that CD-ROM, so that is constantly working through iterations to develop that further. But that is quite significant. Even today there is what they call the NEPwork, which is a network of people who are interested in furthering the development and their understanding of the negotiated education plan. Around 50 people go to that on a daily basis.

Senator TIERNEY—What I find amazing is that—and we have dropped into a lot of special schools—the teachers are very well trained and very dedicated, there are good student-teacher ratios and they are really trying to do the best by these kids, but when we get to this inclusive approach we find virtually no resources to support it.

Ms Winter—In this state?

Senator TIERNEY—In terms of the teachers' training and the support they get in the classroom. If I were a teacher in a classroom with one or two children with disabilities, what

percentage of my time, during the school week, would be supported by some sort of professional support, and what percentage would I be left totally on my own?

Ms Winter—In this state, through local management, we have a thing called the global budget. I explained before that the global budget allocates funding, a cash grant, to students for a year level, but it then allocates 21 or 23 levels of support that are additional for students with disabilities. As I said before, it is up to sites as to how they use that funding.

Senator TIERNEY—So if a child moves from a special school, where they have a certain level of funding allocated, to the mainstream situation, do all those dollars follow them?

Ms Winter—At the end of every term that is possible.

Senator TIERNEY—What do you mean by ‘that is possible’?

Ms Winter—When you allocate funding to a site, say you allocate \$23,000 for a student on top of their year level if they have a severe multiple disability, and say they decide to move schools, the school that has had them up until now will keep that money until the end of term because they may well—

Senator TIERNEY—I am not talking about transition arrangements; I am talking about whether the money ends up in the school which the student attends.

Ms Winter—That is right; absolutely.

Senator TIERNEY—Totally?

Ms Winter—Yes.

Senator TIERNEY—Does that then provide the same level of support?

Ms Winter—Yes.

Senator TIERNEY—Are you sure it does?

Ms Winter—It follows the child.

Senator TIERNEY—Under global budgeting, where they get a lump sum, they are still required by your procedures to spend all that money on that child, in that situation, in the mainstream classroom?

Ms Winter—Yes.

CHAIR—How would you know?

Ms Winter—They have to report through their annual reports on the resource usage of targeted funding. That was introduced last year.

CHAIR—Prior to last year?

Ms Winter—Last year was the first year of global budgets, so it is a whole new world.

Senator TIERNEY—So why do we keep hearing across the country that teachers have very little support? They might have some specialist assistant come in and give them advice. They might have a teacher's aide, who often has absolutely no training in disabilities—unless your state is different. The picture we pick up is that the resource level has actually dropped. We are trying to figure out where it all is.

Ms Winter—We have a students with disabilities database where I can cash up the total dollar allocation every student gets. I have a data manager who can say where all these kids are and all this sort of stuff.

Ms Page—By the way, I do not think any other state could tell you that, from the information we have got from them anyway. But keep going.

Senator TIERNEY—In special schools we see really intensive staff-pupil ratios. Not too many other schools will let us in to see—and we only have evidence from parents, teachers and other groups—but we keep picking up from them that that level of resource support is not there as it is in the special schools.

CHAIR—What Senator Tierney is saying is a concern that this committee has. Would it help you if we were able to disaggregate it? Is it the case that there are higher levels of accountability for the students with higher levels of disability and lesser accountability for students with lower levels of disability?

Ms Winter—No.

CHAIR—Do you think there are the same levels of accountability?

Ms Winter—We have two levels of accountability. The first one is on resource usage and the second one is on levels of achievement. South Australia is just cracking the one on levels of achievement because of our negotiated education plan, with a birth to year 12 curriculum, where all of that is plotted.

CHAIR—So you are satisfied that the accountability mechanisms are appropriate?

Ms Page—No. I would not say that we are altogether satisfied about that. Local management is new in this state. Schools are adjusting to a new system: in the past they had their allocations by staffing, and they now get allocations by staffing and some staffing cash equivalent. Some parents might believe that not all the money that is going to the school for their child is necessarily being spent on their child.

CHAIR—We have had it in Victoria for quite a while; it was a Kennett initiative. As a principal, you save money on teacher relief; you save money on the replacement of teachers by employing those with lower qualifications; you save money by not filling vacancies; and you

transfer funds from one account to another and save on the interest. All of that sort of stuff occurs. Nothing in the accountability mechanism has picked that up.

Senator TIERNEY—That aside, even if you do have support, the classroom teachers are left by themselves for a fair bit of the time, aren't they?

Ms Winter—I think it is interesting that in this state—and, in fact, a lot of my international colleagues when they come to visit say that it is different in this state—it is quite common to see several adults in a classroom supporting a range of students. For instance—

Senator TIERNEY—I am sorry for interrupting you, but we are running out of time. Evidence from another state shows that teachers spend at least 50 per cent of the time with no support at all and have the class to themselves with all ranges of children, including children with disabilities and gifted children.

Ms Page—But you must have realised that the way that schools look and what classrooms look like is different from state to state. You must have picked that up.

Senator TIERNEY—I understand that. There are a lot of fairly common themes coming up in this inquiry.

Ms Page—I am sure there are.

Senator TIERNEY—I just wonder about this lack of training of teachers in this area and about duty of care. Twenty years ago I was at Cordell Hull High School in Seattle. They were talking then about the possibility of being sued by people who had graduated from school but somewhere back in their school history they had not been given proper support, which had changed their whole life. Given the way that litigation is going in this country, does it not disturb you that you are putting teachers in a situation—I cannot think of any other profession that does this; nursing does not do it; doctors certainly do not do it—where they are not trained sufficiently to handle this situation? What about the pedagogy of teaching children with disabilities? Isn't that a worry to people in government?

Ms Winter—As I said before, we take a lot of time to talk to people in the field to find out in what subjects and in what areas they believe they need support. The graduate certificates that we have run have been specifically targeted to that area, as has the retraining support scheme. I believe we are upskilling our staff quite considerably. There is no other state that has—

Senator TIERNEY—How can you say 'upskilling staff considerably', given those budget figures? If you give them five days a year for training in everything, how can you say 'upskilling staff considerably' in the area of disabilities? They might put one day towards that, but there might be other curriculum demands that they need training in, or the school, I assume, under global budgeting often makes the priority themselves. That would be the case, wouldn't it?

Ms Winter—Yes, that is true.

Senator TIERNEY—You would not have a clue whether they are doing any of this.

Ms Page—We do know, for example, that our learning difficulties support team have very good data about the number of schools and the number of staff that they in-service for the whole year. They are greatly in demand, and we know that the in-servicing they do is very specifically targeted to the problem that the classroom teacher has expressed.

Senator TIERNEY—What is the scale of this compared with the teaching force? I am sure it happens, but what is the scale of it? What percentage of teachers get that sort of contact?

Ms Winter—It would be more than 2,000 a year.

Senator TIERNEY—Out of a teaching force of what?

Ms Winter—Would it be about 30,000 or 20,000?

Ms Page—Or 15,000; I really do not know.

Senator TIERNEY—Thank you.

CHAIR—I thank the witnesses for coming today. It is much appreciated.

Subcommittee adjourned at 5.04 p.m.