



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Private and commercial funding aspects of government schools

HOBART

Monday, 2 September 1996

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Members

Senator Crowley (Chair)

Senator Carr	Senator Stott Despoja
Senator Colston	Senator Tierney
Senator Forshaw	Senator Troeth

Participating members

Senator Bolkus	Senator Bob Collins
Senator Brown	Senator Denman
Senator Chamarette	Senator Margetts

Substitute member:

Senator Sandy Macdonald to substitute for Senator Troeth from 12 July to 12 August 1996

Matter referred by the Senate for inquiry into and report on:

The private and commercial funding aspects of government schools. In particular, the Committee will:

1. Describe the nature and extent of fundraising mechanisms - such as voluntary contributions, levies, sponsorships and other marketing arrangements - used by government schools and their associated organisations.

2. Examine State and Territory policies and regulations regarding the collection and use of private funds received by government schools. The Committee will also assess the adequacy of existing State and Territory legislation regulating such practices, and the implications, if any, for the role of the Commonwealth.

3. Identify the purposes for which government schools raise and expend private funds, and describe the impact of private revenue on the curriculum and teaching resources deployed in those schools.

4. Assess the extent to which private funds contribute to differences in the quality

of curriculum and services between government schools, and the implications of this for equity and access.

5. Examine the implications of an expanded private funding of government schools for the implementation of the National Equity Strategy for Schools and for the achievement of the National Goals for Schooling.

6. Consider the implications of increased private funding of government schools on Australia's obligations under relevant international agreements such as the *Convention on Rights of the Child* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

WITNESSES

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Present

Senator Crowley (Chair)

Senator Ferris

Senator Troeth

The committee met at 10.32 a.m.

Senator Crowley took the chair.

BROWN, Mr Parry Edward, Treasurer, Southern Council of Government Schools Parents and Friends Associations, 81 Salamanca Place, Hobart, Tasmania

RAINBIRD, Mrs Carla, Immediate Past Secretary, Tasmanian Council of State School Parents and Friends Associations, 81 Salamanca Place, Hobart, Tasmania 7004

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TYRRELL, Mrs Pip, School Delegate, Southern Council of Government Schools Parents and Friends Associations, 81 Salamanca Place, Hobart, Tasmania 7000

WILLIAMS, Mr Paul Richard, Member, Tasmanian Council of State School Parents and Friends Associations and Vice-President, Southern Council of Government School Organisations, 81 Salamanca Place, Hobart, Tasmania 7000

CHAIR—I would like to declare open and welcome you to this public hearing of the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee. Today's hearing in Hobart is part of the committee's inquiry into private and commercial funding aspects of government schools. I welcome witnesses from the various school parent organisations and from the Tasmanian Council of State School Organisations.

The committee prefers that evidence be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in camera you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I point out, however, that evidence given in camera may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate.

Would any of you like to make some opening remarks?

Mrs Rainbird—I would like to give apologies for Diane Ellson and Grant Herring.

CHAIR—Both from the same organisation?

Mrs Rainbird—Both from our state school—

CHAIR—Thank you. Who would like to start off?

Mrs Thompson—I could say that I have been involved with parent organisations at the regional and state levels for five or six years now and have held office at the

regional level and I know that this issue of the levies has come up every single year. We have discussed it at length both in the regions and at the state level every single year for the past six years. It is not as though this is the first time we have thought about it.

CHAIR—Has the nature of the discussion changed over those six years?

Mrs Thompson—People are becoming increasingly alarmed at the situation. As I understand it, there is a tradition that parents provide a few extras in schools, and at the time of the Cressap cuts in Tasmania we began to provide not the little extras but part of the substance of the school's operating budget.

CHAIR—How do you know that? I do not wish to in any way dispute it, but can you tell us what makes it clear to you what is an operational budget and how you are beginning to contribute to that?

Mrs Thompson—When the Parents and Friends began to participate in terms of being members of school councils, the school councils were expressing a great deal of distress because they were having to come up with parent money to pay for teachers and school essentials. It is not raw data but it is anecdotal evidence. I could not give you the particulars because, like I say, it has been over the years and it has been comments at parent meetings.

CHAIR—School councils were indicating that the funds that parents were raising were being used to employ teachers?

Mrs Thompson—Absolutely.

CHAIR—Is that proven?

Mrs Thompson—Like I said, it is anecdotal evidence. I do not have any proof. I do not have any data.

CHAIR—I might say that it is not a novel comment. We have heard this from other people and I wondered if Tasmania could provide any hard evidence that that was where the money was going.

Mrs Thompson—That comes down to another issue, because every single person who is sitting at this table from the parents' point of view is a volunteer. Many of us have our own jobs or we are very busy and we cannot afford the time, nor do we have the resources, to put proof before you. If we were able to attract some sort of resources to document and to formally do the kinds of things that add credence to what we know, in order to do that we would need some resources.

CHAIR—In fact, if you did that you might be working for the education depart-

ment.

Mrs Thompson—I would hazard to say that we would not be working for the education department.

CHAIR—Does anyone else wish to make a contribution? All of you are prepared to now move with questions? Okay.

Senator TROETH—I read in the Tasmanian government submission that all staffing is determined from central office. An allocation of staffing is made to schools by whatever formula is needed. In that case, how would parents be able to buy the services of an extra teacher, if what you are saying is true?

Mrs Rainbird—In cases like music, for instance, some schools do not have the staff capacity to have a full-time music teacher—or an art teacher or drama teacher or something like that—therefore, they will employ a part-time music teacher who will come in for two or three hours a week. In some cases the parents have provided for that teacher to be in that school because they feel that that part of the curriculum is an important aspect for their children to have so they will opt to pay for that teacher's time. In those situations that does occur in quite a number of schools.

Senator TROETH—And that is cleared through the ministry of education and approved by them?

Mrs Rainbird—It seems to be. I guess it comes down to a school based decision, so it is up to schools to decide whether or not they do that. Some parent associations will object strongly to doing that and others might feel quite happy to be party to that.

Senator TROETH—Mrs Thompson, getting back to what you were saying about having to pay more and more of what you consider to be costs incurred through sending a child to school, do you consider that any of those costs that you are now paying are essentials that should be provided by the school?

Mrs Thompson—In the last two days numbers have been given to me about one primary school and about one high school where the contribution to the school operations from parent levies and private sources is 25 per cent to 27 per cent.

Senator TROETH—Of the costs of—

Mrs Thompson—Of the school's operating budget. I do not know what numbers they are talking about because we as parents do not have the time to investigate full-time how these numbers are reported and what they mean. I mean there are budgets and then there are budgets.

Mr Williams—It is on the record that Tasmanian parents are contributing something like \$22 million to \$25 million a year to the education system for their children's benefit which amounts to about \$350 per child in government schools in Tasmania. If you have three children at school it is over \$1,000 that is \$20 per week.

Senator TROETH—If a parent cannot or will not pay that levy, how do children cope with that?

Mrs Sherwin—It very much depends on the school. In the school I am involved with we have a lot of children that come from homes and they might only be at the school a short time. The school feels that it is not worth while disadvantaging parents that might not have the money. We try to encourage it but we obviously do not disadvantage them and stop them doing things. I have heard of a primary school in the southern area where the children have been denied the end-of-year reports or assessments or they have not been allowed to finish a project or even start the project because the parents have not provided their levy.

Senator TROETH—In my reading of the government's submission it is says somewhere, I think, that schools are to ensure that children are spared any embarrassment?

Mrs Sherwin—I feel that it definitely varies with the individual school. Certainly it is the right thing not to embarrass personally a child but there are schools that would certainly do that. It seems that it does occur in Tasmania.

Senator TROETH—That would exclude children from programs?

Mrs Sherwin—That would exclude children from programs.

Senator TROETH—If parents have not paid the levy?

Mrs Sherwin—Yes.

Mrs Rainbird—It would be a minority. There would not be many schools like that. There are a lot of families on loan issue and the government does provide a subsidy for those children at the schools but it is nowhere near the amount of the cost of taking the child through the school for the year. Some schools will ask parents to pay the gap, for instance, to cover excursions and various things so the children are still part of the program. Most schools, I can assure you, would not ostracise the children whose parents cannot pay the levies.

Senator TROETH—At the other end of the scale, would you have any idea what percentage could afford to pay but choose not to? I mean if it is seen as a voluntary levy, do any of you have any evidence of people who could afford to pay but choose not to?

Mrs Tyrrell—Generally that information is not available to us. We know that there will be X number of families in our school organisation that are not paying.

Mrs Rainbird—It would be a small number again.

Mrs Tyrrell—Yes.

Mr Williams—The other thing is the impression that is being put across in Tasmania that the school levies are not voluntary.

Senator TROETH—That they are compulsory?

Mr Williams—That has been the wording of the policy announced from state education people. It is rather a different outlook from ACT where the minister responsible for education in the ACT has said categorically that school levies are voluntary. In Tasmania they have not made such a categorical statement that they are voluntary. The last thing that was circulated to Tas. Council indicated more that they were compulsory but obviously they would not like to see heavy-handedness deployed in gathering those levies.

Mrs Rainbird—There are some schools that, after a period of time, will call in debt collectors to—

CHAIR—Debt collectors to collect a voluntary levy?

Mrs Rainbird—Yes, to collect a voluntary levy. That has been known, there is evidence.

CHAIR—Has anyone protested that to the courts?

Mrs Sherwin—The way it seems to be stated in paper work that you get through various schools that I know of is that none of it actually says that it is voluntary. It is called a levy rather than a fee but nowhere does it say that this is a voluntary amount of money for you to pay. So it is assumed by most parents that you do have to pay it and there is a time frame to pay it in.

Mr Williams—To be more specific, the last thing that came out to Tas. Council was not so much saying school levies are compulsory but reinforcing the power given to principals through the Education Act to collect those levies; that the Education Act clearly states that principals have the power to collect them and that has the backing of the Education Department.

CHAIR—That is part of your act, isn't it? The Education Act, which is—I do not know when this was amended but the date we have is 1994—pretty recent, and under

division 5 it says:

Subject to subsection (2), tuition fees are not payable in respect of educational instruction provided to any student at a State school during the hours which the State school is open.

But then section (3) says:

The Secretary may authorize the principal of a State school to levy a charge to cover the incidental costs and expenses incurred in respect of providing educational instruction.

and

(4) The principal of a State school, with the agreement of the school council, may charge for activities which are in addition to the normal educational instruction at that State school.

Clearly, the principal would be within the law to set levies of some sort or another, but it does not say that they are compulsory, does it?

Mr Williams—No, it does not; but it is not saying that they are voluntary either. In the tone of the literature that we have been receiving there has not been an emphasis on them being voluntary; it is on the discretionary responsibility of the principal.

CHAIR—When did that move away from voluntary to no statement and an implication that it is no longer quite so voluntary as it used to be?

Mrs Thompson—That would be associated with the Cressap cuts that—

CHAIR—Cressap?

Mrs Thompson—I am surprised you are not familiar with that; there was a report called the Cressap report that was implemented in Tasmania, in 1987-1989. Basically, the heart of funding for the school system was taken away. You have never heard of the Cressap?

CHAIR—I have not. Is that a name or is that a set of letters?

Mrs Rainbird—It's a set of letters.

CHAIR—Okay, meaning?

Mrs Rainbird—It is a report by a committee formed to look into the whole education system budget, and drastic cuts were made right across the board in Tasmania. It badly affected everybody.

CHAIR—Was that in 1989?

Mrs Thompson—Yes. For instance, my oldest boy started year one before the impact. He was in a class with 20 children. My other son started after and he was in a class of 30 children, in the space of a year.

CHAIR—You are saying that about six or seven years ago the word 'voluntary'

faded out?

Mrs Thompson—Began to fade. Schools' backs were against the wall, they needed to provide for the students and the government was not going to be forthcoming with the resources so the onus went onto the parents to pay for it.

CHAIR—In the schools that have a voluntary contribution or a non-designated voluntary or non-voluntary contribution, who is involved with that? Is it the principal or is it the school council in conjunction with the principal?

Mrs Thompson—It depends very much on how each school is organised. Those issues are all clouded by the fact that each school can operate very individually. Some schools have school councils who really look at things; other schools have school councils where—I do not know what you want to call it—hand-picked individuals go along with what principals want, and in other schools there are token parents and friends organisations who do what the principal wants and there is no school council. There are other organisations where the parents and friends are very active and very vocal but they do not have a school council per se.

Senator TROETH—So it is not constitutionally necessary for a school to have a school council?

Mrs Thompson—We are currently in the mode of transition on that, so our education act says one thing but what falls out in the schools is different. There is quite a lot of variation even in terms of the levies. A couple of times we have tried to collect some information, but it was confounded by the fact that some schools as part of the levy, say, charge for all school excursions, insurances and extra costs, and other schools charge those things separately. So you cannot that easily—

Senator TROETH—There is no uniform accounting structure?

Mrs Thompson—A measure of it would be very sophisticated. I would say that we would need \$3,000 to \$5,000 in order to do a proper survey to find out what is really going on, and it would have to be done by someone who is professional, that understands the complexities of that situation.

Mrs Rainbird—Tas. council did do a survey in February 1994. I can table that if you wish to have it.

CHAIR—Yes, that would be good. Can you tell us briefly what it has found?

Mrs Rainbird—It just averages out. This was done by our regions. In our Tas. council we have three regions: the north, the south and the north-west. Each region was asked to survey their schools. We have gone back to 1992, 1993 and 1994. In 1992 the

maximum levy paid in schools was around \$110—this was primary schools—and in 1994 that had gone up to \$150. In high schools of course it does go higher. There is not a lot I can say about this.

CHAIR—How did you find this data? Was it by writing to schools?

Mrs Rainbird—We surveyed our schools.

CHAIR—How did you do that?

Mrs Rainbird—We sent out survey forms and schools filled them in and sent them back.

CHAIR—Who filled them in?

Mrs Rainbird—The parents.

CHAIR—The parents and friends?

Mrs Rainbird—Yes, or school councils.

CHAIR—Or individual parents?

Mrs Rainbird—No, it would not have been individual parents, it would have been through the school P&F.

Senator TROETH—So each school, if it has not got a school council, would have a parents and friends association?

Mrs Rainbird—Yes, it would have a parent body.

Senator TROETH—So there is some form of student-parent representation at every school in Tasmania?

Mrs Rainbird—Yes.

Mrs Thompson—The response to that survey was voluntary, so we did not get a response from every single school.

Mrs Rainbird—Yes. It was not a huge number of responses that we got, but the data that we did collect we have collated.

CHAIR—How many schools?

Mrs Rainbird—I do not know.

CHAIR—Do you know how many schools in those three regions?

Mrs Rainbird—Over the whole state we have 240 state schools.

Mrs Thompson—About 110 in the southern region.

CHAIR—Okay. You offered us a copy of that?

Mrs Rainbird—You may have that, yes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

Mr Brown—Just building on the levy situation, what I found in more recent times is that the school is allocated a budget, and then that budget is broken up into the various expenses. More often than not, annually, we decide upon the levies. In more recent times, my feeling is that the levy figure has been pretty well assessed on any shortfall of that budget if you do want specialist teachers or, alternatively, if there are areas that the school, or the parents of that school, wish to develop a little bit further than the funding you get from the government will support.

As an example, when we started at one of the schools that I am involved in at the beginning of the year, with the cost of the books plus the levy they had two separate figures: the cost of the textbooks plus levies. Then there was a total. We found that year that our levies dropped substantially, but the following year it was my suggestion that we include the books and levies in one total. We found that it picked up substantially because we were relying a great deal on those levies to support the school curriculum for the year.

CHAIR—That is very useful, Mr Brown. Perhaps you could tell us what you thought the levy was to cover. Was it just shortfall for books and teachers?

Mr Brown—No. My idea of the levies is for excursions, say, science materials, the little extras that you do at the school from time to time that you are going to incur in the year's curriculum. The parents contribute to that. My thinking was that it became a little bit more than that: if parents were suggesting that they wanted music, art, and there was not the funding to enable that to occur, I feel that part of that funding was allocated to meet the request of the parents for those little additional at that school.

CHAIR—I have some more questions that I would like to follow along that line, but I will ask Senator Ferris if she would like to ask some questions now.

Senator FERRIS—I am interested in the extent to which children in the playground might be aware of other children whose parents may not have paid the fees. I am interested in issues such as the confidentiality of the school records; whether teachers in the classroom in fact know which children have not paid the fees; whether, if the school has any children who are state wards, those voluntary levies are paid, and to what extent other children may be aware of that. It seems to me that the issue of confidentiality is quite important in the social structure of the playground. Do any of you have any views or information about that?

Mr Brown—The only thing that I am aware of, being on councils and being on parents and friends, is that we have no idea as to who is and who is not, but I know at times a question may well be asked as to what percentage of the school are on what is known as the free list. I think annually over the last few years that has escalated quite dramatically. But to say this person is on it and this person is not on it, I certainly would not be privy to that. Whether or not the teachers are, I don't know.

Mr Williams—It may not necessarily be an issue of confidentiality because children themselves know from which level of income they are coming to a fair extent, and they talk about that. With the fickleness of children's friendships, one week's buddy can be next week's 'You bludger'.

Mrs Thompson—Last year in the middle of December, for other reasons, I rang around to a number of the schools in the rural area in southern Tasmania trying to get some parents' views on something. Something that came up in more than one school for discussion on the telephone was concern that in the smaller rural communities people know each other and people know what is going on in a more intimate way than they do in the urban areas where there is more anonymity amongst individuals.

So in rural communities confidentiality issues are much more significant, because in order to be on the free list papers have to be filled out and the fact that one family returns an envelope means that the other families have seen that family return the envelope. It is probably less so with the children, but certainly at the parent level people in smaller communities are very interested in who is paying and who is not paying.

There is a fair bit of strife in school communities about some people not paying and some people paying and whether they can really afford it but they are just not paying or whatever. Also there are people with values who believe that in a democracy where a free education should be available, it is not appropriate to charge fees. So those people would protest by not paying and sticking to their value system. There is strife in the school communities about fees in the first place which causes poor cohesiveness and teamwork for whatever reason that parents get together to do things.

Senator FERRIS—On the issue of foster children, it would be interesting to know whether the state department here in Tasmania is paying voluntary levies for children who might be placed in schools. It would be an interesting indicator of whether the government believes that they are voluntary levies.

Mrs Sherwin—We have had state wards at my school and foster children. If they come in part way through the year, we quite often find that the levy is not paid. But if they come in at the beginning of the year, it seems they are paid if they are in for the whole year. We quite often have foster children and state wards come into our school four times a day to two weeks or whatever, basically to get them into a system and then within two weeks they might be put into a home or whatever and then they are taken out. So our school quite often finds that that money does not get paid.

CHAIR—What do you understand by the state paying the voluntary levy? Is this the pre-contribution bit?

Senator FERRIS—Or an addition?

Mrs Sherwin—No, this would be part of the free list. It is like reimbursing.

CHAIR—I thought that was what you were saying. So when you say the state picks up the tab—what is it called?

Mrs Sherwin—The free list.

Mrs Rainbird—The loan issue.

CHAIR—How much is that worth?

Mrs Rainbird—In primary schools it is around \$42 per child and in high schools it is somewhat more. If children move from one school to another where they start the year and have paid their levies, it does not move on with them. If they move half way through the year, they are just absorbed into the next school because the levies have been paid already and there is no pressure on them to pay again at the next school that they go to. It is just once a year.

Senator FERRIS—The other issue that I was interested in is the degree to which schools or parents and friends associations feel under pressure to accept corporate sponsorship on a one-for-one basis, for example, from a fast food chain, if the children or the family spend money and bring the docket to the school and the school then gets \$1 from the fast food company towards the cost of some essential equipment such as computers or something. So there is an encouragement by the school community itself, for example, to patronise one particular store. Does that put any pressure on any of the schools that you are associated with?

Mrs Thompson—Certainly when my children were in primary school that issue came up and parents protested and the practice was stopped at our school.

Mrs Rainbird—It is a school to school decision again.

Mrs Thompson—Yes, I know.

CHAIR—Is it increasing in some schools in Tasmania?

Mrs Rainbird—Yes, I think so.

CHAIR—Who, in fact, gets the sponsorship? Who goes out to get it?

Mrs Rainbird—Often companies will approach a school, and at other times schools might approach some companies.

CHAIR—‘Schools’ here meaning staff?

Mrs Rainbird—No, probably parents. Again, it depends. If it is a decision made at a school meeting, if it is endorsed by the principal, then it will go ahead.

Mr Williams—Sometimes the approach has come through our Tas. council office that the executive officer of our organisation has been approached a number of times by people who want to get a funding scheme into the whole state-wide education system, so they think the best place to start is Tas. council state school P and F.

CHAIR—Can you give us an example?

Mr Williams—Yes, VIP Home Services. I am not sure who made the initial approach, but students can do odd jobs and raise funds for the school as well as themselves.

CHAIR—How would they raise funds?

Mr Williams—By being paid for the work.

Senator FERRIS—You are saying it is like a scout's bob-a-job?

Mr Williams—Yes, only the funding is set up for a school instead of a scout group. Other approaches have been made—various confectionary companies have approached us.

Senator TROETH—We all know about that.

Mr Williams—Yes, we get lots of approaches.

Mrs Rainbird—Yes, they come through schools all the time.

Senator TROETH—Yes.

CHAIR—What was the response to the VIP approach?

Mr Williams—I do not believe that we have taken it up, nor are we likely to.

Mr Brown—I saw VIP picking up cheap labour. Looking at the short-term arrangements and not the big picture, it was a wonderful way for schools to generate some income. However, the VIP people were certainly doing alright out of the deal as well. We brought it up at our school and I certainly did not support it. In the points which we put over, we indicated that it certainly was not the way to go.

I have always worked on values and morals more than anything else and that is the way I would like it to be always. But the way things are at present, you are being worn

down progressively just by force of numbers. I have always maintained that we have to have set standards and we have to maintain those standards, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep the standards up.

Mr Williams—I would like to back-up those comments. As a parent group we are concerned that corporate sponsorship of schools does not become exploitative and affect the attitudes to money of the students in an unhealthy way. We do not particularly want to see a future generation of ultra-pragmatists. We would like to see productive people who can do productive work in the community in the future. But we are not interested in raising our children to be automatons for corporate fundraising.

CHAIR—It will be interesting—as I think you are saying to us—to understand what messages would have been passed to the children if that sponsorship had been incorporated, at least as you have explained it to the committee. If it was a percentage of VIP's involvement for advertising or something else, it might be different. But to use—as you said—the students as non-paid labour or the equivalent then being paid to the school would certainly create interesting messages for the students, would it not?

Mr Brown—Yes.

Mr Williams—It does. Other messages are conflicting with the prevailing educational philosophy. You see 'Able to work as an effective member of a team' on every job description that you can lay your hands on these days. So there is an emphasis in schools on training our children in cooperative behaviours for learning exercises.

Then you get a corporate sponsorship scheme coming into a school, which emphasises competition, through a prize for your school that some other school does not get, a class getting a reward that another class does not get or even students within a class getting a reward that other students in their class do not get. It is counterproductive to the general educational thrust of helping to engender cooperative, productive people.

Mrs Thompson—I hope that the fundamental question that really underlies all of this discussion is: what sort of society is ours and what do we believe in? If we believe in equity in education, this whole business of fees and levies is complete hypocrisy. There are a range of incomes in families in government schools, and whether or not they can afford it goes beyond what we are talking about here. We are talking about equity and free education for our people.

The Tasmanian population of government school children is approximately 75 per cent of all the children that are in schools in Tasmania. We are saying that 75 per cent of our population will be educated according to what they can afford, and we will get the benefit of what they could afford for our society. That is what I believe the thinking is behind the idea of levies and user pays that seems to be so prevalent in this system.

I feel alarmed for our society because—as has been stated in several of the parent responses, including that of ACSSO, our national parent organisation that has submitted a response—parents have been voicing these concerns. If we do not look at that central issue, we get lost. The very idea that there is a levy and it is being used to support the school system is probably against the foundation of what this country is all about.

CHAIR—Thank you. Do you have a question, Senator Troeth?

Senator TROETH—You said that a lot of the imposition of levies had dated from the last six to eight years. Possibly, government has been less able to afford some of the technological advances in education that have been made in schools since that time. For instance, let us take the provision of computers at a primary school level. For a government to provide every school with a computer for every child would be economically unlikely, if not impossible. Is it therefore impossible to expect parents to contribute a small amount towards the provision of better education facilities for their children?

Mrs Rainbird—Parents have provided umpteen dozens of computers, amongst a lot of other things. In a lot of schools, it is probably the parents that have provided all the computers in the school through a variety of fundraising functions and different things.

Mrs Sherwin—Certainly, a lot of those parents would like to think the schools would be able to provide the computers through their levies. But most of us are realistic enough to realise that fundraising is what pays for the computer equipment, for the updating and for those technological advances. Certainly, with our school it is the outside fundraising—outside of levies—that has provided that.

Mr Williams—To take up the equity issue again, specifically relating to computers or other major, expensive items, if we are to be reliant on fundraising or levies in the local school to raise money for equipment like that there will be wide variations from one school to another, according to the discretionary income levels in those communities.

Senator TROETH—I certainly did note that, but I also noted in the Tasmanian government's submission, even reading between the lines of bureaucratic speak, that there are very definite allowances made for the degree of remoteness and the degree of every category of disadvantaged students and that there are weightings made according to that. The government would seem to be making a genuine effort to address that sort of discrepancy that you are talking about in terms of the money that it spends on schools and the weightings that it gives to different areas.

CHAIR—Unfortunately, we are getting pretty close to the end, and I wondered if I could put in a couple more comments on which I would like to get your views. I think the point that has been raised in the last few minutes is really very interesting, that is, the question of equity in a free education system for our children, and whether or not

computers, for example, are a nice extra that schools have or whether they are now part of mainstream education. I wonder whether anyone here would care to comment on how you define what is core, or central, education and what is therefore to be funded by government apart from the so-called non-core or extra issues that parents and friends can properly fund.

Mrs Thompson—I brought along something along those lines. I have a boy in year nine, and this is the textbook that he is using. I would like you to note its condition. It was reprinted in 1979; it was first published in 1973. That is 23 years ago. The book is 15 years old. Notice the quality that is in this book at the moment. How would you feel if your child came home with a book like this in their hand? Do you think that that society is valuing the education that child is getting? That is essential, in my mind—that children have textbooks to read. This is a disgrace. I think the government has a responsibility to provide books.

CHAIR—According to the clear statements from education departments, books, paper, pencils and so on would be a separate category from the costing of staff. As I understand it, the levies that the minister or the secretary allows schools to raise or to ask parents to pay would be directed towards non-staff costs, as in books, pencils and so on.

Mrs Thompson—But the books that my children get in their schools are a set of empty exercise books and a few pencils. That is what I see from the levy.

CHAIR—Are the parents in Tasmanian schools that you represent aware of what is defined as core educational requirements and what is outside that normal, central—

Mrs Rainbird—I think that is very blurry.

Mr Williams—It is blurry, but things that we use to determine that would be things that are essential for gaining the outcomes which are required for the eight different learning areas and what the community expectations are of a graduate of the system. That would include, in this day and age, computer literacy, amongst a whole lot of other literacies and numeracies. Therefore, there needs to be equity of funding across the entire education system to provide the resource materials, be it current textbooks or computer equipment, so that there is no injustice.

Mrs Thompson—There would be an opportunity for the corporate sponsors, if they were sincere about what they wanted to do, to fund the technology in schools in a pooled fashion. So they could say, 'This is what industry wants to do, we want to make sure the technology is in those schools because we need that skill in our work force' and then pool that money into a foundation for that purpose.

CHAIR—This is certainly an interesting idea and it certainly runs counter to some of the comments that seemed to be coming through earlier, that the schools in Tasmania

were very shy of corporate sponsorship. Certainly, the lollies—‘lollies’ here meaning the ones that are selling those sorts of things—have not been acceptable.

Mrs Thompson—If the sponsorship were such that industry gave as a block and then the funds were disbursed equitably across the system and they were thanked as a group—

CHAIR—We are coming to the end of our time. I hate to cut across anybody here, but I want to ask you for a couple of comments. On the one hand, Tasmanian schools are saying that they support the equity of a free education. It seems to me to be a bit contradictory that you have a free education but you are able to raise a levy. That seems to be something that a number of you have indicated is a puzzle for you, too. But, at the moment, given the funding, Tasmanian parents—whether they are on council or parents and friends—are going about raising levies in most schools, or is it all schools?

Mrs Rainbird—Yes.

CHAIR—Can I just ask you who collects it?

Mrs Rainbird—The school.

Mrs Tyrrell—The school administration, not the parents, which does happen sometimes in New South Wales.

CHAIR—The ‘school’ probably means the secretary to the principal?

Mrs Sherwin—The administrator.

CHAIR—The administrative officer; okay. Are all those contributions receipted?

Mrs Sherwin—Yes.

CHAIR—What happens if you pay week by week?

Mrs Rainbird—You can do. Some schools have that option. I know in my school we have just discussed this issue of levies and we will probably have three options for different ways to pay—an up-front levy or payment with a discount. Because parents want itemised accounts of where their levy money is actually going, most school are doing that now. So you will get an itemised account showing exactly what your levy pays for.

CHAIR—Does it ever say that it is used to pay for staff time? Some of you indicated earlier that in some places it is used to buy staff time. Has it ever said that?

Mrs Rainbird—If it is, then it should be on that piece of paper. Generally, I do

not think so. But it can have things like rubbish, cleaning—

CHAIR—The collecting of rubbish, we presume.

Mrs Rainbird—Yes. Curriculum development—that sort of thing. The parents and friends' association should be able to discuss those openly and decide whether or not that is an appropriate fee to pay.

Mrs Sherwin—That is what happens at your school, but it does not necessarily happen at every school.

Mrs Rainbird—It does not happen at every school.

Mrs Sherwin—It certainly does not happen at ours. We have options on varieties of ways to pay our voluntary levy. But unless you belong to the P & F or the management advisory council, you actually don't find out where that money goes to.

Senator FERRIS—Can you pay by other than cash? Can you pay by voluntary work, for example, in the school grounds?

Mrs Thompson—No.

Mr Williams—No.

Mrs Rainbird—That is another voluntary contribution.

Mr Williams—Working bee participation is expected as being part of a good member of the community.

Mrs Rainbird—If parents pulled out all their voluntary time and all the money through contributions that they put in, I do not think schools could survive.

Mrs Tyrrell—There is something that has concerned me since I moved to Tasmania 3½ years ago. In the schools I was involved with in New South Wales, the primary school had a \$15 a year levy per child and a maximum of \$25 a family. I moved down here to a primary school where it was \$80 per child. So if you had two children it was \$160. In the high school up there, it was \$45 in years seven to 10 or \$50 if you were in years 11 and 12, and that included the provision of your textbooks. I came down here and for years seven to 10 it was \$125 and for years 11 and 12 it was \$150, plus you had to buy your own textbooks. That has been of great concern to me because my children were getting a good education in New South Wales and they are getting a good education here, but why am I paying three or four times as much?

CHAIR—Are you prepared to give us those figures?

Mrs Tyrrell—Yes.

CHAIR—Would we be able to have those on the record?

Mrs Tyrrell—Yes.

CHAIR—Are you happy to tell us where in New South Wales this school was?

Mrs Tyrrell—Yes; it was in northern New South Wales.

CHAIR—How far north.

Mrs Tyrrell—Just short of the border.

CHAIR—Tweed Heads way?

Mrs Tyrrell—Yes; I am talking about Murwillumbah High School and a primary school called Uki.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that. We will get those figures. Is it the wish of the committee that the figures be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The figures read as follows—

CHAIR—Do you have some notes, Mrs Thompson?

Mrs Thompson—Yes, I prepared something for you today that I wanted to submit. It has to do with looking at valuing education, and there is something about the literacy rates in Tasmania at the moment and how it looks as though we are joining the Third World in that area.

CHAIR—Thank you for that. Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

CHAIR—Mr Williams, you have a further comment?

Mr Williams—I would like to make one final comment regarding corporate sponsorship. I was recently discussing this issue with Norm Green from the Durham County Board of Education in the Province of Ontario, Canada. He described the working relationship that Durham County and the schools have with GM Canada in which GM Canada appears to be genuinely interested in improving the quality of education to provide better outcomes, for example, teacher exchanges with corporate personnel et cetera and funding for schools.

They appear to be altruistically motivated to get a better system of education so that eventually there are better, more productive graduates from the primary and secondary school systems, rather than it being a corporate sponsorship which is based on short-term corporate interest in bolstering the profit line. That is the kind of corporate sponsorship that parents would quite welcome to see happening. But we would like to have some input on those kinds of arrangements and negotiations were they to come to pass.

CHAIR—We have to wind it up. It always gets going just at the end, doesn't it, which is a terrible shame.

Senator TROETH—I just had a question. Apart from corporate sponsorship I know that in every school there is parent fundraising by one means or another. Would any of you like to give us an estimation of the proportion of the school's operating budget that you would think your own fundraising would contribute, apart from corporate?

Mr Brown—Can I just say that it is a difficult one to assess, not knowing the total budget of the school. But we have a fair at the high school and we raise between \$20,000 and \$25,000 at that fair. I have been involved in the fair for some time and it is so terribly difficult to get other people to lend a hand. We had one chap who took two weeks off from his work to organise the fair. We have got to the stage now that I am going to donate \$100 every year instead of doing the fair or anything. It is going to be a tax deductible \$100 because it is going to be allocated to library books or a building fund. I am more than happy to do that because I am just sick and tired of this—

Senator TROETH—I can imagine.

Mr Brown—I have not got the time, and the effort is just unbelievable.

Mrs Sherwin—And it is always the same people.

CHAIR—Mr Brown, that is an interesting way to get the Commonwealth to put in some of their dollars. It is called a very clever part of cost shifting. And I am not sure you should give the education department any more ideas—they are sitting down the back listening. They are smiling; we are all smiling. Joke! Joke!

I thank you very much for your contributions today. The trouble is we do not really have time in an hour to do justice, but the committee is very appreciative of your being bothered to come and make those comments from the parents or the parents and friends side. As a very last question, do you often get the chance to talk to the department about these issues and to negotiate or be clear about what is core curriculum and what are extras and add-ons, so that school councils are clearer about what the decisions are that they have to make? Do you feel as though you have enough access to the department and/or the minister, or do you have to go through a regional inspector?

Mrs Rainbird—We generally have a very good relationship with the department. We can generally get in and see somebody when we need to, or when we ask, and we often have members of the department come to our state executive meetings and discuss various issues. And this is one on which we have had discussions with them.

CHAIR—But what happens when the parents of Tasmania say, ‘It is very nice of you to advise us if we are going to have to do this or we can do this, or whatever. We don’t want to. We are tired, tired, tired of paying to subsidise this state’s education system. We don’t wish to be told what we are entitled to do. We want to tell you that we are not doing it any more’? Have the parents ever had a voice of that sort, or have you ever made it clear that the parents’ contribution has run dry.

Mrs Thompson—I can respond to that. There are positives and negatives there. The positive thing is that we have an annual conference and our process is to put forward motions from individual schools to the annual conference. And in areas where the department can, through the minister, they do certainly take those motions on board and they act on them. We are, I hope, about to begin to do some research to find out how well they have been responding. But our sense is that they have responded very well over the last six years. However, when it comes to money, sometimes the intention is there in relation to requests and a little bit of money is put somewhere where much more money is required to really do the job. As a parent organisation, we do have problems mobilising our group to advocate because of—

CHAIR—All the things you have said in terms of your dedication, the calls on your time et cetera.

Mrs Thompson—Too busy fundraising, and the parents are focused on local school issues.

CHAIR—Mr Williams, a last comment?

Mr Williams—We also have a problem with the federal government’s not granting sufficient funds to the state level in tied grants for education. If federal funding to the state government is going to be just a lump of money and the state decides what they are going to do with it and how much goes into education, that is going to make it harder to

guarantee a sufficient level of funding for education in the states at the government schools.

CHAIR—That is a very useful point on which to conclude this session. Unfortunately we do have to finish. I thank you all very much for your contribution.

[11.40 a.m.]

BOWER, Mr David James, Consultant, Resource Planning Service, Finance and Facilities Branch, Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development, 116 Bathurst Street, Hobart, Tasmania

JACOB, Ms Alison Joan, Director of Educational Planning, Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development, Box 169B GPO, Hobart, Tasmania

CHAIR—I welcome the witnesses from the Tasmanian Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development.

Ms Jacob—I have to apologise. I am replacing Mr Neville Behrens, who is our Director of Finance and Facilities. Unfortunately, he is caught up with budget estimates committees this morning, so I really am sorry about that.

CHAIR—The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but should you at any stage wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence, or answers to specific questions in camera, you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I point out, however, that evidence taken in camera may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. The committee has before it a document which is numbered 63. Is there any extra material you would like to table at this stage?

Mr Bower—Not at this time.

CHAIR—Would you like to open the batting with some introductory comments and then the senators will put questions to you.

Mr Bower—The main topic that we came prepared to talk to would be school levies. School levies in Tasmania have moved in focus over the last few years. Historically, the education system provided the school buildings, the teachers and the facilities for children to learn. Parents provided the combustible, consumable type materials used by the students themselves—

CHAIR—Meaning?

Mr Bower—Meaning books, textas, woodwork materials—

Ms Jacob—Cooking ingredients.

Mr Bower—Whatever the children used, the parent historically provided. It used to be a case of you got a book list from the school, a set of materials that your child would use during the year, and you would front up at your local shop and you would buy the materials and present them at the school.

For a variety of reasons, we have now moved away from that. Schools have a bulk purchasing power not available to individual parents. We can get items cheaper. By the items themselves remaining school property and being loaned out to the students rather than being owned by the students, there is also a sales tax exemption that applies so, once again, they come cheaper to the parents.

It is easier for the school also to collect most of its fees up front at the start of the year rather than going, cap in hand, every couple of weeks for an extra \$2 here and \$2 there. So rather than a parent providing the materials and paying as activity occurs, we have moved towards the situation where there is an up-front levy charged by Tasmanian schools which is sought from parents at the start of the year.

The authority to raise levies is contained in the Education Act that was proclaimed last year. As such, it is the will of the government and the people that levies be raised in our schools. We do not really regard it as being a voluntary contribution—the words that are used in other states—but we do regard it as a fee that we would like from parents unless the parents are in financial circumstances that make it difficult for them to pay, in which case we provide all the basic materials that those eligible children require.

CHAIR—When was the first Tasmanian Education Act?

Mr Bower—I do not know.

Ms Jacob—It was 1932.

CHAIR—It was 1932. What happened in Tasmania before that?

Ms Jacob—That was the one that we were using up until the new act which came in last year. That is the one that I am most familiar with. But I presume that there would have been one prior to that. I would have to check on it.

CHAIR—Can tell me what the general intention about secular education is in this state? Is there a preamble to your education act that says, ‘Tasmania believes that people of this state are entitled to X’?

Ms Jacob—There is a very general preamble. I guess the most recent information in that regard would be in the departmental strategic plan, which outlines the goals and the major strategies for the education system for any particular year. Basically, the values are based on the *Hobart Declaration of Goals for Schooling*, so that would be our general framework.

CHAIR—Does your Tasmanian Education Act make any statement about what you are doing with education?

Ms Jacob—It does, but only in the most general terms. Would you like us to table the act? We can certainly do that. It basically just provides the framework for the education system.

CHAIR—Does it talk about secular education?

Ms Jacob—Not specifically. It mentions it in the sense of what the general system is aimed at.

CHAIR—Is the state system a secular system or is it a religious system?

Ms Jacob—It is certainly not religious, but I do not think the act specifically refers to its being secular. I cannot recall a particular aspect where that phrase is used.

CHAIR—Other state education acts do refer to a ‘free, secular education’. Does Tasmania do that, or has it done so?

Senator TROETH—There are no state religious schools, so I guess the definition would be by general assumption rather than exclusion.

CHAIR—If you could find something on that, and on the early origins of the Education Act in this state, that would be very useful.

Ms Jacob—Yes.

CHAIR—The act says, under section 41:

Subject to subsection (2), tuition fees are not payable in respect of educational instruction provided to any student . . .

What does ‘tuition’ mean?

Mr Bower—We would take that to mean the actual fees or costs incurred in providing the tutor, the instructor or the teacher.

CHAIR—It would mean the teacher but not, for example, computers.

Mr Bower—No.

CHAIR—You did say earlier that the tradition was, in this state, that school buildings, teachers and facilities were generally picked up by the department.

Mr Bower—That is correct.

CHAIR—You say books, texts and woodwork materials—that is a splendid example; I am enormously chuffed about ‘woodwork materials’—are traditionally picked up, among those who can, by the parents themselves.

Mr Bower—That is correct.

CHAIR—Where does ‘computer’ lie?

Mr Bower—It lies, as a prime responsibility, with the Department of Education.

CHAIR—So you would put that under ‘facilities’?

Mr Bower—Certainly. It is not a component, in any way, shape or form, of school levies. However, parents organisations historically have undertaken a number of fundraising activities. Quite often they will target those funds towards an area of the school where they see a need. As computers are an area of increasing need in this state, as in most others, quite often they are targeting computers at the moment. But it is a choice made by the parent organisation raising the funds in consultation with the school.

Ms Jacob—Each school does get a school resource package, which is the main money for running the school. The items which the school is responsible for buying are listed in one of the attachments which we have provided. That would certainly include everything from the maintenance of the building right through to the library, teacher aids and so on. All of those things would be considered to be departmental responsibilities.

Mr Bower—Most of those funds are not tied. In other words, we deliver to schools a school resource package and they may choose what elements they wish to purchase. If schools choose to place emphasis on computers and buy a number of computers, they are free to do so; whereas, if they choose another area of school endeavour, such as maintenance of buildings in a special minor works project that they wish to undertake, they can choose to put their money into that area. It is their choice.

CHAIR—That is a very interesting thing. I will come back to that shortly, because it is convenient to have parents there to foist those sorts of choices onto when, according to what you said, both of those should be covered by the department.

Mr Bower—No. In the school resource package, it is the school’s choice as to how they use the funds; but, for additional funds above those raised by the parents, obviously the parents can then target any area they wish.

CHAIR—Yes. Convenient things, parents! Somebody said that the free list was about \$42. Is that for a primary school child?

Mr Bower—I do not have the exact figure, but it sounds about right and it is for a

primary school child. You used the term 'free list'. Students who are unable to pay school levies and who, through their financial circumstances, are eligible for what we now call the student assistance scheme have their basic materials provided by the school. The school is funded for those materials in two ways: they get a special student assistance scheme grant per child—and, for a primary school child, it is in the order of \$42—and in addition to that a lot of their funds are delivered in accordance with socioeconomic indices which deliver additional funds to those schools that have a number of parents in deserving financial circumstances.

CHAIR—So that is according to your formula. I have had a look at that material, and I think it is a nightmare, and no wonder! Is that in the act, or is that actually guidelines on how you will do it?

Ms Jacob—It is guidelines.

CHAIR—The nursing home legislation has got formulas which are equally mathematical and very puzzling. You are saying that some of the money is allocated directly per child, and some is allocated to the school because of a percentage of children in socioeconomic need.

Mr Bower—Most of our formulas are per-child based. If you target the maintenance formula, 60 per cent of the funds for the maintenance formula are delivered on a per capita basis.

CHAIR—Can we come back to that in a minute? I want to ask you more on this \$42, and I then want to give my colleagues questions. The \$42 seems to me to be an assessment by the department of what might be an amount to cover students' books, woodwork, chalk, paper, et cetera.

Mr Bower—Correct.

CHAIR—I am very interested to know, if you assess it as \$42, why you do not pay it for all students. I know the answer to that. And if you do think it is worth \$42, why are levies in fact much more than \$42?

Mr Bower—Levies comprise a mix of elements being termed either required or discretionary. The student assistance scheme direct reimbursement only covers the required components of levies; it does not cover the discretionary components of levies. Where the parent can still be asked to pay, the school can choose to withdraw that service or to provide the service using other funding sources.

CHAIR—'Discretionary' is a much nicer word than 'voluntary', isn't it, Mr Bower? Can you tell me what discretionary funds are directed to?

Mr Bower—Discretionary activities are those that are considered to be in addition to the normal educational activity at that school. The precise definition at each school is really left for the school and its community to decide.

CHAIR—What is normal?

Mr Bower—For instance, if the curriculum included a study of Shakespeare and *Hamlet* was an excursion being attended as part of the core English curriculum being undertaken that year, I would regard the excursion fees to *Hamlet* as being part of the required levy system. If, however, there was a visit to the Hobart show or to the circus that did not relate to the educational prime activity being undertaken, it is an addition and, therefore, a discretionary activity; if the child does not attend, the core educational program is not affected.

CHAIR—We could be looking at the basic physics principles of the rides in the fairground as part of the show.

Mr Bower—That is why it is up to each school to determine what they regard as being core.

CHAIR—Yes, I thought I would be sucked into that, Mr Bower. This is an area that I would like to come back to; discretionary funds is the euphemism now for voluntary payment.

Mr Jacob—We acknowledge that it is a very grey area between—

CHAIR—Especially as the act says that the state and the minister shall be responsible for core curriculum. It is pretty unusual to say, ‘We are responsible for that but the parents can define it.’ That does not seem to be consistent with my general understanding of the minister’s responsibility.

Mr Jacob—We are not saying that the parents define it; we are saying that that would be a decision that the school made in consultation with the community. It would not just be up to the parents to define it; it would be a combined thing between the staff and—

CHAIR—But you are saying that some of those decisions are made locally.

Mr Jacob—Yes.

CHAIR—That seems contrary to a clear understanding of what is core educational needs. I can see how parents can be a bit distressed and fraught here. If there is pressure on the school for its running budgets it could off load it onto parents.

Mr Jacob—Yes, that is true.

Senator FERRIS—I am interested in the issues that I raised previously with the parents' delegation: compulsion, choice and confidentiality. They impact on the children. Turning first to the issue of compulsion: has anybody tested whether there is a legal requirement for this? Is there any evidence that people have been taken to court; if so, what sort of outcome has there been?

Mr Bower—At the moment we are in a state of change: from what we used to do under the old education act to what we will now be doing under the new education act that was proclaimed in July last year. There was a set of interim levy guidelines that went out to schools in January of this year. I understand that is part of the submission that has already been made to you. Under the old levy guidelines and under the instructions that are still in the school management handbook, which is available to all schools, a school may pass a debt for unpaid levies to a collection agency to be acted upon. However, schools are told that they cannot threaten or proceed with legal action. In other words, they can use a collection service to try and chase the money but it cannot be processed to court.

Our legal advice is that, under the new education act, for the first time, the unpaid levy becomes a debt that can be chased in common law, and this is a course of action that a number of our schools are recommending to us. It is an issue that we have not made any decision on whatsoever at the moment; it is still being discussed. The guidelines that we issued to schools in January of this year are silent on that point. But, no, it has never been the case that people have been taken to court for unpaid levies.

Senator FERRIS—Just moving to the issue of children in the playground and the confidentiality of who has paid and who has not paid: does the department have any guidelines on that?

Mr Bower—Yes. All our guidelines on levies and on the student assistance scheme stress utmost confidentiality and the avoidance of embarrassment at all costs.

Senator FERRIS—Presumably, it will be difficult to do that if parents are taken to court.

Mr Bower—People are not taken to court.

Senator FERRIS—Under these new guidelines, they very well could be.

Mr Bower—There is the potential, but it is not being pursued by the department at this stage. It is subject to discussion with the minister.

CHAIR—Senator Ferris's point is a very pertinent one, is it not? How would you,

if you did proceed to the court, guarantee the privacy, confidentiality or anonymity that you refer to in other parts?

Ms Jacob—That is probably one of the major reasons why we have not done that: to protect the children—and because we would realise that, for the sake of a relatively small amount of money, there could be an enormous amount of ill-will created between the school and the parent concerned.

Senator FERRIS—Clearly, the schools are applying pressure to do that—or some schools are, as you have just said.

Mr Bower—Yes.

Senator FERRIS—Moving to the other point that I raised, I am interested in the degree to which corporate sponsorship is offered and in fact is very attractive to a school—for example, if a fast-food outlet happened to be just along the road from the school—and the degree to which families might feel under pressure to contribute on a one-for-one basis. I believe that on the mainland this has occurred. Does the department have any guidelines, or is it really left up to the school, as the parents said before, to decide? It does seem to me to be another area where there could be some guidelines or at least a framework for guidelines.

Ms Jacob—At the moment, we adopt the national framework, the national code of practice, on sponsorship. All schools are aware of that and it is certainly in the management handbook. If we are aware of any particular large sponsorship campaign—for example, a national one—it is quite frequently that schools actually ask us for advice on that and we would provide additional advice. The main consideration is to ensure that there is no duress or that the students are not put under any pressure to participate.

Senator FERRIS—My last question relates to the degree to which, for example, a teacher of Japanese or music or art or something else might be employed by the levies that are paid or the voluntary contribution that is paid. How is that teacher regarded in relation to the school for coverage of third-party insurance? What is the legal standing of that teacher, in relation to that of other teachers who might be employed by the department?

Mr Bower—Once again, levies should not be used to employ staff. Therefore, that should not be a situation that occurs unless it occurs under section 41(4) of the act, which says:

The principal of a State school, with the agreement of the school council, may charge for activities which are in addition to the normal educational instruction at that State school.

Therefore, if languages were being taught by the school as part of its regular educational

program, the employment of the person should be covered by the education department. If that were seen as being an extra-curricular activity, offered to a few people, almost in a money making capacity, then it would come under section 41(4) of the act, and that could not happen unless the school council were to agree that it should happen.

CHAIR—Could I just interpolate there, Mr Bower? You say to people that the education department is responsible for all tuition or the fees of teachers but that funds raised and levies cannot be used to pay for teachers, and that that is all covered by the department. However, I have to say that this is the language of utter confusion, if not obfuscation. We have heard that some 300 teachers—equivalent to 80 full-time staff—are employed by privately raised funds. Can you confirm this?

Mr Bower—I do not know where your figures come from. I would be most surprised to find that that was the case.

CHAIR—Can you confirm if there are any teachers employed that way?

Mr Bower—With the school resource package funding that is given to schools—for maintenance or to buy computers or whatever—they may choose to use those funds to employ teachers additional to those allocated to them under the teaching quota system.

CHAIR—In which case, can I then reiterate Senator Ferris's last and very important question? What is the insurance status, for example, of those teachers?

Mr Bower—They are employed by the department.

Senator FERRIS—In an indirect sense?

Mr Bower—No; in direct sense.

CHAIR—How can you say that?

Mr Bower—The school resource package is a package of money passed out to schools. Schools take a percentage of it as cash. If they wish to employ teachers, they tell the department about it when they set their budgets, and that teacher allocation, the staffing component, is withheld by the centre, and the centre employs the teachers direct. Our schools do not employ teachers.

CHAIR—The 'centre' meaning what?

Mr Bower—Meaning the education department. There would be no difference in the status of most teachers employed under school resource package funding, as opposed to those under the normal teaching quota.

Senator FERRIS—I think you have demonstrated that. There seems to me to be a bit of confusion there. A teacher allocation that might appear on your department's records as applying to a particular school may not, in fact, be the figure for the entire teacher numbers at the school?

Mr Bower—It may be supplemented by a resource package.

Senator FERRIS—Yes. And what might have been given to the school to use for rates and rubbish might finish up employing the French teacher. That might be entirely acceptable?

Mr Bower—There are some funding sources which are tagged. Maintenance funds is one of the most obvious, and there are obviously some bills that the school must pay, such as rates—although that has not happened yet. Grants for rates are still paid centrally.

Senator FERRIS—Yes. I just used that as a—

Mr Bower—Yes. Schools are given as much flexibility over the funds that we devolve to them as we can possibly give to them. They can choose which elements they purchase, including teachers.

Senator FERRIS—Let me ask one final question that has been handed to me on sponsorship and it is a very good question: has the department ever thought in a more corporate sense about looking at managing sponsorship itself? Has it considered, for instance, being more proactive, in a more structural sense, or would you see that as being entirely up to a school, however proactive or reactive that school council and headmaster might be?

Mr Bower—Historically, in this state, I would understand that most of it has been dealt with at the school level, but I am unable to answer you as to whether the department has looked at it proactively.

Ms Jacob—To my knowledge, that has not happened. If we were receiving some sort of corporate level sponsorship, I guess that we would be concerned about what the sponsor would be aiming to get out of that, and how that might, perhaps, jeopardise what we were trying to do.

Senator FERRIS—Yes. I guess it would go back to Linda's point that, if a large employer group in a place like Tasmania, for example, saw that there was a particular need for future employees to have particular skills, the employer group might make those skills available in the schools in the region around its sort of employment. It certainly does address the equity argument more freely than, perhaps, the Huonville submission indicates. It is a problem.

Ms Jacob—Certainly, in relation to businesses and industries providing their services within the department, that certainly does happen. I suppose the example that comes to mind is under the Australian vocational training scheme where we have got about 70 programs operating across 14 industries. I guess that where those industries are providing training and where they are making their businesses available to have students working in them, that is certainly a form of sponsorship.

Senator FERRIS—That is almost a first step in a way, isn't it?

Ms Jacob—Yes. I think that the industries concerned would see that as certainly being beneficial to them, and we certainly see it as beneficial to the students.

Senator FERRIS—I am certainly not critical of them—

Ms Jacob—No. I think that it is a mutually beneficial form of sponsorship, and something that we see as very productive.

Senator FERRIS—Sure. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Just before we move to Senator Troeth: Mr Bower, how would you count teachers insured under the department who are not listed as being paid by the department under the allocation to a school for teachers?

Mr Bower—They are paid by the department in that we have chosen not to deliver the cash to the schools. We have held it for the centre, and we still employ them using departmental funds. They are part of our teacher count.

CHAIR—So you are actually counting staff under the teachers in this state even though they are actually paid for by money outside the standard allocation for staff?

Ms Jacob—They would be counted as additional to the staff that were allocated to that school. So a school would receive its allocation of teachers, and the staff that were being funded under the resource package would not be counted as being among those teachers. But for the purposes of employing those people, and establishing their work conditions and so on, they would be treated the same as other teachers.

CHAIR—I think they would but I am interested in the figures, just what Tasmania is doing providing staff across the schools. As I understand what you are saying, if those teachers are counted in there would be a false indication of a higher allocation of staff than is actually the case. The staff will be there but they are not to be funded out of the state staffing budget.

Ms Jacob—When it comes to figures based on our total number of staff, they would not be included for the purpose of student-teacher ratios and that sort of thing. But

for purposes of employment they would be treated the same.

CHAIR—How do you count these teachers. Would you know how many there were across the state?

Mr Bower—Not offhand, no. I am unable to answer your specific inquiry about whether they are included for our national statistics. For all of the material that I see, they are identified separately as a number, but I would need to check that point and report back to you.

CHAIR—We would appreciate that, thank you very much. As this committee seeks to find the best balance we are finding out considerable areas of confusion—what is defined as core, what is not, what parents can raise, what they cannot and how staff are counted. We have been given a lot of evidence that suggests staff are being effectively increased. It looks good for the state that it has got this many staff but we discover that some of them may be funded differently, as Senator Ferris has just been able to discover. That leads to confusion about which figures are being counted where and this committee would be very concerned to know. If you could help us in any way at all then that would be great.

Mr Bower—It is an easy question to answer. It is simply that we do not have the information available.

CHAIR—I appreciate that, Mr Bower. I think that honesty puts you in front of some others, although not in this state, of course.

Senator TROETH—With regard to those teachers who would be hired under those circumstances, is their qualification level and suitability for the teaching assessed by your department in a central capacity?

Mr Bower—Yes, they are exactly the same. They are employed by the education department and therefore they must meet our qualification requirements.

Senator TROETH—There is a case to be made out for parents whose levy is funding the employment of that particular staff.

Mr Bower—The levies, once again, should not fund staff.

Senator TROETH—But if they do?

Mr Bower—They should not.

Senator TROETH—We were given some anecdotal evidence that that had happened.

Ms Jacob—Was it levies or was it through fundraising that the parents and friends had done?

Senator TROETH—I would have to refer back to the *Hansard* but in that sense, non-department money, if I can put it that way, is being used to employ staff. For a teacher to be placed on the payroll then it must happen with the knowledge of your department given that you would have to approve that teacher. What would then happen in the case of a conflict between parents who legitimately felt that they had assisted in raising the money to employ a person who they wanted to teach their children music or French or whatever, but that person was for some reason or other not acceptable to the department?

Mr Bower—I am not aware of any instances where that has occurred. Our staffing is organised by our district superintendents who work with the school principals to give them the best possible mix of staff having regard to the teachers available. They would normally sort out any conflicts. I am not aware of it happening or of it being an area of concern to either parents or the education system in this state.

Senator TROETH—Perhaps you could report back to the committee if there are, at present, any education department staff employed and funded by parent contribution—whether that is fundraising or levies.

Mr Bower—I am unable to do that.

CHAIR—Could you tell us then, how many are funded under resource allocations?

Mr Bower—Yes.

CHAIR—Which is, I think, perhaps another way of parents saying to us that they feel the resources are being reduced to pay for staff and, therefore, they are using their money to increase that. I think what we need here is as much information as you can give us, because parents are clearly under the impression that they are contributing, in their parent contribution, to the salaries of staff.

Mr Bower—Certainly levies should not be paying for that area. The school has a budget. The school's budget is formed in bulk by resources devolved from central office. They also receive resources from their parent organisations which go into their budget. What they would do is simply use their parent money to do some school maintenance, and leave more of our money available for salaries. Therefore, I cannot answer the specific question you first asked.

Senator TROETH—Yes, I understand that. You spoke about—in some cases—the collection of the levies being put in the hands of debt collectors, but gave us an assurance that parents would not, in the foreseeable future, be taken to court over this and that no

threats would be used. Debt collectors—even with the most altruistic of motives, that is, to collect the money—still would see the collection of the money as the imperative for being in business. Would there not then be a conflict between no threats against parents—of whatever form that may take—and the money being collected by debt collectors?

Mr Bower—Obviously it restricts the debt collectors in their activities. They need to alter their standard letter which threatens legal action to adopt one that does not. But this was in our previous guidelines to schools on levies. Our current levy guidelines are being refined. The document that went out to them in January did not give them the option of using debt collection agencies, although it did not take back that option either. That is an issue currently to be discussed with the minister. We will go out to schools during September with firm guidelines for levies in 1997. The issue will be resolved before the end of September.

Senator TROETH—I was also interested in the figures which we were given comparing levies here with those of similar education levels in other states. You would have heard that there is a much higher dollar value here. Is that because of Tasmania's lower population base and the fact that it still has to provide comparable educational facilities?

Mr Bower—Once again, the levies should be for the consumable items used by students in the classroom situation, and for excursions and performances that the school deems appropriate. I have no information on what is happening in other states.

Senator TROETH—But you would still take the point that it does seem to be a much higher levy here than in some of the states, in dollar terms?

Ms Jacob—We heard the submission which you heard earlier, and I am afraid that that is the only information I have.

Senator TROETH—Are parents aware, in a detailed sense, of what their levies pay for? I gather levies are given a receipt. Is there a transparent process that operates in schools so that parents are aware of the details which you gave us as far as discretionary and core payments are concerned?

Mr Bower—Certainly there should be. We have been emphasising parent involvement in the levy setting process and advocating transparency with levies for a number of years now. The document that went out to schools—that is part of our submission to you—has a couple of paragraphs to half a page which says, 'Please tell your parents what you are doing and why you are doing it, and involve them in your decision making processes.' However, we did do a survey of levies at the start of this year and a lot of schools did not respond in the way that I would have wanted them to respond, and that would lead me to believe that perhaps they are not being transparent at the moment to their parents.

Ms Jacob—Can I add to that just very briefly that each family in our state school system was provided with a parent information book at the beginning of this year which does have a section on levies, and that makes it very clear to parents that they should expect to have that transparency provided to them and that really schools have responsibility to do that.

The other point which might be important is that we are really very encouraging of schools having school councils, although only about half of our schools do have school councils. School councils are very much involved in the whole budgetary process and accountability for the budget in the school, and that includes any money that is raised outside of the normal school resource package. So that is another level of accountability or transparency that ought to be in place.

Senator TROETH—But perhaps the explanation of what your levy provides should be reinforced with the school councils.

Mr Bower—Certainly we are taking every opportunity to reinforce that with schools and we are going as far down the track as we can of requiring them to report fully to their parents on what are the components of the levy. Down the track of these are the required components. These are the discretionary components and as we go further down that track we would expect a group of parents to opt in and opt out of certain discretionary components.

Senator TROETH—I note the comprehensive nature of student assistance that is given by the department in your submission. Do you have complaints from schools, and I am talking about school administration, that the student assistance does not provide enough in terms of covering the basic needs of children whose parents cannot afford to pay?

Mr Bower—Yes. Obviously schools would quite naturally seek as much money as possible, and they do have some good grounds for looking at that area. We would also argue that you cannot directly compare our student assistance scheme per capita reimbursement to the levy, because you would need to take off some things, such as the discretionary components, such as the profit that their book room may make from certain items, et cetera. Some schools do sell the items directly to the parents, therefore they are not sales tax exempt, therefore we need to take sales tax off. When you take those off, it gets a bit closer. But every year as part of the budget process we do two things. We review how much money is available to put into schools under the students assistance scheme, and we also look at the sector differentials that we have to see whether they need correcting or not.

Senator TROETH—What percentage of parents do pay levies?

Mr Bower—I understand that about one-third of parents are eligible for the student

assistance scheme, which would mean that levies are being sought from two-thirds. The actual number of unpaid is an increasing area of concern to our schools, but I do not have actual details.

Senator TROETH—Not even a percentage?

Mr Bower—I can provide you with some information from a survey two years ago which I do not have with me, if you wanted some additional—

Senator TROETH—That would be of help. Thank you.

We talked about the provision of computers and similar technological education facilities; to what extent is the implementation of technology dependent on the individual school's capacity to generate its own funds?

Mr Bower—Once again, schools are provided with resources which are untagged. It really is up to the school to determine its priority as to whether it wishes to buy computers or not. I think the system would argue that funds are there, assuming the school allocates sufficient priority to it, to purchase whatever computers are required.

Senator TROETH—If that expenditure is dependent on the administration's agreement or otherwise, what happens at schools where there is not a high or formal level of parent participation—schools that have only a parents and friends committee, rather than a fully-fledged school council? Would that not mean that, if the parents wanted something like computers and the school did not, there would be little chance of that being achieved?

Mr Bower—The school and its community should work together in budget preparation, even when there is not a formal school council.

Ms Jacob—That would certainly be one of the reasons we would encourage schools to have school councils. Then, under the act, they actually do have a right to participate.

Senator TROETH—But there is no formal requirement for schools to have school councils.

Ms Jacob—No. Under the act they are optional.

Senator TROETH—Thanks.

CHAIR—You mentioned a survey on the levies.

Mr Bower—Yes.

CHAIR—Would you be able to provide any more detail about that to the committee?

Mr Bower—A formal report will be written within the next two months. That can certainly be provided. Is there any specific direction that you want?

CHAIR—I think the committee would welcome details such as how many schools there are, how many schools returned the information and how much you know about how many schools. I presume you know a whole lot about schools because of the formulae you have for allocating. You have also given me a new word I have never heard of: rurality. I do thank the Tasmanian education department for a new word. I can see that your formula does take into account the socioeconomic and distance calculations, particular contributions and so on.

Mr Bower—Yes.

CHAIR—Have you got data from every school about their levies and about the percentage of student assistance scheme recipients in each school? You should know where they are, right?

Mr Bower—Yes.

CHAIR—We would welcome that, and anything else in terms of the bean counting, to start with.

Mr Bower—There are 234 schools in the state. Every school responded to the survey at the start of this year. It is a requirement under the new Education Act that the secretary approve the school levy, and the survey instrument at the start of this year was the mechanism for the department to actually approve the school levy. Therefore, if they did not respond, theoretically they had no authority to charge levies this year. So we got a 100 per cent response for the first time ever.

CHAIR—That is a very good opener. Tell me, then, how there can be the sort of difference that says, for instance, that the average charge in kindergarten is \$71.08, the maximum is \$170 and the minimum is \$20. You have discrepancies of enormous breadth and width. For the record, I note that Mr Bower nodded at this stage. How can you go from \$20 to \$170?

Mr Bower—There is a very large variance in levies between schools. Levies have historically been set by the school and its community. This year is the first time ever that the secretary has needed to approve a school's levy structure.

Consideration is being given to capping school levies. That is under discussion with the minister at the moment and, once again, will need to be finalised before we go

out to schools with levy guidelines. That is to overcome some of that variance.

There are counter-arguments to that: why should we restrict the schools that are charging high levies? If they are charging high levies, that means they have very materials intensive programs. It means their community, in approving their levy system, have said that they want a very heavy consumable item program. Therefore, why should we be able to say, 'No, I'm sorry, you can't have that. You are going to cut back your program and live within a contribution of \$X from parents.' However, there is the belief that the variance is too high and that we do need to look at it. At the moment, the proposal is that it be capped.

CHAIR—That is interesting, Mr Bower, because certainly it seems like a very thoughtful response to the difference at year 6 between \$50 minimum and \$230 maximum, or in year 10 the minimum being \$75 and the maximum being \$630.50. When I hear you say that one-third of your students are eligible for student assistance across those schools, I presume that does not mean there are some in every school.

Mr Bower—They would just about be in every school.

CHAIR—Presumably that may be slightly higher in some schools than in others. But, given that you have just given me the answer to the question I did not ask—but thank you very much—and given that there are in fact student assistance recipients in every school, the difference between \$75 and \$630, for example, or \$20 and \$170 in kindergarten, would have to be disadvantaging for some of the children in those schools, particularly as the state thinks \$42 is a sufficient levy.

Mr Bower—If I could use as an example that \$630 fee, schools were asked to respond to us in our survey by telling us all of the fees that they actually collect from parents. A lot of them, unfortunately, did not answer that question. They told us what they regard as levies and left alone a number of other items. They were told to exclude camps and books, and were asked to tell us everything else. The school that responded with the \$630 return did tell us everything. There were such things as \$110 in leavers' activities, including a \$15 T-shirt. I think they had a very heavy materials component in their woodworking area.

A number of our country schools also charge \$130 for home economics, whereas it is about \$30 in a city school. The reason for that in the country schools is that each week the student fronts up home with a meal for the family. In other words, there are reasons for some of these differences.

CHAIR—Takes the food cooked at school to a family in the community?

Mr Bower—That is right.

CHAIR—Did the education department or parents think that they were subsidising meals-on-wheels to families?

Mr Bower—No, it is to their own family. They participate in an educational cooking class and their product actually goes home. That is the justification the school puts up for having \$130 as its home economics levy.

Senator FERRIS—I am interested in the issue of portability. We heard some of the parents say earlier on this morning that if a child spends one term at a school that charges \$75 for year 10 and two terms at the school that charges \$630 per term, or vice versa, there is no attempt made by either school, or any school, to pick up the balance that might be remaining at a school that the child no longer attends. I was just wondering whether you have ever given any thought to issues of portability?

Mr Bower—Portability is a very interesting issue. It has been thought about and there are so many complications that, other than dealing with it on an individual case by case scenario basis, it has been decided at the moment not to issue guidelines on that topic. Both schools and the parents are encouraged to talk over the issue and see whether they can reach a compromise.

It is not a case of saying, 'I pay \$100 for the year. I left one-third of the way through, therefore two-thirds should go to my other school,' because their levy bases could be very different. Also, a lot of the levy costs are actually paid out at the start of the year when the books, et cetera are purchased. The excursion programs could be very different. One school might have a low levy but charge for excursions, et cetera, as they go. The other school might have a fully composite levy where everything is included. It really is a matter of looking at what the parent has paid, what activities differ between the schools and, hopefully, coming to some mutual arrangement to resolve the problem.

Senator FERRIS—I presume you take my point that some schools could be profiting quite handsomely from this?

CHAIR—How many children are moving from one school to another?

Ms Jacob—I cannot give you an exact figure, but it is almost up to 20 per cent turnover of students in some schools.

CHAIR—We have run out of time. If my colleagues will excuse me, there are a couple of questions which I wanted to ask. On table four of your submission on levies and charges, you point out a significant difference in the levy between academic emphasis and vocational emphasis, with the vocational emphasis coming out higher except on a minimum. This certainly is a challenge in equity. Maybe you do need more costs to run a woodwork or a home economics course but, even so, the cost of the equipment and so on is probably much higher than one volume of Shakespeare's combined works.

Mr Bower—That is the reason.

CHAIR—Taking that into account, I am very interested in how you deal with the matters we have already discussed, the difference between maximum and minimum—you mentioned a cap on levies—but also the correlation between the schools' levies and your factoring in for high need areas, depending upon socioeconomic factors. How do you get all these together?

Mr Bower—At the moment there is no correlation between the indices used to deliver departmental funds to schools and school levies; they are regarded as different funding sources for different purposes, although they are not mutually exclusive—no inter-relationship is used in our formula.

At senior secondary level the vocational type course is more expensive than the academic course reflecting in the materials used. The colleges themselves, in setting their levies, are very aware of the equity issue. As far as possible they try to set general levies across the board regardless of the subjects chosen.

CHAIR—Presumably this has a bit to do with your department's consideration of something like a cap?

Mr Bower—No, that is a different issue again.

CHAIR—So it will not take into account the equity issues?

Mr Bower—The cap? Once again, we have not discussed this fully with our new minister. There is a strong argument for not capping the senior secondary grades—years 11 and 12 being the non-compulsory schooling grades. It is also complicated by the fact that there is a very large percentage of part-time students in the senior secondary colleges doing one or two subjects. Therefore, if you impose a cap, it could well be that, to recoup money, the schools would up their general component. Therefore, if you are doing one subject, you might pay a full levy component. Lots of issues here are still unresolved.

CHAIR—They certainly are. I am still not quite clear. If you have a school that, for example, has a high number of student assistance recipients—let us say one of those special socioeconomic areas, maybe 30 or 40 per cent—what is the highest percentage, 50 per cent?

Ms Jacob—I think it goes even higher than that.

CHAIR—Okay, 60 per cent. Let's be reasonable and say 50 per cent of the students are student assistance recipients and \$42 is assessed by the department as being adequate. How is that school, seriously, going to compete when down the road there is a school that is able to actually set \$630 or \$250 or \$110 as the levy?

Mr Bower—The funding formula has a very high socioeconomic component. That socioeconomic number actually arises from the number of loan issue student assistance scheme students in the school. Therefore, those schools that have a greater number of student assistance scheme recipients have a higher socioeconomic index that delivers more general funding to them to try to compensate for their disadvantage.

CHAIR—That may be true. But you have made it clear that the way the school funds are allocated means that one stream of money may not necessarily get to the other. If the socioeconomic index gives a bigger grant to a school, how would that ensure that more grants would be allocated under other than teachers salaries, maintenance and equipment so it might get to books, chalk, et cetera for the students, even though they are not paying the levy?

Ms Jacob—The guidelines that the schools receive with their resource package do make that very clear. The reason that some schools are receiving more funding is that they have more students who have that need. The expectation is that those students will receive positive discrimination in the way that they are funded. So schools are very clear on the reason for getting that funding and what it is intended for.

CHAIR—Why should not I as a parent in Tasmania say the department has actually worked out, according to its socioeconomic indicator plus its student assistance grant, what it reckons is not a bad amount of money per student in this state? That is, it pays on behalf of schools or where parents and children cannot pay, an increased amount of money. Why should that not be available to all students across the state under some notion of state secular free funded education?

Mr Bower—I am not too clear on your question. I can answer it from the point of view of why should not people regard this as the standard levy. But are you saying that we provide this amount of money where people cannot pay levies, therefore, we should provide it to all?

CHAIR—You have assessed, on behalf of children from a lower socioeconomic background, the amount to educate them plus what you judge is the extra because they are unable to contribute that extra themselves. That seems a de facto way of working out what is necessary to educate a student in this state.

Mr Bower—I would have to answer it the other way by saying that the funding system in the state expects parents to pay for the consumable materials used by students. There is the expectation that they will pay. For those students whose parents are in financial circumstances where they are unable to pay, the department will give the school a top-up grant at established levels for those students.

CHAIR—That is just to state what you have already made clear to us, Mr Bower. I suspect that what I am asking you is probably a policy matter and perhaps I should put it

to the minister.

Mr Bower—Thank you, Senator.

CHAIR—But we are not quite at the estimates. How does a family advise the department or its school that it is in financial difficulties?

Mr Bower—Parents are advised by a number of mechanisms of the availability of the student assistance scheme. There are leaflets and booklets that go out to every student to say, 'Hey, this is available.' Also, when the parent is fronting up to the office to talk about levies, they can ask for an application form and they can talk over the issue and say, 'I am having trouble paying,' in which case the school office would immediately offer them an application form for the student assistance scheme.

CHAIR—What evidence does the family need to provide to support its case?

Mr Bower—They need to provide evidence of income and that is usually accepted as any other form of Commonwealth card such as jobsearch or whatever eligibility. But they do need to provide proof of income.

CHAIR—Proof of income?

Mr Bower—Proof of income.

CHAIR—How is this held in the school?

Mr Bower—It is not held in the school; it is sighted by the school. The parent fills in an application form that says what their income level is. The school then verifies the fact that they have seen something that says that this parent is on unemployment benefit or jobsearch—something that would verify the fact that they fall into that income range.

CHAIR—So if a person was from a low-income working family, they would not necessarily be eligible?

Mr Bower—I do not have immediately available the cut-off limits but, yes, if they are earning salary, even on low income, there is the potential that they would not be eligible. It may depend on the number of children in the family.

CHAIR—Can you provide us with anything further on the way schools would do an income assessment for families who would be eligible?

Mr Bower—Certainly.

CHAIR—That would be useful. Also, anything further you could provide to that so-called policy question that I have put to the minister would be of great assistance. We

have run over time. It is because the department invariably gives us such very useful information. We thank you for the opportunity to put things to you. I presume, if there is anything further the committee wants, you would not mind if we contacted you.

Ms Jacob—Certainly not.

CHAIR—If there is anything else that you think we should know, please feel free to tell us.

Senator FERRIS—When you are putting things together for us, could you include a school that might have 60 per cent of children who are on the special assistance and the levy that the remaining parents might pay. I am interested in whether there is any attempt to try to, in some way, top up the financial impact of more than half the children being able to contribute only \$42.

Mr Bower—I know what you are saying and the guidelines say this should not happen—that paying parents should not contribute for materials on behalf of unpaying parents. It is part of the school budget mix and it is a very difficult question to answer.

Senator FERRIS—Could you have a look for us?

Mr Bower—I will see if I can find something.

Senator FERRIS—Thank you.

[12.42 p.m.]

PERRIN, Mr Richard Anthony, Vice-President, Huonville Primary School Parents and Friends Association, 100 Agnes Street, Ranelagh, Tasmania 7109

SPINKS, Mr James Malcolm, Principal, Sheffield District High School, Henry Street, Sheffield, Tasmania 7306

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers that evidence be given in public but, should you at any stage wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence, or answers to specific questions in camera, you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. However, some evidence taken in camera may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. In recent times, the Senate has ordered that in camera evidence be made public. The committee has before it document No. 1 from Mr Spinks and document No. 55 from Mr Perrin. Mr Spinks, we will open the batting with you and then turn to Mr Perrin. I now invite you to make some introductory remarks.

Mr Spinks—The reason I responded to your invitation in the newspaper is that I believe that what we have here is a classic misconception. It is perceived in the media, and in various other areas, that sponsorship and commercial funding in education are significant factors. In fact, those who are knowledgeable about these things know that it is a very small factor in public education. But unfortunately it becomes a political football. In my written submission, I likened it to the tip of the dog's tail being mistaken for its head. I base that analogy on my work not only in Australia but in many overseas countries which has looked at similar problems.

I responded so that I could bring this misconception to the senators' attention and because this misconception is actually hijacking the real agenda which I feel governments should be addressing. Basically there are three things: insufficient government funds for education; the criteria for their disbursement within each state to different schools needs further attention; and there needs to be better planning within schools to match the scarce resource for the learning priorities for children.

CHAIR—That has left me a bit breathless, Mr Spinks. I am dying to ask questions.

Mr Perrin—I have a son in prep grade and a daughter who will be entering kindergarten soon, either next year or the following year. My reasons for putting a submission into the inquiry include the school parents' and friends' desire to examine opportunities for commercial and private funding in our school, our desire for senators to have an insight into parent-teacher concerns regarding sponsorship at a disadvantaged school—both rural and socioeconomic—and our wish to benefit from any initiatives arising from this inquiry.

The key points contained in the submission are as follows. As you will have read, the Huon Valley experiences a number of disadvantages that affect education opportunities, with high unemployment, low socioeconomic index and low school retention rates. However, on the positive side of the ledger, we have superb natural values, abundant space and clean air and we encourage you to come down if you have the time.

CHAIR—Can I just ask you very quickly to put us on the map and get us into the Huon Valley?

Mr Perrin—It is 40 kilometres south of here; down this way is Huonville. It is a good road and lovely scenery. I know you are short of time.

CHAIR—So you grow apples to the south as well as to the north?

Mr Perrin—Absolutely, yes.

CHAIR—The Derwent Valley runs north or north-west, is that right?

Mr Perrin—Yes.

CHAIR—And that is a big apple growing area?

Mr Perrin—Yes, apples and hops.

CHAIR—And the Huon runs down—

Mr Perrin—South.

CHAIR—But not down to Port Arthur?

Mr Perrin—No.

CHAIR—The other side.

Mr Perrin—The other side of that, yes.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr Perrin—Our industry base is narrow, being principally farming and forestry. There are important implications for commercial and private sponsorship, that is, there are not many spare dollars. Our population is stagnant, but it is projected to rise sharply at both ends of the age distribution, that is, more young and more older people. Huonville Primary School has 560 students which is considered to be full capacity. I have heard that almost 50 per cent are on student assistance. A range of programs are running at the

school to address disadvantages. School community involvement is facilitated through a number of committees, including parents and friends, mothers' club and the canteen.

There are several key points that I bring before you. Is sponsorship a good thing? It is possible that sponsorships are widening the gaps between schools simply because some schools do not have the ability to raise these funds. Should emphasis instead be placed on educational outcomes whereby national or state standards are implemented for social, technological, sporting and other skills? Perhaps a cap should be placed on school sponsorships by governments to contain the gaps between these schools, working on that proposition.

As to the ability to raise funds, I contend that most families in the Huon Valley are preoccupied with trying to keep their families going, let alone getting involved in raising money. As well many families lack the confidence to get involved in an issue such as seeking sponsorship. As for school funding, there is a great concern amongst parents and friends in our school that any funds we do raise through private sponsorship will be taken off the other end. In other words, it will come off the school resource package. I think that is the term. What is the point then of going after dollars if it just going to be taken off the other end? In addition, it will be a burden to parents who are already involved in school activities. No doubt the same people who turn up week after week will be expected to carry the duties. And this may result in distraction from other key activities such as reading, tutoring and parent help which are so important. Our parents and friends association recognises the need to have careful sponsorship planning. It is generally acknowledged that sponsorships received by the schools should be utilised in a strategic way, that is, through agreed objectives and goals for spending that money.

It is very important to have ethical sponsorship and guidelines. Not all potential sponsors would be welcome. For example, brewery or tobacco companies would not be appropriate for the school group. Similarly, sponsorship from forest industries or the Gay Mardi Gras would be contentious in our school environment, leading to the need for appropriate guidelines and school processes to assess potential sponsors.

Making sponsorship attractive: the possibilities of making sponsorship attractive through tax rebates and other government sanctions were raised and the P&F believe these should be carefully explored. District level sponsorship was seen by some as a good idea, in other words district level sponsorship, not just school sponsorship, to avoid divisive individual competition between schools and hence widening the gap for some schools between richer and poorer areas.

We saw an important role for the Commonwealth government in providing guidance and expertise in seeking sponsorship. It was suggested that appropriate funds be provided for the employment of an expert who could advise schools on strategies to achieve sponsorships. We feel priority should be given to providing these services to rural disadvantaged schools, which generally speaking lack the expertise to gain the sponsor-

ship.

Finally, sponsorship alternatives. In the Huon Valley context, as in many rural communities, I suggest, around Australia, sponsorship can take many forms apart from cash. For example, we should never underestimate the value of in-kind donations such as treated timber poles, building materials, food and person hours.

Those are the key points contained in the submission. I have also recently updated it with new information and have provided, in accordance with your guidelines, three copies.

CHAIR—We would appreciate those. Thank you very much. Are they in any major way different?

Mr Perrin—No.

CHAIR—For the record, is it the wish of the committee that that updated submission be tabled? It is so ordered.

Mr Spinks, do you and Mr Perrin talk to each other?

Mr Spinks—We have only had a brief conversation on the telephone some three days ago.

CHAIR—I was actually somewhat flippant. I did not mean to be, but it seems to me both of you are making presentations about the same issue from a slightly different emphasis. Is that so? You seem to be saying, Mr Spinks, that we should not get carried away with this question of sponsorship because it is very small in the scheme of things.

Mr Spinks—That is correct.

CHAIR—Whereas Mr Perrin is saying it is something that in their area they have actually given very serious consideration to. They reckon they now are getting an optimal outcome by sharing it equally, adding a few things to the school, things that otherwise would not be coming but a great concern from the parents.

Mr Perrin—Sorry, that is not what I am saying. If I had to categorise it in 10 words or less, it is that we do not know about the sponsorship but we are very interested in the sponsorship to see what the potential is.

CHAIR—I beg your pardon, you are quite right. Not sponsorship so much as parental contribution—private funds that are other than sponsorship, as in parent levies or fundraising by the schools.

Mr Perrin—We have left that pretty much alone.

CHAIR—Right, but do you think a district sponsorship could be a more appropriate way to go because it would stop one school using its time resources or getting an advantage over other schools?

Mr Perrin—That was one of the points. Not everyone held that view.

Senator TROETH—I would be interested in the views of your parent communities on sponsorship and fundraising.

Mr Spinks—The Sheffield School has a very well formed school council and the school council is responsible for the entire budgeting process. Of course, in that budgeting process it is not only the allocation of moneys but the allocation, more importantly, of children's learning time and teachers' teaching time, because that is the real budget of the school. So in those processes over several years they themselves have formed the opinion that the real resource of the school for teaching and learning is teachers, and it is what those teachers do that is the most critical thing for the school councils to concern themselves with. Because they have that understanding and they have all the data available to them, including the cost of salaries, they recognise that although in the past they have chased sponsorship, if they make that their focus then their time is probably misdirected.

Senator TROETH—Mr Perrin, what is the feeling of your school community, your parents, about sponsorship? I take your views. Does that accord with what the people at your school think?

Mr Perrin—Yes. What I have summarised here is the view of a special meeting held with the parents.

Senator TROETH—I did note that, thank you.

Mr Perrin—Some people say, 'No way, we don't want to touch it'. Others say, 'Hey, if we can supplement our school outcomes, particularly in disadvantaged areas, let us try to do it.'

Senator TROETH—Mr Spinks, looking at your third point that there should be a better informed debate about how each school is going to use that resource package, do you think that should be at the school level or do you think there should be more direction given by the department about the way in which schools should allocate their priorities?

Mr Spinks—At the school level; the centre should keep right out of that. One of the things that we are becoming more and more aware of is the diversity of education. Thankfully, right across the Western world and in the world full stop, more and more we see government getting out of education and giving education over to the communities through processes called self-management or local management or self-governance, depending on which country you are in. It all means the same thing, of governments

finding ways to distribute equitably the resources but then giving local communities with their local schools the decision making capacity as to which priorities they should assume.

What governments have found out is that the priorities for one community will differ from the priorities of another community. If governments set the priorities, invariably they are going to get it wrong for some communities. The only alternative is to give that decision to communities themselves. Thankfully, that is occurring.

With a lot of the questions that you put to the education department people in the last hour or so, it was very interesting for me, as a practising school principal, to listen to the answers. Of course, they were very much at a disadvantage since a lot of those decisions now rest with schools and their communities and not with the centre. Might I add that some of the questions to them were unfair. They did not know the answers because they were not in a position to know them. But if they were put to school principals or to the presidents of school councils or P&F associations they would be well and truly able to answer them.

Senator TROETH—Thanks.

Senator FERRIS—Mr Perrin, I see you as being a person who might be able to answer some of the questions that you heard me raise with the previous two witnesses. Given that you are a principal of a school that has more than 50 per cent of children on special assistance, is there any opportunity taken to try to make up from among those parents who can make a contribution some of the shortfall? The \$42 seems to be pitifully low when you look at some of the voluntary levies—and I use the word ‘voluntary’ in a slightly cynical way—that the department contributes. Do you try to pick up on that?

Mr Perrin—I am sorry, I have stalled because I am not a principal of a school, I am a member of the P&F. Can I have the question again please?

Senator FERRIS—I am interested to know whether your school, given that it has got a special assistance level of 50 per cent of students, tries in any way to pick up from parents who can make a contribution any shortfall arising out of the fact that the \$42 is a very low amount to pay?

Mr Perrin—No, I think they recognise you cannot keep getting blood out of a stone. As I say, many people are paying as much as they possibly can. The points that you made before were very interesting. In terms of kids who know whether or not their parents are paying the levy, I would have to add anecdotally that they do know. My son comes home and tells me, ‘George hasn’t paid’ or ‘Jim hasn’t paid’ or whatever and I feel that is very unfair. But to answer your question, I do not think you can get much more blood out of that stone.

Senator FERRIS—My second question relates to another question that I asked the

departmental representatives: given that you have got an area which is moving from an old structural base to some sort of new economic base which is not yet quite defined, have you got any views on how your region might feel if, for example, you were able to identify a company that might be a major employer which might decide to give regional sponsorship to a school such as yours because it is actually going to be its employment base? In other words, they might decide the kids would get a job doing wood turning in a company or something like that. How would you feel about approaching that likely major employer of your pupils and saying, 'Would you be able to put something into the school that might make our pupils better equipped for jobs in that plant at some later stage?'

Mr Perrin—I think that is a marvellous idea. Further to that, your example is a classic for INCAT here. I am not sure what their funding is, but they actually stimulate employment opportunities appropriate to that industry.

In our context, Dover is a major mariculture area. I know that they were providing money to the local school. I think they might even be contributing to the curricula, too. So I would have no hesitation, if there were a major industry to develop there, in approaching them to say, 'Let's look at what you can do for the local school and what we can give you in return'—providing it were not the local real estate agent that might hang a sign on the school gate, so you would think the school was for sale.

Senator FERRIS—It would almost be an extension of what the department revealed is already being done.

Mr Perrin—Yes.

Senator TROETH—What sorts of things would you see the school as being able to give back to the sponsor?

Mr Perrin—I think it is important that we say, 'This sponsor has provided money. It will be used in the following way. When our new crop of aquaculturalists comes through the school, they will think of that company straight away.' Say it is a feed company and it is an aquaculture course they are supplying: that will be in the front of their minds when they exit school, hopefully.

Senator TROETH—They will think of it when they look for jobs.

Mr Perrin—Hopefully.

Senator FERRIS—They might spend some four months moving from the school into work opportunities in an already established course.

Mr Perrin—To answer your question a little more clearly, it is to have their name in front of the kids. It is actually a little bit naughty, really. It is a bit scary.

Senator TROETH—It is product awareness or firm awareness.

CHAIR—Say that again, Mr Perrin.

Mr Perrin—Well, if it were taken to an extreme it might be taken as propaganda.

CHAIR—You were actually using the words ‘a little bit naughty’.

Mr Perrin—It is, in the sense that I do not think propaganda is appropriate. I think altruism was mentioned before. If it is not altruistic and really is for other goals and objectives—and obviously it will be—it will have to be carefully looked at. I think sponsorship that results in just selfish gain is not appropriate. But how do you separate selfish gain?

Senator FERRIS—How would you see it if that sponsorship, for example, employed a teacher who had special qualifications in an area of that industry? Would you see that as being an acceptable principle?

Mr Perrin—Yes, I would. I think that, as stated in the Tasmanian department of education guidelines, it is acceptable so long as that sponsor does not turn around and say, ‘We are now sponsored by the department of education’, ‘Our products are endorsed’ or whatever.

Senator FERRIS—So there are guidelines.

Mr Perrin—Yes.

Senator FERRIS—Do you have any comment on those issues?

Mr Spinks—Yes. I think that we, in that particular instance, are looking at extreme cases that might occur. I cannot recall one of those instances occurring in a Tasmanian school in the 25 years in which I have been a principal. I am aware of one case which occurred in an English school when I worked in the UK as a consultant for a while.

CHAIR—What circumstances are you particularly referring to?

Mr Spinks—I mean circumstances where the person providing the money is actually determining what person will be employed and what they will do. It is always the furphy which people raise when they discuss sponsorship. But the reality is that, when you get into schools, that kind of sponsorship does not occur. The reason it really does not occur, I suppose, is that the amounts of money that sponsors put up are really small amounts. It is hundreds of dollars, if that; it is not thousands of dollars.

CHAIR—The question of sponsorship may not be the large amount of money that makes it more than the tip of the tail of the dog, but private funds contributed to our public schools are becoming a very significant amount of money. The department provided figures of \$19.6 million as the amount of revenue from private sources to schools for 1995. The Commonwealth Grants Commission figures show \$291.646 million for expenditure on government education. Our calculations would put that at about six per cent. Whilst sponsorship may not be big or significant, private funding—which is a bit of sponsorship and a lot of parental contribution—is becoming a very significant and increasing amount of funding for our public schools.

I would be interested in any comment you have on that, but, in particular, I want to pick up on your point that the best thing teachers could do would be to teach. I should state a prejudice: I want to say, ‘I agree with that.’ But do you know, or have you got any evidence in your years of experience of how much teacher time goes to deal with sponsors, to either seek out sponsorship or to meet with sponsors, when such tasks could be carried out by the parents and friends or the parents council or the school council? It certainly would seem to be an interesting distraction from teaching to deal with sponsors in that way. On the other hand, I would be interested in your comments about what might be legitimate for teachers other than teaching, such as in schoolyard supervision, community involvement and so on. Would you care to comment?

Mr Spinks—It is very wide-ranging. Perhaps I can illustrate it best by reiterating a story of what happened to me in my first year as a school principal. I was a very young man and I was very much aware of my inexperience. I asked my district superintendent for advice as to how I could become a better principal. I said, ‘Are there any schools I could go to to learn about principalship?’ He said he would think about that. After a period of a week he gave me a list of four schools I could visit. I thought these must be tremendous schools run by tremendous principals and so I phoned them all and said could I come and learn.

When I got to the first one—it was a large primary school—the principal was in the foyer surrounded by cakes. Now the principal was alone. There was no other person with him—just cakes. The principal’s task, as I could see it, was to look at each cake and think of the price, write it on a little tag and stick it in the cake. He was going to finish this before he spoke to me, that was obvious. There were no parents there, so it could not have been public relations. There were no children, so it could not have been a learning exercise, and it was taking some time. I got rather bored by watching this so I did a few quick calculations of how many cakes and how much money was involved. I also knew the principal’s rate of pay. The amount of money to be raised by the cake stall would not have paid the principal’s salary for the time taken to put the price on the cakes.

When I left that school I thought to myself, ‘The superintendent never said that they were all good schools. He said that if I went and observed I would learn.’ I came away having learnt probably what for me was a critical lesson in principalship. That was

always to put a cost on your own time, to put a cost on your teachers' time, to put a cost on your parents' time in terms of, 'Is it contributing to the learning of children?'

For the rest of my days, that was something which very much guided my thinking. I am sorry to say that many times when you visit schools you see highly paid people and highly motivated parents doing things which do not really contribute to education and that is sad.

CHAIR—I can see that if we were to get into educational philosophy and how schools use their time, we could have an absolutely wonderful time. I appreciate your comments. I am not sure that everything can be easily valued or assessed for how much it is costing, but I must say that I have sympathy for some kind of alternative economic models. However, time spent with pupils may be constructive, even if you cannot put a value on it. But I do not think this committee really disagrees with you. You seem to be saying for us not to worry too much about sponsorship and for us to make our main game concentrating on the standard of education and what we can offer our children—

Mr Spinks—With the resources we have already got. If you look at the figures that I gave for my own school—which is a typical school, it is in neither a very affluent area nor a very poor area, and it has got a whole range of people—you will see that the sponsorship and the fundraising are half of one per cent. The levies and parent contributions—and that is the total of everything that parents can conceivably pay for—are 2.5 per cent. If we spend our time arguing about that in the school and neglect what we are doing with the other 97.5 per cent, then we make an error. It is easy for schools and parent associations to fall into that trap.

CHAIR—That is an interesting point. I would just ask, though, if you can tell us what percentage of students in your school are getting student assistance.

Mr Spinks—Yes: 44 per cent.

CHAIR—So it is not too different from the Huon school. I actually found both of these submissions very interesting to read. It may not be what you intended to do, but both of you gave me, when I read your submissions, energy. I had the sense that both of you were very active and alive and involved in communities that were concerned and doing things for education. Is it a fair comment about both of you that your schools are up and running?

Mr Spinks—I would hope so!

Mr Perrin—A very insightful comment!

CHAIR—*Hansard* will no doubt report our laughter. Mr Perrin, what is it that you particularly want to say? Mr Spinks's message is clear: 'Don't be distracted by sponsor-

ship; the state is giving us enough in our school.'

Mr Spinks—Not enough.

Senator TROETH—You would like more?

Mr Spinks—We would like more.

CHAIR—How do you decide what more?

Mr Spinks—The amount of money that is available for education depends on how big a bucket you have to take the money out of, but the only way that we can look at whether we are spending enough as governments on education is really by comparison with like countries, and we do not compare very favourably. That is the truth of the matter, isn't it? We are in the bottom one-third of Western countries.

CHAIR—If we moved away from the word 'sponsorship' and took into account private assistance to our publicly funded schools, how would your school be placed if all private contributions went?

Mr Spinks—It would not make a significant difference.

CHAIR—I would be interested to know how. If you have got 44 per cent of students on student assistance, you must be getting \$42 in primary school for each of those students, and you must also be getting an 'I' factor or whatever it is—I think it is an 'I' in the formula—and that funding might all go.

Mr Spinks—The bit that I would hope would not go, of course, would be the teaching staff that we get. With the \$400,000 which is our resource packet, we have got 44 per cent of our children on SAS and, if that bit were dropped out, the package would probably only be \$360,000. The amount on needs index is not very high.

CHAIR—That is \$360,000 compared with what?

Mr Spinks—Compared with \$400,000.

CHAIR—Yes; I see what you are doing: on \$400,000 you would be down \$40,000. Lots of schools would say that that was a fairly significant amount.

Mr Spinks—Yes, it is, if they do not put beside it the cost of their teaching staff. One of the interesting things about the cultural aspect of education in Australia is that over the years teachers have considered it to be a really nasty thing if you consider how much the staff cost. It is as if the cost of the teaching staff is something which we do not mention—though they pursue salaries in the public arena quite happily. But in fact it is

the huge cost in the running of a school. A teacher might say to me, 'Unless I get a new set of texts this year, my class standards will drop.' I say, 'Perhaps, I should replace you with a text, then.' It is the teacher who makes the difference, not the material resource. Often we let that material resource be too significant in our thinking.

CHAIR—But if your students never had access to computers in 12 years of education, they would be behind the eight ball, would they not?

Mr Spinks—Yes. But with the amount of money we have got, there is sufficient money for computers.

CHAIR—You leave me a bit amazed, Mr Spinks.

Senator TROETH—Some of the evidence that we have heard this morning indicated that parent contributions—through whatever form—made up about 25 per cent of the operating budget. How would those schools get on if that were removed?

Mr Spinks—I have not seen the figures. But in the 25 per cent—it is 25 per cent of what?

Senator FERRIS—The operation.

Senator TROETH—The operational budget.

Mr Spinks—But what would it be as a percentage of the total budget, including the cost of the teaching staff?

Senator TROETH—So you have included in your figures the total cost of the staff. They have not and, therefore, there is the discrepancy between them.

Mr Spinks—That is right. So therefore, the 25 per cent is really an inflated figure, isn't it?

Senator TROETH—Perhaps what we need to put to you is that—

CHAIR—It is not an inflated figure, Mr Spinks, it is just a figure.

Senator TROETH—The cost of teachers' salaries is always going to be a component. What we have heard today is that the parent levy obviously varies enormously, and we are concerned about the individual impact of that on the way in which schools can operate. If they are finding it difficult to meet costs, should they then increase the parent levy? Why is it that some schools charge more, and so on? Staff salaries, which is obviously an important component in your argument, have not been mentioned by any of the others as part of the argument.

Mr Spinks—I think that that is because there is this cultural thing that we do not think about that. In fact, it is the most critical factor in the learning outcomes of the children in the school. And that is why I want to see that become the agenda.

It certainly has become the agenda in the case of the English and New Zealand educational systems, and it is increasingly so in places such as Victoria, where the resource package to schools makes no distinction between teaching staff and other kinds of resources. It leaves it up to the school and its community to make that decision. It is interesting that they very quickly work out that the real thing that makes a difference to children's learning is teaching, and that that is where most of the resource goes. But certainly, by not having two kinds of packages—as indeed we have in Tasmania at the moment—and by having just one package of resource, this makes people think about what the total resource package is for a school.

CHAIR—We have been hearing a lot about equity, Mr Spinks. It would be of major concern to the committee if, for example, all resource dollars were spent on staff, and some children, therefore, finished up with near enough to no texts or equipment because their families could not afford them. Mr Perrin has said that most families in his area are really doing it hard, and that they have not got too much spare time for anything except that sort of core basic stuff. So I guess, as a matter of equity, I can see the reason why people are saying, 'Hold some of your resources for equipment and materials.' Mr Spinks, how does your school consider what is the core, what is the basic requirement of a school and what are the add-ons?

Mr Spinks—The answer to that question is going to be different for every school in Australia. No two parent bodies will define 'core' in the same way. In my own community they would probably put agricultural studies in as core, because we are an agricultural area and we own a school farm, but I would doubt that there would be any other school in Tasmania that would put agricultural studies in its core. If you go past maths and language, and science and technology, then probably that is the only agreement you are ever going to get that that is core. I think this is why, worldwide, there is a move to self-management because of this divergence between communities in defining core for education.

CHAIR—So that makes it a bit difficult for the committee because we have been given a lot of evidence about parent levies and private funding being used under the Tasmanian Education Act to supplement other than what is core. So if each school is defining what is core differently, how on earth would the education department be able to know?

Mr Spinks—You had better ask them that.

CHAIR—In fact, how do you in your school and your council negotiate with the department so that there is an agreement that you are not using core funding for extras or

extra funding for core activities?

Mr Spinks—The school council establishes a school charter. There is a requirement that that charter be submitted to the district superintendent and, if necessary, to the centre for them to give their affirmation to the charter. One of the things that we would hope that the district superintendents would check—and no doubt they do—is whether the school and the school council intends to address the state priorities as well as local priorities. So that check is made in that way.

CHAIR—Mr Perrin, did you want to add something there?

Mr Perrin—Yes, I did, thanks, Chair. I think the move to the remote management or autonomy of schools is to be commended, providing we do not lose the centralist links in providing standards. Because in Tasmania—I grew up on the mainland—it seems to be so important which school you went to in terms of your employment prospects. If one school chose to direct their core activities into an area that was unemployable down the track—I doubt they would do that, but if they did—I think that would be a big disadvantage to those kids. I think there is still a very important role for some central intervention in the setting of standards.

CHAIR—A basic core statement.

Mr Perrin—Yes. A question that you did not quite ask me last time—because you were going to—was why I am here. I would reiterate that it is an altruistic thing. We were genuinely concerned that you have a view from a disadvantaged school, but we also want to benefit from any outcomes from this inquiry and, of course, a re-examination for us—we have not really even thought of sponsorship or supplementing our resources or our curricula with sponsorship. So that is why I am here.

CHAIR—Mr Perrin, I was particularly interested in your comments about people being able to give in kind if they have not got cash. I think you mentioned, for example, treated pine or logs or something of that sort, or even their time. No-one should be sitting down with a book and marking off how much they have given and so on. But some families might want to contribute and cannot, except in kind. Your evidence is quite interesting because a question which I think Senator Ferris asked earlier was met with, ‘No, we don’t accept other than cash.’

I suppose you could receipt a pine log or a treated log, but it would be very hard to turn that into other resources. It is a direct resource into the school in some kind of beautification or some kind of equipment, unless you raffle it at Christmas. But I take it that you are meaning people actually contributing something to the works of the school.

Mr Perrin—Quite so, Senator, and there are so many families I know like that who just do not have a spare dollar so they will come down and dig a hole or put a

treated pine post in. We have just been building landcare jetties and what have you, and even finishing off school activities that should have been finished by the state department but have not been. People will come up with a bag of nails or make some time available. In a rural disadvantaged community that is so important, that 'in kind' sponsorship.

CHAIR—And that allows everyone to contribute, according to their ability, and preserve their own dignity. We have been told by the department that they are responsible for the construction and maintenance of buildings, yet most schools would tell us that some of their fundraising goes to minor capital works. That is, I suppose, what you have just said, about things that should have been finished by the department but have not. How do you see that? Is it a question of your having to wait forever or of the department saying, 'No, we won't be getting around to that'? How is it that you decide, 'We had better do something about this ourselves, rather than wait'?

Mr Perrin—It is just as you have expressed it; that is it. If we have 200 kids sitting on a decking area that is unshaded—and that is nasty down here because we have an ozone hole above us and it rains a lot, so in both seasons our kids are exposed—we cannot sit around and wait for departmental annual budgets that are going to be frozen, as they have been this time, for 12 months. Kids are going to suffer—they are going to get sunburnt and hypothermic in that time. So we decide we will do it ourselves.

It is very frustrating, because that money is then diverted from other key areas that the school identifies such as good adventure playgrounds or supplementing the curriculum by getting in a guitar teacher or someone who can tell you about the war. So it is frustrating.

Mr Spinks—I feel I should make a correction here because I think there is a misunderstanding of the education department. They would never say that I am a great defender of them, but I think in this instance I must defend them. You stated, or I thought I heard you say, that the education department was responsible for buildings and maintenance. That is not correct. In Tasmania, schools are responsible for their own maintenance, and school principals have avidly sought that. The figure which defines what the school will do and what the centre will do is the figure of \$20,000. So if an item of maintenance or development is \$20,000 or less, then it is the school's responsibility; if it is more, it is the centre's responsibility. The amounts to cover this maintenance and minor development are contained within our resource package.

My experience as a school principal in Tasmania goes back over 24 years, so I have experience of when the centre did the maintenance and I have experience of when schools have done the maintenance. There is a vast difference now that we do it ourselves. It is like 'how big is a bucket?' You will never get enough money for maintenance—never. But if we compare maintenance of our schools now with, say, 10 years ago then the maintenance now is far, far better when schools do it themselves.

I do not think we spend more money on maintenance. But, because the school has got control, the system does not get ripped off in providing that maintenance. Also, if the school knows that if it does not need to use it for maintenance it can probably use it for some other more educational purpose, then suddenly maintenance does not need to be done, or vandalism is less, or things are better looked after. So the outcome of self-management in our Tasmanian schools—and this has also been observed in other countries and other states of Australia—is that when schools manage their own maintenance, schools are better maintained and we can release more dollars for other things.

CHAIR—I appreciate all those comments and I will not now, on the record, point out the contradictions of some of those remarks of yours, Mr Spinks.

Mr Spinks—I would like you to, Senator, if there were contradictions.

CHAIR—I am just interested that if schools manage their own maintenance it is quicker and better, but if schools decide that they do not want to do their own maintenance they will set it aside for something else. I presume what you are saying is that sometimes schools are able to reduce the demand on maintenance, for example, with vandalism—

Mr Spinks—Yes.

CHAIR—I do not know quite how you would do that. Are you suggesting that that \$20,000 comes from the state department to the school and the school allocates it how it will, or is it that any item under \$20,000 is for the school to fundraise?

Mr Spinks—In the resource package, which in my own school's case is \$400,000, part of that is deemed to be for maintenance and minor development.

CHAIR—I see what you are saying.

Mr Spinks—There is a minimum amount which we must use for maintenance and minor development, but if the school wishes, it can increase that amount by spending less on some other areas.

CHAIR—So you could decide: we will have fewer computers and more sunshades this year?

Mr Spinks—Yes, that is the school's decision, with the school council, or if not the school council then it should be a decision made between the school and the Parents and Friends Association.

CHAIR—How often are decisions of that sort put to the broad parent community?

Mr Spinks—It varies from school to school.

CHAIR—In your school?

Mr Spinks—It would be part of the budget which is submitted to the school council. So the school council controls which of those expenditure items would go forward.

CHAIR—A lot of parents would say that if the school council decided it, it might as well be the department, because they do not really know about it and they do not have too much of a say.

Mr Spinks—The school council is elected by the parent body. Just as you are responsible to your electorate, they are responsible to their electorate. I have seen parents get voted out as well as get voted in.

CHAIR—I appreciate that, but does the school or the council take any special steps to make sure that the broad body of parents is involved in what the school is deciding are its priorities this year?

Mr Spinks—Yes, it does. It often does surveys and, in the very process of writing a school charter and reviewing that charter, it is always consulting with broad groups in the community to make sure it gets that right. Often within the charter there are special things which they might take on board, like it might be to make a provision for children's health needs in view of alterations to the environment.

CHAIR—Mr Perrin, how does your school do it?

Mr Perrin—Our consultation is embryonic. We do have a P&F, obviously, and we would like to move to a school council. I have learnt a lot today about the values and advantages of that. It is not really the P&F that undertakes the consultation with the parent community; it is the school through a weekly newsletter. It annoys me a bit that people sit on their hands and do not go and find out a bit for themselves too—that is the other side of the question. I think that people should have an interest in their school and find out about it and have a say on the priorities, recognising that it goes through a P&F or a school council.

CHAIR—Senators, I think we have actually gone overtime. I thank you both very much indeed for your contribution. I suppose, Mr Perrin, you are saying, 'We read about this or heard about it and so we wanted to have a say, and we wanted to learn.' That is probably the very best assessment I have had in a long time of what Senate committees are about. We sometimes think that we are an extension of the parliament out into the community. We appreciate very much when the community decides that it wants to respond, and comes along and contributes to our deliberations. I think, both of you, these

were pretty punchy submissions and the committee will be enormously benefited by them. Thank you both very much.

Committee adjourned at 1.29 p.m.