



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Private and commercial funding aspects of government schools

BRISBANE

Thursday, 30 January 1997

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*.

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SENATE
EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Private and commercial funding aspects of government schools

BRISBANE

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Present

Senator Tierney (Chair)

Senator Carr

Senator Troeth

Senator O'Brien

The committee met at 9.04 a.m.

Senator Carr took the chair.

McCOLLOW, Dr John Edward, Assistant Secretary (Research), Queensland Teachers Union, PO Box 1750, Milton, Queensland 4064

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Carr)—I call the committee to order and declare open this public hearing of the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee. I welcome you all. Today's hearing in Brisbane is divided into two sessions. The first session will examine evidence on the committee's inquiry into private and commercial funding for schools. The second session will deal with the inquiry into developments in adult and community education since 1991.

Welcome, Dr McCollow. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Dr McCollow—I represent the Queensland Teachers Union. With me, to assist me, is Rob Askew, our research assistant.

ACTING CHAIR—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 taken in camera may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate.

The committee has before it submission No. 70. Is it the wish of the committee that the submission be incorporated in the *Hansard* record of proceedings? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

ACTING CHAIR—Is there any other material which you would care to place on the table at this stage?

Dr McCollow—Not at this time.

ACTING CHAIR—You are welcome to make some introductory remarks to the committee, and then we shall proceed to questions.

Dr McCollow—By way of introduction I guess it would be useful to summarise the QTU position in relation to the growth in reliance by government schools on private and commercial sources of funding. The QTU is concerned about the negative effects of this growth. We would consider that among those effects were the following: the undermining of the idea and the reality of a free and universally provided quality public schooling system, and its replacement by a view of education as an individual and private consumer good that is purchased in the marketplace; the enabling of governments to evade their responsibilities to provide adequate resourcing for public education; an increase in the inequality of access to educational services; divisiveness between and amongst school administrators, teachers and parents on issues such as the levying of school fees; the potential for inappropriate involvement of commercial organisations, for example in terms of inappropriate influence on curriculum content and inappropriate use of advertising; and the amount of time that is put by school administrators and teachers into activities which are not focused on their core educative role.

I would like to speak briefly to the recommendations that we included in the document that we provided to the committee. The first two recommendations are that the state and territory—I guess we should have added Commonwealth—governments reaffirm their commitment to a strong public schooling system which embodies the values of democracy, social inclusiveness, equity and high educational standards; and that, in the light of such a commitment, government sponsored initiatives such as support for enrolment growth in the non-government schooling sector and school based management of budgeting be evaluated in terms of their impact on public schooling.

I would just point out that these are really context setting recommendations. Public schooling has traditionally been recognised as playing an important social role and as a major contributor to the health of democratic societies. Recently, however, governments have tended to ignore the wider social contribution of quality public education systems and have stressed schooling as an individual economic benefit that is best delivered and consumed via market mechanisms and ought to be subjected to the rigours of managerialism. In such an atmosphere, the potential dangers of an expansion of private and commercial funding for public schools are magnified because they combine with these other measures and the sense of public education's special social role is diminished.

The third recommendation was that the idea of a community standard be reinstated as a means of defining and reviewing core resource needs in schools, which

should be funded by governments. This is particularly relevant to the financial pressures being felt by schools in relation to information technology needs.

As the AEU submission puts it:

. . . there is no longer any concept of what is a reasonable level of resource . . . at the same time as there is an exponential growth in what is educationally justifiable.

The 1994 discussion paper that was circulated by the former Schools Council noted that the basket of services approach:

. . . provides a rationale for determining funding levels that can be tested over time. It provides a basis which is currently not evident for justifying specific levels of funding.

It also noted that the disadvantages of the approach were said to be that it assumes a connection between the value of inputs and the quality of outcomes.

The QTU would make two points to you in relation to that perceived disadvantage. One is that much of the research which has cast doubt on the connection between inputs and outcomes has now been discredited. Secondly, such an approach does not rule out the application of accountability mechanisms that relate to outcomes.

The fourth recommendation was that there be an increase in government funding in actual and proportional terms through government schools and that this funding be provided on a differential basis according to need. We recognise that private and commercial funding of government schooling cannot be eliminated. There is a need, however, to address the growing tendency for these sources of funding to be used to replace a substitute for government funding and to minimise as much as possible the inequitable effects of such funding. Increasing the level of government funding is a way of addressing these issues.

We believe that there is capacity to do this at both the Commonwealth and state government levels. OECD figures show that Australia is neither a big spender on education nor a high taxing country by international standards. Similarly, Commonwealth Grants Commission figures and figures produced by last year's Commission of Audit in this state show that Queensland is a low tax state and would have raised, according to the Commission of Audit, an additional \$840 million in revenue in one financial year if its tax effort was equal to that of other states. It is also a low spender on schooling—according to the Commission of Audit, last in Australia.

The fifth recommendation is that an education foundation be created as a means of providing an opportunity for corporate support for schools which is educationally appropriate and equitably distributed. Commercial funding is not a major source of funding for public schools in Queensland at this stage. Nevertheless, promotions such as the Coles docketts for computers and the Pizza Hut's support a reader promotion do raise important questions of social and educational probity.

Furthermore, the US experience is chastening. The viewing of commercials in relation to such products as Burger King hamburgers and Snickers chocolate bars is now

compulsory for students who attend schools that take the channel 1 with current affairs programs. There is an example of a sample letter sent home by a media group in the United States. It was sent to schools as an example letter that they could send to their students to support a fundraising activity. The letter makes very interesting reading. It says:

Dear Grandma

My school needs more computers for our classrooms. You can help us by ordering some news magazines or extending your current subscriptions at this time.

You'll save money with the school prices and your magazine orders provide more 'hands on' computer training for me. Order by the prize deadline and I can earn a school crew shirt.

Please help me if you can.

From: Amy.

P.S. I love you.

Those sorts of activities are reality now in American schools and it is our view that it would be useful to act in Australia before that sort of thing became commonplace in Australia.

The sixth recommendation that we had was to do with strengthening the guidelines in relation to commercial and private sources of funding. From our reading of the submissions from the AEU and from our sister union, the South Australian Institute of Teachers, it appears that Queensland is more advanced than some other states in regulating aspects of private and commercial funding, but there are a number of problems with that, as we have pointed out in the written material we have provided to you.

I will give one example, though we have several. In the Department of Education manual, if you go to the index of that manual, which is the manual that school principals use to seek guidance on departmental policy, and look under 'voluntary levies', you will find that it is listed in the index. It takes you to a section of the manual and in that section it basically says that if you do have voluntary student levies you should maintain a roll list to identify the students who are expected to pay and that you should identify the anticipated total collections. The rest of it basically deals with accounting best practice. It also provides a bill that you can send to parents that says on the top of it 'state school notice for payment', which I would think many parents would interpret as not meaning that the levy was voluntary. There is no discussion at all in the manual of the voluntary nature of those levies or when it is appropriate to levy students and where it is not.

ACTING CHAIR—Would you like to incorporate that material into the *Hansard*?

Dr McCollow—Yes, I could do that.

ACTING CHAIR—That would assist the committee. 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—

ACTING CHAIR—At an earlier point in your remarks you indicated that you thought your submission should, in terms of recommendation 1, refer to the Commonwealth government as well as the state and territory governments. Do you wish to formally amend your submission to that effect?

Dr McCollow—If that is possible, Senator, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you concluded your remarks?

Dr McCollow—Yes, thank you.

Senator TROETH—Dr McCollow, you noted that one of the negative effects of commercial funding in schools may well be inappropriate influence of those commercial sponsors as far as the curriculum goes. Have you had any experience of that in terms of actually what is taught in the classroom being directly related to the sponsorship?

Dr McCollow—As I said in my opening remarks, in the brief interviews that we conducted with our members, we did not uncover any instances. Commercial sponsorship was not widespread in terms of curriculum programs in Queensland schools. Most of the commercial sponsorship related to such things as landscaping, the provision of computer hardware and things like that. The only instance where there would be perhaps some slight influence would be where computer hardware is being provided by a particular firm. There would be an obvious tendency if you have got Apple computers to be teaching skills that are relevant to using that hardware rather than using IBM type computers. We did not uncover any instances that would be, I guess, headline grabbing. However, as I said, in preparing we did some research in relation to the situation in the United States. There is an article that is in a recent *Phi Delta Kappan*, which is a respected American educational journal. The article, in its November 1996 issue, is called 'Profits R Us' and does provide a number of examples of the way in which American firms have influenced curriculum in ways that could be argued to be extremely inappropriate.

Senator TROETH—You did also say that Queensland is more advanced in their watchdog role on this sort of thing, if you like. Is that because initiatives such as the American ones that you mentioned have been floated here and rejected?

Dr McCollow—I am not aware that there were any initiatives of the nature of the ones that were put forward in South Australia. I am not sure what the reason is that Queensland is more advanced. I guess I would have to say more advanced in inverted commas; when we did what was a very rudimentary search on policy documents and legislation, we did seem to find that there were policy documents that had been developed and that there were regulations that were relevant, but the quality of those is perhaps open to question. The inference could be drawn that they probably were not developed in relation to any specific proposals, because they do not seem to be able to pick up some of the sorts of things that are being proposed in other places.

Senator TROETH—Have you done any survey of your membership of the willingness or otherwise of teachers to seek business involvement in their schools?

Dr McCollow—I guess the short answer is no. But we did conduct—as we said in the information that we provided—some interviews in preparing for our testimony today with about 24 of our school principal members. We also sought some information from our regional organisers, who have contact with our members on a regular basis, about what their views are. I think it would be fair to say that there are mixed views amongst our membership. Some are extremely incensed about what they see as an affront to public education. Others—and I would say this would not be an insignificant group—see opportunities; they look at the needs in their schools and they look at opportunities for private funding to provide those.

So there is a conflict where there are those who say that the best sort of strategy is basically to live with the fact that private and commercial funding is here to stay, that government funding is not going to cover what they want to do at the school and so, yes, there are members who are enthusiastically pursuing private and commercial sources of funding.

Senator TROETH—Those who are inclined to favour private and commercial funding, or at least accept it as a fact of life—apart from the money involved, which is an obvious incentive, do they see any value in the school and the students becoming better acquainted with business techniques and business practices?

Dr McCollow—I think there are a number of members who would see that as a plus to this type of funding, yes.

Senator TROETH—Among your membership, is there an even spread between primary and secondary schools?

Dr McCollow—I am not sure what an even spread means, Senator. We cover both primary and secondary teachers and we have coverage of the vast majority of teachers in both sectors. But there are obviously more primary teachers than secondary teachers because there are more primary schools.

Senator TROETH—Among your recommendations you mentioned that an education foundation should be created. How would that be funded?

Dr McCollow—I do not know that I am competent to go into this in any detail. Basically, what we are floating is the broad idea of an education foundation. The way we would see it funded would be through the sponsorship of the Commonwealth and state governments—perhaps through MCEETYA or something like that. It could be set up and then funded—but the primary ongoing funding for it would be provided by private corporations.

Senator TROETH—So that would be the method. You would be putting commercial and private sponsorship into a two-stage process rather than direct funding of schools. Is that the purpose of it?

Dr McCollow—It could be a bipartite sort of foundation which had representation from governments—or tripartite, with the two levels of government and private corporations. They could then seek funding from private sources, could determine what the best uses of that funding would be and then determine ways in which industry which provided that funding could receive credit for playing their role as good citizens.

Senator TROETH—When I say it is a two-stage process, I mean the money would go into a fund and the fund would then be distributed to schools, rather than businesses in each area directly donating to schools.

Dr McCollow—That is correct, Senator.

Senator TROETH—Thank you, Mr Chairman, that is all.

Senator O'BRIEN—Dr McCollow, there are a couple of points I wanted to take up, having been provided with extracts from the Queensland Education (General Provisions) Regulation Act 1989. Firstly, there is clearly no ability to require private citizens to contribute to the cost of education by any school under the legislation.

Dr McCollow—That is our reading of the act too.

Senator O'BRIEN—To the extent that there is private funding now, it is voluntary contribution by parents, in the main.

Dr McCollow—Yes, that is true.

Senator O'BRIEN—Are there any other private contributors you know of, as distinct from commercial, who are not parents? I want to deal with commercial separately.

Dr McCollow—There are a variety of ways in which schools raise funds. There is the hiring of facilities. A variety of groups would use school facilities: church groups, sporting groups and private educational providers. That would be a source of funding. Some schools sell products that are produced at the school. There is one school that sells something like upwards of \$40,000 worth of its agricultural products every year. I am not sure who they sell those to but I assume it is not just the parents.

Senator O'BRIEN—Essentially you have fundraising activities by the school and you have voluntary levies from the parents. Is there another area where private contributions would come from? Are there any instances of benefactors making unsolicited donations? Is that common or uncommon?

Dr McCollow—I am not sure. Some of what could be characterised as commercial funding might also be characterised as philanthropic, where you have a local business donating money. Even when a major firm donates money, there is usually a quid pro quo in it in terms of advertising or recognition. I guess it depends on what sort of construction you want to put on it whether you see it as philanthropic or commercially motivated.

Senator O'BRIEN—That would be fairly common, like donating to a school fair or something like that.

Dr McCollow—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—In terms of commercial funding in government schools, it seems that commercial activity is almost prohibited by section 20 of the act, isn't it?

Dr McCollow—Yes. That was one of the examples we used. The first subsection of section 20 says:

The principal or other person in charge of a state educational institution or an authorised officer shall not allow the use of his official position in any way that might be construed directly or indirectly as advertising or a propaganda medium.

That seems quite straightforward. But that certainly does not seem to be consistent with the sort of information we were getting back from schools where the sides of walls—there is an example, if you drive on the south side of Brisbane, one of the schools on the highway there has a big billboard advertising that the local piggery supports the agriculture block.

There are other examples, and one of the examples we got from the interviews we did was that a commercial firm had donated \$17,000 in kind—a computer firm—in return for the room hire to provide private computer courses. Those sorts of deals seem to be able to be done, notwithstanding the wording of the regulation.

Senator O'BRIEN—The use of the premises would be covered in part 3 to the 1989 act which talks about hire of the premises, wouldn't it? Wouldn't that be different from—

Dr McCollow—Is that section 4(c) you are referring to? It says it allows an association to use the premises of a state school as a venue for a fundraising activity. I am not quite sure. That is an interesting one. I would say that most people, on their first reading of that, would think what that was doing was allowing the P&C to run a school fete and not allowing a computer company to come in and run private courses.

Senator O'BRIEN—At the moment you have given some examples of, for example, a private computer firm donating equipment, and the quid pro quo is to be able

to use the classrooms for private classes, I presume outside of school hours. What would you say are the positive and negative consequences of that sort of activity?

Dr McCollow—I think it is similar to the Coles promotion. Most schools, if they had the opportunity to get \$17,000 worth of computer equipment, if you were a school principal who was provided with that opportunity you would think long and hard about knocking that back. So certainly it would be very difficult to put out a regulation that says you cannot do that, because I think principals and school communities might feel hard done by.

There is obviously an advantage in access to that equipment, but there are also some questions about whether schools ought to be put in a position where they are dependent on the goodwill of a private organisation to provide that equipment and, certainly, a school down the road which just happened to be slower off the mark or further geographically away from the organisation that was doing it or not located in the place where they wanted to run their private courses will miss out.

It obviously increases the inequity of provision across schools. I am not aware that there is any inappropriate influence on the curriculum. I am not sure whether the computer comes up with a 'buy whatever brand of computer this is' message when the students log on, but it does raise some questions about whether there is any sort of control over those sorts of potential problems.

Senator O'BRIEN—There are probably a number of possibilities, but I think we would like to hear some substance if there is something that we can hang our hat on in relation to actual activity—conjecture is another thing.

Dr McCollow—As I said, what we did uncover from the bit of research that we did was that commercial agreements are not at this stage a major source of funding, or seen as a major problem that school administrators grapple with in Queensland at this stage, but we believe it would be foolish to say on the basis of that that we should not look at some of the issues that that raises.

Senator O'BRIEN—On your recommendation 5, relating to education funding, one might be tempted to categorise that as another way of getting tax dollars from the corporate sector directly into the education system—

Dr McCollow—I do not think that would be a bad thing, would it?

Senator O'BRIEN—Is there a question as to whether the commercial sector's contribution to the education system should be voluntary or part of the general tax system and properly addressed that way?

Dr McCollow—Our national body developed that proposal, so they would

probably be the best ones to talk about it in detail rather than us. Our understanding of the proposal is that it provides a suggestion that ought to be looked at carefully, not in terms of the wider question of increasing the taxing of the corporate sector, although that probably would not be something that we oppose, but in terms of the fact that we have an unregulated situation in terms of corporate sponsorship in schools—we have a demonstrated interest in providing corporate sponsorship to schools from the private sector.

This provides a mechanism which allows corporations who want to be good citizens to provide that support for the public education system and also to receive some credit for doing so. However, it minimises the risks of undue influence on the curriculum or creating even greater inequality between schools because some are winners and some are losers.

ACTING CHAIR—In hearings in other states we have heard that so-called voluntary levies are now being used to fund what were once regarded as core state responsibilities. For example, the provision of basic amenities for students, such as toilet paper, is now funded out of so-called voluntary levies. Is that the sort of development that is occurring in Queensland?

Dr McCollow—We believe it is. The QCPCA, I know, will be better placed to provide information in that regard because of the more extensive survey that they have done of schools. The particular area that was uncovered in our interviews with principals was the fact that it is no longer appropriate to think of information technology as an extra—parents really have an expectation that their children are going to be able to have access to information technology—and that the provision that is made for that, if it is not topped up by some private source of funding, is just inadequate. Principals gave examples both of where P&Cs had provided basic hardware in terms of information technology and also of where they had taken decisions, for example, not to have the carpets cleaned at the school so that they could put in coaxial cable or something like that.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it not the case with the growing tendency towards school based funding, global funding, whereby the state provides a block grant—which is often at a reduced level on a per capita basis as pressure mounts on state governments to reduce their educational allocation—that schools are resorting to additional sources of funding from private sources to try to fill the gap caused by shortfalls in state revenue?

Dr McCollow—I think that is true. That is a point that is made in the AEU submission, that whatever the benefits of global budgeting, one of the problems it creates for schools is that there is no longer any identification of what it is that the government is providing for in the money that it provides to schools. In the old days we had the line budgets that basically said that you got so much and that was for pencils, and so much for stationery. You could go through the provision line by line and see what it was that you were being asked to cut back in relation to. With global budgeting it is impossible to do

that. You cannot authoritatively say, 'We have been underfunded for such and such,' because the global budget really leaves it in your hands about what it is that you want to underfund.

ACTING CHAIR—We have had examples, for instance in Victoria, whereby the reductions in public education have been so dramatic that schools have to make choices about whether they provide heating in winter. As you would know, the Victorian winter is somewhat different from yours. Is that the sort of pattern that is emerging in Queensland?

Dr McCollow—I do not think we are as far down the road in Queensland. We have not followed the schools of the future route at this stage. There has been a movement towards more global budgeting in Queensland schools but it has been incremental; it has not gone as far as in Victoria. I cannot really speak for Victoria but I think it provides a starker example of the impact of global budgeting than Queensland does.

ACTING CHAIR—The Commonwealth government, in the last budget, introduced new measures for funding of private schools and the shifting of resources from public education to private education through the enrolment benchmark adjustment mechanisms, which will see a real fall in Commonwealth money provided for public education in this state. What impact do you believe that will have in terms of pressure for school authorities at a local level to try to attract money from other sources?

Dr McCollow—It is interesting that you should ask that. I think it should be noted that the coalition government in Queensland is on the record as opposing the enrolment benchmark adjustment as a mechanism. The Department of Education believes that it will have a significant impact on the total amount of funds that are available to it.

ACTING CHAIR—It is a net loss of about \$18 million, I think was their estimate.

Dr McCollow—Right. At the local level, it is interesting, at my wife's school they had their first staff meeting of the year and one of the things that was actually raised at the staff meeting was, given that it was now a competitive atmosphere in which the school was competing, whether cooperative programs with other state schools in the area should cease and that they should seek to position themselves as being able to provide these programs on their own, so that they could establish a market advantage over the other schools in the area. What that is going to mean is that programs that were provided across three schools in the local area may cease in the long run, and I guess the pressure for this will increase as the atmosphere becomes more competitive. It may mean that certain students, at least at some of those schools, will miss out on certain activities they have got access to now.

ACTING CHAIR—Is it the view of the union that the capacity of individual schools to raise private and commercial support differs according to the region in which they are situated?

Dr McCollow—Absolutely. That was an almost unanimous view. Whether they were accessing huge amounts of non-government sourced funds or whether they were not, they pointed to the fact that not all schools had the ability to access non-government sources. Geographical location is important in the depressed rural economies. Major corporations such as Mount Isa Mines are no longer looking to provide the support that they once did to the schools in Mount Isa. In local rural communities, we are not probably talking about huge amounts of funds but the small businesses are hard pressed to provide support. It is also significantly related, we believe, to socio-economic status of the community in that within the south-east corner there are vast differences between schools.

It shows up even in things such as how much the voluntary levy is. High schools in the Logan area virtually do not charge a voluntary levy, because they do not believe they would get enough compliance to make it worth their while, whereas some of the high schools in wealthier suburbs charge quite substantial voluntary levies.

Just one other point perhaps worth mentioning is that it is also a function on how entrepreneurial the school principal is. That was one comment that I think could be made, that principals said that they now saw that they were being judged not just on their role as an educational leader or as a manager of people but also on their entrepreneurial skills, and that there were some principals who basically made their name and their career based on being at the cutting edge of entrepreneurial activity.

Senator TROETH—When you mentioned the voluntary levies, is it made clear to the parents that they are not compulsory?

Dr McCollow—It should be. We do not have any evidence about how those are presented to parents. We hear anecdotal stories where the letter is sent home worded in such a way that parents interpret it to mean that it is not a voluntary levy, but certainly teachers and school administrators are well aware that it is voluntary.

Senator TROETH—So you do not have any factual evidence to show that it is presented in a compulsory manner?

Dr McCollow—We do not, no. Perhaps the QCPCA could provide a better answer to that one.

Senator TROETH—Are you aware of any situations where students have been denied access to subjects if they cannot afford to pay levies?

Dr McCollow—We do not have any hard evidence that that is the case. We have heard anecdotal stories. Based on the information that we have, it is not unreasonable to say that there would be certain students who would miss out on certain types of classes because there are course levies that are specific to the course. These would be practical courses—

Senator TROETH—I presume it would be woodwork, or something like that, where there would be a need for materials over and above the normal class requirements.

Dr McCollow—We do not have any hard evidence that students have been ‘denied access’ to those courses. But it would not be surprising if there were students who had been steered away from those courses because of their incapacity to pay the levies. There are also students who miss out on what are considered to be extras, such as when a science class has an expedition to the Heron Island science station and that has to be paid for by the parents. That would be considered an extra, but in fact it would be a valuable part of the course.

Senator TROETH—But talking about activities that take place in the classroom, you do not have any factual evidence to say that students are denied access to the classroom or to the course?

Dr McCollow—No hard evidence, no.

ACTING CHAIR—Senator Troeth, we are running out of time. There are two matters I would like to raise. First of all, Dr McCollow, you referred to an article about the experience in America. Could a copy of that be made available to the secretariat and do you wish to have it incorporated into the *Hansard*?

Dr McCollow—Yes, that is fine.

ACTING CHAIR—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—

ACTING CHAIR—My final question to you is: do you believe that the extent of state and national governments' abrogation of their responsibility to public education increases the levels of inequality in our society?

Dr McCollow—I do not think there is any doubt about that. The evidence that exists—and there is some reference to some studies in the submission by our national body, the AEU—shows very clearly that the record of the last decade of governments pulling away from provision of funding in education and in other areas of social provision has increased inequality in Australia.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for your attendance here today and your assistance to the committee.

[9.51 a.m.]

ALEXANDER, Dr Don, Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland

BOND, Mr Peter, Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland

LOGAN, Mr Lloyd, Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland

CISLOWSKI, Mr Garry John, Chair, Quality Assurance and School Review Network, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc., 72 Cornwall Street, Annerley, Queensland

KIMBALL, Mr Bruce Alan, Executive Officer, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc., 72 Cornwall Street, Annerley, Queensland

NELSON, Mrs Sarah, President, Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc., 72 Cornwall Street, Annerley, Queensland

ACTING CHAIR—I welcome the witnesses from the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations. 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 taken in camera may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate.

The committee has before it amended submission No. 25. Is it the committee's wish that it be incorporated in the *Hansard* proceedings? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

ACTING CHAIR—Mrs Nelson, is there no other material that you wish to table in support of this submission?

Mr Kimball—Perhaps if I could come in at this point to indicate that the reason for our amended submission is that we have been relying upon a University of Queensland survey and there are preliminary results that we want to present today. I am not sure in what form, whether it will be written or verbal.

Mr Logan—It will be verbal only.

ACTING CHAIR—You are welcome to make any introductory remarks you wish at this point. We will then consider any questions.

Mrs Nelson—I would like to start by taking the opportunity of letting you know a little about our association and whom we represent. The Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations was established about 50 years ago by a group of very keen Brisbane based parents—keen in regard to the content and subsequent outcomes of their children's education within a public school system. Today, we are still a volunteer association, which represents over 1,200 state schools' P&C associations—96 per cent of P&C associations across Queensland—and some 500,000 students. We are funded by an annual state grant-in-aid and by affiliation fees from our P&C association members. We are governed by a policy and constitution based on an underlying philosophy centred around the principles of equality, humanity and participative democracy.

We believe that the public education system should be fully publicly funded and provided so that school experience is of the highest quality, and is not dependent upon the capacity or willingness to make a financial contribution. It should ensure that all children participate in a broad general curriculum which is both challenging and satisfying. It should also provide the resources necessary to ensure the objectives to which the system is committed are achieved for all children and that inequalities are neither generated nor perpetrated.

The full text of the nature of public education is attached to our submission. As we have said, our submission is based on the preliminary findings of the survey conducted last year. We had commissioned the University of Queensland to assist in this. The initiative was in the absence of any hard data relating to private and commercial funding to Queensland government schools. The survey aimed to identify funding sources accessed by P&C associations, the extent of these funds and how they were spent.

We also sought information from individual parents about the financial and voluntary contributions that were made towards their children's schooling. Unfortunately, we do not have the full findings yet as they will not be available for another month.

We note the submission from our national parent body, ACSSO. Their submission

made reference to a number of funding situations in a number of states but failed to mention Queensland. Our presentation today, hopefully, gives us the opportunity to share some of the preliminary findings of the survey with this committee.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much. Is there any other contribution?

Mr Cislowski—Not at this stage.

ACTING CHAIR—Perhaps we should hear from the University of Queensland in regard to the survey.

Mr Logan—We put forward these comments with a number of limitations. Firstly, the sample could not be taken to be representative of the profile of P&Cs across Queensland. The returns from the P&Cs do not match the profile so that is the limitation. The data on expenditure by parents is perceptual—self-reported data—and it therefore cannot be checked with any crosschecking of receipts and so on, so there is a limitation there. The P&C data, which we have every reason to believe and have every confidence in, is based on their records, but we have not had the opportunity to crosscheck any of that either.

The parent sample was from those people who are involved in the school, so it is going to be skewed towards the higher end of involvement. The whole picture will not be here in the P&C data because quite a lot of money goes directly through school accounts and not through P&C accounts only. However, some of that variation will be picked up out of the direct parent data.

I am saying that there are limitations on this study. The data is soft data, so it is an indicative or suggestive rather than a representative picture of what is out there. However, there is no really hard data in this area—as, no doubt, you found out in other states—which suggests a huge gap in coming to decisions about this very complex matter with which you are dealing.

Our findings would, in the main, reinforce what I have been told from other states and also from what John McCollow was talking about. It indicates that there is a gap in funding between the expectations of what parents evidently want from their schools and what they are prepared to pay for and the moneys that are coming from government. That gap is met in two ways. One is by direct resource contributions in terms of materials and funds and the other is by labour.

We found really nothing surprising in terms of the funding part of this. The funding is uneven across schools. Some schools are well located to raise funds and others are not. Some schools do not have a neighbourhood community, a McDonald's, a Coles or even a local pub to support them. Other schools are entrepreneurial and are well placed. So there is certainly a disparity in terms of the gap funding and how it is being met. That

would be nothing new.

It seems as if there is a considerable variation, even amongst the parents we surveyed—and these were the people who were at least involved in the schools. So you have some people making massive contributions to schools and others making very little. What the impact of that is on the school community and on the learning of those children is unknown. But there are wide discrepancies. There are also differences between the primary and secondary contribution. That follows what we know, that there is high involvement usually in pre-schools and then it seems to peter out as kids become more and more embarrassed about having dad and mum around the school.

We found some indication that some subject area offerings seemed to be governed by parent contributions. Technology is one, music is another, sport is another. It seems as if the quality of offerings in some subjects which you might call core curriculum—and, certainly, technology is a high priority—are dependent, to a degree, on what is available from parents to supplement or complement the difference between what is supplied and what their expectations are.

To return to the question of voluntary hours, I am hesitating about saying they were predominantly within the area of teaching, because that is really non-U from the union's view, but it is certainly involved in the instructional activities of the schools. It is in coaching in classrooms, in reading and so on, as well as in sport. You have some people giving more than a week's work; for them, schooling is nearly a full-time job. In addition, there are the working bees, and the tuckshop takes a large time and book-hire and uniforms take some time. There is a huge component here of labour, and if that labour is withdrawn the quality of the schooling will be at risk. All of that is free.

We also found, in expenditure, some infrastructure costs which were somewhat surprising to us. For instance, expenditure on security, on wages, on loan repayments, on grounds repairs was quite significant. Then there were the program costs of computer hardware and software and classroom curriculum materials, including library and AV. There are regional differences, school differences and parent differences. It is a very complex kaleidoscope that this data shows, and I imagine it reflects the data from other states.

Dr Alexander—We have not finished with our analyses of the data. Nevertheless, we do have reasonable awareness of what the data are saying. Perhaps you have questions that we could attempt to answer, rather than speak to you from the state of the data as they are now.

ACTING CHAIR—Are there any other contributions at this point?

Mr Kimball—If I could refer the committee's attention to the submission we have tabled this morning, we have attached the two questionnaire instruments, as a part of that

survey, to our submission this morning. So, as a reference, you can see the questions we were asking.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Dr Alexander—The questionnaires unfortunately did not get distributed until the end of November and of course over the break we were not able to do much. However, the two questionnaires at attachment B will illustrate to you the sorts of responses we sought. Approximately 20 per cent of the P&Cs' executive, either a treasurer or a president, responded, which I think, given the short space of time, was quite good. One in five, roughly. I believe 1,277 was the total of P&Cs and we had a response rate of 245, so we came up roughly one out of five, 19 per cent, I think—not too bad.

Parents, we had around 800 out of a potential X, because the schools varied in size. We asked for three from each P&C but of course the size of the school population varies enormously, so we do not know what the potential population there was. So it was 800 out of X.

ACTING CHAIR—We have heard evidence in other states from parent organisations about the contribution by parents to the education of their children in financial terms. I appreciate the point you are making in terms of labour; it is always understood to have been extensive, and you can include in that assistance for homework and all the other things that go toward supporting children at school. I am just wondering what is your assessment of the financial contribution per child for a parent at, for instance, a high school. We have heard estimates of up to \$40 a week per child when it is averaged out across a year. Are those sorts of figures unrealistic, in your assessment?

Mr Cislowski—I would not consider those figures unrealistic at all, particularly when you consider that at high school—and I have a couple of children at high school—what used to be considered niceties of excursions and trips et cetera are now part of core curriculum. For example, I had a son studying marine studies and part of that course was a trip to an island to do the marine studies aspect of the course. It was not considered to be an extra, it was part of that course, and it was a couple of hundred dollars. So, when you average that out over the school year, \$40 is not unreasonable at all.

ACTING CHAIR—And if you have got a number of children at school at the one time then of course that figure is increased. So for many families in this state I would think this would be a particularly difficult period in the year, trying to fund the return to school—books and so-called voluntary levies and things like that. Have you any evidence of hardship being experienced by parents at this time of the year?

Mrs Nelson—In a high school setting where the elective subject the student has chosen to take adds perhaps to the total cost, then there is an example of a manual arts module at a high school in Wide Bay that charges an extra \$280 over and above the

textbook hire scheme and the resources that are included in that, and that is for the construction of a kayak. For a child who is progressing through that subject area and they see this is the piece de resistance of their manual arts course study, it is seen they are disadvantaged to some degree if they are not financially able to access that course.

ACTING CHAIR—Are parents finding it difficult to meet these demands from schools?

Mrs Nelson—Yes, it would be a constant. It is an ongoing concern throughout the year, or at the beginning of every year, when they see the handbook coming out, that they see the extra for this is going to be that over and above, and the fact is that they may have two in high school and they might have a couple more in primary school. So it is an ongoing concern.

Mr Kimball—High school is always a surprise for parents. Once they have been involved in the primary school—and previously this morning we have heard about the difference between the primary and the high school setting—but for a parent as a volunteer, in the move into a high school setting, not only do you see different ways of income generation but you also see the sizeable amounts for particular programs. So as a general observation, and I think all three from the QCPCA here this morning have children in the high school system in Queensland, it always is a surprise to parents about how things operate quite differently in high schools. They are very good in their entrepreneurial skills generally and they are very efficient. The high school that my children attend is certainly a school that does not require me to fundraise, and I appreciate that, but it is certainly very efficient and very demanding in dollars.

Mr Cislowski—To speak from an individual school situation—I am the secretary of a secondary school on the south side of Brisbane—at this time of year we run a textbook hire scheme and our principal's time is consumed quite largely with negotiating the paying off of the hire scheme for many parents. We have a school community that involves a high socioeconomic area as well as a low socioeconomic area. As I said, at this time of year the school principal spends a considerable amount of her time negotiating payment schemes for those parents who are finding financial difficulties at this time of year, to meet commitments to the higher scheme for the provision of resources such as manual arts and that sort of thing.

ACTING CHAIR—This state, like all other states, has high levels of poverty and unemployment.

Mr Cislowski—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—How do your members report to you that students are treated who cannot afford to pay these very large sums of money?

Mr Cislowski—Examples we have at this stage are not severe. I know of schools where the severest penalty for failing to pay fees is withholding a report card at the end of the year. Some of them try to recover fees but not very vigorously. Most of them will allow fees not paid at the end of one year to simply drop. I do not know of any situations where students have been more adversely affected than by those remedies.

ACTING CHAIR—These are voluntary levies. Why should there be any sanctions?

Mr Cislowski—Correct. I could not agree with you more.

Mrs Nelson—The high schools are now developing the textbook hire scheme. If you are entering into an agreement to pursue that avenue of accessing the textbooks, there is not necessarily a written agreement or a paper you have signed to say that you agree to joining in the textbook hire scheme and that therefore the expectation is that you have \$80 or \$85 to pay over that year and they will split it within two payments. Schools are finding, where parents have done that, that they might have paid the first \$40 but they have neglected or otherwise cannot pay the other \$40. Then there is a chase on as to how best to recover that money. I know of a school that sent out a letter saying, ‘Come and talk to us if you need some assistance, or pay it off at \$5 per week or whatever.’ Sometimes it gets to the stage where a threat goes out that they will withdraw their textbooks.

ACTING CHAIR—Are students ostracised?

Mrs Nelson—No, not necessarily. I think all schools are working on trying to alleviate the problem or the money concerns of the parents to enable them to continue.

Mr Kimball—I draw the committee’s attention to the first page of our submission, in the fourth paragraph. We received correspondence from the Australian Booksellers and Publishers Association, who have expressed concerns about textbook hire schemes in Queensland. They have indicated that something like 95 per cent of high schools—they did not say high schools but I would conclude that it is high schools—currently operate some form of textbook hire. They have major concerns about the spending of those funds on requirements other than textbooks, so there is another issue. Other than the pursuing of outstanding textbook hire contributions there are issues about accountability for that money.

Parents are in a difficult situation having to make decisions about whether to participate in a textbook hire scheme. To make that decision requires information to be given to parents or to be available. We are aware of difficulties in a number of schools in terms of having all of that information. That is, if I do not participate in a textbook hire scheme, if I put my request in by a certain date I am quite entitled to get the government cheque rather than actually participating in the school scheme. Parents are unable to get

lists of books that they will be required to purchase to help them make the decision whether they participate in that scheme. Therefore there is coercion.

It is marketed in a very positive way by schools as the benefits of book hire schemes. But already organisations like the ABPA are flagging not only concerns about the loss of curriculum writers in Queensland as a result of these textbook hire schemes and having to rely upon Victorian texts, outdated texts and dog-eared texts—those sort of issues around textbook hire schemes—but also other issues such as what we do about collecting those fees.

We view with concern the debt collectors in South Australia pursuing outstanding fees with the support of state governments. We are aware of media reports, only a fortnight ago, that the state government there supports the use of debt collectors for outstanding school contribution fees. When we read about what is being done in other states, we read that as writing on the wall and we view it with concern. You obviously have not seen the article. I have a copy if you want to see it.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, if we could, please. The committee would appreciate that. Senator Troeth, do you have any questions?

Senator TROETH—Yes. I would like to ask you about your survey and the data that you presented. In your normal dealings with statistics, do you consider a return of one out of five to be a satisfactory base on which to base any conclusions?

Mr Logan—For that sort we would be looking at a 60 to 60-plus per cent return. That is what we said.

Dr Alexander—Aside from the percentage return, the individual units, the school size, diversity among them and the very dramatic difference of character among the schools make any overall generalisations difficult.

Mr Logan—On our stats and why we cannot answer your question about children: you have taken your unit of analysis as the individual child. We will take our unit of analysis as the household, because it is the household that is the centre of concern here rather than the child. We will be able in time to give you—with the limitations that we have set—the cost we have put on the household, the cost to households.

ACTING CHAIR—How long do you think that would take, Mr Logan?

Mr Logan—We should have a figure like that for you within a couple of weeks. We can get that sort of figure for you. We can get those individual figures.

ACTING CHAIR—The committee is due to report in April.

Mr Logan—We would have it to you before that.

ACTING CHAIR—We would really appreciate any further contribution, if you would care to send it to the secretariat.

Mr Logan—I am not trying to be tricky with these numbers, Senator.

ACTING CHAIR—No, we appreciate the thoroughness with which you are approaching it.

Mr Logan—We do not want to put forward stuff that turns out to be false or misleading.

Dr Alexander—I think we would be very reluctant, too, to speak in terms of averages when the highs and the lows are so far apart.

Mr Logan—The standard deviation on this does not—

Dr Alexander—There might be a case in one instance of a contribution from a household of \$10 a year, ranging up to maybe \$5,000 or \$6,000 a year. It is very difficult to strike an average that has any meaning when you have such diversity involved as that.

Mr Logan—Again hedging all this stuff is that it varies from year to year. You may suddenly have a great thrust onto a hall, for instance, or something or other. The costs can be higher in a major project such as that for a household that gets really involved in it than in a year of maintenance, status quo stuff. The snapshots are also not going to give a picture of a household over the life of involvement with the school, over the 12 years. That is further complicated in this issue because, as you yourselves would know, at some times families are better able to make contributions than at other times in life. Some families are involved with schooling for many years. If you have got two or three kids, you can have these school costs for 20-odd years—plus the tertiary ed costs. So it is terribly complicated, Senator, as you would appreciate.

Senator TROETH—Thanks for that. I do appreciate it. I have a question now about the questionnaire which was to be completed by the treasurer or president. I refer to item 1, source of funds and real estimated income for 1996. Could you give us some more details on donations in money from charities and/or companies, donations in kind such as use of equipment and donations from individuals. What were the comments or returns like on that?

Mr Bond—The donations from charities and companies varied greatly from one school where it was \$10 to another school where it was \$6,000. So again great discrepancies, but obviously some came in. We did not ask specifically which companies or organisations they came from. Again, donations in kind ranged from \$5 to \$8,085 and

donations from individuals from \$2 up to \$20,000. So you can see sometimes they are quite substantial, but there is a great discrepancy right across.

Mr Kimball—Senator, could I draw your attention to page 6, paragraph 1—

Senator TROETH—This is on the submission, yes.

Mr Kimball—Hopefully I have got the correct version for you. We have mentioned the building of a school hall and I draw your attention: a Brisbane metropolitan primary school P&C subcommittee, mind you, has recently attracted a half a million dollars grants, two grants from two departments. They have raised \$300,000 in parent contributions, which includes a \$70,000 contribution—that could be a donation—from a casino. They are currently negotiating a \$100,000 loan, and as a result of all of this funding the subcommittee has been requested to incorporate. That comes through my role as an executive officer, it did not come through the survey. So donations—I have got a donation from a casino.

Senator TROETH—I do not wish you to identify the school, but would it be in what you would describe as a high socioeconomic area?

Mr Kimball—I think it is more a case of location. I believe it is an affluent area. I am unfamiliar with that part of Brisbane, but its location substantiates its—it was exceptional in that it was one school in Australia that got a lovely grant to build its facilities.

Senator TROETH—And no doubt strenuous entrepreneurial efforts to attract that sort of funding.

Mr Kimball—Absolutely. To quote the chair of the subcommittee, he said: ‘I put my hand up to be a volunteer. I didn’t know what I got myself into.’

Senator TROETH—Perhaps he should go into politics.

Mr Kimball—I would make him an offer.

Senator TROETH—I would like to go back to some of the instances that you quoted individually about the ways in which students need to access various subjects. I do take your individual point about your student undertaking marine studies. If a student was to undertake marine studies, you would imagine as part of the content of the subject that they would need to go on an excursion like that.

Mr Cislowski—Yes, I was aware of that.

Senator TROETH—Was the excursion an essential part of the subject in that you would have a project or whatever assessed as part of the attendance?

Mr Cislowski—Attached to it was an assessment component that was virtually vital to the successful completion of the course.

Senator TROETH—What would happen to students who did decide to undertake that subject and who needed to go on the excursion but who could not pay the fee required: were they then stopped from going on the excursion?

Mr Cislowski—No. In fact, the high school is a very caring high school and it did not exclude students who could not afford to pay. The school in fact paid for two students to attend. The money came out of P&C funds in the end anyway. So it was not a case of free and gratis, it came from other means, but the students themselves were not ostracised because of an inability to pay. But there was still a cost to the community for that to happen.

Senator TROETH—I think you mentioned that the principal at your school is negotiating for low income parents and spends a considerable amount of her time at this time of year doing that. Who is she negotiating with and what do those negotiations involve?

Mr Cislowski—She negotiates with the parents for a scheme for pay off their text book hire scheme over the school year to fit in with their income. So it is not a case of you either pay now or pay later, they will work out a scheme designed to fit in with individual needs. But it is a cost to the school community because it takes a fair bit of her time in order to do that.

Senator TROETH—Is that an undertaking by that particular school or is there any system-wide scheme in place?

Mr Cislowski—I am not aware of a system like that. That is definitely a school based situation where they will take into consideration financial hardship.

Senator TROETH—Where contributions are of a voluntary nature as at the start of the school year, what is the wording on the form that is sent out to parents for those contributions? Is it made clear to parents on the form that the contributions are not compulsory?

Mrs Nelson—Yes. On all that I have ever been involved with and seen from other schools, that is the case. The voluntary contribution scheme is directed to support the P&C in their fundraising. Schools often spend time deliberating how best to fundraise—whether it is going to be the continuation of the school fete or the pie drive or the spellathon. When these voluntary contribution schemes came into being it was put to the school

community that, rather than spend a lot of volunteer time in organising the actual fundraising event, how would you see the benefit or how would you find it acceptable to voluntarily contribute X amount of dollars over the year? That was sometimes established around whether they had one child or two children or a family cost. And that varies every year as to how that school community feels, whether they will or they will not contribute in that given year. But on all that I have ever seen or been involved with, it is always put that it is a voluntary contribution scheme to the P&C association, which then worked with the school on determining how that money will be spent.

Senator TROETH—Thank you.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think you have partially addressed this matter, but can you give us some idea on the range of income attracted from private and commercial sources that state schools in this state would rely upon?

Mrs Nelson—No, I do not think we can totally. It depends on what would attract or what is that commercial funding. We might get a sponsor for the footy post pads or something, or they might seek assistance through a local retail outlet in assisting kids in getting their sports equipment ready for the regional sports carnival or whatever, where they have been selected. I do not honestly think that we could actually say that we can give real evidence on that.

Senator O'BRIEN—You have got one example here of fundraising—if I am interpreting it correctly, nearly \$1 million.

Mrs Nelson—The Coles—

Mr Kimball—This is the page 6 one?

Senator O'BRIEN—Yes, that is one example. That may be the top end.

Mrs Nelson—That is the top end.

Mr Kimball—I think it is the absolute, and for a primary school it is particularly the top end. I am sure Samford might support that.

Senator O'BRIEN—What sort of bottom end figure would you suspect?

Mr Cislowski—The bottom end figure is zero. We have many schools that are not associated with a town. One example is Arcadia Valley school where you are driving down through Arcadia Valley and you do not even see a homestead, they are so far off the road. You flash past the school and you drive another 100 kilometres and you do not see anything. It has a community attached to it but it is a widely spread community, and that school would find it extremely difficult to attract any sponsorship or promotion at all. That

is the actual bottom end of what we come up against in our range of schools.

Mr Logan—This notion that you have a school in a community is quite misleading and erroneous. It came from somewhere, I think rooted back in the 1970s somewhere with Karmel and that sort of stuff, with a school and its community. Here our schools are not area-ised, so you have kids travelling quite large distances across town to schools of their choice. So their parents are not part and they are not part of that neighbourhood community notion. It is quite simplistic and quite misleading for many Queensland schools anyway. And, in the main, commercial interests of the particular primary schools and many secondary schools—most schools are very small. They are not large organisations, they are small organisations, and they will be only attracting commercial involvement from their small area around them.

We have a long history here, as in other states, of the community donating things to the school. But that is quite different to what I hear you talking about, which seems to me to be the funding by firms of schooling for the commercial benefit of the firm itself.

Senator O'BRIEN—Not necessarily, but I think this inquiry is about the implications of private and commercial funding, and private funding could well be parents or it could be a benefactor in the community or it could perhaps be the running of fetes, fairs, or whatever you would call them.

Mr Logan—Quite a lot of it would be, under my definition anyway, the local store that donates the prizes, or the local store that gives a discount to the tuckshop—that sort of thing. All of that has gone on, and that is private.

Senator O'BRIEN—We have a zero to the exceptional example that you give on page 6 as the sort of money that is raised from a variety of sources. I think the question that the committee would like addressed is: do you have a view on how that divergence of the amounts of money that supplement the school budget affect the educational outcomes in those schools?

Mr Logan—It is difficult to talk about the outcomes but you can talk about the provision. It is certain that the provision is linked to resources, and your two major resources are people and the material technological resources that are there. There is a direct relationship between the provision of the quality of the learning experience and those resources. Outcome measures of anything to do with learning are very difficult, particularly over the longer term, but there is a relationship between the provision and the resources.

Mr Cislowski—One of the areas where the starkness between curriculum offerings shows is in information technology simply because of the resources required to effectively teach information technology. I am sure you are sick of hearing of the GJ Coles promotion for Apples for the teacher, but in the Queensland situation most of our schools were

unable to access a Coles outlet to participate in the scheme.

It was a very well-meaning scheme but we have a lot of examples, which unfortunately we do not have information here on, of schools that cannot provide the computer facilities to get into that, and they are the ones that GJ Coles would have hoped to have helped, but unfortunately they are the ones who could not access the scheme, which is one of the reasons why they cannot generate enough funds to generate the computer facilities. So that is one curriculum area where it definitely shows up that sources of funding has a direct impact on curriculum being able to be offered.

Senator O'BRIEN—You talked about the ability of parents to select a school, not area based, for their child in the public school sector. Would the level of fees and levies influence parents in regard to choice in any cases?

Mr Logan—You would have to ask them.

Dr Alexander—I would not think so.

Mr Cislowski—I am afraid we do not have any information on that.

Senator O'BRIEN—I think there would potentially be another consequence when you talked about the resources available, in that the schools that can raise more funds would have better resources and may be more attractive.

Mr Logan—We know that in some cases kids travel from one end of the highway to a school on the other end of the highway on the Gold Coast because the school is seen to be better.

Mr Cislowski—The example of the curriculum that I have is that major metropolitan high schools and the senior secondary schools offer around 40 subjects, whereas Longreach High School, in the senior secondary, offers only 15 subjects and at Hughenden High School they offer no maths and science for senior secondary school because they cannot attract any teachers. We have a problem in Queensland with a shortage of maths and science teachers, but in Hughenden they offer no subjects in senior secondary in either maths or science.

Senator CARR—What does that do to the enrolments? Do parents turn away from the school?

Mrs Nelson—Some parents do not have any choice, when they are in Hughenden or the Isa or a rural location like that.

Mr Cislowski—Unfortunately, their only choice is to send them to that high school or to put them into a private school, to board them or to go by distance education. They

are their only alternatives in that situation. I cannot answer with what those parents would select for their children, but there are certainly some very hard choices.

Senator TROETH—The school would have access to distance education, though—

Mr Cislowski—Yes, the school would have access to it.

Senator TROETH—The subjects could be provided but not at the classroom level?

Mr Cislowski—Yes. They cannot be provided on site; they can be provided through the school of distance education. But again there are some hard choices for parents to make when it comes to that end of the schooling years.

Senator CARR—But the cause of that is the shortage of those sorts of teachers across the state, is it not?

Mr Cislowski—Yes, there is definitely a problem with a shortage of teachers. But the high school my children attend has only 600 and they have problems accessing a range of curriculum in the senior secondary school, on class sizes because there are not that many teachers to go around and there are resources attached to running those subjects. If they cannot reach minimum numbers, they cannot offer subjects.

CHAIR—That is a function of the size of the school.

Mr Cislowski—That is a function of the size of the school, not a function of costing.

Mr Logan—It is a function, Senator, of two things. It is a function of the size of the school but also it is a function of not having the capacity to develop and utilise the alternatives such as those that information technology can offer.

CHAIR—In small schools that is always the case: you cannot get the curriculum choice purely by the mathematics of the number of students. You are talking also about resources in Queensland. In other states, like New South Wales, every school is connected to the Internet. This is a matter of state government priorities over the last 10 years.

Mr Logan—They can connect to the Internet here, if you have got the brass.

CHAIR—But they have, you see. The state government has provided the priorities in the last 10 years.

Mr Logan—If you do that, you can then offer a wider program in your smaller

schools.

CHAIR—I missed the earlier questioning, I am sorry. My plane was broken down on the runway in regional Australia—another problem we have. Not having heard the earlier questions I just want to ask a broad question which I hope no-one has already asked. Let us just step back a little bit from the whole debate here. Governments are facing drastic budget problems and have done so for the last 10 or 15 years. Every state, the Commonwealth level, Liberal, Labor—all have the same problem. Given that there are not enough resources—that is the reality—for what we can do in education, what are you suggesting in terms of private and commercial funding? Are you suggesting that we do not do it at all? No magic cash cow is going to come in from government and fix this. I would just like some response.

Senator CARR—The Commonwealth increased its spending under the Labor government by 40 per cent.

CHAIR—I was not asking you, Senator Carr; I was asking the table.

Senator CARR—You ought to get the facts straight.

Dr Alexander—It is probably something that is left more at the political, ideological level. There are enough resources; it is how they are distributed, the priority. If there were more public moneys raised, perhaps more public acts could take place. But it is a very hard political decision.

CHAIR—But as Senator Carr has just said, it has gone up 40 per cent from the Commonwealth, and we are talking about up to nine months ago. Surely there should be enough resources to go around if the Commonwealth has been so generous in these things.

Mr Cislawski—But the situation has always been that, apart from the funding that comes from government, schools have raised additional funds. That is a fact. What we are concerned about is that the additional funds that P&Cs raise are now seen as part of the essential operating budget of the school rather than in furtherance of the objects which were stated in the Education (General Provisions) Act, which in previous years have been to provide the extras or the additional niceties that the school community demanded. More and more we are seeing those funds now directed, in my school, into maintenance of the grounds. We spend a lot of money on petrol to run the mowers. Instead of providing the additional funds, it is now becoming part of the normals, and our concern is that increased funding is only going to keep the status quo. It is not going to improve our schools.

CHAIR—But again that is a function of not enough resources going into education, as has happened over the last few years. You are brought back to the point of having to provide what was provided originally as part of government budgets.

Mr Cislawski—Yes.

CHAIR—Given that that is the situation, given that governments—state or federal, Liberal or Labor—are not going to provide great increases, what do we do about this problem in terms of private and commercial funding? What constructive suggestions do you have to actually bring about better outcomes?

Mr Logan—The reality is that we are moving more towards the privatisation of schooling, in that there will be a greater non-government component. The runner in this at present is Kennett in Victoria. They are furthest down that track.

One back from there, the issue is how much investment you put into your young in terms of essential schooling. What is it essential for the schools to do? One of the problems with your costs on education is that the school services just continue to increase and increase. We have to start drawing rings around things and saying, ‘This is what; it will be done,’ and until we get some accurate estimates of what that costs to be done. That side of the agenda needs addressing as well as where this money coming is from. At present these are both black holes—absolutely black holes.

There needs to be some hard thinking done about what we, as a nation, require our schools to do. If we can define that, we have then got some angle on about what the costs of this should be—all these are still rubbery—and what we are prepared now to fund. Some of that funding will be core funding. Essential, safety net funding would, I imagine, be the responsibility of government—as an investment, not as a cost against those kids. It is an investment in those kids as a nation. If you want then a more up-market version of it, you look at the commercial side.

I am talking about the compulsory years, to 16. I think the question is different once you move into the non-compulsory years. We have said as a nation that this is an essential experience for every kid in this land. Up to the age of 16 this is it. Once you move into years 11 plus and into the tertiary area, it seems to me then that it switches from investment purely in the individual as a citizen to the idea that that family or person is making an investment in their future, and they should pay for that. Just the same as university students pay, it may well be that the cost of 11-plus education is picked up more. So I am suggesting that there are two issues here. There would be, I imagine, a much higher commercial involvement as well as private involvement in the funding of the non-compulsory years.

CHAIR—It comes back, though, doesn’t it, if we stick just with those compulsory years—

Mr Logan—Okay, we are talking about the compulsory years only.

CHAIR—It comes back to the problem that people in this country do not want to

pay more taxes. As a matter of fact, governments of all persuasions try to put taxes down, not up. If we are not getting more taxes, you do not have the funding base for your roads, for your defence systems or for that. So that is a given.

Mr Logan—Yes. But, if you take education itself, you can shift—and the OECD is advising a shift—from government funding at the top end of your schooling down to your compulsory schooling. You can shift funds, which would change burdens, within the vote itself.

Mr Cislowski—I am having extreme difficulty answering this question. From the QCPCA point of view, our policy is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child—that is, we believe that public education should be fully government funded and resourced. So I find it difficult to answer how we should come up with a better framework of funding it. The other issue it comes back to is that we are still talking about domestic income here. Whether it be through taxes or companies income, we are still talking about the education budget as a proportion of the gross domestic product. All I see that government is trying to do is shift the proportion of that funding that comes directly from them through taxes to other sections of society that are willing to pay for it. The United Nations has recognised that education is of value to the whole of society. Taxation seeks to gain money from the whole of society. To start to discuss gaining money from certain sections of society denies the fact that education will contribute to the whole of society in the future.

Senator CARR—State governments have dropped their contributions from total budget outlays for education. In my state they have gone from about 24 or 25 per cent of total outlays to about 18 per cent—

Mr Cislowski—And are proud of it.

Senator CARR—As you say, where once the state was proud to spend most on education, now they are saying they are spending least and they see that as an achievement. The federal government, in its last budget, has dropped its contribution to education from 11 per cent of total outlays to nine per cent of outlays over the course of the forward estimates period. Is there not an issue here about government priorities as much as about the capacity to pay?

Mr Kimball—I know quite clearly that, as an organisation, the QCPCA strongly supports a government schooling system and we believe that system is at risk. We know what we are doing as an organisation, and that is promoting public debate about government schooling, and if we can help that debate along we will. The debate is about commercial and private funding. There are opportunities that certainly are hard to turn down, but we make reference to that in our submission.

CHAIR—The private and commercial funding that is in government schools is

something that is really here to stay. I do not know if you addressed this earlier on, but what ways would you like to see it change to operate more effectively for education?

Mrs Nelson—That is if we agree that it is an effective way for schools to continue. Can it be relied upon for a commercial investor to contribute some hard cash or a facility to a particular school? He might be totally reliant on a return on his investment, and when that does not happen it is withdrawn. Linking that to the parent contribution in time and in money is, again, wholly and solely dependent on their capacity and their willingness to contribute. It should not be a transition from the government funding to this private and commercial funding. The core funding should come from the government, with continued confidence in public education.

CHAIR—Because of all the reasons we have discussed, that is not happening—

Mrs Nelson—But it does not mean to say that it cannot happen.

CHAIR—In an ideal world, that is true. But we are getting further and further in the hole in this country, so that is unlikely.

Mrs Nelson—When my child's learning assistance program is dependent on a willing and able volunteer, then there are some problems there.

Mr Cislowski—Our biggest concern is diversity. Queensland has a great diversity among schools, as our survey has shown. An increase in commercial and private sources of funding would reinforce the diversity in schools and, because it represents so many schools, put a number of our schools at a disadvantage in relation to others. We would seek any funding model that was developed to equitably cater for all students, irrespective of geographic location and economic circumstances.

CHAIR—Do you have any suggestions on how that may be done.

Mr Cislowski—I am afraid I am not an economist; I do not have any magic tricks on how that may be done.

Dr Alexander—There are other critical solutions available, not educational ones. The pie is fairly finite; it depends on how it is divided up. If it is divided up in favour of social services such as education, then yes, I would be happy to say more money should come to schooling. But it is very difficult to make political decisions on behalf of politicians.

CHAIR—The suggestion has been made in other hearings that possibly sponsorships could be worked more in a central way, getting more equitable outcomes that way.

Dr Alexander—I have recently come back from visiting several countries. One in Central America, Chile, is currently privatising everything fast and furiously. Up until 10 years ago the city of Santiago had six good universities, now it has 45 universities. Aside from the original six, all the others have arrived over the last 10 years. Everything is very pragmatic, everything is very commercial, everything is job oriented. I would suggest that if education becomes private so will the interests that stem from it. Community interests will be on the decline if education is disfigured by private interests entirely. I appreciate the conundrum you pose: the money is finite and the government cannot fund everything. Somewhere there has to be a balance struck between the two that does not cause those who pass through schooling to feel some sort of communitarian solidarity instead of just doing as well as their parents can afford to pay them to do so they can pursue private interests. That to me presents a frightening scenario and there must be a balance struck somewhere—I do not know where it is.

Mr Cislowski—A proposal for a centrally organised sponsorship mechanism may be a way to overcome our difficulty with diversity among schools and to make sure that resources are equitably distributed to all schools. As I said, and as has been said earlier, in the great diversity of Queensland it is the small rural schools, schools without towns, that would suffer from sponsorship dollars being gained by high profile areas—like our school on page 6 which obviously has a great capacity to attract funds. Those sorts of schools may attract funds to the detriment of other schools. They may be excellent schools but excellent people have come from the bush as well. We would seek to have their education of the highest quality irrespective of where they are.

Mr Logan—Senator Tierney, I cannot grasp the difference between a tax and a voluntary contribution from commerce. If commerce makes these voluntary contributions to education, is that not a different sort of tax for education on that particular segment of the community? If so, why should commerce pick it up? Why should labour not pick it up? Why should industry not pick it up? Why commerce?

CHAIR—If it is all voluntary from the commercial sector, then they do not have to do any of this.

Mr Logan—But if we are going to press for this, and if it is going to be an integral part of the funding, it is essential, if your school is going to continue to run, that it is paid. It seems to me to be a surrogate tax, that is all.

CHAIR—One of the ways in which this discussion has evolved today is that we do not seem to be considering the fact that we do have a private schools sector, which is about 30 per cent of the population. So you have a model where you have one-third of the schools reasonably well off, in varying degrees, depending on what level they are, and you have public schools that attract sponsorships and charge fees in varying degrees, and then you have a group that do not have the capacity to do that.

Mr Logan—You have the residual schools; those that are left.

CHAIR—The ones who do not have the capacity to do this. Wouldn't we perhaps be better moving towards a model where we work out some compensatory devices? I am just putting that as an alternative to perhaps central sponsorships which are then spread. There are a number of ways of doing it.

Dr Alexander—Private schools are not altogether privately funded, as you are well aware. That money could be spent on some of the projects in the public sector.

CHAIR—But only if you take all the private schools over into the public sector as well.

Dr Alexander—Private schools tend to be a matter of personal choice.

CHAIR—Yes, but in terms of funding it would put another \$1.5 billion into the system every year which would then be gone under that sort of scenario. The basic point I am making is that what all these sponsorships and raising funds in other ways do is put great funds completely into the system. We have more funds than would have been there if that did not happen. The question is how do you set up a system where perhaps you distributed that?

Dr Alexander—It is a distribution problem again.

Mr Cislowski—The problem with the distribution, whether it is centrally organised or there is a compensatory scheme involved, is that the nature of sponsorships, promotions and private commercial funding is that they are transitory whereas with a taxation base we have a fair idea from year to year what our taxation—

CHAIR—It is transitory as well, I am afraid.

Mr Cislowski—Perhaps that is so, but a large commercial sponsor may cease without much notice at all. When it is factored into the system as being part of the overall funding, it then becomes a very difficult management problem for government to work out how all the schools are going to be funded.

Mr Logan—As you would know, Senator, some of the private schools here are going into corporation in order to hedge against the uncertainty of government funding. It is uncertainty all around.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for appearing today.

Short adjournment

[11.20 a.m.]

HANNAM, Mr Robert William, President, P&C Association, Samford State School, School Road, Samford, Queensland

HARRISON, Mr Anthony, Principal, Samford State School, School Road, Samford, Queensland

CHAIR—Welcome. The committee prefers evidence to be given in public, but if at any stage you wish to give any evidence, part of evidence or answers to any questions in camera you may make the request and the committee will consider the request. Such evidence, however, may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate.

The committee has before it submission No. 20. Is it the wish of the committee that the submission be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

CHAIR—Is there any other material you wish to table at this stage?

Mr Harrison—We do have a copy of our school annual operational plans which give budgetary information. I am more than willing to give you those if you would like them.

CHAIR—Thank you. You are welcome to make some brief introductory remarks and then we will go to questions.

Mr Hannam—We are pleased to be able to come before the committee. We responded to the initial request for information back in July. We did not quite know where that was leading or what was happening and, I would have to say, we were not quite sure what was happening here today either. We have listened with interest to the other two submissions this morning and I guess ours is on quite a different tack from those. Perhaps if we can offer anything to this committee, it is more from the grassroots level.

We are a small school on the outskirts of Brisbane. It is always interesting hearing that others have the same problems we do. The comments on the voluntary levy is something that is pretty close to us at the moment because we have just introduced one for the first time ever, after a lot of consideration. It actually comes into play this year for the first time, so I cannot even tell you what the success rate and so on is because it has not actually happened yet, but it has certainly been approved by our local P&C.

We have some comments that obviously we have put forward in our submission on the topics of other potential private funding and other potential commercial funding. We have not addressed it from the point of view so much of whether it is philosophically correct or not. I guess you will get that information from others. We are probably more pragmatic. We have had to convince our parents. Obviously, we fundamentally believe that public schools are funded by government and P&Cs have always been happy and willing to come forward and provide funds in a variety of ways to top those funds up.

We approach that in a pragmatic sense in that, if there are not sufficient funds, we would like to see our children getting the best opportunities that they can and if we do not jump in and provide those extra funds they are going to miss out. While we perhaps leave it to others to argue with governments as to what those levels are or whether they are sufficient or not, we have just gone about the business of making sure the funds are there now. Whatever the outcomes of any other arguments, they are perhaps a couple of years down the track.

We have taken it at a far more grassroots level. The document that Tony tabled there shows our annual operational plan, which identified what the needs of the various departments of the school were. We then tallied up the beans in the bean box to see how many we had. We now join all funds that are given by the government with the P&C funds, on the proviso that the P&C is given a good input into how those funds are spent.

This certainly takes place.

In the last two years—and probably more so for this year—we have spent a lot of time with the administrators of the school, so we have really jumped in there with them and joined in and now we help decide the priorities of spending that money. Our main interest is to make sure that the money is spent across the interests, whether it is music, sport, in the classroom, the arts, science or whatever. We want to make sure there is a good balance spread across and the areas are not missing out.

In the back of the AOP is an ask list. Last year the gap between the ask list and what funds were available was much greater than this year. This year I think the gap was probably more in the vicinity of \$60,000.

Mr Harrison—Yes, approaching that.

Mr Hannam—The reason that the gap is less this year is that people knew from last year what happened, so they did not have quite such a big wish list because they knew they would not get it. So it was probably a more realistic wish list. But we then had to sit down and chop about \$60,000 off across the board because we see what funds are there and what we can dish out.

Just a quick comment on the voluntary levy from our point of view: the parents have accepted it—and when I say that, the P&C has accepted it. We get a fairly good roll-up at P&C meetings and we publish what we are discussing and what is agreed to, so those who do not attend meetings certainly have opportunities to speak up and offer their opinions. It has been accepted in principle. Running out and collecting the money, as you can imagine, is another matter. Whether the funds come in is yet to be decided. Having heard some of the discussions on the voluntary nature of it this morning, to us that is a real problem, having it voluntary. I see it as a fairly delicate issue. If it is pushed too hard people are very quick to say education is supposed to be free, et cetera. If we do not push it too hard—as in pushing the collection of it too hard—what happens is that you collect 20 or 30 per cent. The people who pay are very keen to see what percentage of people are paying and front up the next year. Try and have your voluntary levy when you have only had a 20 or 30 per cent collection last year and those 20 or 30 per cent have already stated that they will not be paying next year!

So the voluntary nature of it causes us problems, even in designing how we ask for it. I noticed, Senator, that you were asking a couple of questions on that: how is it asked and how is it made clear that it is voluntary? From our case, yes, it is. But the more clear we make that, the more scared we are that they will not take the issue seriously. So we want to say, ‘Yes, it is voluntary, but before you don’t pay it please consider what the implications are.’ We actually send it out in the form of an invoice. We got one complaint last year that it was invoiced as though it was compulsory, and that was despite the fact that a covering letter went with it explaining it in great detail and highlighting the word

‘voluntary’. But we did send it in the form of an invoice in the hope that it was treated seriously. So there is a very fine line there and we acknowledge that.

Mr Harrison—Can I emphasise the voluntary status in the sense that the beauty of our system too is that it is not the principal that goes chasing those contributions, so there is no coercion from a departmental representative as such. We certainly endorse it and when we enrol new families we let them know that it is there and we ask them to consider it, but the chasing of the funds and the invoicing is all done through the P&C Association. I think that is an important point, because it does not set us up as the people who are chasing the funds.

Mr Hannam—We have set up that voluntary levy in the form of a library fund. There are various reasons for that. One is that most of the funds are expended through the library—and we include a lot of the computer and technology equipment through the library. We also do not hide from the fact that it is a legitimate tax deduction for those contributing to it, if it is through a library fund. There are quite strict guidelines on that which we have gone into and we ensure that any funds spent from that area strictly comply with what the Australian Taxation Office lays down. So it is actually titled a library fund and the voluntary contribution will come through that.

Another quick comment is that a number of parents from our school are watching very carefully this year to make sure that that money is spent quickly, or put into the system quickly. A child is only at the school for seven years. Some of them are in grade 4 or 5 and have already been told that the grade 7 parents probably will not pay it because they will not see any benefit from it. So we took the other tack: we have a kindergarten or preschool attached to the school, so we have also approached them with the view that most of those children are likely to come into the system and they are likely to gain the most benefit. I guess it is just racking your brains and trying to get it to work in the best possible way.

Regarding the overall acceptance of it by parents: the big fear, of course—and you have probably heard it time and time again—is that governments are going to rely on this money, and not just voluntary levies but any P&C money, whether it is the fete or whatever. We have also adopted a global budgeting situation where we are just putting the P&C moneys in with government. Personally, I believe that we can protect against that by having a big input into how that money is spent, but it is another matter to go out and convince the rest of the parents that we are actually making sure that the money is being spent in the correct areas. But there is certainly a fear that, as governments see that money increasing, rather than being top-up money they will tend to chop back on the distributions and come to rely on it. Without a doubt—I can only speak for our school—that is the main fear of the parents in our school.

A couple of quick things that I referred to in the submission from Samford were other possibilities from funding. When I talk about joint usage arrangements I am talking about calling on funds from local government where the facility that is to be built or provided is available outside school use. In our case, I am referring to a school pool. But

we have also just started talking with the local government about a hall and they are very open to putting in substantial funds towards that. I guess that is not private funding to us; we think that it is, in that the facilities are then available to the wider community and the pool is designed to be, and is, certainly actively used. It has an independent operator who operates outside school hours.

It has just been a brilliant success, the whole way that school pool has operated over the last four or five years. The local government endorse it fully and they have just built a grandstand for it into which they put 100 per cent of the funds. They are very happy to jump into bed with us with a hall which, again, would be available for outside school use. Tony manages the pool from 9 to 3, so it is a school facility in those hours, but then a private facility outside those hours. There are certainly provisions there for school carnivals and things where it may not be in the 9 to 3 time period. We advocate those arrangements and we see them as a really good opportunity of gaining facilities and good funding from not just a sympathetic council but a council that looks at it pretty pragmatically too and sees that it benefits the wider community.

On commercial funding, which I guess is perhaps the most controversial, we have had a couple of instances come up in the P&C, even down to things like a group actually approaching us to do our school magazine whereby they would provide the paper, the photocopying and do it. What they were offering to do was to run around and gain classified advertising from local businesses. There was potentially a couple of thousand dollars that would have come back into P&C funds from that, whereas, at the moment, it actually costs us from between \$1,500 to \$2,000 a year to provide that school magazine. At the end of the day, at the moment, we have rejected that offer—there are several reasons for that—but we are open to other offers along those lines.

Overall, we think that commercial funding can work in schools. We see that it needs a set of guidelines. I do not believe they exist at the moment, other than basically to say—as I understand it; I do not have full knowledge of it—that commercial funding is not permitted except to some limited extent. So we would see that there would need to be a set of guidelines, but we think it could work. As I said, I am not addressing the philosophical issue of whether it should. Do you want to add anything to that, Tony?

Mr Harrison—The issue of our school newsletter being funded by the private company was a pretty contentious issue for a couple of meetings, because we did not want to be seen to be anti-entrepreneurial, which seems to be the word that is thrown around at us now. We looked at the school newsletter and at the integrity of that document, which goes to homes every week and which we know is really highly valued in our community. We also thought very seriously about the local businesses in the Samford area and at the onus of responsibility that would place on them if they were to be approached to support the school. We know they support us in a lot of other ways. For those reasons, we decided at this stage not to go with it. There was certainly some good healthy debate, because not only was it going to cover our costs, but I believe a profit of some \$1,500 or \$1,800 would probably have been returned to our school, so it would have been a \$3,000

turnaround. But, for the reasons I mentioned, we decided not to go with it at this stage.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Are there some questions?

Senator O'BRIEN—Could either of you give us some more details about how your library fund works and what the limitations are on the use of the funds that go into it?

Mr Hannam—In relation to how it works, I have to say we are at the beginning of it so I do not have definitive answers. We plan to ask for \$75 for the first child and \$95 per family. It is very interesting because when we initially were debating it last year we were only talking about per family and the feedback came back that that was not equitable, to the point that we were told that it would probably fail on that basis. I personally favoured the family contribution, rather than the per child. It was also hard if you said \$75 per child; even from \$75 to \$95 there is not a lot of difference, but if you started multiplying \$75 by four kids it really got heavy. Whereas on the first-child basis, you needed a good solid amount from the first child if it was going to work at all.

Another point on that was that we have undertaken not to do other forms of fundraising. Someone made up a list of all the things, from book week to sausage sizzles and whatever, and they felt they were putting their hand in their pocket every week for \$2, \$1, \$5, whatever. There was no direct voluntary contribution. Last year we ran a chocolate drive which was quite amazing—they sold around \$18,000 worth of chocolates, of which \$9,000 came to the school. Also, there was a kids runs for kids program, which brought in about \$9,000. We have undertaken not to run either of those this year, so that the voluntary contribution is supposed to be a one-off—and I guess some people will sit back and see whether that is the case. We have had to exclude things like the fete, which we see as a fun day anyway. It is the major money earner at the moment—it earns about \$20,000 in one day—but people also have a lot of fun doing it. It is a lot of hard work, but they involve the kids a lot.

Even given the chocolate raffles and the kids run for kids program, the reason we have pushed the levy is that we think it is a very efficient way of collecting money. If the primary objective is to get money into the school, every dollar that comes out of the parents' pockets should go to the school. With the chocolate drive, 50 per cent goes to the commercial man; you pay a dollar, but only 50c goes to the school. So we have used that argument with the voluntary contribution.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you use the money that goes into the library fund for a variety of purposes?

Mr Hannam—Yes, it is identified separately on our P&C income and it is imperative that we spend it under the guidelines set down by the Taxation Office. I might say that the guideline is fairly broad in that my understanding of it is that it states that it

must be spent on items reasonably under the control and for the benefit of the library. So obviously that would include books, but library resources go far beyond books, with videos, audio equipment and computers as well.

Senator CARR—You might buy a set of computers and have them housed in the library or lent out to classrooms?

Mr Hannam—Exactly.

Senator O'BRIEN—Is this a tax deductible amount?

Mr Hannam—Yes, it is.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you know if this mechanism is widely used?

Mr Hannam—I cannot say whether it is widely used; I know of a couple of other schools that certainly are using it. We understood that there were two funds that were legitimately tax deductible: one was a building fund and the other was a library fund.

Mr Harrison—Our understanding is that it has certainly been more widely used in the private schooling system; it is probably something a little newer to the state schooling system. But it certainly has been utilised in the private school system for quite some time.

Senator CARR—Is the voluntary levy in addition to the library fund?

Mr Hannam—No, that is the library fund.

Senator CARR—So your entire parent contribution is channelled through the library fund?

Mr Hannam—The direct parent contribution, yes. Obviously the fete—

Senator CARR—What about subject levies and those sorts of things? There are no additional charges?

Mr Harrison—I will clarify it: there are a few small ones occasionally that come in. Religious education springs to mind, which I think works out at something like \$6 or \$8 a year. But in the primary schooling we have a lot less emphasis on textbooks than we do in the secondary schooling. So, whilst it is still significant and we have school excursions—which I heard came up earlier this morning—that certainly is not entailed in any of this funding. But, as far as the funding through the P&C goes, the library fund is their direct access.

Senator CARR—There are no craft levies?

Mr Harrison—Yes, we do have a small craft levy that I think works out at about \$5 per student per year.

Senator CARR—Couldn't the library fund fund craft?

Mr Harrison—Probably not under the guideline as we understand it taxation-wise. That is where we have to be careful where we channel that money, as Bob said earlier. If we channel it into areas that are not legitimately housed in the library or used for those resources, we may be putting in jeopardy the tax deductibility of those donations. We are learning a little at the moment too.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you see this as a way of effectively gaining an additional government contribution to the operation of your school?

Mr Hannam—No.

Senator O'BRIEN—Do you advertise its tax deductibility?

Mr Hannam—Yes.

Senator O'BRIEN—And so the parent gets back a proportion of what they pay?

Mr Hannam—Yes. I guess our purpose for doing that is to make it more attractive to the parents so they will pay it.

Senator O'BRIEN—Have you considered the concept that in fact it is generating an additional amount of government funding for your school through the tax deductibility mechanism to the parents?

Mr Hannam—We have not thought of it from that point of view, but I guess you are right technically in what you are saying. The total income from the P&C has gradually built up. Last year it was about \$35,000, and that was the net profit of the P&C. Obviously, we see chocolate drives, et cetera dropping off. You lose that, but we are replacing it with the voluntary library fund. We are throwing ourselves to the wolves a bit because we do not know how successful that is going to be. This is the first year of it.

We have 600 students and there is potentially \$50,000 there if everyone paid. I am not adding up every family or individual, but there is \$45,000 to \$50,000 there. We would drop off these other items, but we believe there is the potential to be ahead by \$15,000 to \$20,000 from where we were this year, and we see that as essential to keeping up the resources that we want.

Senator O'BRIEN—I just wanted to touch on the funding of the school magazine. Mr Harrison has expressed some reasons for the proposal to have an outside provider fund

that, by advertising, and pay a profit to the school. That is not an uncommon method of putting out publications in other areas. Did you have any concerns which went to the role that the publication played with the students themselves?

Mr Harrison—It should be noted clearly that the decision not to go with the funding was a P&C decision. It was not a principal's decision. We put it to the meeting and we decided which way we would go. My personal view is no, I did not have fears in that regard about the publisher. I did not see that it was going to impact. Obviously, when it goes out in a school newsletter, regardless of what we say, there is some underlying message that we are endorsing the products and the advertisers. There was a niggling doubt in my mind over that, but I was prepared to go whichever way our parents and citizens association went. That was my only personal reservation, about that underlying endorsement. Our major reasons were, as I touched on earlier, the undue pressure that we thought we would be putting on our local businesses. They already help us out in many ways.

Mr Hannam—Also—this has got nothing to do with the philosophies behind it, probably—in our area there happened to be three local magazines, all of which do assist. So we thought fronting back up to them and asking them to do this would be too much. It is probably a bit of a red herring in this conversation, but those were our reasons for not going with it.

Senator O'BRIEN—It was going to impinge on other potential funding raising and relationships.

Mr Hannam—Yes. As Tony says, they come forward with prizes or whatever for raffles and different things at different times, so they do support the school in other sorts of ways.

Senator O'BRIEN—Did you see any conflict between the commercial implications of that publication and section 20 of the state Education (General Provisions) Regulation, which limits the use of the educational institution for commercial or propaganda purposes?

Mr Hannam—Yes. I do not know the section as such, but we knew that, if we were going to go ahead with it, we would have had to address those issues more seriously. We went to a certain extent with it only. We knew that, if we had decided yes, we were going to do it, we had make sure that we were complying with those sorts of things.

Senator TROETH—I would like to ask you about the reaction to the voluntary levy proposal when it was first mooted at P&C. Along what lines were there pro and anti arguments? Was there a general level of agreement at the end that this was the decision you should go with?

Mr Hannam—It was put to the people in a fairly pragmatic sense. We will come back to our chocolate drives and kids run for kids. Whereas they were a resounding success—we were absolutely amazed at how much came in from a chocolate drive—there were also objections to the fact that there were a lot of incentives and prizes for kids who sold the most chocolates. The kids running for kids one was similar—there was a bicycle or something for the successful ones. So there were negative vibes about how that sort of fundraising works too.

The other thing—a lot of people raised this with us—is that it is okay to sell to grandma and aunts and uncles, but then if you go around knocking on doors there is an issue of danger in that. My wife objected violently to another thing as well. I have got two kids; they both arrived home with two big cartons of chocolates—sort of, ‘Go and sell them.’ On the back, as you would know, it said, ‘Win this, win that, win whatever.’ She objected to that. We did it; I think we ended up buying the box and just paying the money. I do not know what happened to the chocolates.

In the P&C meeting I supported the voluntary levy. It was from a pragmatic point of view. It seemed easier. I thought it overcame some of the problems with the chocolate drive. I see the direct levy, at the end of the day, as being like when you put your hand in your pocket: you are buying chocolates and you know 50 per cent of it is going somewhere else. I keep using the word ‘pragmatic’; it was for those reasons. So I guess I put it forward, ‘Why don’t we consider doing this?’ People sat on the fence for a while. We did not push it. We discussed this all last year. We had had those two things halfway through last year. People knew we needed more funds. So we said, ‘Where are they going to come from?’

All this was starting this year. We actually did, for the second half of last year, a \$25 one and it was explained in great detail. I think we would have had about four foolscap sheets over different times and go out and justify the reasons for it or whatever. We invited people to come to the meeting and discuss it and we were all very democratic about it. At the end of the day even some of the real old stalwarts who come along and object to everything—and I am thinking of a couple in particular—now fully endorse it and, in fact, they were the ones who wanted it up from \$75 to \$90. The attitude was, ‘If we are going to do it, let’s make it work.’

Senator TROETH—With your proposed magazine or newsletter that you were going to put out, were you proactive about that or did businesses come to you and say that is what they would like to do?

Mr Hannam—Actually it was two ladies from another local school in Brisbane who had done it for that school. We are still not sure whether they were doing it as a fundraiser for their school. They asked if they could come along and put their case forward to the P&C. We said that was fine. So they came along and they offered to do it for the school. So we did not go out seeking it. Someone came to us and put the proposal.

Senator TROETH—Have you ever thought about seeking any other commercial sponsorship or involving businesses, industry or commerce in the school from that point of view?

Mr Hannam—In relation to the newsletter?

Senator TROETH—Yes, or any other forms of sponsorship.

Mr Hannam—In relation to the newsletter, no. One of the guys who runs the little local magazine was actually at that meeting. He was cringing a bit. He thought, ‘Here is a fourth one who is going to go and ask people for classified advertising.’ He certainly considered, ‘Will I do this?’ There was some debate about whether the P&C would do it—in other words, whether some parent would run out and talk to these businesses and ask them. The answer was no. On the other question of whether we have considered other forms of commercial sponsorship, the answer is probably that we have not, but I see it as a topic that is going to come up.

Senator TROETH—When you say that you are \$40,000 short of the minimum needed to adequately fund the school, that is core classroom type functions, is it, that children need to do in order to be educated?

Mr Harrison—It is very hard—and I know it was raised here earlier this morning—and it is one of the challenges that we are facing now. It is very hard to delineate what is core curriculum any more. Five years ago having computers in classrooms was something that was very nice. Now it is something that is totally expected. Whilst we know that our Department of Education has been trying to meet those changing needs, it is incredibly difficult just because of the expense.

It is very hard and, for someone to draw a line around something and say what is core curriculum nowadays, I as the principal of Samford State School would find it very difficult to give you what a core curriculum is as such. All the things are outlined in that budget if you get some time to have a look at that. It shows some of the things that were requested.

Senator TROETH—So, if you do not raise the \$40,000, will you just have to delete some of the things that you wanted to do?

Mr Harrison—That is where we spend literally hours and hours prioritising. We have a great P&C Association that sits down and helps us determine that. Like anything, we have to operate on a limited budget and we try to decide which are our priorities.

Senator TROETH—As a matter of interest, are there any government policies in Queensland for introducing information technology programs into schools?

Mr Harrison—Programs as such or funding?

Senator TROETH—Funding for those programs.

Mr Harrison—The good news that we just received in the last few weeks is that there has been a major increase—I think there was something like \$5.2 million additional to last year's budget that was allocated to information technology. Our school has just received the first cheque for that, which I think equated to something like an extra \$8,000 for our school, which we welcome and we think is fantastic, but anyone that knows the prices of computers knows that you are probably looking at three computers across a school of 600. So, while we appreciate it, obviously every bit that we get extra helps.

Senator TROETH—Very good. With the construction of the school and community pool to which Mr Hannam referred, did the school pay the part that was not paid by the local council or did the Department of Education pay that?

Mr Harrison—The Department of Education.

Mr Hannam—At the end of the day the pool was about a \$300,000 exercise. I think the figures would equate to the education department putting in between \$100,000 and \$110,000 or something like that, the local government put in \$150,000 and the P&C and the community—and we certainly went out to the community there—came up with \$45,000 to \$50,000, something in that vicinity.

Senator TROETH—Thank you.

CHAIR—You mentioned earlier this levy which you sent out an invoice for and you have on it that it is voluntary. What sort of compliance do you have with payment of that?

Mr Hannam—When we did the \$25 last year, that was done as a family. So it was \$25 for the family and I think at that time we had 350 families, 500-and-something children, and we got about 220. So we considered that quite a good result. Between 60 and 65 per cent paid the \$25. The most frustrating thing—we know it will come up with this current one, \$75-\$95, where it is a bit higher—is the question of hardship. Personally, I do not believe that that is the main reason why we did not get the other third, if you like. People were coming in three and four and five months after we had first put that out—and we certainly put out reminders—and people would say, 'Oh, I forgot,' and you do not know how hard to push it, you do not know how many times to follow it up. You are going to have people resenting it if you pick up the phone and say, 'You have not paid your thing.'

We were even considering this year whether we put that we actually want them to make a return where they pick a box saying, 'Philosophically we disagree.' That is fine,

we have to respect that, if you tick that box we will not follow you up. It is frustrating where initially you only get a 20 to 30 per cent response. So do you follow it up, do you send another letter? That is expensive, it is difficult to administer. Are you asking the school administrators to do it or are parents doing it? Do you pick up the phone and ring them? All those issues are tricky.

CHAIR—With the one-third that do not pay, is there any consequence for the school curriculum or for the child in terms of materials or are they just treated the same?

Mr Hannam—Categorically no—

CHAIR—That concern has been raised before, but it seems in your system—

Mr Hannam—There is no effect whatsoever.

Mr Harrison—Probably the only difficulty we have, and it is not the contribution, is when it comes to school excursions. Then we have to make a decision as to whether we can help out families. That is the tough one that we deal with. If they are not able to pay for the week's excursion to the coast or for the marine research that they are doing, then we have to decide, but again we do not make the excursion part of the core curriculum, which I think was mentioned as a prerequisite of secondary education this morning.

Mr Hannam—But, in relation to the levy, certainly not.

Senator CARR—How do you know that students are not ostracised, that teachers do not make remarks? Can I say to you I was a teacher for 10 years and I was at a school that had a reputation for being fairly rugged, a working-class district in the north-west of Melbourne where the levels of poverty were very high and there was substantial reliance on what was called the state schools relief fund, which is that old Depression fund in Victoria. I also know that teachers were making remarks to students that did not make contributions on the basis that a teacher felt that there was not a genuine case of hardship or for some other reason felt there could be further encouragement. So how do you know that, in your school, teachers do not take it upon themselves to assist the parents in the collection of so-called voluntary levies?

Mr Harrison—By assisting, do you mean making those remarks to put undue pressure on children? It is very clearly understood by our teachers that that does not take place. If they have concerns, they bring them to me and I usually give the parents a ring and see if there is any way we can help. There were a few last year that basically just could not pay at a certain time. We got into a time payment scheme without any problems at all.

Mr Hannam—You are referring there to excursion money? I would just like to separate that. You might be combining the two.

Senator CARR—The point I am trying to get to is that, with the best intentions in the world, the most democratic and enlightened policy is being set by you as a principal. How do you know your teachers are implementing it?

Mr Harrison—With the levy, the teachers probably would not even know if the children paid the levy because the money goes to the P&C Association; they have no part in that at all. Quite frankly, unless Bob comes and sees me, I do not even know which children, which families, have not paid the levy. So that one would not even be an issue. On the excursion one, I could never give you a guarantee that that does not take place outside in the playground, and certainly, whilst we make sure that our teachers know that it is not to occur, I again cannot give you an ironclad guarantee to say that it does not, merely to say that the teachers certainly are aware that that is not a policy at our school.

Mr Hannam—The parents would be so fast on the phone to the P&C or whatever if there was anything like that. They would be very quick in our school to pick up the phone.

CHAIR—We have been discussing fees. What about sponsorships? Do you have any involvement with that in your school, from companies or—

Mr Harrison—No.

CHAIR—There being no further questions, thank you very much for appearing today.

Committee adjourned at 12.01 p.m.