

Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2012-2013

Outcome 2 – Schools and Youth

DEEWR Question No. EW0370_13

Senator Nash asked on 30 May 2012 , Hansard page 71

Question

Education Allowance

Senator NASH: The other issue I have is in relation to the extension of the distance education allowance to four-year-olds. I know that the ICPA's proposal for the extension of the distance education allowance to include four-year-old children accessing early childhood programs has been rejected. Is that correct, and on what grounds?

Mr Davies: I am not 100 per cent certain whether 'rejection' is accurate. It has not been supported yet. I think this is part of the correspondence from the minister across a range of concerns raised by ICPA and the resolutions at their conference. The minister has corresponded with them and that proposal has not been supported.

Senator NASH: If it has not been supported, that can be taken as 'rejected'. I will stick with 'rejected'. Correctly if I am wrong, but I understand the wording from the minister was that the proposal 'was not in line with the current review of school funding'. Is that correct? Mr Davies: I do not have the correspondence with me so I cannot confirm that. Sorry. Ms Paul: We can take that on notice.

Ms Paul: We can take that on notice.

Senator NASH: Okay, if you could. If that indeed is the case, can you explain why it is not in line with the current review of school funding? If I can continue, given that it indeed is the case, the *Review of Funding for Schooling* report refers to the fact that remote and very remote students are being left behind, particularly in NAPLAN testing. It would seem that the ICPA's proposal would be in line with the current review.

Ms Paul: So the proposal—I have not seen the minister's letter so I am not commenting at all on what you said—

Senator NASH: I understand that, but I am taking an opportunity now. If we could go along these lines and then if it turns out not to be the case that was my information from the letter that was received.

Ms Paul: That is fine. The broader context is that the approach that the Gonski review is recommending is for a loading for small, remote schools. I forget how the geographical coverage goes but basically there would be a particular approach to a loading, which is probably a slightly different architecture to that. Why don't we spell that out in answer to the question on notice?

Answer

The Isolated Children's Parents Association proposal to extend to 4 year olds the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme was not supported in light of current work that will improve access to preschool programs for rural and regional areas; both through the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education and the Review of Funding for Schooling.

As part of the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, all Australian governments have committed that by 2013 every child will have access to an early childhood education program in the year prior to full-time schooling. The Australian Government is

contributing \$955 million to states and territories over the five years to 30 June 2013. State and territory governments are responsible for ensuring the delivery of preschool education in their jurisdiction. The Government is encouraging states and territories to seek innovative and flexible delivery models to ensure their programs are accessible despite geographic isolation.

The Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report recommends that school size and location would attract a loading which would be available to schools in remote and very remote areas. This recognises the additional costs of operation in such locations and the comparatively poor educational outcomes for students at these schools. The Report suggests that the loading would range from a suggested maximum of 100% of per student amounts for very small schools in very remote locations, to 10% of per student amounts for medium sized schools in remote areas.

The Strategic Policy Working Group is considering the ranges of each loading as proposed by the Review Panel, and the increments at which that loading will increase. These settings need to accurately reflect the legitimate additional costs associated with operating small and remote schools. States and territories and non-government education authorities are currently considering the information they hold regarding costs in such schools to provide advice in relation to the adoption of the proposed settings.