

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2004-2005 SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES

Outcome: 1

Output Group: 1.2 – Assistance to individuals including those with special learning needs

DEST Question No. E436_05

Senator Carr provided in writing.

Question:

Validity of national literacy benchmarking

Part of the Government's stated rationale for the inquiry into literacy is the assertion that too many children cannot read.

What does this imply for the validity of the national literacy benchmarks? Are they too low?

If so, should they be raised? Will they be raised? By how much? By what process? What objective measures and criteria will be used?

If not, why not? What are the implications of not raising the benchmarks for eligibility under the new tutorial vouchers scheme? Doesn't this mean that there are children who cannot read adequately who are not going to receive assistance under the scheme, because they are meeting a benchmark set too low?

Answer:

Validity of National Literacy Benchmarking

The Inquiry into Literacy reaffirms the Government's commitment to ensuring that all Australian children achieve in literacy and that they acquire essential reading skills to equip them with the foundation for learning in school, and throughout their lives. The Inquiry will focus on determining the most effective teaching methods so that our children's literacy standards are improved. The Inquiry will also provide an opportunity to consider reading assessment and the standard of the benchmark test.

In recent years the Australian Government has pursued the introduction of national performance benchmark testing and reporting to parents. These are vital steps in the effort to improve students' achievement.

The national benchmarks that underpin the reporting of student achievement describe nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards for aspects of literacy and numeracy at particular year levels. That is, they represent the minimum acceptable standard of literacy and numeracy that a student must have at a particular year level in order for the student to continue to make progress at school.

The benchmarks do not attempt to describe the whole range of literacy learning, nor the full range of what students are taught; nor do they try to describe the full range of student achievement. Instead, they represent important and essential elements of literacy at a minimum acceptable level.

The development of the national benchmarks was realised through a cooperative process involving all State and Territory school authorities, the Australian Government and

representatives of non-government schools. The development work was undertaken by Curriculum Corporation with reference to levels of achievement as demonstrated in national surveys, State assessment programs and international data. The development process involved both technical expertise and extensive consultation. Those involved included all key school education authorities, academic experts in literacy and numeracy, educational testing experts, parent groups, teachers and teacher professional organisations.

The Tutorial Voucher Initiative is an innovative pilot measure introduced by the Government to assist children who have not reached the minimum national standard of reading. Under the pilot, those parents who have been advised by the relevant educational authority that their child was below the Year 3 national reading benchmark in 2003 will be eligible to receive a Tutorial Voucher valued at \$700 exclusive of GST. An independent external evaluation will be conducted in parallel with the Initiative. It is expected that the evaluation report will be available towards the end of 2005.