

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION

Reference: Academic Standards of School Education

Tuesday, 26 June 2007

Witnesses

Dr Dahle Suggett

Deputy Secretary, Office for Education Policy & Innovation, Department of Education, Victoria

Mr John Firth

Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Ms Dianne Peck

Acting General Manager, Student Learning Programs, Department of Education, Victoria

Questions taken on notice

CHAIR - How is the availability of specialist teachers in the literacy and the special education areas holding up in Victoria?... In the sense of children with disabilities, for example, who are taking part in the normal school curriculum. I do not mean special education groups or schools; I mean special education and literacy... And, as well as the numbers, would you comment on whether you are experiencing shortages.

Response

Specialist teachers are employed in regular schools by the schools themselves. Schools are attempting to address learning needs in new ways and therefore are changing the conventional mix of staff in schools. Along with classroom teachers they employ youth workers, counsellors, special education teachers and clinicians. The engagement of staff with special education expertise can complement and extend the skills of teachers and other paraprofessional staff who are traditionally employed within a school setting to support students with additional needs.

Effective and inclusive schools understand that students' developmental needs are best promoted through a collaborative approach and by focusing on the students' learning needs rather than on their disability. They understand that a range of multi-skilled personnel (e.g. teachers, specialists, teacher aides, clinicians, volunteers and other students) are available to support students with their learning and also that decisions about the allocation of special program funds should be based on the desire to make the classroom inclusive.

The Department provides \$50 million annually through the Student Support Services Officer program to fund a range of allied health professionals including psychologists, social workers, guidance officers, and speech pathologists to further support schools to cater for the diverse learning needs of students. Under this program Student Support Service Officers are recruited by school networks to provide service to schools. These Officers work: in a variety of ways depending on the local network demands; mostly within the same network; and independently of one another but as part of their local schools' Student Wellbeing Team.

Student Support Service Officers are expected to provide comprehensive services and continuity of care for students while developing effective working partnerships with schools and other community groups. They may be Guidance Officers, Educational Psychologists, Social Workers, Speech Pathologists and specialist teachers. Specialist teachers may be allocated Student Support Service positions for their recognised expertise, such as, extensive experience or further training in welfare.

Senator BARNETT - Does rewarding of excellence for teacher performance happen in Victoria? If it does, what criteria do you use and what criteria should you use?... Are the criteria set? Are they known?... Is that something that perhaps you could take on notice and send to the committee?

Response

Victorian government schools use a robust teacher performance system managed by school principals which is designed to recognise high performance, address low performance and support ongoing professional development. As part of the system, teachers must submit a performance and development plan which is agreed to and assessed by their school principal. Victoria has a classroom teachers' classification structure comprising three categories – graduate, accomplished and expert. Classroom teachers only progress through these categories and related salary scales if they can demonstrate that they have met defined professional standards.

Senator FIFIELD - How many tech schools does Victoria have at the moment? Does it have any stand-alone technical colleges at secondary level?... Are there any plans for any more in addition to the five?... How many students will there be in those five?

Response

The technical schools to which reference is made are the four Technical Education Centres (TECs) and Holmesglen Vocational College. They will provide senior secondary students with access to high-tech, modern facilities and industry standard equipment.

The TECs are being established at Wangaratta, Berwick, Ballarat and Heidelberg within existing TAFE institutes. The Berwick and Wangaratta TECs opened in early 2007. When fully operational each TEC is expected to have 300 equivalent full time enrolments (EFT).

The Holmesglen Vocational College is part of the Moorabbin campus of the Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. It opened in February 2007 and offers a vocationally-focussed program with clear pathways into further TAFE study programs and apprenticeships. Enrolments at Holmesglen are also expected be 300 EFT.

There are no government schools in Victoria that are classified as stand alone technical schools. However, the overwhelming majority of Victorian government secondary schools offer Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools programs. Some of these schools deliver specialist vocational training. For example Ntec at Northland Secondary College specialises in automotive, engineering, furnishing and electro-technology and delivers these programs to a number of local schools.

In addition, the Victorian Government in 2006 announced it would fund over five years:

- \$35 million for new Tech wings to be built in up to 30 government secondary colleges; and
- \$15 million for all other government secondary colleges for grants of up to \$100,000 to modernise tech equipment and facilities.

Senator FIFIELD - Finally, in the area of music education—and you would be aware of this statistic - only about a quarter of kids in the government school sector Australia wide have an exposure to a formal music education program as part of their schooling. Do you know what the figure is for Victoria - the percentage of students who have an exposure to music education?

Response

Victoria does not collect data on the amount of time schools spend on specific learning areas. Victorian government schools are highly devolved and design their own curriculum within curriculum frameworks provided by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). The Arts are a core component within the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). However, discretion exists at the school level in the performing arts area as to what combination of music, drama and dance are used to meet the Standards. In the post-compulsory years three Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) studies and one Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program address Music.

Music is generally provided through both general classroom music learning programs and optional instrumental music, both covered by the VELs. At primary schools instrumental programs are self funded and initiated by individual school councils on a user pays basis. At secondary schools instrumental music is provided through the Instrumental music program which is funded by the Department of Education at approximately \$17 million per

year. This includes funding for approximately 300 EFT instrumental teachers, most of whom are attached to a base school but move across schools as required. Resources in this program are allocated by the Department's regions.