

## Chapter 3

### Supplementary tuition programs

3.1 The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) is a literacy and numeracy tuition program, supplementing standard teaching resources and aimed at improving these skills at key points in the first seven years of schooling. ITAS is a renamed program, formerly known as ATAS during the previous quadrennium.

3.2 ITAS funds tutors to assist classroom teachers by giving individual help around or outside the classroom. For this reason, ITAS tutors are said to run 'in-class' assistance, as distinct from year 10-12 program tutors and those tutors who operate in homework centres after classes have finished. ITAS funding will be allocated on the basis of the number of indigenous students who have not met the year 3, 5 and 7 literacy or numeracy benchmark tests, or students who are at risk of failing to reach these curriculum achievement levels for their age. Students in remote and very remote locations attract higher levels of funding.

#### Rationale for the change that is ITAS

3.3 The evidence that is nearly always missing from a Senate committee report is any kind of policy discourse from the responsible minister. Very rarely are second reading speeches of ministerial statements drafted with a view to covering the kinds of questions a committee might ask. Political considerations (rather than procedural rules or conventions) generally preclude the appearance of ministers before Senate committees. DEST, which states but does not defend or explain policy, points out that ITAS funding is intended as a 'top up' to that provided in the mainstream recurrent funding from both Commonwealth and the states and territories. A DEST official explained the Government's policy this way:

...the government is saying that in this quadrennium it wanted to more strategically focus its Indigenous specific funding such that, if the key testing points in the mainstream were year 3, year 5 and year 7, and the mainstream – for want of a better description – was failing these kids at those points, strategically let us use those funds to provide intensive support to those kids there. No-one is saying that there should not be tutorial assistance provided in early schooling, but that is not necessarily the strategic use of IESIP ... Why aren't the General Recurrent Grants used for that?<sup>1</sup>

3.4 The committee notes that DEST was unable to cite any assessment of the educational validity of the failure-based approach to funding. It may be assumed that this was policy driven by a reporting imperative, as will become obvious from the evidence in this chapter.

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1 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.49

3.5 There are three issues which concern the committee about changes to the ITAS guidelines. The first is a reduction in funding; the second is the targeting of the funding; and the third has been the delay in providing it. The effects of reduced funding remain to be seen, and should eventually be made known through the performance reporting. The issue of targeted funding is of more immediate concern because according to teachers and system administrators, the principles of the funding are educationally flawed in that they are based on a response to failure rather than on building a strong foundation of literacy in the early years of schooling. Finally, the committee's concerns about delays to funding echo many of its criticisms in relation to PSPI, the difference being that at least ITAS in-class assistance goes to systems for allocation to their schools and the direct benefit of students.

3.6 The committee also points out that there has been much adverse comment on the consequences of the Government's targeting of remote area students. Targeting of funds in a tight budget has as a consequence the under funding of some needs in other areas. Those affected in this instance are students in schools with low indigenous attendance. The Government also appears to have underestimated the needs of students in urban schools, particularly across the Top End, who are partly itinerant, and from NESB families. Their itinerancy can deprive schools of ITAS funding even though at peak times, the enrolments of indigenous students may far exceed the minimum number to attract ITAS funding. Thus, 'targeting' becomes a blunt instrument of funding policy, and in this and other cases does not always address the most needy students.

### **Past and future funding**

3.7 The committee heard much evidence of the importance of this program, at least in regard to the way it was conducted to the end of 2004. The DEST final report of its review of IEDA in 2004 noted that tutoring through ATAS had contributed to some improvements in literacy and numeracy levels. The details of expenditure for all states under ATAS (as it was known) in the previous quadrennium is set out below.

<b>ATAS Funding \$m</b>					
		2001	2002	2003	2004
NSW		5.04	7.68	8.01	9.8
VIC		1.22	1.72	1.54	1.63
QLD		4.96	6.4	6.87	8.07
SA		1.61	1.68	1.58	1.54
WA		3.76	5.82	5.07	4.33
TAS		0.74	1.27	0.97	1.33
NT		2.94	6.25	6.41	7.11
NO		8.12	9.81	9.08	8.35
TOTAL		28.39	40.63	39.53	42.16

<b>ATAS Approved Students</b>			
	2001	2002	2003
NSW	2256	2848	2420
VIC	783	875	793
QLD	1588	1573	1432
SA	904	1154	1158
WA	1359	1564	1938
TAS	403	264	247
NT	718	664	749
ACT	212	227	197
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8223</b>	<b>9219</b>	<b>8934</b>

Parliamentary Research Service based on DEST figures

3.8 There is a prospect that in some schools, fewer students will be looked after when the new program comes into full operation. The new formula fails to anticipate the likelihood that additional funding may be required in future years for students who may fail to sustain their earlier success in reaching benchmarks. An estimated 1666 students will attract funding of around \$3.7 million. It may appear that fewer students will be eligible to receive a higher level of funding<sup>2</sup>.

3.9 This is doubtful, however, as ITAS (as distinct from the old ATAS) does not include an administrative cost component, which must be borne by states and systems. It was estimated that there may be a 25 per cent reduction in the tutor hours available for each student: a significant reduction for a program crucial to bridging the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous achievement rates.<sup>3</sup>

3.10 For some schools the reduction in funding is very significant. Ms Michele Forbes, the principal of the Nyikina Mangala Community School, illustrated for the committee the stark differences in funding outcomes which can occur under the new formula. The Mangala School has only 30 students, ranging from age 4 to 17, so the number eligible to sit the benchmark examination is very low, as few as 2 students. Under the previous arrangement, the school received around \$30 000 per year, whereas under the new one, only a few thousand dollars is expected. As Ms Forbes pointed out, the difference in funding almost equates to a teacher's salary.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Ms Fitzgerald, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p.2

3 NTDEET, *Submission 8*, p.3

4 Ms Michele Forbes, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.42

## **ITAS and educational values**

3.11 The final report (2004) of IEDA concluded that ATAS was a major strength of the program, although it lacked a common and agreed reporting standard.<sup>5</sup> Some of the most compelling evidence presented to the committee, though it was not extensive, questioned the value of ITAS under new arrangements. The committee first heard criticism of the educational rationale for post-failure tuition in Darwin in February 2005. There were two related issues. The first was the funding being restricted to tuition in years 4, 6 and 8. The second was that the funding was to be directed at students in remote communities. That is, students enrolled in Darwin suburban schools were to be treated in the same way as students in large cities in the south.

3.12 To deal with the issue of year 4, 6 and 8 funding first: the Government's view is that funding should be targeted at remedial needs following benchmark tests conducted in the previous year, rather than provide continuing support. While the rationale for this was not fully explained, it may be assumed that evaluation of this program will at least show some sort of result. The Government, in a significant concession, has agreed that the use of the funding provided under this formula is to be used at the school's discretion. It can be directed, for instance, to early childhood years, where most authorities believe it is most effective. But the funding itself will still be allocated on the basis of the benchmark tests, as the Government's priority appears to be to have something by which to measure progress.

3.13 The alternative way of expending funds, through the more educationally sound method of concentrating funding in the early years of schooling, or allocating it on the recommendation of schools selecting students most at risk, may bring results which are more difficult to measure in the absence of any benchmark results in the short term. The committee assumes that the Government wants early indications of success by any possible measurement. There is a presumption that education funding policy should be determined by what can be reported, rather than what is most necessary for overall success in achieving learning outcomes. The committee's preference is the more open ended allocation of funds to those identified as most in need, so that recurrent funding can be directed at the early years of learning. This is consistent with current research findings on learning, and not only for indigenous students. The committee believes that MCEETYA should prepare some radical policy to ensure that this research be acted on.

3.14 A number of criticisms have been made of a remedial learning program based on experience of failure. This is a perverse incentive, according to the co-ordinator of indigenous education for the Catholic Education Office in Darwin, who described the funding model as 'pedagogically unsound', being simply a funding formula: a way of

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5 Commonwealth of Australia, *Review of the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program – Final Report*, 2004, p.xi

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distributing funding. The committee was assured, however, notwithstanding the Government's rationale, the funding would be well used.<sup>6</sup>

3.15 Representatives from the Queensland Catholic Education Office saw the system not only as pedagogically unsound, but also as symptomatic of broader ignorance about the needs of indigenous students:

In dealing with Indigenous students who fail the benchmark test the model does not recognise that the needs of Indigenous students are identified much earlier ... the whole social, emotional and linguistic issues with Indigenous children have to be addressed from day one. We cannot wait to say, 'Okay, they've failed the benchmark test, now let's give them some extra help.'<sup>7</sup>

3.16 The committee was told that most children starting school at the age of four had non-standard English or Creole; a fact not recognised in any ITAS or SRA funding elements. Such students had enormous difficulties in learning standard English. The Government's policy of leveraging recurrent expenditure to meet the needs of indigenous students was explained to the CEO in Townsville by the state manager of DEST, and the response of the CEO was that DEST appeared to consider it an easy matter for a school or a system to move funds around to meet new priorities. But realistically, there was no scope for flexibility as funding barely covered teachers wages.<sup>8</sup> The CEO in Townsville advised the committee that the 18 per cent non-teacher segment of the budget had to cover everything else, from professional development to teacher housing and transport. It had told DEST that priorities could not be shifted:

That is what I said. It is almost infuriating that this is the standard answer that we get, 'You have to find a way of doing it.' There is a certain arrogance—or ignorance, I do not know—that applies to that sort of thinking. You sit there and you take it and you cop it and you give the standard answer back, 'It'd be very nice for a DEST officer to be located in our office when we're trying to juggle the budget pot, so you can actually come to an understanding of exactly what we are trying to do.'<sup>9</sup>

3.17 The Australian Education Union (AEU) submitted that the new ITAS system fell down in three key ways. First, it punished schools which ran successful programs by removing their funding. Second, the system did not provide tutoring for students as they progress through years and as subjects become more complex. Third, the provision of tutoring only as late as the fourth or fifth year of school was contrary to

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6 Ms Frances Murray, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p.38

7 Queensland Catholic Education Office discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.13

8 *ibid.*

9 *ibid.*

well-established belief and practice: that early intervention is necessary for children in need of learning support.<sup>10</sup>

3.18 The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia also questions the decision to exclude students in K-3, 5, 7 and 9 from accessing ITAS by focussing support on post-benchmark failure. It points out that intervention at that point is inappropriate, as early intervention is the key to educational success for students at risk of failure.<sup>11</sup>

3.19 The committee notes that ITAS funding is not specifically tied to particular years of schooling. There is some flexibility. But it is more difficult to be flexible if funds are limited to the failure score. In practice, it would be to the advantage of a school if the vast majority of students were reported as failing to reach the benchmark. And for schools which have striven hard for success, the financial incentive will be lost. Worse, without the continuation of funds which follows failure, there will be genuine cause for larger allocations of funds in following years. The position was put the committee in a submission from Amanbidji School, located west of Katherine NT:

The first MAP benchmark tests after we [husband and wife teachers] indicated only one student from years 3, 5, and 7 who achieved the level. Now in 2004, after consistent, ongoing delivery of the ATAS tutoring...we received results from the MAP testing to show 100 per cent benchmark pass in year 3 and 85 per cent pass in year 5. No students were in year 7. ...Our school has clearly demonstrated how the ATAS has significantly improved all outcomes measured under the benchmark testing. ...Without the ongoing support from the tutor in 2005, the students who have not achieved benchmark will not continue with accelerated learning. It is only with the one on one session that the students receive extra support and consolidation.<sup>12</sup>

3.20 The submission ended on a despondent note, with the likelihood of funding for 2005 being reduced to 25 per cent in that received the previous year, and a great deal of hard work during 2004 being placed in jeopardy for lack of follow-up support.

3.21 The Council of the Ross Park Primary School in Alice Springs made a similar point. At this school, where every fourth student is Aboriginal, ITAS tutor hours have been slashed from 85 hours per week in 2004 to just 12.5 hours per week this year. Whereas last year 56 students from years 1-6 benefited from ATAS support, only 5 students in years 4-6 will now receive tutoring. The submission states that ATAS was very successful, with more students achieving test benchmarks than ever before. The submission made the point that:

In our experience it takes much longer than one year for students to catch up to benchmarks, especially if their home life does not expose them to a

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10 Australian Education Union, *Submission 12*, p.8

11 AISSA, *Submission 17*, p.3

12 Mr Graeme Robinson, *Submission 3*, p.2

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rich learning environment and the opportunity to develop pre-formal learning skills and concepts.

Although most of our ATAS-supported students have reached benchmarks, they need ATAS support to continue. The new-found confidence can be fragile if support at home is not forthcoming and the school can no longer afford to provide it. In our school's experience children often fall behind again once this support is withdrawn. Further, benchmarks are very low and some students only just manage to reach them. They need significant ongoing support to at least maintain this level.

...Under the new ATAS regime some students will be further disadvantaged through no fault of their own. Those who miss MAP testing, for example due to illness or 'sorry' business, will have to wait another two years before they become eligible for tutoring. Even if they were among the lucky five to be selected for tutoring at Ross Park Primary School it may by then be too late to make a significant impact.<sup>13</sup>

3.22 Submissions on ITAS, more than on any other matter, have highlighted the disjuncture of funding policy and educational practice. It is one of the consequences of having a funding source remote from the circumstances of expenditure, while still insisting that motions be gone through which bear no relation to reality. It is clear to the committee that most people it spoke to did not understand that ITAS was a funding formula, purely and simply, for the convenient purpose of ease of measurement. System administrators generally understood this better than people in schools. The most powerful criticism of ITAS often came from people vainly seeking a rationale based on educational principles. These usually came from people at the 'chalkface' and from indigenous education workers. One of these told the committee of her own experience:

I have also been given to understand that a child must sit and do poorly at the relevant tests before they will be considered for funding for tutoring; that the school, which deals daily with the child and can produce examples of their work, are not to be part of the selection process. From experience I know that most children who cannot achieve at class level already feel bad about themselves and are developing low academic self esteem; some will do anything to avoid being tested and therefore 'have their noses rubbed in' their poor abilities. Children, who play truant, claim to be sick, are sick of are away on genuine family business and do not sit the test are immediately deprived access to tutoring funding. Why bother attending school if you cannot participate in most of its activities? Tutoring encourages participation, gives the individual access. Just knowing that they have a tutor for assistance encourages attendance.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Ms Elke Wiesmann and Ms Stephanie Mackie-Schneider, *Submission 2*, p.1

14 Ms Anne McNamara, *Submission 1*, p.2

3.23 The committee considers that these notions represent a 'holistic' approach to teaching and nurturing which is fortunately commonplace in schools, and requires to be in ever more abundant supply as funding is further squeezed.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The committee recommends that the funding formula for ITAS be based not on a consequence of failure to meet year 3, 5 and 7 benchmarks, but generated by the number of students which schools assess and identify as being in the bottom 20 per cent of their cohort.**

### **Mobility factors**

3.24 A number of submissions and witnesses highlighted practical problems which the architects of ITAS under its new guidelines, appear not to have anticipated. The factor of student mobility is one of these. It is fair to state that DEST appears to have responded to some of the criticism of its planning in this regard, as a result of listening to the evidence presented to this inquiry.

3.25 The problem begins with the fact that ITAS funding is based on the numbers of students who attempt the Multilevel Assessment Program (MAP). Many students would not have attended school on the day these tests were held. As the CEO in Darwin pointed out:

...children who have participated in the Multilevel Assessment Program for the benchmarks only attract funding if they fail. We have many students who, through no fault of their own—their families are out bush for the months of August and September over the three-week period that the MAP is implemented—are not around. Schools do their best to find the kids and sometimes they cannot. In that three-week period they are not there. There might be double or triple the number of kids who have participated at a school. Therefore, they are an invisible figure for the ITAS funding.<sup>15</sup>

3.26 The committee is aware that parents can apply for an exemption in the circumstances of their child missing a test, but few parents would be aware of this, and no more ready to apply even if they were aware.

3.27 The South Australian Government submission points out that the mobility of indigenous students is generally three times the rate of non-indigenous students. It points out that the movement between schools of indigenous students affects their eligibility for in-school tuition. Indigenous students who may be eligible in one school may move to a metropolitan school where they may lose this eligibility. The argument here is for funding to follow the student and not depend on the school they attend.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Dr Bill Griffiths, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p.38

16 Government of South Australia, *Submission 22*, p.2



3.28 The committee heard more concrete evidence of the complications resulting from student mobility in a remote school in the Northern Territory. The principal of Shepherdson College, on Elcho Island, explained that 10 tutors worked at the school in 2004. As late as March 2005 there were none, and the school was only then being supplied with information by NTDEET with regard to funding for years 4, 6 and 8 students who failed the MAP test in 2004. The principal raised the mobility question as one funding complication that DEST may not have factored into its management plans:

If you stop and think that we are in an Indigenous community, you will realise that most Indigenous communities have somewhere between 150 and 250 per cent turnover. What happens is that the money is allocated to a particular student. The student may have sat the MAP test here but currently be over at Milingimbi receiving education. By the time the funding is released to Milingimbi, that student may then be over at Ramingining or back here at Elcho Island, and we have to then start trying to track that student to pass that money on. It is going to be an administrative nightmare trying to keep track of where the students actually are within the system.<sup>17</sup>

3.29 A number of respondents made similar criticisms, seeing the method of allocating funding to schools based on the results of an examination conducted in one school year, with the results of the examination applied in the following year, as deeply problematic. In such cases, a student who changes schools between years will not 'carry' funding for tutorial assistance, but rather the funding will remain with the school at which the student sat the examination. In such cases, the result is that funding is not distributed according to need, even if DEST's method of assessment is accepted as being effective. The committee has been told that turnover in most indigenous communities runs at somewhere between 150 and 250 per cent. The potential for inaccurate allocation is considerable.<sup>18</sup>

3.30 The committee concludes that mobility and attendance factors complicate the funding arrangements for ITAS. It does not accept that the benchmark-based funding has much educational validity. It is the kind of formula that would be more suited to dealing with an emergency health problem like an epidemic. Given that the funding will, in practice, be available to school principals to use on literacy and numeracy tutoring at their discretion, it may have been unnecessary to have confused the issue with benchmark testing. The committee will be looking closely at how this program is working.

### **Remote students**

3.31 The committee notes the probability that the Government has been without the benefit of broad advice about remote communities. The Catholic Education Office

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17 Mr Peter Moore, *Committee Hansard*, 2 March 2005, p.16

18 See also, for example, Ms Cathy Day, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.10-11

in Darwin advised the committee of the realities of dealing with indigenous students and their communities across the Top End, in particular, the failure to understand what constitutes 'remoteness' in the targeting of funds. The Government's decision, it was said:

...has a very southern Australian perspective about it, in that it is presumed that most kids in urban schools speak English, or close to it, as a first language, and come from an urban Indigenous background or history. We have huge numbers of students in our urban schools whose parents come from remote Indigenous Australia and who speak English as a second language. These children are in our urban schools. Having been classified as provincial, as Darwin schools are, they attract funding at half the eligible student rate by the formula but in fact these students are the same as students at Bathurst Island and Port Keats. They just happen to be in our urban schools because they live in town camps such as in Alice Springs or out near Palmerston. So the same student group is being discriminated against because of where they find themselves temporarily—two or three years of living in a town camp, for example. I do not think that the picture of Indigenous Australia in the top of Australia is actually mirrored in the funding formula.<sup>19</sup>

3.32 Remoteness is also a problem for some independent schools in Western Australia. The experience was similar at the CAPS Coolgardie School, where Principal Jim Heslop told the committee that the proximity of the school to Kalgoorlie made it difficult to retain the school's \$32 000 worth of funding for the latter half of 2004.<sup>20</sup> Nor, at the time of the committee's visit to Perth, did he know what this meant for the future of the school. Dr Heslop said:

I do not mind picking up less funding as long as I can understand the rationale behind the whole arrangement. But, because my school is now a provincial school for ITAS but a remote school for all other classifications, I have lost about \$36 000 that I would have expected to pick up when I was working out last year's budget. Now, I will not pick up more than \$24 000. Added to that, when you remember that a third of my school come from locations that are extremely remote, such as Warakuna...and that they come with whatever baggage is associated with that remoteness, the fact that we are classified as provincial rather than as remote is just a little more confusing-and I can't receive any answers, either.<sup>21</sup>

3.33 The emphasis of the IEDA program on remote students has been criticised in South Australia. Submissions have been critical of the fact that access to ITAS funding is dependent on having more than 20 indigenous enrolments. In South Australia only 53 out of 318 metropolitan schools meet this criterion. The South Australian Department of Education figures indicate that nearly 1500 indigenous

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19 Ms Francis Murray, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p.35

20 Dr Jim Heslop, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.48

21 *ibid.*, p.49

students will miss out on this assistance.<sup>22</sup> The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) made the same point.<sup>23</sup>

South Australian sensitivities in this regard no doubt arise from the fact the state has the highest proportion of its indigenous people living in the capital city, reflecting the description of Adelaide as a 'city-state'. Even Port Augusta is now classified as 'non-remote'. But as the submission from the Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education in South Australia pointed out, geography is not the only factor in isolation. Indigenous communities in metropolitan areas are more socially isolated than other groups in the community, and young people are therefore more likely to drop out of school.<sup>24</sup>

3.34 The Catholic Education Office in the Northern Territory put the ITAS funding in the best possible light. While noting that no funds were targeted at the early childhood years for tutoring support, the CEO stated:

That is okay on one level, in that we believe that we are allowed to be flexible with the dollars we attract in at the school level to include the cohort of students but cover other students as well. However, where that falls down, I feel, is in urban schools in the Top End—probably North Queensland and north WA have the same issues.<sup>25</sup>

3.35 The committee notes that schools in places like Darwin, Karratha, Broome, Cairns and Townsville are under pressure as a result of having to deal with itinerant students without being funded for them. Targeting the dollar on the basis of remoteness creates anomalies which the Government is unlikely to recognise, but it is indicative of ill-considered or poorly advised policy. The committee urges that in the light of implementation experience, modifications be made.

### **Difficulties for boarding schools**

3.36 The committee heard evidence of funding anomalies in the case of boarding schools, particularly in satisfying DEST criteria for concept plan assessment.<sup>26</sup> The Queensland Catholic Education Commission reported the difficulties involved in demonstrating 'partnership' between the school and parents in circumstances where, by the very nature of boarding schools, any regular representative meeting between parents and the school is impracticable.

3.37 Another difficulty for boarding schools and their students is that the funding changes, which attempt to offer particular help to students in remote areas, do not

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22 Hon Jane Lomax-Smith MP, Minister of Education and Children's Services, *Submission 22*, p.1

23 AISSA, *Submission 17*, p.3

24 Hon Stephanie Key MP, *Submission 4*, Attachment p.2

25 Ms Frances Murray, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p.35

26 Queensland Indigenous Education Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.9

recognise those students, who though from remote areas and in need of assistance, reside in boarding schools in large provincial and capital cities

3.38 The CEO in Townsville provided the committee with a copy of a newsletter to parents from the principal of Abergowrie College in Ingham, part of which read:

Another area of concern I want to draw to your attention is the loss of \$133 000 worth of programs which we ran in 2004. The new DEST funding has so far proved disastrous for us. Our highly developed extra attention homework program, our Indigenous program officer, our uncle's program, our sponsored parent's teleconferences, our indigenous sporting scholarship program, our dance troupe subsidiary funding – all now cut due to lack of funds. I've tried to fund out of school fees our extra assistance homework program just for year 8's this term, at a cost of \$15 000 – and I'm just hoping that I can find funds to continue this into term 2.

The bizarre fact seems to be that Government agencies like DEST, want to focus funds on remote schools – completely disregarding the fact that the vast majority of our students come from remote or very remote areas. ...Why funding is not attached to these students is beyond me; but as you know we try to help each student and his family as best we can...<sup>27</sup>

3.39 The committee's visit to Koormilda College in Darwin elicited similar views.

3.40 DEST responded to these observations at the committee's Melbourne hearing. While unable to provide the committee with assurances that the situation would be resolved satisfactorily, officials reported that the Government had been made aware of the problems faced by boarding schools.<sup>28</sup>

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The committee recommends that the Government amend its policy to ensure that students from remote areas enrolled at boarding schools in cities remain eligible for the funding that goes to students in remote areas.**

#### **Consequences for the supply of tutors**

3.41 There were many comments made to the committee relating to the tutorial crisis: students suffering in limbo awaiting tutors, with the likelihood of such additional pressure placed on teachers that many would suffer 'burnout'. The discontinuity of tutors would mean that any resumption of the program would see a desperate shortage of tutors. The current crisis indicated that the Commonwealth Government was oblivious to the importance which schools placed in maintaining a continuing relationship with tutors and the value of having people committed to an association with a particular school. The principal of Yipirinya School in Alice Springs, an independent indigenous school, told the committee that tutors were being

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27 Tabled supplementary evidence, Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Townsville, Paper 5

28 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.5

dispersed and would be unlikely to return to the schools they had been associated with.<sup>29</sup>

3.42 The changes come on top of an already tight market for tutors in most regions where indigenous students exist in any great number. As the Principal of the Jiggalong Remote Community School told the committee:

There is no way we can attract a relief teacher or a teacher to come into the community to fulfil that ITAS obligation. Basically, the ITAS money is sitting there and we cannot access it, because we cannot get a teacher to come in.

3.43 Difficulties are worsened by the strict rules around accessing funding. The committee heard that, under the relevant guidelines, only trained teachers may be employed using the funding, with community members or others with relevant but formally unrecognised qualifications being ineligible.<sup>30</sup> Fortunately, at least some schools are able to use the services of devoted Aboriginal Education Officers for this purpose.<sup>31</sup>

### **Program delays and conclusion**

3.44 As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the delays in funding was the most pressing problem for most schools. Certainly, this was the case in February when the committee made its first visits to schools. Since then DEST has been working to overcome this problem, and the committee assumes that other problems associated with the funding, and already discussed, have become more evident. Nonetheless, some of the evidence included in the interim report warrants repetition here.

3.45 In addition to an underlying reduction in tutor hours, ITAS has suffered long delays in the provision of funding which have characterised the government's broader changes under the amended act. An experienced teacher and school principal in South Hedland in Western Australia told the committee:

This has been the worst delay that I have known, but it was because there were just no parameters. We had no idea. There were no guidelines whatsoever...whenever there were meetings, the comment from everyone was: 'No one is sure of the process yet', or 'The plans for the process have not been formalised'.<sup>32</sup>

3.46 The committee presumes that this frustration is gone but not forgotten. Similar views were expressed in Townsville, where the Queensland Indigenous Education Commission told the committee of its frustration and that of the children who would

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29 Such concerns were expressed in a number of schools, including by Mr Paul Campbell at the Cairns West State School discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.30

30 See, for instance, Mr Vincent Vesnaver, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2005, p.5

31 See, for instance, Mr Geoff Blythe, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2005, p.18

32 Ms Janet Matthews, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.11

otherwise have been receiving assistance, but for the delays in getting the funding flowing. The Commission was adamant that, should tutors be engaged under the assumption that funding would be paid retrospectively, costs would have to come from school budgets. Retrospective payments would not occur.<sup>33</sup> The committee noted that Commission staff reported being told categorically that funding would not be made available retrospectively. This contradicts DEST advice to the legislation committee during the February 2005 additional estimates hearings.<sup>34</sup>

3.47 These are echoes of initial confusion. The committee again makes the point that this unhappy experience should not be forgotten and the lesson learned. At the very least, the ITAS program should be reviewed by the MCEETYA CEO committee over the next twelve months, with particular reference to issues of equity and accessibility, as well as to the other outcomes that will be measured.

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33 Queensland Catholic Education Office discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.19

34 Mr Tony Greer and Mr Shane Hoffman, *Committee Hansard* (Estimates), 16 February 2005, p.115-7