

The Senate

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Employment, Workplace Relations  
and Education References Committee

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Indigenous education funding

Final report

June 2005

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ISBN 0 642 71535 1

This document was prepared by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee and printed by the Senate Printing Unit, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra.

## Membership of Committee

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Senator Judith Troeth appointed 14 April 2005	LP, Victoria	Deputy Chair
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## Terms of Reference

The implications of the Government's proposed changes to funding arrangements for targeted assistance in Indigenous education, as contained in the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004, and in particular:

1. Proposed changes to the IEDA and IESIP programs, with reference to:
  - a) the new tutorial assistance arrangements and Whole of School Intervention strategy under IEDA, and
  - b) new strategic initiatives for indigenous students in remote areas and the new flagship project for teaching literacy under IESIP.
2. The likely educational outcomes of the Commonwealth's new indigenous-specific funding measures, with reference to:
  - a) the Indigenous Youth Leadership and Indigenous Youth Mobility Programs, and
  - b) the Government's objective of accelerating educational outcomes for indigenous students, as stated in the 10-point national agenda for schooling announced in November 2003.
3. The accountability requirements applying to funding agreements made under IEDA and IESIP programs, with reference to:
  - a) the new framework of performance monitoring and reporting on educational outcomes, and
  - b) the new financial reporting arrangements.
4. The effect of the proposed funding measures on current state and other systemic indigenous programs, and future implications for the operation of ASSPA committees.
5. The extent of consultation between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, schools and parents, especially ASSPA committees, about policies and details of changes to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000.



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## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1** page 25

The committee recommends that the Government ensure that under PSPI there is genuine engagement with parents and the community to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes for all students.

### **Recommendation 2** page 25

The committee recommends that as a matter of preference, PSPI reverts to guaranteed per capita funding, and in the event that this does not occur, that PSPI be applied for twice yearly, with conditions which recognise the circumstances of individual schools and their diverse educational needs.

### **Recommendation 3** page 34

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 in literacy and numeracy skills.

### **Recommendation 4** page 38

The committee recommends that the government amends 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.

### **Recommendation 5** page 51

The committee recommends that the Auditor-General be requested to conduct an efficiency audit on current arrangements for the application and processing of funding for PSPI programs.

### **Recommendation 6** page 52

The committee recommends that local or regional committees which assess funding applications from schools include at least one member with educational qualifications and experience, and at least one indigenous member active in a school community.

### **Recommendation 7** page 53

The committee recommends that the Minister, through MCEETYA, addresses the need for schools to report on the expenditure of Commonwealth funds in a way which is least burdensome, preferably through a single document which includes data on all programs that have been funded and are currently running.

**Recommendation 8** page 54

The committee recommends that MCEETYA address the problem of restricted access to student records maintained by state agencies in cases where it is required by schools to facilitate enrolment in another system or school, and where it is for the educational advantage of the student.

**Recommendation 9** page 55

The committee recommends that MCEETYA look more closely at reporting requirements attached to Commonwealth funded programs to ensure that they reflect criteria based on sound and agreed educational principles, and realistic expectations of learning outcomes.

**Recommendation 10** page 59

The committee recommends that the Minister addresses the need to rationalise funding grants to minimise the number of applications that have to be made by schools.

**Recommendation 11** page 60

The committee recommends that so long as Government policy continues to require direct contact between schools and DEST officials, that these officials are provided with adequate training in how to deal with principals and teachers, and gain some familiarisation with the operations of schools and at least some rudimentary insight into teaching inputs and learning outcomes.

**Recommendation 12** page 61

The committee recommends that a copy of the report be sent to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner with a request for comment on the implications of the PSPI program in relation to the progress and achievement in indigenous education.

## Preface

This report reflects the views expressed by indigenous parents, educators and those in the broader indigenous community about recent changes to funding arrangements which threaten to undermine their full involvement in the education of their children. It is also the outcome of the concern expressed by professional educators about changes which may arrest progress in achieving improvements to literacy and numeracy among indigenous students.

Specifically, this report is critical of the rationale and administration of the distribution of indigenous education funding. The report focuses on what has made the program more difficult to administer, especially in the timeframe which the Government considered adequate for implementation. The new funding arrangements made heavy demands on the patience and energy of funding recipients. They not only reduced the amount of funding they could expect to receive, but caused a reduction of the critical involvement of indigenous parents in the running of schools.

The committee has found that preparation for managing the process of change was manifestly inadequate. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) should have been aware from experience, from a knowledge of the needs and culture of indigenous people, and through its extensive regional and local network, of the requirement to prepare well for policy changes. The Government should have anticipated that direct dealing by DEST with school principals and school communities on sensitive funding issues had the potential to raise apprehension in schools.

The committee has no insight into advice which the Minister may or may not have been given by DEST in regard to the practicalities of hasty implementation. There is, however, unequivocal evidence that DEST did not anticipate the problems that would be created by new processes. Nor did it prepare its own regional and local staff adequately with the requisite policy knowledge, or the skills required to deal effectively and sympathetically with school principals and school community leaders. Evidence presented by DEST in the concluding public hearing suggests that implementation of the new funding policy was notable for its attitude of 'learning as we go'. Advice to schools was inconsistent, not only across the country, but within states and districts; paper trails were hard to follow; and there were anomalous gaps in policy and administration which were hard to explain to people running schools. This was a case of planning on the run.

Senior DEST officials told the committee that its inquiry had helped the department to identify matters which it should attend to. Although it is the role of Senate committees to exercise the scrutiny that has marked this inquiry, this committee finds no particular satisfaction in identifying avoidable problems that have arisen on such a large scale. No one elected to Parliament could help but be depressed to find that confidence in the processes of government among school communities has been seriously damaged by this process. Such concern is above party considerations. The task of picking up the

pieces falls, unfortunately, not only on the Minister and his department but upon those who have suffered the frustration of dealing with a demanding but ill-prepared public service.

The committee thanks the many communities and individuals who assisted, and in many cases, inspired this inquiry. It thanks officials in the education departments of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory for assisting with professional advice and facilitation of access to schools and other arrangements. It also thanks Catholic Education Office personnel for providing similar advice and services in those states and regions the committee visited. The committee was also ably assisted by DEST officers, notably the state managers in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and it is grateful for their advice.

Perhaps most importantly, the committee thanks the many school principals and teachers who welcomed the committee to their schools, and who, with community leaders, gave generous hospitality. At the public meetings it arranged the committee gained many insights into administrative problems associated with policy change. The credibility of such evidence was all the more obvious coming from workers at the chalkface. The anger and frustration of these people in having to deal with the procedures and requirements of Commonwealth officialdom, made a strong impression on the committee.

The committee's recommendations are directed toward a review of procedures and policy outcomes. DEST is on notice of continued scrutiny of its performance in improving its relations with schools and of ensuring that its procedures are not at odds with professional educational practices. These are not appropriate in circumstances where it does not employ the personnel it wishes to administer, and where funding is relatively insignificant.

The committee commends this report to the Senate.

Senator Trish Crossin  
Chair

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

1.1 On 16 March this year the committee tabled an interim report for this inquiry. The report dealt with evidence the committee had gathered in the Northern Territory of strong dissatisfaction with new policies in regard to education funding applications and their approval, and the state of confusion resulting from the hasty implementation of these new procedures. The committee concluded that this was placing the education of students at risk, particularly in regard to participation rates. Also at stake was progress, after years of solid work, in raising literacy and numeracy standards, and in encouraging parents to become involved in the running of the school and the educational program. The committee believed, on the basis of evidence put to it, that the new arrangements would also be likely to jeopardise the considerable progress which had been made in building school-community relations, and result in a climate of distrust between communities and the Government.

1.2 This final report confirms that earlier assessment. It is clear from the evidence taken by the committee that the experience of schools and communities in the Northern Territory is widely shared across the country. In many instances the extent of dismay at what is happening as a result of policy changes is even more evident in some Queensland and Western Australian communities and school systems.

### Background to the inquiry and its progress

1.3 On 6 December 2004, the Senate referred to this committee an inquiry into the implications for schools of amendments to the *Indigenous Education Assistance Act 2000*. The Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004, which was introduced in the House of Representatives on 17 November 2004, provides for funding over the 2005-08 quadrennium. The legislation was passed by the Senate the day after this referral and was assented to on 14 December 2004. Referral to the committee was the only way to give the legislation more careful scrutiny than Parliament was able to do in the limited time the bill was before it. There was an urgent need to have funds appropriated for 2005.

1.4 The inquiry was prompted by reports of concern and confusion which emanated from schools toward the end of 2004. Although the detail of the implementation of the new policy was at that time rather vague, there was sufficient reason for many communities to become concerned about the likely end to the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Scheme (ASSPA) funding and significant changes to the administration of what was to become the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS). The committee responded quickly to requests for an inquiry, even though its findings would be delivered six months after the passage of the amendments.

1.5 The committee authorised a subcommittee to deal with the reference. It advertised for submissions late in 2004 and held meetings and hearings in the Northern Territory in February 2005, after which the committee tabled its interim report. It resumed the inquiry with further hearings and meetings in Western Australia and Queensland in April 2005. A feature of the committee's inquiry was visits to schools to meet representatives of school communities. Much of the evidence was drawn from these public meetings, conducted, in some instances, in circumstances of informality. Valuable evidence was also heard at meetings of school staff in much the same way. The committee also heard, in more formal hearings, from state and territory education departments, and from the Catholic Education Offices. A list of submissions to the inquiry is in Appendix 1. A list of venues, including schools visited by the committee, is to be found in Appendix 2. The final hearing was in Melbourne on 27 April when the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) appeared before the committee.

### **Observations on the legislation**

1.6 In the paragraphs which follow in this section of the chapter, the committee comments on the legislation and identifies and places in the context of national indigenous education policy those program components which are the main focus of its scrutiny.

1.7 The Government's amendments to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act were, at the time of their introduction to Parliament, presented as a continuation of current measures under the act, consistent with the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. The Government has emphasised its determination to improve the educational outcomes for indigenous students. Its approach with the 2004 amendments has been to redirect funding to programs where there have been demonstrated improvements to learning outcomes, and where students have been most seriously disadvantaged by their remote localities.

1.8 The amending bill appropriates some \$913.2 million for the 2005-2008 quadrennium.<sup>1</sup> This is an increase of \$47.3 million, up from \$865.9 million in the last quadrennium. Of that funding, \$29 million is for the two new programs.

1.9 On the face of it, there is nothing in the Government's drafting of the bill, or in the Minister's speech introducing the bill which suggests a radical shift in policy. The bill consists largely of one schedule listing the appropriations, specifying accountability processes and other terms and conditions for agreements to be made between 'providers' (DEST 'newspeak' for schools and systems) and the Commonwealth, including performance reporting and evaluation. There is no specific reference in the bill itself to the programs described in later paragraphs. The amended act, being a states grants instrument, gives no hint as to the substantial changes to

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1 Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill, 2004, Explanatory Memorandum.

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implementation detail. Nor is there any such indication in Minister Nelson's second reading speech in introducing the bill. The Minister speaks of 'improved program management', 'better targeted assistance', and 'ongoing initiatives': all suggestive of a continuing program subject to normal incremental change.<sup>2</sup>

1.10 Yet, the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004 was not legislation that provided for incremental change, as the committee sees it. There are several new elements that warranted more thorough public discussion and consultations with the states and territories, and other interested parties. These elements are associated with the more direct and intrusive intervention of the Commonwealth in the operation of schools and school systems. This is the focus of the committee's scrutiny.

### ***Leveraging, targeting and accountability***

1.11 Commonwealth education funding has long been characterised by the imposition of conditions by the Commonwealth, and by a gradual tightening of accountability procedures. This amendment bill significantly strengthens the accountability arrangements for funding agreements under the act. As the submission from the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) points out, an important feature of the new funding arrangements is the leverage of mainstream funding and other resources to ensure that indigenous education gets more access to them. Reporting requirements have been strengthened, with annual statements to be made on how Commonwealth funds are spent. This new performance monitoring and reporting framework is based on current Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP) performance indicators.

1.12 To maintain the Government's pressure on the states and on other systems and schools, DEST requires annual statements of achievements and other outcomes. Under the Indigenous Education Agreements now provided for in the act following the 2004 amendment bill, the Commonwealth not only enforces accountability for the funds it provides under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act, but requires school systems and independent schools to report on how they have advanced, or intend to advance, the objects of the act from funding other than that coming directly from the Commonwealth.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the Government is informed as to how well its leverage is succeeding.

1.13 The leverage strategy of detailed reporting, however, affects the operations of schools which do not have the resources to deal with the reporting requirements. The submission from the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia makes the point that the level of reporting and accountability, compared to the relatively small amounts of money available, is a continuing issue because different programs have different accountability and reporting requirements. The submission urges that these

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2 Hon Brendon Nelson MP, House of Representatives *Hansard*, 17 November 2004, pp.8-9

3 DEST, *Submission 18*, p.14

arrangements be evaluated so as to improve educational outcomes and allow for more effective use of government funds.<sup>4</sup>

1.14 The committee acknowledges the importance of accountability, as would be evident from the committee's scrutiny of the DEST portfolio over many years. As this report shows, however, the committee believes that the accountability processes which are increasingly a feature of DEST-funded programs tend to be out of proportion to the funds provided and are often a burden to administer. They fail to recognise the professional requirements involved in the educational process. Ultimately, they are more ritualistic than authoritative because there are few processes in use to provide independent verification of results. The committee makes further comment on reporting in chapter 4.

### **The focus of committee scrutiny**

1.15 The basic structure for the funding of Commonwealth programs remains substantially unaltered. An important legislative change is that the act now provides funding for both the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) and the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Programme (IEDA) for the period 1 January 2005 to 30 June 2009. Previously, funding to support payments for IEDA was provided annually under Appropriation Act No.1. Bringing IEDA under the 2000 Targeted Assistance Act will allow for quadrennial funding and align this to calendar years. It will also allow for some integrated program delivery in association with IESIP. As noted above, the accountability provisions for IEDA will now be aligned with those for IESIP.

1.16 The committee has also considered the policy contained in the 2004 amendment in the light of the Government's broader indigenous policies. The determination to leverage mainstream funding at a state level is consistent with the Government's plans to 'mainstream' indigenous services provided by the Commonwealth. The emphasis on 'competitive' funding and a more rigorous reporting regime is also consistent with the policy of removing the emphasis on any distinction applied to indigenous people in the mainstream. This explains, in part, the replacement of ASSPA with PSPI, as explained in a later paragraph and in chapter 3.

1.17 The committee's focus is on Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program (IEDA). Neither the act, nor the 2004 amendments, refer to IEDA, but under the new Guidelines the conditions attached to two funding components are substantially changed.

### ***ITAS***

1.18 The first of these is the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS, and formerly ATAS), which is continued, although as a greatly reduced benefit for fewer

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4 AISSA, *Submission 17*, p.5



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students and under new arrangements, which are more fully described in chapter 3. The new policy emphasis, as the committee views it, addresses failure rather than promoting success. Furthermore, funding for the program is capped, and may result in a shortfall of tuition places with the significant growth in enrolments.

1.19 The ITAS program provides in-class tutorial assistance for indigenous students who fail to meet national benchmarks in years 3, 5 and 7. Tutorial assistance is provided in the year following the examination at which the student underperformed (that is, years 4, 6 and 8). In other words, under the new arrangements, students must fail to meet national benchmarks before their school becomes eligible for tutorial funding, raising a number of serious practical and pedagogical questions. Tutorial assistance is also provided for students in years 10, 11 and 12. According to the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the program for secondary students has been expanded to allow as many as 50 per cent of remote students to participate.<sup>5</sup>

1.20 The Government's rationale is that its tutorial assistance money is supplementary to the funding and the efforts of all other programs for all students. The Government states that it wants to target its indigenous specific resources at those students who are falling behind in schooling.

1.21 In the Government's view, the best indicator of this is the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. These benchmarks set the very minimum standard expected of students to progress satisfactorily in schooling. Those who are failing them clearly need additional assistance. However, while the assistance is targeted at those students not reaching the benchmarks, the minister has given education authorities the flexibility to apply some of the funding to those students at other levels, who, without extra support, are at risk of not meeting the benchmarks.

1.22 The committee notes that educational shortcomings in this program were overshadowed by a more basic problem facing schools: that of obtaining any funding in time for the beginning of the 2005 school year, and of finding tutors at such a late stage in the year. Many schools believed that their funding problems would not be resolved until mid-2005.

1.23 The committee acknowledges Minister Nelson's advice to Parliament that the reason for the funding delay is that state and territory governments have not signed their Indigenous Education Agreements with the Commonwealth. Funding can not be legally given to the states and territories to manage the tutorial assistance program until they have signed the Agreements. Having been on the table since January 2005, a number are only now being signed.

***ASSPA – PSPI***

1.24 Of equal concern, and perhaps of more significance, has been the changed funding arrangement for a program designed more than fifteen years ago, and running with increasing success since 1991: the now discontinued Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Scheme (ASSPA). This program has been replaced by the Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI). As ASSPA, this component guaranteed per capita funding to schools, allowing for family and community agreement on the use of this funding. As PSPI, funding has been reduced, is payable to schools only on application, and according to guidelines which preclude school community responsibility for decisions made about its use.

1.25 DEST commentary on PSPI is rather sparse. The committee is unclear as to whether PSPI bodies are to be subordinated to school councils, with specific responsibility for indigenous matters. The thrust of policy in this vexed area appears to be to give school principals sole responsibility for applications for Commonwealth funds available to a school.

1.26 The committee concludes from the evidence that the Commonwealth may not understand the likely consequences of its failure to continue to support ASSPA. The committee learned very little about the likely operation of the PSPI during the course of this inquiry, probably because no one is quite sure of how it will work. It is not clear whether the Government expects that the spirit of ASSPA will live on in PSPI, and whether parental interest and skills are likely to be retained. PSPI bears all the signs of being a program in search of a policy.

1.27 If it is the Government's intention to retain some of the old ASSPA spirit, then according to the evidence received by the committee, this is unlikely to happen. PSPI committees risk being regarded by indigenous people as token bodies since being stripped of their old powers and responsibilities. The committee concludes that for indigenous people a loss of recognition of their status in the school community, which ASSPA gave them, may involve a sense of being marginalised.

1.28 Finally, all the funding to be made available must now be applied for in a cumbersome two stage process, described in more detail in chapter 4. Under new arrangements, payments from DEST based on indigenous enrolments will no longer be made through PSPI or any other program. Rather, school administrators must now make a submission for funding, with reference to the *Indigenous Education Programmes Provider Guidelines 2005-2008*. Having had reference to the Guidelines, schools must then generate a 'concept plan', which is essentially an expression of intent, providing an opportunity for a school to outline its ideas on the purpose and functioning of a project, together with a brief description of the initiative and the results which are expected to be achieved.

1.29 It appears from the guidelines that applications will not be made for the quadrennium: most projects are anticipated to last one to two years. The committee imagines that while teachers will become more confident about making submissions,

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depending on the results of their first applications, they will remain stressful and time-consuming exercises. So far as is known, reporting may be more frequent than once each year.<sup>6</sup>

1.30 The committee reported in 2000 on the wide community support for IEDA programs, noting that they had provided consistent, supplementary levels of assistance across the country. The committee called for increased flexibility in the use of discretionary funds. In a recommendation the committee called for direct funding for schools. It is a matter of interest that Minister David Kemp supported neither of these recommendations. In relation to direct grants to schools the Minister stated that it was not the practice of the Commonwealth to specify funding for regions below the state or territory level.<sup>7</sup>

### *New programs*

1.31 In addition, the bill provided funding for two new programs that come within IEDA: the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program and the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program. These new programs are funded out of savings made from reductions in appropriations to ITAS and PSPI. The committee has not reported on these programs, which have yet to be implemented. The committee awaits with interest the publication of the guidelines.

### *IESIP*

1.32 The second main program, running concurrently to, and complementing IEDA, is the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP). This is continued without major change. It provides largely per capita recurrent funding and funding for research and for curriculum innovation. IESIP funding goes mainly to schools and school systems. It provides recurrent supplementary assistance to schools, based on per capita rates, determined by the relative remoteness of the school, among other factors. Rates to non-government schools are higher, as Commonwealth funding assumes that most recurrent expenditure on indigenous education in government schools is covered by state or territory sourced appropriations. In addition to recurrent funding IESIP includes funding for specific purpose projects known as 'strategic initiatives'. For instance, in 2005-08 this will include continued funding for a literacy program called 'Scaffolding', to be jointly funded by the Northern Territory Government.

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6 DEST, *Indigenous Education Programme Provider Guidelines 2005-2008*, p.65

7 Government Response to the Senate report on the inquiry into the effectiveness of education and training programs for indigenous Australians, March 2001, p.3

## Policy implementation issues

### *The response from the states and territories*

1.33 The intersection of Commonwealth policy and its administration with state operations is a matter of considerable interest to the committee, but it was touched on only in discussions with officials of the Western Australian Education Department. While senior state and territory officials have been closely involved in negotiating the funding agreements with the Commonwealth, the committee has gained an impression that state and territory officials (with the exception of those from Western Australia) have been, at most, marginally involved in the implementation processes which have taken up so much of the time of principals and their staff in departmental schools. DEST has invited state departmental officers to sit on panels which assess the applications for ITAS and PSPI funding, but these offers have not always been taken up.

1.34 While the committee finds this indifference remarkable, possibly indicating a lack of departmental support for principals and teachers in their dealings with an outside agency, it may also indicate a tension that results from the Commonwealth usurping a states role. State officials may not have accepted that they had any co-responsibility role in administering DEST policies, which in most cases were not supported with any enthusiasm (to say the least) by state ministers.

1.35 If questions about these policy processes and views of state and territory officials were not pressed by the committee, it was because of the unlikelihood of its getting straightforward answers. State officials are understandably circumspect in the evidence they provide to the committee, whether in relation to their own operations, or about the Commonwealth's programs. Whether they approve of Commonwealth programs and DEST methods, or not, they have to work with them.

1.36 The relevance of noting this matter here is that the Commonwealth has placed some emphasis on the fact that funding is allocated on the basis of competition, among other criteria. The Guidelines for PSPI applications state that it is a competitive process, and not all applications can receive funding.<sup>8</sup> This is a ground-breaking development, intended, the committee presumes, to imbue principals with a competitive spirit. It appears to be based on the premise that some unknown proportion of principals are passive 'time-servers', lacking, perhaps, the 'dynamic and entrepreneurial' qualities needed for the position; that some of them require a sharp 'incentive' to improve their performance.

1.37 In the circumstances of reduced funding, this competitive factor has the potential to deprive some public and other systemic schools of the funding they would have been entitled to under the old scheme. School systems have no choice other than to acquiesce with this policy. The committee presumes that where Commonwealth

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8 DEST, *Indigenous Education Programme Provider Guidelines 2005-2008*, para A10.5.1

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funding is not forthcoming, for whatever reason, state education departments and Catholic Education Offices will have to make up for the funding shortfall in the interests of equity. This may result in some difficult budgetary decisions at system level.

1.38 The committee's reflections on the implications for public school governance of measures that come within this legislation are to be found in chapter 4. The committee makes the point here that schools should not be burdened with the task of dealing with two levels of government. Principals of public schools are not employed by the Commonwealth, and it is the appropriate role of state education department officials to deal with DEST. The committee is surprised that state ministers have appeared so nonchalant about the bureaucratic demands made by the Commonwealth on their employees in regard to indigenous and other funding arrangements.

1.39 At last report, in early June 2005, two state systems, Queensland and the Northern Territory had signed the quadrennial funding agreements with the Commonwealth, along with most state Catholic Education Commissions or Offices and two state TAFE authorities. DEST claimed that all other systems were on the 'cusp' of signing.<sup>9</sup>

### ***The timing of policy implementation***

1.40 The committee has noted a degree of vagueness and uncertainty in the recollection of some witnesses in regard to the consultation program and timetable for the implementation of new funding rules. The committee has found the 'paper trail' difficult to follow, as have a good number of those who have given evidence. This information has not been formally sought by the committee, but the vagueness of the recollections suggests a lack of focus on implementation.

1.41 Much has been attributed to the fact that the federal election in October 2004 came at an inconvenient time: that it prevented consultation and planning. The committee rejects this excuse. The rules regarding the 'care-taker' period before an election should not have resulted in work being stopped on this administration. Regardless of the election outcome, funding legislation for the quadrennium would have been required, and in the event of the Government's return, its preferred legislation submitted in the form of amendment following agreement signed with states and systems.

1.42 This is one view. Government party senators on the committee note the evidence from DEST that its view of continuing work on implementing change was influenced by a statement from the Opposition spokeswoman expressing firm opposition to the Government's indigenous education funding. It was unlikely that an

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9 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard* (Estimates), 2 June 2005, p.56

approach to the Opposition, as suggested by one committee member, would have resulted in any agreement to proceed with planning during the election period.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Guidelines***

1.43 As previously noted, the act is silent on the program details it covers. The Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment Bill 2004 is in effect a states grants bill, fulfilling the requirements of section 96 of the Constitution. It does not go beyond the appropriation and the conditions that go with it. It is necessary to turn to the *Indigenous Education Programmes Provider Guidelines 2005-2008* to find the devil in the detail. The Guidelines cannot be regarded as 'legislative' in the formal sense, although it may be argued that they are legislative in character, being extraordinarily detailed and prescriptive, for the purposes of micro-management of the programs by DEST. There are parallel instances of this micro-management trend in DEST's regulation of higher education, although at least much of the detail there is set out in legislation.

1.44 Notwithstanding this, the committee notes that its indigenous education report of 2000 recommended that schools be directly funded by the Commonwealth. It also notes that state officials are asked to sit on the panels to determine those projects to receive funding. Government senators on the committee also point out that the Investing in Our Schools program, a current Government initiative providing direct funding for schools, is very strongly supported by schools.

1.45 These trends represent a new phenomenon in Australian public administration which has yet to attract the attention of commentators. The committee's concern in relation to the Guidelines has been with the discretionary powers of local and regional DEST officers in relation to funding applications from schools, and the unnecessarily time-consuming impositions they place on school principals and their staff.

### ***Concept plans***

1.46 In the weeks when the committee was visiting schools, a great deal of the time of the committee was taken up with complaints about having to submit concept plans as a first stage in the application for funding. Apprehension about these plans was fuelled by reports that a high proportion of them were being rejected in the first instance. News of this filtered through to Canberra, and the committee was advised of efforts made by DEST to refine application guidelines. Even so, as late as early June 2005, the committee learned that only 57 per cent of concept plans submitted earned the response of an invitation to make a formal application for funding.<sup>11</sup>

1.47 The committee is concerned that the guidelines instituted for indigenous education programs will eventually be replicated for broader DEST funding programs,

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10 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.15

11 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard* (Estimates), 2 June 2005, p.51

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and therefore affect all government and systemic schools. The effect on independent schools will be less dramatic because in most instances they deal directly with DEST and have little contact with state and territory education departments. These processes appear to be the result of a determination to raise a consciousness of the importance of 'accountability' out of all proportion to the extent to which it presents a problem. Furthermore, the gate-keepers in this exercise appear to be less than qualified for their task. The committee considers that local DEST officials are likely to be placed in the position of stepping beyond their field of competence in the exercise of discretions which the Guidelines give them.

1.48 The committee has problems with this bureaucratic trend on principle. The committee questions whether it is the proper role of Commonwealth officers to stand in judgement on the merits of school program proposals. DEST does not run schools and would probably lay no claim to any official or recognised expertise in curriculum matters beyond what it can purchase from consultants. It is an imposition on schools for the Commonwealth, which does not control schools, to require them to spend disproportionate time on submissions for relatively small amounts of funding. The politics of Commonwealth indigenous education funding is seriously affecting, and interfering with, what were once successful programs.

1.49 Commonwealth funding arrangements are complex. Their complexity results from policy of long-standing by which the Commonwealth injects funding to schools to ensure that innovation is maintained, that particular sectors are maintained and that needs that may otherwise be overlooked by states are looked after. Increasingly, the Commonwealth has taken a strong and direct interest in particular areas of the curriculum, giving them, for a specific time, national priority status. This happened with citizenship education, and continues now with literacy and numeracy.

1.50 Successive Commonwealth governments, both Labor and Coalition, have sought to take on national education policy leadership through the vehicle of MCEETYA. Scepticism of the effectiveness and quality of state education policies and administration is not hard to find among those elected to the Commonwealth Parliament and who take a strong interest in education. According to some commentators, the current Coalition government has been more interventionist than its predecessors in its determination to press for national educational benchmarks. While the practice of leveraging state legislation and other action as a condition of the receipt of grants is long-standing practice, it appears to have been more rigorously applied in the case of education funding under the current Government.

1.51 The committee has always held the view, across the party divides, that without Commonwealth expenditure initiatives, and the conditions attached to them, some states would be likely to reduce their own expenditure on education. Some state education officials have been known to privately acknowledge this reality, even while suffering the Commonwealth's interference in matters where the states consider their own expertise and experience is being overridden in the process. Whether these developments have had an adverse effect on the culture of educational leadership and

policy innovation in the states is an issue that appears to have attracted little commentary or analysis so far.

1.52 The committee's view is that the conditions which apply to Commonwealth funding need to be commensurate with the amount of funding received, and that educational outcomes should result from genuine agreement in MCEETYA, rather than because of Commonwealth insistence, reinforced by the funds that are never rejected. The Commonwealth may buy in the educational advice which underpins its policy, but systems have the experience of running schools, and rather more knowledge of what are practicable and achievable outcomes.



## Chapter 2

### Parental and Community Support and Awareness

#### Introduction

2.1 The demise of the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program as a result of amendments to the Indigenous Education Assistance Act was the most contentious issue faced by the committee at its meetings with indigenous communities. There are two elements to the dissatisfaction resulting from this decision. The first is that it suggests to indigenous communities that there is a retreat from a Government commitment to self-determination, and has been widely regarded as an indication of lack of trust in the good sense of indigenous representatives. The second element is the more practical consequence of having greatly reduced levels of funding to support educational programs, particularly in student welfare and attendance support and in covering extra-curricular activities.

2.2 The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program dates back to 1990. The 1990-91 DEET programs book describes ASSPA as being designed to encourage educational opportunities for indigenous students, at the same time as encouraging increased parental and community involvement in education<sup>1</sup>. It may be taken to mean that through ASSPA's role in strengthening the connection which parents and extended families have with local schools, and through involving them more in the decisions of the school, that over time students would be more comfortable in a school environment in which their parents and grandparents were familiar faces.

2.3 The number of ASSPA committees increased across the country from around 2000 in 1991 to 3839 in 1999. Over 90 per cent of all indigenous pre-school and school students attended schools which had ASSPA committees. ASSPA funding entitlements ranged from \$110 per student in a primary non-remote school to \$315 per student in a remote secondary school, with funding ranging up to \$100 000 for a particular school. Ten per cent of schools received grants of over \$10 000.<sup>2</sup>

2.4 ASSPA was conceived within the wider context of policy promoting indigenous self-determination. The demise of ASSPA may be regarded as one manifestation of the Government's impatience in attaining achievements in this direction, and a change in emphasis to what it sees as transparent and accountable ways of delivering programs which it believes will improve numeracy and literacy standards. The committee notes some contradictions in efforts made recently to

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1 Commonwealth of Australia, *Review of the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program, Final Report*, 2004, p.11

2 Commonwealth of Australia, *Review of the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) Programme*, 1999, at <http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/indigenous/publications/idea/idea.htm>

balance responsibility with accountability. This is always a problem with indigenous programs. Opposition senators, and many witnesses appearing before the committee, take the view that ASSPA, despite the minor shortcomings evident in some communities, was largely successful in maintaining this balance. Whatever may be the shortcomings of programs in other portfolio areas which have been associated with self-determination, the importance of parental involvement in schools is beyond question. This holds good for any school community anywhere.

2.5 The committee and Minister Nelson appear to agree on this point. In April 2005 the Minister is reported to have stated that public schools with high indigenous enrolments should be run like independent schools for the purposes of ensuring parental control over staffing. Speaking to Aboriginal representatives meeting in Cobar, the Minister is quoted as saying:

You need to have the power to recruit your own principals. I think the future for public education has increasingly got to be about giving parents and the school itself the power to control their own destiny.<sup>3</sup>

2.6 Opposition senators wonder how it is possible to reconcile the decision to abolish ASSPA with sentiments expressed above by Minister Nelson. The Minister appears to be torn between two conflicting policies: that of supporting local initiative and self-management, which is now conventional wisdom; and imposing a Commonwealth policy, with stringent conditions attached, likely to stifle local initiative and impose a centralised micro-management regime. The committee urges that a broad choice be made in favour of the former, with negotiations to produce a satisfactory compromise on accountability measures.

2.7 In fact, ASSPA funding has been spent on a range of projects, the vast majority of which fit broadly within the objectives of the indigenous education program. Common projects include nutrition programs, swimming classes, excursions (particularly where the school was remote and trips would not otherwise be possible), curriculum support, artist or musician-in-residence programs, and provisions for National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week. The quality of extra-curricular programs makes a crucial difference to the success of the core curriculum.

2.8 The demise of ASSPA has not been adequately explained. At the Melbourne hearing, DEST officials were asked about the evidence upon which the decision to abolish ASSPA was based. The committee heard that the government drew on a number of findings in a 1999 performance review, including criticisms that ASSPA has little influence on decision-making within schools, and being insufficiently concerned about educational outcomes.<sup>4</sup> However, the committee notes that other parts of the review appeared to reflect very favourably on the usefulness and performance of ASSPA, especially in its role of increasing participation rates. Indeed,

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3 Hon Brendan Nelson MP, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 2005, p.2

4 IEDA Review, 1999, p.59

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at the time of tabling the committee's interim report of this inquiry in March 2005, the DEST website continued to report on the effectiveness of ASSPA in addressing and improving educational outcomes, according to evaluations made and anecdotal evidence provided. Particular comment is made on the positive effects of cultural activities on learning outcomes, and on improvements to student self-esteem, confidence and pride.<sup>5</sup>

2.9 It should be noted that the effect of the disbanding of ASSPA is likely to be uneven. The committee has found that in Western Australia, public schools will see a large measure of continuity preserved as a result of the Commonwealth's agreement to run the PSPI through established state structures. Regard is being paid to Western Australian legislation which requires Commonwealth money to public schools being paid through the state education department. District Aboriginal Councils will play a key role in advising DEST on funding allocations. Western Australia is committed to school-based budgetary decision-making, and each school has a plan for indigenous education.<sup>6</sup> Submissions from the governments of Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania do not make it clear how they will deal PSPI. Submissions were not received from either New South Wales or Victoria. The committee has no information on the extent to which these states have developed structures for accommodating Commonwealth initiatives.

### **The effectiveness of ASSPA**

2.10 The committee heard substantial evidence of the successful role played by ASSPA over its years of operation. Successes included increasingly confident participation by parents and extended families in school operations, as well increased attendance and fewer behavioural problems. Parents have become noticeably more confident in their participation in school events and at meetings, as was even evident to the committee. The committee also heard of ASSPA's role in fostering student pride in their school and culture through activities such as NAIDOC week. These improvements to school tone and morale were due to programs which, at the time of the committee's visits to some of these schools, were under threat or had stopped.

#### ***Nutrition programs***

2.11 The 1999 review of ASSPA found that perceptions of efficiency were influenced by opinion as to whether some expenditure was in the category of 'welfare' rather than 'education'. The committee encountered this argument during its visits, hearing documented evidence of recent decisions by local DEST officers to the effect that provision of breakfasts and nutritious food during the day did not fit expenditure guidelines, resulting in funding applications being rejected. These included a letter from DEST to the Parramatta State School in Cairns declining to accept its concept plan, and clearly stating that:

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5 *ibid.*

6 WA Department of Education and Training, *Submission 19*, p.3

Under the program we will not be funding excursions, teacher aides, tutors, the professional development of teachers, TRS, NAIDOC, sports, nutrition programs, resources, artists, workshop presenters, camps and fees.<sup>7</sup>

2.12 The committee notes the assurances it has received from a senior DEST official during the hearings on the additional estimates to the effect that a school nutrition program could be fairly regarded as an attendance initiative, and as such was a major priority for the Government.<sup>8</sup> It appears that this message has been ineffectively transmitted to DEST's regional decision-makers, at least until recently, when DEST issued modified guidelines. However, schools continue to report discouraging messages from DEST in relation to nutrition and other so-called 'welfare' based programs. At the committee's final hearing, DEST submitted that nutrition programs were able to be supported only where they were shown by schools to be linked to 'core objectives'. This view was reiterated when DEST appeared before the committee on the budget estimates on 2 June 2005.<sup>9</sup> While DEST's response would have been appreciated, the committee understands that principals and teachers became frustrated with official efforts to have them make submissions on such obvious matters.

2.13 Notwithstanding DEST's inconsistent approach, schools continue to provide the services they know to be important, sometimes relying on teachers to dip into their own pocket for food.<sup>10</sup> At Shepherdson College, the ASSPA committee funded a breakfast and fruit program, as did many other energetic committees across the Northern Territory and the states, with the results as described:

One of the huge benefits is behaviour management. Three years ago we used to have fights and trouble in all the classrooms all of the time. As we got to understand the importance of nutrition and health, we had very few behaviour management problems within the school because, through research and in combination with the health centre, we were able to link those together. If you are going to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, you have to make sure that all the things that go together to make that happen in an Indigenous community are in place, otherwise literacy and numeracy are not going to suddenly improve on their own.

2.14 When asked about the perceived link between a nutritious diet and good behaviour, one principal illustrated his response with an anecdote:

We have three [deputy principals] looking after each block, and when a child comes to them I want them to be able to tell me why that child is

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7 Correspondence from DEST Regional Office to Mr Paul O'Reilly, dated 4 March 2005, provided as additional information 7 April 2005

8 Mr Tony Greer, DEST, *Committee Hansard* (Estimates), 16 February 2005, p.118

9 Mr Shane Hoffman, DEST, *Committee Hansard* (Estimates), 2 June 2005, p.56

10 This was reported on a number of occasions. See, for example, Dr Jim Heslop, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.52; Ms Janet Matthews, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.2 and at the Garbutt State School, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.74

misbehaving. In week one of term one of 2005, we had nine students sent to our senior block deputy...nine out of nine of those students by one o'clock in the afternoon had not had breakfast, morning tea or lunch and all reported that their tummies were growling and they were hungry...if you are tired and if you are hungry then you are not going to learn and you are not going to behave yourself. It is just not going to happen. It never has and it never will.<sup>11</sup>

2.15 Evidence was offered to the committee from almost every school it visited on the link between 'full tummies' and learning responsiveness. But there are other consequences, too. The committee heard that students who have now to buy their lunch are less likely to attend school at all, due to the shame involved in taking a handout.<sup>12</sup>

2.16 To complement nutrition programs such as these, at least two schools visited by the committee operate a system whereby deductions are made by Centrelink from parents' accounts and in return the school provides students with breakfast and lunch, ensuring that at least two meals per day are eaten. In addition to avoiding being shamed, this provides an added incentive for school attendance, as parents insist that their child attend school and eat the food which has been paid for.<sup>13</sup> A variation on this scheme was the running by the school canteen of an optional account system, allowing block payments and a 'line of credit' arrangement for students. As every school principal will attest, an inability for students to pay cannot exclude a student from benefits available to other students.

2.17 One participant in Cairns suggested that policy makers need to be realistic about ways to achieve learning outcomes:

[A]s teachers and principals in schools we know that if we have a hungry kid they cannot learn and we need to deal with that issue. Everybody wants to fund the big picture thing about improving literacy outcomes. But they do not necessarily want to address all the nitty-gritty issues. If there is one thing I have learned about improving the literacy of Indigenous kids it is that it is a complex issue, and it needs to be addressed in a variety of ways depending on the circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Other activities***

2.18 Another ASSPA responsibility that may be forgone under new arrangements, and which also contributed significantly to school attendance, is travel for the

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11 Mr David Knox, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.31. See also Mr Faraone, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p. 30; La Grange school discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2005, p.16

12 Ms Janet Stewart, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.17

13 See, for example, Ms Janet Matthews, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.3; Ms Glenys Pianta and Ms Charmaine Durshell, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005. p.24

14 Mr John Baskerville, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.27

purposes of sport. The sports and music teacher at Milingimbi School told the committee of one problem, possibly insignificant to policy makers, but not so to children in Arnhem Land:

from what I can see this year, the impact of the stalling process has probably already blown our sports program—not just ours but that of the whole Arnhem region; I do not know which other regions. ...To enter students into competitions for the NT school sport program in town—nearly all those events occur next term—the bid for the team to be nominated has to be in very soon. You have to get them in a month before the event. So, by the sound of things, if we are not going to know for weeks whether we are getting any money it sounds like all those programs, at least for this year, anyway, are going to be blown out of the water. So kids in the Arnhem region will not get to play sport or compete in sport in the Territory this year. That is my perception in terms of immediate impact, and, again, things like music excursions and just basic resources for the classroom, as Ingrid was talking about. We are all very much in the dark. We would like some answers.<sup>15</sup>

2.19 Since the committee visited Milingimbi in March, the school has learned that it will receive \$40 000 under PSPI, half of what it received under ASSPA in 2004. The sports program still remains under threat.

2.20 Similar concerns about inter-school sport were voiced at Shepherdson College and at the Yarrabah School. In both cases, it was ASSPA funding which kept the inter-school sports program afloat in a region where travel is very expensive. Yet, as the committee was told in several schools, sports participation is a key to literacy and numeracy for a high proportion of boys.

2.21 Teachers and community representatives in Yarrabah spoke of the threat to the work experience program at the school. The program provides access for students to a broad range of industries and types of work experience in Cairns, which lies 76 kilometres away. Hence, a bus service is needed, for which ASSPA funding was essential.<sup>16</sup> This must have been taken up by a local DEST officer present at the committee's hearing. The committee was pleased to hear later that funding had been arranged for the bus through a different program.<sup>17</sup>

2.22 The committee points out the connection between maximising participation and learning effectiveness, on the one hand, and nutrition and sports programs on the other. The committee is struck by the fact that neither the Minister nor DEST have made an authoritative statement recognising the link between nutrition and fitness and learning readiness, and putting these concerns to rest. Local DEST officials needed more guidance on this point, as DEST has belatedly admitted. As the Commonwealth

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15 Mr John Graham, *Committee Hansard*, 2 March 2005, p.3

16 Yarrabah school discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.3

17 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.45

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chooses to become increasingly more involved in the minutiae of direct school contact, it will find many similar problems awaiting it. They require a much closer acquaintance with school culture than would be currently possessed by many DEST officials.

## Criticisms of ASSPA

2.23 An internal review of IEDA, including the ASSPA component, was conducted by the (then) Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs in 2000, with a final report published in 2004. The final (2004) report of the review of IEDA is presumably the basis on which the Government made its decision to disband ASSPA and replace it with PSPI. The committee asked about the details of the review of ASSPA at the budget estimates hearings in June 2004. It learned that in reviewing ASSPA functions, DEST selected 400 of the 3800 ASSPA committees at random (albeit a statistically significant sample) and sent them a discussion paper for comment. There were 10 responses.<sup>18</sup> The committee therefore has some doubts about the veracity of the final report.

2.24 Most submissions and witnesses held the view that ASSPA funds were expended on a broad range of programs which were eminently helpful in achieving the objectives of the program. As Principal Jan Matthews told the committee in South Hedland, WA:

I think there are a lot of things we use the funding for that lead to improvement, but it is like going up a mountain – there are a lot of pathways up a mountain...you have got to make people want to learn...you are not necessarily going to make people want to learn by just saying 'What we are looking at is literacy and numeracy'.<sup>19</sup>

2.25 The 2000 Review considered that ASSPA had provided an appropriate and effective mechanism for increasing the participation of indigenous parents, but was in favour of changes. Specifically, the reviewers stated:

There is broad consensus that the success of ASSPA within a particular school community is heavily reliant upon the attitudes, skills and motivation of the Indigenous parents, the school principal ... the most successful ASSPA committees are those where there is a genuine partnership between the committee and the school.<sup>20</sup>

2.26 The review found that:

These programs continue to be appropriate, and they enjoy strong support from the community, because program objectives and outcomes align very closely with Government priorities and initiatives as well as meeting client

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18 Mr Shane Hoffman,, *Committee Hansard* (Estimates), 1 June 2004, p.158

19 Ms Jan Matthews, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.12

20 DEST, *A Review of the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) Program*, 2000, p.44

needs at the local level. These programs have been effective in achieving overall program objectives.<sup>21</sup>

2.27 In contrast, the 2004 review finds that:

The involvement of Indigenous parents and communities in education is still an appropriate policy response, but the ASSPA program in itself is no longer an appropriate intervention to achieve this...mainstream education providers and peak parent bodies should be encouraged to step up their activities to encourage and engage Indigenous parents in school education issues in particular.<sup>22</sup>

2.28 The committee is puzzled by the stark differences in the findings, over a relatively short four year time span. Apparently, the ASSPA program went from being a successful program to a failed program in a very short time, in spite of the program's successful alignment with government priorities being listed as a key strength in 2000. The committee is unable to identify what changed between 2000 and 2004, or how such changes precipitated a radical shift in the policy of program delivery. DEST officials agree that the negative and positive findings on ASSPA in the final report are 'observations from both sides of the fence', but that the Government drew on the report in support of changes.<sup>23</sup> They are not referred to in the 2004 report, so it must be assumed that this report is a signal for a policy change, rather than a report which gives reasons for a change. The committee has looked in vain for a missing link in the argument.

2.29 The Australian Education Union (NT) considered that problems with ASSPA Committees were more about a lack of structural support from DEST in integrating Committees with mainstream school management structures and in providing support and advice to ASSPA members.<sup>24</sup> There may not be any structural support available to the new PSPI creations in the new funding, but it does appear to be the Government's intention to integrate them into mainstream school management.

2.30 The committee noted that even supporters of ASSPA were aware of the uneven performance of the committees. The Director of the Catholic Education Office in the Northern Territory warned of the view of holding an over romantic view of ASSPA, and there was support for this view from other roundtable participants in Darwin. But as the CEO later conceded in its evidence, there was no doubt that ASSPA provided a focus and a locus where indigenous parents have felt comfortable

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21 *ibid*, p. 6

22 DEST, *Review of the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program, Final Report*, 2004 p.45. Accessed at [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous\\_education/publications\\_resources/profiles/indigenous\\_education\\_direct\\_assistance\\_report.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/publications_resources/profiles/indigenous_education_direct_assistance_report.htm) on 23 May 2005, 2.15pm

23 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.33

24 Australian Education Union Northern Territory, *Submission 9*, p.7



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and able to come in and make a contribution to education policy and the way the school is run.<sup>25</sup>

2.31 Personalities play a part in the stability and success of ASSPA committees, as does community mobility. For instance, the committee visited Koormilda College, one of the largest Protestant boarding schools in the country, and learnt about the problems faced by boarding schools whose ASSPA committees were drawn from many communities, creating complications for school management.

2.32 Varying effectiveness was recognised, particularly between those schools which had a high or almost exclusive indigenous enrolment and those which did not. The principal of the Kurrawang CAPS School in Western Australia told the committee:

The sheer facts that these [Aboriginal Independent Community Schools] are Indigenous and are run by Indigenous boards and that Indigenous parents have a major part in the day to day running of those schools means that ASSPA worked incredibly effectively...ASSPA was probably one of the most effective programs that was running.<sup>26</sup>...However, if you look at the broad range of schools across Australia, the comment that I have heard is that some were not effectively administered and some schools did not have ASSPA committees, which is possibly the case in suburban areas where the Indigenous population is quite small. ...I cannot understand why something that was not broken needed to be fixed, but perhaps in other spheres and aspects of ASSPA across Australia there were some issues that needed to be dealt with...

2.33 ASSPA committee stalwarts, as might be expected, were eager to describe their role and its importance in the life of the school. The committee noted that many of these people were depressed about the fact that their active involvement in school life was nearing its end, and it noted what a considerable loss to the community and to education programs they would be. The committee was told in Alice Springs that while ASSPA attracted a core of active parents, the PSPI program would not. Indigenous parents would be unwilling to serve on school council sub committees. They would resent being 'mainstreamed'.<sup>27</sup>

### **Homework Centres**

2.34 Apart from ITAS and the PSPI, the other component of the Whole of Schooling Implementation Strategy (WOSIS) which is relevant to this chapter is the funding of homework centres. According to DEST, funding for centres may be applied for independently or as part of the school's concept plan. In order for the application to be successful, as with other elements of a concept plan, it must be

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25 Dr Bill Griffiths, *Committee Hansard*, op.cit., p.40

26 Mr Grant Little, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.52

27 See, for instance, Ms Carmen McLean, *Committee Hansard*, 3 March 2005, p. 19

established that it was developed by the school and indigenous parents and community in partnership. It must also demonstrate clear milestones and performance measures. In common with other WOSIS programs, there is a requirement that an application for funding must show that a homework centre would achieve specific educational objectives. DEST advised that 88 homework centre applications had been approved as at 27 April 2005, and that figure had risen to 100 by 2 June 2005.<sup>28</sup>

2.35 The committee recalls the enthusiasm with which homework centres were extolled during its 1999-2000 inquiry into indigenous education. It was interesting, therefore to hear the views of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training. There is less enthusiasm there at system level where industrial issues loom as significant.

...homework centres are not a part of the concept planning process in Western Australia for the government school sector. We made a decision, along with the state DEST office, that the homework centre process was one that we were not prepared for our school principals to manage. The information was provided to us in late December that DEST expected the principalship to manage homework centres. We refused to allow that to happen, only because we have not gone through a due and appropriate process with regard to the principalship taking over homework centres. It has EBA ramifications and a whole stack of other ramifications.<sup>29</sup>

2.36 The committee has not pursued this issue with other state departments.

### **The importance of continuing indigenous involvement**

2.37 The changes to structures and to funding do not give promise of continuing strong involvement of indigenous parents. The Independent Education Union of the Northern Territory (IEUNT) warned that while ASSPA may not have been perfect, its replacement with PSPI has the potential to disenfranchise indigenous parents of students studying in urban and independent schools. The IEU added that:

To argue that after 13 years of operation the ASSPA program produced negligible evidence in improving educational outcomes of [I]ndigenous students is to ignore that those outcomes can only improve if the students attend school on a frequent basis and feel comfortable in the school environment.<sup>30</sup>

2.38 Most schools with an ASSPA committee reported that, if not completely disbanded, the residual group of active indigenous parents was fewer in number after the changes. As one witness told the committee; parental involvement will dwindle because too many restrictions are put on parent committees. Interest would be lost

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28 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard* (Estimates) 2 June 2005, p.51

29 Mr Bob Somerville, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.21

30 Independent Education Union of the Northern Territory, *Submission 6*, p.10

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because of unwarranted concern with the mechanics of accountability, all because of occasional instances of mismanagement.<sup>31</sup>

2.39 For most, however, it is the loss of decision making power that has brought about a reduced interest in ASSPA-type committees by indigenous parents. Typical of sentiments were these observations from a teacher speaking at Kirwan State High School in Townsville:

If we were having some issues with getting parent involvement, we will now have big issues because if there is no ASSPA committee and if those people have no power and do not have some money and resources to work with to make some decisions that really do impact on their kids, they are not coming.<sup>32</sup>

2.40 DEST acknowledged that concerns such as these were evident from the committee's transcripts, and conceded that one of the challenges they faced was improved involvement and engagement of parents in the schools.<sup>33</sup> The committee is curious as to why DEST would have expected a different reaction to that reported here. It raises questions as to the policy rationale and the process by which it was arrived at, and the sources of that advice. These are decisions which are reached by governments within a sphere of policy about which there is often public and parliamentary indifference.

### **Testing the mettle of school principals**

2.41 A side effect of the changes has been the need for principals to use school funds for essential services, previously funded under ASSPA. The committee heard of the unease of a number of principals with this course of action, because it risks a breach of financial guidelines on the use of mainstream school funds. In the event that PSPI funding does not arrive, principals would be accountable. As one principal said:

A lot of us have our backsides hanging out bigtime, because we are funding things from our school budgets that we are hoping we will then get the money back for, and we do not know whether that will happen. I cannot, as a human being, justify not doing what I think is right and proper, having consulted with my community, because I am waiting for bureaucracy to catch up.<sup>34</sup>

2.42 A number of other principals admitted to following the line of 'spend and be damned'. They could not bear to see valuable programs cease simply because of uncertain funding. The principle of La Grange Community School on the north-west coast of Western Australia south of Broome is one such principal, though he put it

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31 Ms Sharna Raye, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p.13

32 School representative, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.35

33 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.34

34 Cairns West State School discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.24

more gently when he affirmed that he was taking \$300 a week fruit money out of school funds, while awaiting for an as yet unknown amount of PSPI funding:

We are looking on the positive side. Our attitude is that people want us to do what is right. We are working on the principle that if people can see that we are doing the right thing they will come to the party. We will worry about it if it does not turn out that way. As I said, we work on the principle that people will do that. We work on the principle that if it is really obvious people will support us in that endeavour.<sup>35</sup>

2.43 The committee is gratified to know that in their role as 'risk managers' school principals are increasingly prepared to put the immediate welfare interests of their students before other considerations. Their role and vocation gives them no option, and governments have no option but to support them.

## **Conclusions**

2.44 From the evidence put before it, the committee concludes that ASSPA was a program which enjoyed considerable success in achieving its stated objectives. The committee heard ample evidence that, by their nature, ASSPA committees promoted indigenous involvement in school activities, and that this had definite benefits for indigenous student education outcomes. The committee acknowledges that the ASSPA program was not perfect, but heard little evidence that it required serious reform. The overwhelming majority of stakeholders who contributed to the inquiry supported the ASSPA program, even if, in some cases, in amended form, and saw its abandonment as a retrograde step.

2.45 The committee's second observation is that while PSPI's designers may have intended concept plans to promote simplicity and community involvement in the types of activities applied for, this has not eventuated. The disbanding of ASSPA committees has in many cases left principals without confident and committed indigenous people from whom to take advice. Principals themselves have in some cases found difficulty in interpreting DEST policy intentions regarding new ground rules. This has been made more difficult because of reports of conflicting advice from DEST, which have filtered down through the principal's 'grapevine'.

2.46 The final, and most telling observation is that the committee is unconvinced that the PSPI program, as it has been 'rolled out' so far, will promote indigenous involvement in schools. Indeed, the early evidence suggested that a sizeable proportion of the former ASSPA committees have completely disbanded and have not been reformed. Only with great difficulty are they likely to be resurrected as PSPI committees. The transferral of funding from an indigenous parent and community-based committee to the school principal has been interpreted as a vote of no confidence by the Government in indigenous people, and this has resulted in a fall-off

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35 Mr Geoff Blythe, *Committee Hansard*, 31 March 2005, p.17

in indigenous parental and other community support which the program seeks to attract.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The committee recommends that the Government ensure that under PSPI there is a genuine engagement with parents and the community to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes for all students.**

### **Recommendation 2**

**The committee recommends that as a matter of preference, PSPI reverts to guaranteed per capita funding, and in the event that this does not occur, that PSPI be applied for twice yearly, with conditions which recognise the circumstances of individual schools and their diverse educational needs.**



## 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

## Chapter 4

### Policy administration

4.1 The committee is critical of the implementation process of the changes the Government has legislated for. This has resulted in a number of significant deficiencies in the administration of programs which might not have occurred had things been done differently. A characteristic of good government is that evolutionary policy change is marked by a smooth transition. This cannot be achieved without public knowledge and reassurance of what is to follow. Proper consultation allows people to become reconciled to new procedures, in cases where change is contentious, as this one has been. People affected by change can be assured of fair treatment within a new system, and public confidence in government programs can be maintained. It is all a matter of trust.

4.2 It is difficult to escape the conclusion that in this instance the process of change has alienated people affected by it. This failure of administration has been as much as anything a failure of anticipation: a failure to take the time to win approval for policies through more intensive consultation. There has been a lack of respect shown in this process, which the committee has gleaned not only from comments from indigenous people, but also from school principals. Conflicting advice from some officials, and some tactless treatment of school principals and system administrators, demonstrates poor preparation and inadequate training at the official level. The imposition of urgent deadlines may have been regarded as an administrative necessity, but in relation to what DEST probably refers to as 'the client group' it was a public relations disaster. Indigenous people do not immediately complain and at the same time 'get on with it'. For many of those associated with schools the disbanding of ASSPA without preparing the ground for its successor was to be seen as a withdrawal of trust.

4.3 Nor has administrative haste resulted in schools being able to access funds in a timely fashion. As described in earlier chapters, the PSPI and ASPA program funding arrangements have kept many schools waiting for long periods, assuming that their concept plans had been successful. Delay in the delivery of ITAS suggests that the learning needs of students were given low priority.

4.4 The committee considered a number of reasons for the delays, including the timing of the federal election<sup>1</sup> and the fact that the new system relies on a multi-stage assessment. Even if one accepts that these were delaying factors, they only strengthen the argument that 2005 should have been a transition year, enabling appropriate levels of consultation, organisation and planning to have taken place. Instead, a debacle has ensued which has seen a significant numbers of students disadvantaged by delayed programs.

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1 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.2

4.5 It is clear that, in grappling with its implementation of the new programs, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) had left a great many schools without much enlightenment on matters such as 'concept plans' and other hoops through which schools must jump in order to qualify for Commonwealth funding. It ought to be well-known that communication with schools is difficult through December and January. Amidst the anger and frustration expressed to the committee, there was a recognition of the difficulty faced by DEST officers 'on the ground', and an appreciation of the efforts of a majority of them in dealing flexibly with confusing red tape. However, from the committee's experience of listening to principals, teachers and administrators in both government and non-government schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland, it comes to the only conclusion possible: that whatever view is taken of the Government's indigenous education funding policy, its hasty implementation resulted in inadequate and inconsistent consultation with those most in need of timely and accurate information: people in schools.

4.6 This inadequacy was fed back to the committee almost everywhere it visited, but a typical comment came from a Queensland principal, a participant at a meeting held by the committee at Kirwan State High School in Townsville:

To me, the biggest problem is the rush to get this on board and the time line. If you have spent 20 hours sitting down going through all the material, you could find the answers to some of the things we have been talking about today but it is too rushed. We should have had a time frame to move into the new program.<sup>2</sup>

4.7 A participant in committee discussions at Yarrabah had this to say:

We [an Indigenous schools alliance] had a teleconference yesterday. One of the discussions concerned frustration over the concept plans where there has been community consultation. Communities are under the understanding, because they are familiar with the old ASSPA process, that their consultation has been put into the concept plans and that those concept plans will be approved and there will be dollars on the ground for their kids. But very few communities have heard where that situation is at, so there are lots of questions about where the process is at.<sup>3</sup>

4.8 The committee notes at this point that it found less concern among school communities about funding reductions for IEDA programs than for the maladministration of processes for the application and receipt of these funds. It is not yet clear as to whether the Government is aware of how it has brought unnecessary opprobrium on itself. It is rare for a Government to succeed in avoiding criticism for a funding reduction, and then incur unpopularity for its lack of administrative finesse.

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2 Kirwan State High School discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p. 53. See also, for instance, Mrs Margaret Talbot, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2005, p.25

3 Discussion at Yarrabah State School, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.7

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This raises the question of whether the requirements of implementation are likely to work against the success of the outcomes which everyone would wish to see achieved.

### **The consequences of program devolution**

4.9 Problems with consultation and communication extended beyond the initial introduction of the changes. Consistency of assessment appeared to be a problem in each of the areas visited by the committee. It seemed common for one school to be told one thing, while another school was given different, and often contradictory, advice. This was advice on the process for funding applications, and the kind of applications likely to attract funding. The committee was reminded that the IEDA was an example of a 'devolved' program, largely administered by DEST local officials. DEST informed the committee:

...The program is designed for local communities and schools to work together – Indigenous parents and schools – to identify local barriers to achieving educational outcomes and to identify local solutions to address those. It is not possible to say that nationally the barriers are the same in every local community and the solutions are the same and therefore these are the solutions which we shall prescribe. The nature of the program is such that it was designed to allow flexible approaches at the community level.<sup>4</sup>

4.10 The committee commends this approach. The wonder is that DEST did not take steps to ensure that the mindset of its regional and local officials was sufficiently focussed on this. Only since the release of the early transcripts of the committee hearings in relation to inconsistency has DEST 'finetuned' guidelines and directions to officers to achieve improved consistency.<sup>5</sup> The nature and form of the finetuning process appears to lie in improving the standard of communication between DEST regional offices and schools, and clarification of which programs (and in which circumstances) would or would not be considered for funding. For instance, directives have been issued instructing regional offices that nutrition programs, where they are linked to outcome such as attendance, should be viewed favourably.<sup>6</sup>

4.11 This remedial action is welcome. As to whether it will undo any damage which marked the first round of concept plan submissions, discussed elsewhere in this report, remains to be seen. The confusion on the part of both DEST and schools about the appropriate content of concept plans takes on another complexion when it is considered that some schools reported being given informal indications from DEST that they should expect funding to be delivered in due course. The school representatives at Kirwan High School were clear on this point, and described what they interpreted as a 'wink and nod' approach by local DEST officers and an underlying message of 'don't ask for more than last year's ASSPA allocation, and

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4 Mr Shane Hoffman, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.14

5 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.7

6 *ibid.*, p. 30. See also responses to Questions on Notice received 6 May 2005, tabled documents

you'll be alright'.<sup>7</sup> In many instances, schools which expected funding did not receive it. This has worsened an already poor financial outlook for some schools, as programs have been continued and funded from within school budgets on the understanding that no radical changes would occur to the bottom line.

## **Concept plans**

4.12 For the first time, most or all schools in receipt of Commonwealth funding have to deal directly with DEST in a two-stage competitive tendering process, rather than have their state or territory department or system as the intermediary body.<sup>8</sup> Public schools are increasingly in direct interaction with the Commonwealth. Funding of some indigenous education programs requires that the school and its community develop a concept plan. This is a significant development, and explains why these plans have provoked a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty among principals and school communities generally. This is the case with funding for homework centres and proposals under the Parent School Partnership Initiative.

### ***Concept plan rationale***

4.13 Neither the Minister nor DEST has explained the rationale for concept plans in any detail. They are not set out in the Guidelines, although there are detailed instructions on how they are to be submitted. The committee's view, as it understands the Government's thinking, is that they are part of the accountability process: that the receipt of funding is most ideally preceded by a statement that the school understands its needs. Or rather, as Opposition senators would argue, that the school understands what the Government believes its needs to be. An initial submission in the form of a concept plan is intended to demonstrate to DEST approvers that the school is serious about funding and determined to address its educational needs. As Opposition senators have observed before: such a process is intended to counter what the Government believes to be a mendicant mentality, especially in public school, where one simply waits for the money to flow in through the usual channels. The principle of entitlement is to be replaced with the principle of submission. Initiative and enterprise are seen by the Government as demonstrable requirements for success under the new funding arrangement.

4.14 Once the hurdle of the concept plan has been leapt (and it is proving to be difficult) the next challenge is the detailed submission which is an application for specific funding. In due course, evaluation and reporting requirements must be met to ensure the continuation of funding, assuming that it continues in this form in the next quadrennium. In short, the emphasis is on creating a climate wherein schools must be seen to be working for their funding.

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7 Discussion at Kirwan State High School, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, pp.45-47

8 As noted elsewhere in the report, procedures in Western Australia reflect a large measure of state ownership of this process.



4.15 The committee considers it to be more than likely that the guidelines instituted for indigenous education programs will eventually become a model for broader DEST funding programs, and affect all public schools, other systemic schools and independent schools. It may force other state governments to look closely at the policies adopted by the Government of Western Australia which ensure that it retains, as far as possible, administrative oversight of Commonwealth funded programs, and ensures that it is not 'outflanked' by DEST curriculum and social program initiatives.

4.16 DEST officials explained to the committee the requirement for concept plans as a first stage of funding application thus:

The two-stage process was designed so that, in the initial stage, we were looking at simple ideas and concepts worked out between the schools and the parents. There was a relatively simple three-page concept plan template to assist in that process – for school communities to engage Indigenous parents in the process. When this program was being designed, it was felt that having that as a first stage, rather than going to an application stage first, would assist in parental involvement. It also meant that we could provide feedback to the school-community partnership which put in the concept plan. We could go back to them and provide them with feedback about their proposals and provide them with assistance before they put in a fully developed, fully worked up application.<sup>9</sup>

4.17 This process may have merit, but it could not be done properly within the timeframe. It also raises questions – not addressed so far by DEST – about the future of its direct contact with schools. At most of the schools visited by the committee, school staff expressed concern that not only would they be required to compile submissions to compete for funding, but that this would be required of them regularly. In this sense, the requirement for a concept plan and an application was viewed by many as a 'double process' rather than a single one.

4.18 On the matter of multi-application processes, the committee noted comments from a senior DEST official that having five rounds of concept plans was not provided for the sake of bureaucratic convenience, but so as to allow maximum opportunities for community consultation. The committee was informed that DEST officials at state and local levels worked hard to design this process.<sup>10</sup> If this is so, the effort was largely wasted, probably because few people thoroughly understood the new ground rules and their policy rationale.

4.19 Principals and teachers had two main complaints. First, they expressed frustration at having to take time from already full schedules to compose submissions for funding. At a number of schools, the person responsible for drafting the plans reported spending upwards of ten hours doing so.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Mr Shane Hoffman, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.41

10 Dr Wendy Jarvie, *Committee Hansard* (Budget Estimates), 2 June 2005, p.52

11 See, for instance, Mr Peter Moore, *Committee Hansard*, 2 March 2005, p.15

4.20 Second, school staff appeared unanimous in their view that the drafting of submissions for funding was not properly the task of an educator, or even a school administrator. To be required to take time away from tasks which would generate more direct educational benefits for their students evoked a good deal of frustration in a number of witnesses.<sup>12</sup> These tasks were formerly done by state departmental officials experienced in such processes and knowledgeable about school needs. Independent schools, with no system administrators to do this work, have even more reason to complain about excessive bureaucratic demands.

4.21 The committee's interim report noted that DEST appears to be unaware of the impracticability of its submission and administrative requirements. There was evidence that concept plans were beyond the capacity of communities to come to grips with, and accountability requirements are now extreme and counter productive. Things cannot be done in indigenous communities overnight, and time for discussion is needed. The following view encapsulates much of what has been expressed by nearly all teachers who spoke to the committee:

The whole process that is in place at the moment is what we call a white process. In the past...they would sit and discuss as a group and then put in a submission, which was quite a simple submission to write up. Now, with the concept plans followed by applications, it is an extremely complicated process for people for whom English is a foreign language to have to fill in. I do not think people have taken that into account when they have designed all these forms and procedures. They have forgotten that for most of the Indigenous people—particularly in the Northern Territory—English is a foreign language. Therefore, there needs to be a lot more streamlining of the whole application process and concept plan.

Why are we doing a concept plan that gets approved by committee when you then have to go to an application that you may not get approved? Then there is all this evaluation and things you need to do afterwards with regard to it all. If you have three or four concept plans running you are going to spend all your time administering the concept plans rather than getting on and trying to improve the literacy, numeracy and activities within the communities. It has probably gone too far overboard trying to be accountable and part of the process needs to be putting a balance into place. What we are doing at the moment is disempowering Indigenous people in the process because of the high level required with regard to all the form filling, concept plans and those sorts of processes.<sup>13</sup>

4.22 Much of this sentiment was expressed in February 2005, when the failure rate of first attempts at concept plans was causing considerable anxiety. It is to this matter that the committee now turns.

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12 See, for instance, Kirwan State High School discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, pp. 50-52; South Hedland Primary School, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.14

13 Mr Peter Moore, op.cit., p.15

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### *The failure rate of concept plans*

4.23 The committee notes the high number of schools reporting that their concept plans have been rejected outright, at least at the first submission. This meant that they were without funding for up to six months. Most of these schools, which have received ASSPA funding in the past, and have come to rely on it for programs they consider essential to the successful running of the school.

4.24 DEST provided the committee with some information on the number of concept plans received and the proportion of those which led to an invitation to submit an application for funding. A comprehensive analysis of DEST's response is hampered by data relating to concept plans being provided 'as at' three different dates.<sup>14</sup> This represents a 'pass rate' of less than 57 per cent. The committee was advised at the beginning of June 2005 that of the 450 concept plans received, 384 PSPI and homework centre applications had been approved. But it appears that this number represents only about 57 per cent of total applications, because many concept plans included multiple project applications.

4.25 Ms Thelma Guest is the Indigenous Programs Coordinator for 32 Catholic schools, which together comprise the largest population of indigenous children attending Catholic schools in Queensland. Ms Guest and her colleagues represented the Queensland Indigenous Education Commission, reported that their concept plans for funding totalling \$968 000 were rejected outright, and that the same fate had befallen concept plans from the Brisbane archdiocesan CEO. They both pointed to the lack of clarity coming from DEST:

[W]e were not clear on how the concept plans were going to be assessed, and the letters we got back, as far as I was concerned, did not give us enough feedback in terms of what we had done and what we not done enough of and what we really needed to do.<sup>15</sup>

4.26 The reasons given for rejection were usually unclear and there was even some anger expressed about this. The Queensland Catholic Education Commission provided the committee with a copy of correspondence from the Education Officer at the DEST Mt Isa office. The letter, at Appendix 4, may not be typical of 'rejection notices', but it indicates the extent of a cultural divide which operates when DEST attempts to involve its officers in direct contact with schools. The letter is an unhelpful pastiche of ministerial statements and reports of bureaucratic processes remote from the experience of school principals and teachers. Nor is the guidance they need provided in the rejection letter.

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14 Total concept plans received by 31 March 2005 were 450, of which 255 were asked to submit an application for funding. 195 concept plans rejected outright by 19 April 2005. Total approved WOSIS funding per by state and territory was provided, as at 27 April 2005.

15 Ms Thelma Guest, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.4

4.27 The strongest criticism of DEST appeared to come from principals in Queensland. The committee draws no conclusion from this. One of the critics at Townsville said:

We have a lot of committed parents and teachers who wrote the applications, doing the best they could with the information they had, and nothing came out of it. That says something about the roll-out. If people are all off writing applications and no-one gets any money you cannot say, 'Well, none of you knew what was happening.' Perhaps they should have known what was happening. I personally feel that that is part of a bigger problem that we have had with the department in terms of their attitude towards clients and whether they have a service driven mentality. I personally do not believe that they have had that in the past.<sup>16</sup>

4.28 Much similar evidence, known to DEST officers who accompanied the committee, was also recorded on Hansard. Other issues associated with concept plans also angered principals and system administrators, for instance, closure of ASSPA bank accounts.

4.29 In Townsville, the committee heard of an instance where a school principal was informed that his concept plan could not proceed with assessment because ASSPA bank accounts from the previous year had not been closed down or acquitted.<sup>17</sup> It appeared that closure of the account was proving to be exceedingly difficult because signatories to the account could not be located. Correspondence from DEST to school principals appeared to be unclear as to whether acquittal issues were the only cause of the delay.<sup>18</sup> The CEO in Townsville told the committee that one of its schools had also been remiss in regard to acquitting an ASSPA account, and admitted the school had apparently failed to read the small print.

4.30 The department's later response to this concern was that the requirement for full acquittal prior to approval of concept plans was limited to the Townsville area, and was not common practice. Officers submitted that the committee's inquiry had highlighted a problem which had now been rectified.<sup>19</sup> It appears that the local office of DEST was either over-zealous in this instance, or that it failed to read instructions from Canberra. Effective DEST supervision, either from Brisbane or Canberra, would have ensured that these public relations issues did not test the goodwill of DEST's 'clients'.

4.31 As noted in the interim report, even the most energetic principals in innovative schools have trouble with concept plans. Principals, with their close knowledge of the needs of their schools have a natural tendency to believe that their ideas for expenditure will find ready acceptance. Local or state DEST officials,

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16 Mr John Livingstone, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.27

17 Discussion at Kirwan High School, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.37

18 Ms Nola Ogilvy, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.39

19 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, pp. 39, 41

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working to strict criteria, may find it more comfortable to follow the 'one size fits all' approach.

4.32 It appears from evidence given to the committee that this is not what DEST policy makers in Canberra appear to have intended after all. In the case of Shepherdson College on Elcho Island, the principal put in a plan to link its eight homelands schools by computer. The plan was rejected because, according to the principal, DEST did not consider it important. If ASSPA funds had been available in 2005, the principal said he would have demonstrated its importance. Another of Shepherdson's concept plans for a homework centre was rejected because it placed an emphasis on literacy and numeracy.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Shepherdson College on Elcho Island is a relatively large and well-equipped school, is notably well conducted and has widely experienced and well-qualified teaching staff. It enjoys a very close association with the community. It is highly likely that it is in a far more advantageous position to adjust to changes being implemented.

4.33 It is this confusion about what should and should not form part of a concept plan which lies at the heart of much of the frustration. It seemed to the committee that no two schools shared a common understanding of what was likely to be approved by DEST as a concept plan. Officials from the Western Australian Department of Education and Training had some pertinent observations to make on concept plans:

The problem with the concept plans at the moment is the misinformation that obviously always is the case when you have a new process in place that is going out. It is a changing menu from day to day with regard to what the concept plans might or might not have in them, and what might or might not be rewarded.<sup>21</sup>

4.34 The official went on to explain that in Western Australia, the state department retained some ownership over the concept plans and the ranking of the concept plans. As far as the committee is aware this has not occurred in other states or in the Northern Territory. It is certainly the case that although criticism of the IEDA changes was voiced in some Western Australian schools, this did not extend to the administration of the application process.

4.35 The committee heard a number of criticisms of time taken to complete DEST requirements. One principal said that she was no longer prepared to work between midnight and 5am completing these administrative tasks. Little things become irritating, such as the fact that DEST was closed the day the PSPI applications were due.<sup>22</sup> Such sentiments were probably best summed up by one principal from a group of teachers who met the committee in Cairns:

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20 Mr Peter Moore, *Committee Hansard*, 2 March 2005, pp.19-20

21 Mr Bob Somerville, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.20

22 Ms Anne Manger, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.24

The...other comment I would like to make is that one broad problem which applies to the program we are talking about and to a number of the Commonwealth programs is that, by being submission based, they are building a huge inefficiency into the system. ...administrators and other people in schools end up spending huge amounts of time chasing funds to make things happen and have very little time to actually make them happen in the school. There is also the frustration of getting a good program going, only to have the funding and the program disappear. I am not saying that will be the case with this one. I know it is over a quadrennium, and I guess that is great and we will get some continuity. But then you have the gaps in between, as has happened in this particular case between the quadrenniums. If I could make one plea to you it would be that you trust people in schools and school communities. We are happy to be accountable. If you give us funds and give us criteria to address, we can make a difference. But please do not make our job harder by building these inefficiencies into the system.<sup>23</sup>

4.36 While many schools expressed frustration at having to compete for funding through a submission based system, others were willing to embrace such a system if only they were provided with a better understanding of the 'ground rules'.<sup>24</sup>

4.37 DEST attempted to explain the value of concept plans. It informed the committee that the purpose of concept plans was to improve consistency in program funding. It was stated that concept plans:

... enable schools, particularly schools who may not have the capacities that better equipped schools have, to write applications. It was a simple tool – a three page document to capture what it was that a school might have wanted to do to enable the department of the assessing group to work with that school to further flesh that out ... I think some disappointment may have entered into these arrangements to date because a number of schools, perhaps of their own volition, went beyond in the initial stages filling out the concept plan – a short, three-page format – to actually moving in one fell swoop to a full-blown application.<sup>25</sup>

4.38 That view accords with the committee's own impression. It hopes that when expressing its disappointment in schools magnifying the difficulty of their tasks, DEST understands this to have resulted from its own failure to communicate effectively. Officials may stress that all that was required was a three page document. Yet, the evidence shows that principals appeared to agonise over these for days or weeks. This seemed wasted effort since the initial rejection rate for concept plans was so excessively high as to bring the validity of the process into serious question.

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23 Mr John Baskerville, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.27

24 See, for example, Dr Jim Heslop, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.46

25 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.7

4.39 DEST has not conceded responsibility for this failure, but it assured the committee following the tabling of the interim report that action had been taken across jurisdictions to improve consistency in assessment procedures.<sup>26</sup> The committee will follow this up in 2006 to assess how successful DEST has been in making amends for past mistakes. The committee will also request the Auditor-General to conduct an efficiency audit on the operation of the IEDA program, with particular regard to the quality and timeliness of DEST state and local administration of funding applications and advice.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The committee recommends that the Auditor-General be requested to conduct an efficiency audit on current arrangements for the application and processing of funding for PSPI programs.**

#### *Assessment procedures*

4.40 The committee was interested in the process for assessing individual concept plans. DEST informed the committee that arrangements differed between jurisdictions, but cited arrangements in the Northern Territory as an example of how assessment is sometimes carried out. In that jurisdiction, a regional assessment panel is composed of the DEST district office manager, managers from the regional Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) and the regional NTDEET manager, when or if this official was available for this task. Most often, they were not. According to DEST, a typical assessment panel might comprise a representative from each of the Catholic and public school systems, an independent schools body, a DEST officer and a community representative. DEST acknowledged that none of these positions would necessarily be occupied by a person holding educational qualifications.

4.41 DEST argue that the ability to make a judgement merely on whether proposals fall within program guidelines does not require knowledge of educational principles.<sup>27</sup> That may be the case for some proposals, where funding is sought for activities clearly outside guidelines. The committee argues it is less likely that officials without experience in schools would be able to assess the value of programs based on local needs. It is doubtful whether local DEST officers are familiar with local needs. This would not have been a normal requirement for them in their previous role. Concept Plans are almost always developed by teachers and principals, all of whom have not only educational qualifications but also extensive working knowledge of the needs of their students. The committee is struck by the fact that, under these arrangements, judgements are made by panels which in most cases are unqualified to make them. In order to make an informed judgement on the likely success or otherwise of proposals,

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26 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p. 8. At page 12, Mr Greer stated that a nationally consistent approach was in place.

27 Mr Shane Hoffman, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.36

the committee is firmly of the view that at least one assessor should hold educational qualifications and has accordingly recommended this.

### **Recommendation 6**

**The committee recommends that local or regional committees which assess funding applications from schools include at least one member with educational qualifications and experience, and at least one indigenous member active in a school community.**

4.42 In passing, the committee notes that staff training is now on the DEST agenda, and is aimed at improving the knowledge of officers and ensuring improved liaison with clients. The need for this has been made obvious to the committee.

### **Reporting requirements and related matters**

4.43 The legislation gives particular emphasis to improving levels of accountability. This is in large measure to ensure that schools are kept up to the mark in regard to learning outcomes. This does not come without cost, and the cost is borne by schools and system administration. One reporting requirement that provoked criticism was the funding identified for the education of indigenous students which is part of general recurrent grants. It will be recalled that the Government is particularly concerned to ensure that schools do not use funding under IESIP and IEDA programs to make up their entire indigenous education expenditure. Commonwealth funds are directed, as much as anything else, to leveraging additional funds from the states and other systems or individual school budgets. Yet this presents an administrative problem for schools and systems.

4.44 The Catholic Education Office in Townsville described difficulties with meeting reporting requirements as the important issue it wanted to discuss with the committee. The CEO acting director stated:

...[L]egislation requires the commission—and this will affect all dioceses—to report on all Indigenous funding, including our general recurrent grants that are identified for the education of Indigenous students. That is a new...regime of accountability. That takes time; that takes a lot of energy and effort, and there is no recognition of that. The accountability requirements being proposed will be difficult to deliver, given that our systems do not record what proportion of funding is attributed to Indigenous students from that general recurrent system. The apportioning of costs to meet such requirements will be onerous and, basically, artificial. It is very easy for people to come out and see—particularly in our diocese if you walk into a school such as St Michael's on Palm Island—that the children, with the exception of, I think, six who belonged to some of our staff members, are Indigenous children who live on the island. The infrastructure costs, the cost of staffing and the cost of housing are all accommodated for out of our general recurrent budget. We then have to turn around and report on that as well as what we see as quite a minimal percentage on top. We are not saying don't give it to us but, compared to the actual cost of establishing, running and staffing a school, which comes



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out of general recurrent budget, reporting on that and then reporting on the Indigenous funding as if they are almost similar in response seems nonsensical to us.<sup>28</sup>

4.45 This demonstrates that Commonwealth funding comes at a heavy cost to school administrative workloads. It requires the identification or manipulation of data which is either not available, or when compiled has very little validity.

4.46 The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia makes a different point: that reporting requirements are out of proportion to the funds that are applied for. The range of funding sources for different programs and projects require a correspondingly complex range of reporting requirements. The AISSA appears to doubt whether current accountability arrangements effectively ensure the improvement of educational outcomes.<sup>29</sup>

4.47 Concentration on the funding application process meant that witnesses and submissions did not dwell on reporting of program outcomes. The first and most important goal was to obtain the funding. But anecdotal comment indicates that reporting is an area which needs to be looked at. The committee would be concerned if, together with excessive application time required, equally excessive reporting requirements were ever a deterrent to a funding application. In this, as in many other things to do with funding, the Commonwealth needs advice from MCEETYA, specifically from its chief executives committee.

### **Recommendation 7**

**The committee recommends that the Minister, through MCEETYA, addresses the need for schools to report on the expenditure of Commonwealth funds in a way which is least burdensome, preferably through a single document which includes data on all programs that have been funded and are currently running.**

4.48 A more intractable problem results where data is unable to be shared between jurisdictions. An example of the types of data being requested is the number of remote students and the proportion falling below the benchmarks. In the case cited to the committee, it is the state government which is unable or unwilling to provide the information to the Commonwealth, in cases where students are transferred from one system to another. The issue apparently hinges on the interpretation of state privacy laws.<sup>30</sup> This problem results in delaying funding which is usually badly needed in cases where student entitlements need to be transferred to another school. This complaint was made by the CEO, which finds itself in an impossible position. This plight is no doubt shared by other systems and individual schools. The committee recommends that this matter be taken up by MCEETYA and properly resolved.

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28 Ms Cathy Day, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.2

29 AISSA, *Submission 17*, p.5

30 Queensland Catholic Education Office discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.17

## Recommendation 8

**That MCEETYA address the problem of restricted access to student records maintained by state agencies in cases where it is required by schools to facilitate enrolment in another system or school, and where it is for the educational advantage of the student.**

4.49 The reporting requirements of DEST also appear skewed for the purpose of obtaining near impossible outcomes. Officers of the Western Australian Department of Education and Training put down data reporting as one of the unresolved differences between that state and the Commonwealth.

Some of the unresolved matters are around data collection and the data that DEST is requiring us to report on. For example, currently DEST is requiring us to report on quartiles. The process for the quartile reporting is totally incorrect and the data analysis is incorrect. At the national level there are already discussions on being able to provide data across a range. PMRT is currently putting that together. But DEST is ignoring that and going ahead with a process that will not work and will give invalid data. We have brought this up on a number of occasions, but they just ignore it. We brought it up at the multilaterals only last week. Again, they ignored the advice that was provided. That is an example of some of the difficult negotiations that occur. As to data-setting, DEST is very clear on the targets and very difficult to negotiate with in regard to those targets. Some of those targets—and this is what occurred in the last quadrennium—are just impossible to reach.<sup>31</sup>

4.50 The committee is concerned that DEST data management is driven by political considerations: a requirement for improvements that may not be achievable. Western Australian officials told the committee that some of those targets were for 60 per cent gap closures, which they considered to be impossible to obtain. Officials reported that at one stage in the negotiations with DEST they walked out of the proceedings.<sup>32</sup> It was suggested that the setting of unrealistic targets would place the Commonwealth in a stronger position should it later decide to withhold funding from states and territories, although the committee trusts such reasoning does not lie behind target settings. The same officials told the committee that the gap would be closed slowly, especially in remote areas. It would require very considerable funding.

4.51 However, DEST reported to the committee that all states and territories, including Western Australia, have agreed to provide the Commonwealth with the data requested.<sup>33</sup> Advice to the committee from Western Australian officials is that some compromises were achieved.

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31 Mr Bob Somerville, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.35

32 *ibid.*, p.36

33 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.23

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## Recommendation 9

**That MCEETYA look more closely at reporting requirements attached to Commonwealth funded programs to ensure that they reflect criteria based on sound and agreed educational principles, and realistic expectations of learning outcomes.**

### State-Commonwealth issues

4.52 Throughout this report, and particularly in Chapter 1, the committee has made clear its concern about what appears to be a tussle between the Commonwealth and the states over indigenous education funding policy. As noted previously, the committee has long agreed that the Commonwealth has a vital role to play in exercising national leadership to ensure comparability in educational funding and national standards of quality performance in teaching and learning, and educational outcomes generally.

4.53 MCEETYA is the national policy clearing house, the source of such overarching national agreements as the AEP. It seems to the committee that the effectiveness of MCEETYA in this role rests on two principles. The first is acknowledgement of the Commonwealth's leadership role, and its role as the primary source of education funding. Second is acknowledgement of the role of the states in administering the majority of schools, and in accrediting all of them. States, systems and schools are the primary source of expertise and knowledge, gained through experience in relation to curriculum, in its broadest meaning. The two principles recognise that while the Commonwealth may (and should) ensure that states, systems and schools provide value for money, and meet benchmarks and outcomes, these measures of achievement can only be arrived at through agreement with the states, advised by other systems and independent authorities as appropriate. Commonwealth agencies have little or no standing as authorities on matters relating to teaching and learning outcomes.

4.54 The committee has some concerns that the current Government, through the agency of DEST, in its earnest funding initiatives, sometimes fails to acknowledge the limitations placed on them by the fact that they do not run schools. This current inquiry has revealed the differences in outlook which funding bodies like DEST have toward education, as distinct from schools and systems that are directly running schools, or independent schools. The committee recognises the efforts which DEST has made recently to correct previous administrative errors revealed by this inquiry, but the essential problem has been that DEST has been venturing into an administrative role previously filled by state education departments. It is part of the lore of education that teachers and principals have always been wary – to say the least – about the 'department'. Now they may have reason to complain about two departments.

4.55 The committee has no information other than from Western Australia about state attitudes to the Commonwealth initiatives, but the experience outlined to the committee in Perth is unlikely to very different in the case of other states. There is

more than a hint of this in the delay in reaching agreement on the new funding arrangements. Other states have been more reticent in describing what has occurred. A number of issues arise from the committee's consideration of evidence from the Western Australian Government.

### ***Commonwealth micro-management tendencies***

4.56 The Scaffolding Project for improvement in indigenous literacy and numeracy is funded under the IESIP program, and is therefore only marginally relevant here. But evidence given to the committee in Perth on Scaffolding highlights a general problem which is central to this inquiry. The committee put to Western Australian officials that state officials have not been told what the scaffolding policy is, and that they have an agreement which does not reflect discussions held with DEST. State officials confirmed this. They told the committee:

The Commonwealth money comes with a whole lot of tags attached to it. To give you an example, the Commonwealth in the rhetoric has the same sorts of expectations that we have. Literacy, numeracy and attendance retention are the major ones. In particular, you have to go to the areas of greatest disadvantage—that is, the remote community schools. ...What we had been developing was a mandated, structured literacy strategy across all of our remote schools. We would have appreciated having more of an opportunity to sit down with the Commonwealth and say, 'Look, this is what we have developed. This is based on the best knowledge we've got about how to improve literacy, including for Aboriginal students.' The problem was that, when it came to us, there was not the opportunity to have that sort of conversation and say, 'Look, we've got some pretty good ideas about how to do this which are built on a firm foundation.' Instead, what the Commonwealth said was, 'Look, we think that the strategy for Aboriginal students is the scaffolding program.'<sup>34</sup>

4.57 Western Australian officials told the committee that it would need to find ways, through ITAS or some other program to meet the guidelines and expectations of the Commonwealth while still meeting what the state believes to be its strategic purpose. The problem is not that states have any disagreement with Commonwealth priorities or general national policies directed by the Commonwealth, but that the 'tags' put on implementation strategies often make it very difficult for states to operate as they would wish. Fortunately, the Commonwealth's micro-management tendencies have not been evident with the IEDA programs, apart from those so far reported on.

### ***State administration of IEDA programs***

4.58 It appears that a number of states are directly administering IEDA programs. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Western Australian Government has insisted on administering the PSPI funding arrangements, including the application processes and consultations. There are established procedures to handle this. The committee notes

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34 Mr Kevin O'Keefe, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.37

that it heard no complaints from public school principals about concept plans, in contrast to other states. That may be partly explained by the following advice to the committee:

We have been out providing advice at principals conferences to principals that the concept plans need to be simple. They are not to be overbureaucratic or overwritten. We have provided advice to the committees that overwritten concept plans should be placed at the end, rather than at the beginning, because the whole thing is supposed to be simple. We are trying to get the competitive nature out of the concept planning. But of course it is still going to be ranked, so there is still some competition there, which is always the worry.<sup>35</sup>

4.59 The committee was told about the very tight deadlines for concept plan submissions in the Northern Territory. The decision made in Western Australia was to work a bit more slowly to allow schools to put in their submissions and take time for local consultation, so that the process was right. It was not expected that money will begin to flow until second term. The committee regards this as demonstrating that states can do these things better than the Commonwealth because they are dealing with their own schools, and have a closer knowledge of what is needed.

### **The complexity of indigenous education funding**

4.60 The committee notes the various sources of funding for indigenous education. These include not only state and Commonwealth government departments, but increasingly other departments for projects relating to specific areas. Examples might include schools being referred to the Department of Health and Ageing for funding related to nutrition programs, or the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts for funding of a music program.

4.61 The committee received a lot of feedback on the difficulty and complexity of accessing indigenous education funding. Indeed, at least two witnesses considered it to involve the most complex administrative arrangements of any that a principal has to deal with. The following comments from school principals apply to any of the funding processes that schools are involved in, extending well beyond IEDA. As one principal remarked:

A lot of hurdles are put in our way. Every time we think we have passed one hurdle they put another one in our way. As a team we believe that the forms from district and central offices wanting to know how we are dealing with Aboriginal learning styles or how we are catering for their specific learning styles are just a lot of paperwork.<sup>36</sup>

4.62 It is important to remember that indigenous-related funding is only one of a number of funding 'buckets' for which submissions need to be generated. The

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35 Mr Bob Somerville, *Committee Hansard*, 29 March 2005, p.22

36 Mr David Knox, *Committee Hansard*, 30 March 2005, p.29

committee was reminded of the often exhaustive process involved in such exercises, where documents are required to be drafted, checked against criteria, consulted on, redrawn and submitted. Adding to confusion and frustration is the perception that performance and evaluation criteria are in constant flux. When asked whether goalposts move often, one witness said:

I would say there are no more goalposts. There used to be some and we could at least aim for them, and then they started moving them, but now they do not exist any more.<sup>37</sup>

4.63 Another witness in Townsville saw DEST's propensity to change priorities as a sign of naivety about everyday school life.

The issue for us is that there is often not an understanding of the reality of trying to manage an educational system from the DEST officers. We get these fairly blasé statements about shifting our priorities and that if we believe a program is worthwhile we will find the money for it. I find it very annoying and distressing at times because it shows a great lack of understanding.<sup>38</sup>

4.64 When questioned about the rationale for multiple sources of funding, a DEST senior official explained that PSPI funding was focussed on 'linkages with the school plan and how you might better improve student outcomes'. He considered that:

...there may be aspects of initiatives that the community or the school is looking for that can be better handled in a whole-of-government context by contributions from other mainstream programs – that is, for music, art and language programs, which are not a mainstream responsibility of education.<sup>39</sup>

4.65 Quite why DEST is not responsible for education in relation to music, art and language is not clear. This is the response that might be expected from someone unacquainted with the preoccupations and work of teachers. It would seem to the committee that a whole-of-government approach should, by definition, involve a single port of call for schools through which to access government funding, and not individual submissions to individual agencies.

4.66 It is scarcely much wonder that schools weigh the costs of applying for grants. For some, the rewards are not worth the effort. Many schools, apparently, make a decision not to allocate precious resources to submission writing, do not apply for funding, and programs for students simply do not occur. A commonplace view was summed up by a school representative in Townsville:

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37 Discussion at Kirwan State High School, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p. 50. See also Queensland Catholic Education Office discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.26

38 Ms Jane Ceolin, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.26

39 Mr Tony Greer, *Committee Hansard*, 27 April 2005, p.11

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It [making funding applications] is not worth the effort. I have teachers who are working full time now. We are not program writers. I am sick to death of it. It is almost like going crawling on the carpet begging for money. You have to write this submission to be trusted to have the money to do the job. In trying to match the outcomes, I would have to spend hours running around to make sure that everything was right on target for \$4 000 or \$5 000. Why would I do that?...I think that what is going to happen is that the people in the know will go for the buckets of money through submission writing and the rest will pretend they do not exist and will get on with the job as best they can with the resources they have.<sup>40</sup>

4.67 The committee does not believe that this is an outcome which the Government intends. As a first step DEST should explore ways of using state or systemic structures to administer assistance to schools.

4.68 There is some evidence that DEST is aware of the confusions and frustrations that results from its multitude of programs, all of which attract separate funding applications. The committee believes that some rationalisation of programs is essential. This is a task for MCEETYA: to ensure improved intersection between state and Commonwealth programs. This is a matter about which the committee is likely to take a long-term interest because of increasing overlap in programs and jurisdictional complications and tensions.

### **Recommendation 10**

**The committee recommends that the Minister addresses the need to rationalise funding grants to minimise the number of applications that have to be made by schools.**

### **Conclusions**

4.69 A number of terms were used by respondents to describe the situation as it relates to Commonwealth Indigenous education funding under the new IEDA arrangements. People described the state of affairs variously as a mess, a debacle, and a crisis. One respondent even invoked the topical term 'educational tsunami' to describe the situation.<sup>41</sup>

4.70 The committee hopes that something may be salvaged from this wreckage, although it fears that faith in Commonwealth processes may have been damaged over the long term. Much will depend on the attitudes and discretion of local DEST officials, and the extent to which senior DEST officials (and indeed the Minister) support their efforts. It is doubtful whether many of these officers are as well-equipped as they should be in putting themselves in the shoes of educators when exercising their financial discretions. It is something relatively new in educational

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40 Discussion at Kirwan State High School, *Committee Hansard*, 6 April 2005, p.51

41 Yarrabah State School discussion, *Committee Hansard*, 7 April 2005, p.22

administration that non-educators have the role of deciding matters which were formerly in the hands of experienced professionals and who made funding decisions on the basis of educational considerations.

4.71 The committee makes an obvious comment that the closer the processes of DEST come to school operations, the more likelihood complications will result from incompatible systems of administration and different attitudes to effective program delivery. Teaching and learning look easier than they are to those whose working experience has been in the counting house rather than the classroom. This arises from differences in focus and operational function and purpose. School systems, and individual schools, have developed ways of working which result from years of experience, community knowledge and experiments with curriculum practice. In spite of the exhaustive rhetoric, the application of DEST guidelines appears to have taken little account of local or state priorities even when these are compatible with national policy.

4.72 In past reports the committee has urged the Commonwealth to lose no opportunity to assume national leadership on educational matters, notwithstanding the tenuous constitutional responsibility it has. This includes ensuring that states and territories understand their obligations in regard to accountability for the expenditure of Commonwealth funds. Such a role does not require a direct say in the operations of school, neither independent nor schools public or systemic schools. A consequence of this would be what the committee has observed in this inquiry: principals and teachers across the country being distracted from their work, and are unnecessarily preoccupied by the need to meet Commonwealth requirements to an extent which is out of proportion to the funds they actually receive.

4.73 The committee believes that this role is most effectively exercised through serious engagement with states through MCEETYA. The Commonwealth agenda needs to be genuinely negotiated with states. If it is imposed contrary to state advice that it is impractical or because it is contrary to experience and expertise, then the effectiveness of the program must be questionable. The finger of the Commonwealth cannot extend to the classroom desk, and it is at that level that performance has meaning and where outcomes are achieved. It is inconceivable that the Commonwealth would want to take over the running of schools. That being so, the programs run by DEST should, as far as possible, be run through state processes, including those which can target funds and report on program effectiveness. A worthy task of the Commonwealth may be to urge MCEETYA to ensure that state structures and procedures run effectively, but it should resist the temptation to replicate them.

### **Recommendation 11**

**That so long as Government policy continues to require direct contact between schools and DEST officials, that these officials are provided with adequate training in how to deal with principals and teachers, and gain some familiarisation with the operations of schools and at least some rudimentary insight into teaching inputs and learning outcomes.**



**Recommendation12**

**The committee recommends that a copy of the report be sent to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner with a request for comment on the implications of the PSPI program in relation to the progress and achievement in indigenous education.**



# Appendix 1

## List of submissions

<b>Sub No:</b>	<b>From:</b>
1	Ms Anne McNamara, NT
2	Ross Park Primary School Council, NT
3	Amanbidji School, NT
4	Hon Stephanie Key MP
5	Mr Dean Duncan, Qld
6	Independent Education Union, Northern Territory branch
7	Ms Elisabeth Edwards, NSW
8	Northern Territory Government Department of Employment, Education and Training
9	Australia Education Union, Northern Territory
10	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
10A	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
11	Mr John Greatorex, NT
12	Australian Education Union
13	Ms Kaye Thurlow, NT
14	Berry Springs School, NT
15	Katy Gallagher MLA
16	Paula Wriedt, MHA
17	Association of Independent Schools of South Australia
18	Department of Education, Science and Training
19	Department of Education and Training, Western Australia
20	Queensland Government
21	Ms Helina Strnad, Vic
22	South Australian Government



## Appendix 2

### Hearings and witnesses

#### Darwin, Tuesday, 1 March 2005

##### Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training

Mr John Glasby, *Acting Executive Director, Strategic Initiatives*

Mr Trevor Saunders, *Chief Financial Officer*

Ms Christine Fitzgerald, *Director, Policy, Planning and Resources, Indigenous Education Division*

##### Independent Education Union

Mr James Stanley, *Vice-Chairperson*

Mrs Margaret Talbot, *Member*

Mr James Faraone, *Member*

##### Catholic Education Office

Dr William Griffiths, *Director*

Sister Philippa Murphy, *School Principal, St John's College*

Ms Frances Murray, *Coordinator, Curriculum and Indigenous Education*

#### Darwin, Tuesday, 1 March 2005

Mrs Di Ambyrum-Rollo, *Representative, Anula Primary School; and Parent, Wanguri Primary School*

Mrs Margaret Anstess, *Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker; and Parent, Sanderson High School*

Mr John Greatorex, *Coordinator, Yolgnu Language and Culture Program, Charles Darwin University*

Mr Peter Holt, *Acting Manager, Fred Hollows Foundation Indigenous Health Program*

Ms Tanya Lockwood, *Parent, Anula Primary School; and Acting Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker, Namarluk Primary School*

Mr Thomas McCall, *Senior Teacher, Sanderson High School; and Secretary, Sanderson High School Parent Partnership Committee*

Ms Kaye McGuinness, *Indigenous Grandparent, Malak Primary School*

Ms Tanyah Nasir, *Indigenous Parent, Wagaman Primary School*

Ms Sharna Raye, *Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker, Malak Primary School; Parent, Wanguri Primary School; and former member, Palmerston High School Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness*

Ms Patricia Raymond, *Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker, and Indigenous Parent, Humpty Doo Primary School*

Mr Sydney Robinson, *School Council Vice-Chairman, Taminmin High School; Representative, Berry Springs Primary School; and Member, Darwin, Palmerston and Rural Areas Combined Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Working Party*

Ms Theresa Roe, *Literacy Coordinator, Fred Hollows Foundation*

Ms Narelle Rosas, *Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker, Jingili Primary School*

Mrs Delsey Tamiano, *Indigenous Parent, Palmerston High School; and Member, Darwin, Palmerston and Rural Areas Combined Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Working Party*

### **Milingimbi, Wednesday, 2 March 2005**

Mr John Tate, *Acting Principal, Milingimbi School*

Ms Marilyn McGregor, *Assistant Principal, Milingimbi School*

Ms Ingrid Snook, *Teacher, Primary Section, Milingimbi School*

Mr Angelos Conomos, *Senior Teacher, Secondary Section, Milingimbi School*

Ms Amy Burchitt, *Senior Teacher, Secondary Section, Milingimbi School*

Mr Jon Graeme, *Teacher, Music and Sport, Milingimbi School*

Ms Kathy Stavrow, *Teacher, Milingimbi School*

Ms Mirella Rouche, *Teacher, Special Needs Section, Milingimbi School*

Mr Kurt Faber, *Teacher, Milingimbi School*

Mr Stuart Porteous, *Teacher, Milingimbi School*

Ms Gangulaba Elizabeth, *Partnership Manager, Milingimbi School*

Ms Cathy Severo, *Teacher, Milingimbi School*

Paula, *Senior Teacher, Primary Section, Milingimbi School*

Milmilang, *Teacher Linguist, Milingimbi School*

Ms Melanie Wilkinson, *Teacher, Milingimbi School*

### **Elcho Island, Wednesday, 2 March 2005**

Mr Peter Moore, *Principal, Shepherdson College*

Elizabeth, *Teacher, Preschool; Deputy Chairperson, School Council, Shepherdson College*

Ms Kay Thurlowe, *Assistant Principal, Senior School and Homelands, Shepherdson College*

Mr Ian Gumbula, *Chairperson, School Council, Shepherdson College*

Ms Valerie Balkunv, *Senior Teacher at Homelands, Shepherdson College*

Djurokai Buntima, *Elder, Malah Leader, Shepherdson College*

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Ms Judy Djunumbi, *School Council Worker, School Representatives Council, Shepherdson College*

**Alice Springs, Thursday, 3 March 2005**

Ms Sue Crow, *Principal, Ross Park Primary School*

Ms Pat Lawton, *Assistant Principal, Ross Park Primary School*

Ms Annette Jamison, *Principal, Centralian Senior Secondary College*

Ms Faith White, *former Chairperson, Anzac Hill Primary School*

Mr John Morgan, *Principal, Gillen Primary School*

Ms Halliday, *Principal, Sacred Heart College*

Ms Bev O'Callaghan, *AIEW, Ross Park Primary School*

Ms Sally Axten, *AIEW, Braitling Primary School*

Ms Sharon Donnellan, *Lecturer, Charles Darwin University*

Ms Linda Warner, *Living Waters*

Ms Josie Douglas, *Parent*

Ms Venya Clark, *Parent*

Mr Johnny Carne, *ASSPA Chairperson, Gillen Primary School*

Ms Stephanie Mackee-Schneider, *Parent*

Ms Carmen McLean, *Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker, Sadadeen Primary School*

Ms Lorna Anderson, *General Practitioner, Parent*

Mr Matt Skoss, *Teacher, Alice Springs High School*

Mr Vince Jeisman, *Office of Warren Snowdon*

Ms Liz Bovos, *Assistant Principal, Sadadeen Primary School*

Ms Ashley Farrell, *Assistant Principal, Laparinta Primary School; Executive member of the Australian Education Union.*

Ms Joyce Taylor, *AIEW, Larapinta Primary School*

Ms Marlene Chisholm, *ATAS Tutor, Larapinta Primary School*

Ms Angela Ross, *Teacher Gillen Primary School*

Ms Sally Phillips, *Senior Teacher, Gillen Primary School*

**Perth, Tuesday, 29 March 2005**

Ms Robyn Collard, *Co-ordinator, Aboriginal Education K12 Team, Catholic Education Office, Western Australia*

Mr Ronald Dullard, *Director, Catholic Education Office, Western Australia*

Mr Steve Florisson, *Principal, Wongutha CAPS*

Ms Michele Forbes, *Principal, Nyikina Mangola Community School, Jarlmadangah*

Mr Jim Heslop, *Principal, CAPS in Coolgardie*

Mr John Hill, *Aboriginal Independent Community Schools of WA*

Mr Grant Little, *CAPS, Kurrawong*

Mr Les Mack, *Aboriginal Independent Community School of WA*

Mr Kevin O'Keefe, *Executive Director, Teaching and Learning, Department of Education and Training*

Mr Robert Somerville, *Director, Aboriginal Education Training and Services, Department of Education and Training*

Ms Carolyn Pickett, *Wulungarra School*

Ms Laurel Sutcliffe, *Principal, Yakanarra Community School*

**Port Hedland, Wednesday, 30 March 2005**

Ms Janet Mathews, *Principal, South Hedland Primary School*

Ms Yvonne Denham

Ms Sally Neal

Ms Nora Cooke

Ms Denise Powdrill

**Broome, Thursday, 31 March 2005**

Ms Dallas Ferrano, *Teacher, Jigalong Remote Community School*

Mr Vince Vesnaver, *Principal, Jigalong Remote Community School*

Mr Michael Emrose, *Teacher, Jigalong Remote Community School*

Dr Spargo, *Public Health Physician*

Ms Michelle Bentinck, *Pilbara TAFE*

**La Grange Bay, Thursday, 31 March 2005**

Mr Geoff Blythe, *Principal, La Grange Remote Community School*

Ms Helen Bell, *Teacher, La Grange Remote Community School*

Mr Frankie Shoveller, *AIEO*



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**Townsville, Wednesday, 6 April 2005****Catholic Education Offices**

Ms Jane Ceolin, *Queensland Catholic Education Commission*

Ms Cathy Day, *Acting Director, Queensland Catholic Education Commission*

Ms Thelma Guest, *Indigenous Education Co-ordinator, Queensland Catholic Education Commission*

Mr Ernie Christie, *Assistant Director, Queensland Catholic Education Commission*

**Kirwin High School**

Ms Louise Robinson, *Acting Principal, Heatly Primary School*

Mr John Livingston, *Principal, Kirwin High School*

Ms Nola Ogilvie, *Principal, Kelso School*

Mr Peter Able, *Garbutt State School*

Ms Loretta Swain, *Rasmussen State School*

Ms Christine Dawes, *Principal, Cleveland Education and Training Centre, Cleveland Youth Detention Centre*

Mr Darren Kennedy, *Education Queensland*

Ms Jan Meyan

**Garbutt Church**

Ms Maria Byra, *Former President, ASSPA Committee, Pimlico State High School*

Ms Josephine Bourne, *Community Education Counsellor, Pimlico State High School*

Ms Janice Perry, *Parent*

Ms Barbara Soloman, *CEC, State High School*

Mr Shane Ally, *City Council and Chairperson for ASSPA*

Ms Shirley Congey, *Parent*

Ms Grace Moore, *Traditional Owner*

Ms Shirley Close, *Parent*

Ms Dorothy Savage

Mr Karl Wiles, *Parent*

Ms Ella-Mai Blanche, *Worker, Townsville Aboriginal Islander Health Service*

Ms Bernadette Johnson, *School Worker, Palm Island*

Mr Maurice Cloudy, *Education Queensland*

**Cairns, Thursday, 7 April 2005****Yarrabah Community School**

Terri Davidson, *Principal*

Ms Cheryl Cannon, *Deputy Principal*

Mr David Stainsby

Mr Wayne Stafford, *Part-time Worker*

Mr Sam Bann, *Former Treasurer of ASSPA, 2001-2004*

Mr Leon Yeatman, *Parent*

**Cairns West Primary School**

Ms Anne Manger, *Principal, Cairns West State School*

Mr Tony Constance, *Principal, Whitfield State School*

Mr John Baskerville, *Principal, Kuranda State High School*

Mr Paul O'Rielly, *Principal, Parramatta State School*

Mr Paul Campbell, *Principal, Woree State Primary School*

Ms Sandra Stewart, *District Community Education Counsellor, Cairns area*

Ms Maureen Sweeney, *Community Education Counsellor, Smithfield High School*

Mr Greg McLean, *Chairperson, Hopevale Community*

Ms Rosemary Iloste, *Community Participation Officer, Education Queensland*

Ms Ingrid Nybro, *Peace Lutheran College*

Mr Ray Zambo, *Education Queensland*

Mr Brett Ambrum, *Community Education Counsellor, Woree State High School*

Ms Rochelle McIvor, *Worker, Peace Lutheran College*

Mr Stan Sheppard, *Kuranda District State School*

Ms Steph Coleman

Ms Kerry Hollingsworth, *Community Education Counsellor, Trinity Bay High School*

Ms Judy Ketchell, *Manager, Learning Engagement Centre*

Mr Robbie Deemars

Ms Flora Pondrilei, *Executive Officer, P&C, Smithfield State High School*

Ms Rosemary Losty

Ms Yvonne Stevens, *Parent*

Ms Kayleen Leftwich, *Student, Remote Area Teacher Education Program, Cairns West State School*

**Melbourne, Wednesday, 27 April 2005**

**Department of Education, Science and Training**

Ms Auriel Bloomfield, *Acting Branch Manager, Indigenous Business Management Branch and Indigenous and Transitions Group*

Mr Anthony Greer, *Group Manager, Indigenous and Transitions Group*

Mr Shane Hoffman, *Acting Group Manager, Indigenous and Transitions Group*

Ms Trish James, *Director, Program Development Team, Indigenous Business Management Branch*

Ms Susan Smith, *Branch Manager, Indigenous Education Policy Branch*



## Appendix 3

### Additional information

**Hearing: Darwin, Tuesday, 1 March 2005**

*Department of Employment, Education and Training, Northern Territory Government*

Information relating to benchmark testing in 2004

Number of ASSPA Committee in the Northern Territory in 2004

DEET 2005 Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme In Class Tuition Program guidelines

Benchmark data for Indigenous students over the past few years

Description of attendance initiatives and funding expended on specific initiatives

DEET response to the Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Discussion Paper No.3

Finance table referred to by DEET during hearings

Year 3 MAP Tests

**Hearing: Perth, Tuesday, 29 March 2005**

*Aboriginal Independent Community Schools' Support Union, Western Australia*

Indigenous Education Project Scaffolding Literacy Project, Final Report 2/2004

**Hearing: Townsville, Wednesday, 6 April 2005**

*Catholic Education Diocese of Townsville*

'Concept Plan' Townsville and Mount Isa

Unsuccessful letters Townsville and Mount Isa

A copy of emails from DEST of the end dates of While of School Intervention strategy

Information from DEST of the new changes

Letter addressed to parents – Abergowrie College

TCEO letter to Dr Peter Whitney

*Department of Education, Science and Training*

DEST correspondence to schools and communities

**Hearing: Cairns, Thursday, 7 April 2005**

*Parramatta State School*

Concept Plans

*Department of Education, Science and Training*

Letter to Thuringowa State High School relating to Whole of School Intervention Strategy – Concept Plan – First Round 2005

*Education Queensland*

Report on Cape York ASSPA Trial

**Hearing: Melbourne, Wednesday, 27 April 2005**

*Department of Education, Science and Training*

Information relating to:

Split funding by jurisdiction for Whole of School Intervention Strategy

Number of Concept Plans received

Directives to State Managers to further explain or update program delivery

*Northern Territory Combined ASSPA Working Party – Forum notes, 14 May 2004*

Ministerial correspondence and miscellaneous papers

*Concept plan documents*

## **Appendix 4**

### **Response to concept plan submission**

referred to in Chapter 4 at para 4.26







**Australian Government**

**Department of Education, Science and Training**

Thelma Gertz  
Indigenous Education Co-Ordinator  
Townsville Catholic Education Office  
2 Gardenia Avenue  
Kirwan Qld 4817

Dear Thelma,

### **Whole of School Intervention Strategy – Concept Plan**

Thank you for your submission relating to the Whole of School Intervention Strategy's-Parent School Partnership Initiative. The Mt Isa Catholic High School submitted a Concept Plan regarding funding for the following projects:

- ❖ Curriculum & Religious Education and
- ❖ Early Years and
- ❖ Transition of Yr-7-8 and
- ❖ Community Connection.

The Australian Government is committed to accelerating progress in Indigenous education and training outcomes. The Australian Government's restructured Indigenous Education Programmes represent a significant step forward to better focus resources on the programmes that are achieving real results with the objective of closing the educational divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. To achieve this broad objective, the Australian Government has developed a set of priorities to direct its resources to strategic and forward looking interventions that most effectively achieve outcomes, target areas of greatest need and implement holistic and creative approaches to improve education outcomes for our Indigenous students.

**The Australian Government has also established a new approach to the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. "The new approach is based on all of us accepting responsibility. We all need to do better – the Australian, State and Territory Governments and Indigenous people themselves."**

*Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone  
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 15 April 2004*

The Australian Government's Indigenous programs are now administered by mainstream agencies, but under a 'whole-of-government' approach.

A Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs is providing leadership and strategic direction at the national level, advised by a Secretaries' Group and a National Indigenous Council.

In the States, Territories and regions, multi-agency Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) have been established, managed by an Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

Through these new arrangements, the Australian Government is committed to ensuring that funding for Indigenous people from all sources is coordinated and effective, and that Indigenous communities at the local and regional level have a say in how it is spent.

Cooperative working with the States and Territories and local government is also critical, given their important role in servicing Indigenous Australians.

The arrangements combine a bottom-up and a top-down approach. Leadership, strategy and accountability will be provided at the top of the structure, but these same qualities will be emphasised at the local and regional level in active partnership with Indigenous people.

Important terms and concepts underlying the new approach include:

- 'shared responsibility'—governments alone cannot fix Indigenous problems. Both governments and Indigenous people have rights and obligations and all must share responsibility;
- 'partnership'—shared responsibility requires real partnerships involving government and communities, as well as non-government organisations (NGOs) and the private sector;
- 'whole-of-government'—all government policies and funds must be coordinated and used efficiently and strategically in cooperation with local communities;
- 'regional focus'—service strategies must be shaped by the needs of particular regions and communities, not dictated nationally;
- 'flexibility'—services and programs must become more flexible, so they can be adapted to local needs; and
- 'outcomes'—the operation of policies, programs and service-delivery organisations will be scrutinised and judged on the results they produce for local Indigenous people.

A Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs has been established to provide high-level direction to Australian Government policy development, as well as coordination and flexible resource allocation to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Taskforce identified three areas for priority attention:

- early childhood intervention and improving primary health and early education outcomes, to head off longer term problems;
- safer communities; and
- reducing dependency on passive welfare and boosting employment and economic development in Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) will be the main engine for coordination of Indigenous-specific programs in the regions, where the new arrangements are focused. They will work with local Indigenous communities and negotiate regional and local agreements for effective partnerships and shared responsibilities. ICC Managers are employed by OIPC. Their role is to develop and coordinate innovative responses to local Indigenous needs. The new arrangements call for creativity and accountability, together with sensitivity to the needs of local Indigenous people and the ability to negotiate with them.

The new approach was informed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and its commitment to greater coordination in Indigenous affairs. "We have built our model on the coordinated partnership approach of the Indigenous COAG trial sites where the state and territory governments are there beside us. Government departments will work as one with the communities. The government department's job will be to make it simpler for the community and they will do the shopping around for them." (Senator Amanda Vanstone, Address to Bennelong Society, 4 September 2004)

Lessons emerging from the COAG trials have helped to shape the new arrangements. "To underpin government effort to improve cooperation in addressing this disadvantage, COAG agreed to a National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians ... The principles address sharing responsibility, harnessing the mainstream, streamlining service delivery, establishing transparency and accountability, developing a learning framework and focusing on priority areas. They committed to Indigenous participation at all levels and a willingness to engage with representatives, adopting flexible approaches and providing adequate resources to support capacity at the local and regional levels."  
**COAG Communiqué, 26 June 2004**

DEST is required to take into consideration in respect to the investment of public monies in communities ***The New Arrangements in Indigenous Affairs.***

At this point, your Concept Plan does not meet the Department's State and District Priorities in Indigenous Education and as a result can not be funded at this time. The criteria that have been used to assess your Concept Plan are set out in the:

- ❖ Department's *Indigenous Education Provider Guidelines 2005-2008*, these can be obtained either online at: [www.dest.gov.au](http://www.dest.gov.au) or by phoning the Department on **1800 800 821** and
- ❖ *DEST-State Office priorities and*
- ❖ *Within the context of the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs priorities and the COAG principals.*

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the potential and merit of your submission and encourage you to revise your Concept Plan for the next round (to be determined). If you require support and assistance from this office please contact 07 4747 2200.

I would also like to take this opportunity to show appreciation for your continuing and shared commitment in helping to achieve better outcomes for our young Indigenous students, thank you.

Yours sincerely

Lyle F Johnson  
Education Officer  
Indigenous Education Unit  
DEST-Mount Isa District Office  
3 March 2005

