



M/s M Keenan
Committee Manager
Committee on Children and Young People
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

DGL 09/930

Dear M/s Keenan

I write in response to your letter of 22 May 2009, regarding the Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW. You have requested a response to a number of significant issues which have been raised in the course of the Inquiry.

I have attached a response to the questions raised in your letter.

Should you require further information related to this advice, please contact Mr Geoff Muir, Policy Advisor, Access and Equity on telephone number (02) 9561 8933.

I trust that this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deonne M. Smith".

Deonne Smith
**GENERAL MANAGER
ACCESS AND EQUITY**
11 June 2009

1. What innovative programs are being trialled in NSW public schools to reduce the rate of school suspensions? Have any of these programs been found to have an impact on rates of school suspensions?

Specialist assistance is provided to students with behaviour problems to ensure they have targeted support including plans that address the behaviours that led to their suspension to enable them to continue their learning. Schools are implementing effective strategies to maximise student engagement in learning, and minimising the likelihood that students will be suspended from school.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the use of Personalised Learning Plans has enhanced student behaviour and learning.

An example of a recent initiative is the suspension centre program. Suspension centre programs aim to assist students who are placed on long suspension from school to make a successful return to school. There are 22 suspension centres established state-wide, supporting groups of schools that have high suspension rates.

Students who are most likely to benefit from the intervention are referred by their school principal, to help them return to school as quickly as possible.

Suspension centres, first established in 2004, focus heavily on addressing the causes of poor behaviour and involve conflict resolution and self esteem building, along with literacy and homework support. Data indicates that the majority of students who were sent to a suspension centre are benefiting from this program and are not being referred back to the centre.

A number of school and regional initiatives aim to improve student behaviour and learning. Such programs aim to increase student engagement at school and reduce the likelihood that students are suspended. Some examples of such initiatives follow.

- *NonViolent Crisis Intervention* training

NonViolent Crisis Intervention training is one of a number of state-wide behaviour management supports available to staff in educational settings. The training aims to equip staff with the skills to be able to manage anxious or violent behaviour.

To date more than 130 departmental staff have become accredited instructors, enabling them to deliver the training to school staff. Advanced *NonViolent Crisis Intervention* training is also conducted for *Autism Spectrum Disorders and Enhanced Verbal Interventions*. More than 14,000 educational staff have been trained in *NonViolent Crisis Intervention* since early 2000.

- Positive Behaviour for Learning

In 2008, seven regions and more than 300 schools introduced Positive Behaviour for Learning. Some reports have subsequently attributed a decrease in long suspensions to the initiative. As an example, Cambridge Park High School in Western Sydney has had a significant reduction in suspensions since 2005 with the introduction of Positive Behaviour for Learning.

- Behaviour Focus Web Board

Illawarra and South East Region has introduced online support and training for teachers through their Behaviour Focus Web Board. The web board gives staff better access to strategies to manage difficult behaviour particularly in small and isolated schools with support available from a range of regional staff, behaviour and mainstream teachers, and outside specialists.

- Suspension pilot program for Year 7 students

Riverina Region has introduced a pilot program for students in Year 7 following their first long suspension. The region reports that the recidivist rate amongst Year 7 students receiving a long suspension was lower than previous years.

- *Steps2Success* program

South Western Sydney Region has introduced several targeted intervention programs. For example, in 2008, the *Steps2Success* program was implemented for stage 4 students at Lawrence Hargrave School. It is a practical approach to teaching Aboriginal culture and values. The ten week course involves a student program and community action plan. Analysis of suspension data for Lawrence Hargrave School indicates a significant reduction in suspensions from 2007 to 2008 for all students including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures Good Practice Guide (2009)*

The good practice guide has recently been published on the department's intranet as a support document to the *Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures (2005)*. The guide provides support to schools in the following areas:

- working in partnership with parents and the community
- providing school work for students who are suspended
- developing re-integration plans for return from suspension
- adjusting the curriculum and teaching methods
- engaging and working with external support and
- developing and implementing support strategies for teachers.

As schools have just begun working with the good practice guide, feedback on its effectiveness has not yet been sought.

2. Is there sufficient capacity in behavioural schools and tutorial centres to deal with middle years students who have been suspended or have other behavioural issues and are these schools available in all geographic areas?

A core value of education and training in NSW Government schools is that all students can improve in their learning with appropriate support. There is a continuum of behaviour and learning support available to students in government schools. School communities are able to access a range of supports for students via a tri-level approach which includes school, regional and state-based support. Some examples follow.

- Schools

Schools are responsible for addressing the individual and collective needs of students in the compulsory years of schooling and for mobilising support within a whole-school planning approach.

School learning support or student welfare teams coordinate school-based support for student with learning and behaviour needs. Specialist staff are available to support these teams in schools and include careers advisors, school counsellors, year advisors and welfare teachers.

The school counsellor, as part of the learning support team/student welfare team, is responsible for providing relevant information about the student's needs which must be considered in transitioning students to other appropriate supports. The school counsellor is also a valuable resource for principals giving consideration to an application to enrol a student. If any information on the application or advice from a previous school gives principals grounds for further enquiry, they are advised to alert their school counsellor who will assist in accessing further available information.

Principals follow identified processes in enrolling and managing students with a history of violence.

Schools are provided with a range of program strategies such as conflict resolution, mentoring and transition, values education, and engaging with student's parents. Such programs and resources underpin the provision of additional supports for students.

A recent initiative, the *Behaviour Learning and Teaching* program, is accredited as a registered professional development program with the NSW Institute of Teachers. The program also provides support to school staff in managing student behaviour and learning.

The *Behaviour Learning and Teaching* program is based on Lewis and Sugai's School-Wide Behaviour Support model. The majority of the ten modules in the program

address the primary prevention section of the model. This is because primary prevention through positive behaviour support works for over 80 per cent of all students in a given school.

Selected modules in the program address secondary and tertiary prevention, which are designed to provide intensive or targeted intervention to support students who are at risk of serious disruptive and challenging behaviours.

- Regions

The majority of students in NSW Government schools are connected to learning and to their schools. A small number of students may persistently display disruptive behaviour that interferes with individual learning, disrupts the learning of others and impacts on staff. Other students have behaviours, such as poor attendance, lack of academic engagement, anxiety and other mental health issues, which prevent them participating in a full school life.

Students who display disruptive behaviour of high intensity, frequency and duration while relatively small in number, are among the most difficult for schools to manage.

There is a wide range of support for these students. This includes normal classroom management procedures as well as adjustments and accommodations to the curriculum and learning environment implemented by the class teacher. Others, however, may require school delivered support from the learning support team/student welfare team along with the executive staff or support teachers behaviour. A small number may need support from specialist regional programs that may be external to the student's home school.

Regions are responsible for providing schools with practical and effective support. School education directors play a key role in assisting and supporting schools. There are over 1,000 specialist staff available including itinerant behaviour teachers, home school liaison officers, and student welfare and disability program consultants.

- State-based

State office is responsible for developing policies and guidelines to guide the alignment of initiatives.

Some students have behaviour needs which significantly interrupt their own and other students' learning. Short term placement options in learning environments separate to mainstream classrooms provides intensive support for such students. Within these learning environments, quality curriculum is provided in accordance with the NSW Board of Studies requirements, and strong links are maintained with the school at which the student is enrolled.

These placement options include learning environments such as suspension centres, tutorial centres or programs and behaviour schools.

In November 2008, the NSW Government approved an additional \$9 million for the department to support students with complex needs and their teachers. These funds have enabled the department establish a specialist teacher presence in 265 schools in 40 communities of schools across the state in 2009.

These specialist teachers, known as school learning support coordinators, will provide support for students with complex additional learning needs, including students with reading and language difficulties and other learning and behavioural difficulties. They will provide “just in time” support to classroom teachers when needed to help them to meet the specific additional learning needs of individual students who are experiencing difficulties and to respond to the diversity of student needs in their classroom.

The school learning support coordinators will also receive over 110 hours supported online training in a range of areas relevant for their role, including training in language and communication needs, behaviour, autism, and curriculum access for students with additional learning needs.

Behaviour schools and tutorial centres and programs are part of a range of school, regional and state based supports available to assist students in the middle years who have been suspended from school and who have significant learning and behaviour needs.

3. Does the Department intend to review its policies and practices and programs in relation to students who have been suspended or have other behavioural problems?

The NSW Department of Education and Training’s policies, practices and programs are monitored and revised, as needed.

In 2005 Suspension and Expulsion of School Students – Procedures and Student Attendance in Government Schools: Procedures were reviewed.

The Anti-bullying Plan for Schools was implemented in 2005 as part of the Student Discipline in Government Schools Policy (2005).

The Student Welfare Policy (1996) will be revised over the following year.

This regular review of policies, practices and programs ensures that they are relevant and responsive to the issues schools are managing.

School education directors put in place systems to monitor the implementation of policies, programs and resources to maintain safe and supportive school communities. On average, they are responsible for a group of 28 schools, and regularly meet with their principals to identify issues, emerging trends and the need for additional regional support.

This recognises that school communities need to collect the information they need to assure themselves that the strategies they have in place are working, not because it is centrally mandated.

4. Has the Department developed an implementation plan as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Low Socioeconomic Status School Communities? If so, to what extent does it address partnerships with the community, including parental engagement?

The NSW Implementation Plans for the schools National Partnership Agreements have been developed by a cross-sectoral steering committee consisting of representation from both the government and non-government school sectors. The plans are currently awaiting final approval by the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Low Socioeconomic Status School Communities Implementation Plan will provide significant new resources to improve the educational outcomes for students in disadvantaged communities. Reform directions include external partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and the provision of access to extended services (including through brokering arrangements).

For example, a participating school that chooses this reform direction may decide to work with the extended community by linking the school and parents with other government and non-government services, such as an allied health service or a local childhood centre. Alternatively, a school may decide to implement a whole-of-school program to lift parental expectations and engagement in their children's education.

Further information about the menu of reforms available to schools will be publicly available once the final Implementation plans have been approved by the Commonwealth.

5. Has the Schools as Community Centres Program been evaluated and if so, what are the results of the evaluation?

The NSW Department of Education and Training is the lead agency in the management of the Schools as Community Centres program.

Schools as Community Centres is a prevention and early intervention program located in communities experiencing significant challenges of disadvantage. Schools as Community Centres projects work with local human service agencies to provide a range of activities and initiatives supporting families raising children birth to 8 years, including supported playgroups, early literacy, parenting programs, transition to school, adult learning and health and nutrition initiatives.

In 2009 there are 47 Schools as Community Centres projects located in schools across NSW.

The original six Schools as Community Centres projects were evaluated in 1997 and 2004 and reviewed in 2008.

Previous evaluations have found that Schools as Community Centres projects were successful in:

- developing strong links with their local communities
- facilitating increased interagency communication and cooperation
- Reducing parents isolation and increasing their self confidence
- Improving school readiness amongst children participating in the project
- Increasing referrals to local services
- Increasing enrolments in transition to school programs.

The supported playgroups component of Schools as Community Centres was also evaluated as part of an evaluation of the supported playgroup service model undertaken by the Communities Division of the NSW Department of Community services in 2008.

In 2009 an evaluation of the Schools as Community Centres service model will commence along with a review of 30 individual Schools as Community Centres projects.

6. Under the Family Schools Partnership Framework, school systems (government, Catholic and Independent schools) are encouraged to identify a Partnerships Leadership Team to oversee and coordinate their work with families, and to connect with the parent body in their system. Has a partnership leadership team been established within the Department?

The Framework is one of a range of resources that schools may use to assist in broadening its approaches and strategies to strengthen relationships with parents, families and the broader community.

The Framework promotes the establishment of special leadership teams at the school and systems level that would duplicate existing, effective structures and may require schools to take on additional responsibilities that are currently undertaken by other areas of the department. For example, it is suggested that partnership teams work with universities to prepare new teachers to conduct effective partnerships. The NSW Department of Education and Training, through their Higher Education Policy Directorate, currently provides policy, planning, resourcing and legislative advice to the Minister and the NSW Government concerning NSW universities. The department has not established a partnership leadership team at this time.

Infrastructure to support family-school partnerships is already provided in a range of NSW Department of Education and Training policies and resources including the *Student Welfare Policy*, *Cultural Diversity and Community Relations: Multicultural Education in Schools Policy*, *Anti-Racism Policy*, *Strengthening Community Harmony: advice and resources for schools*, cultural understanding and community relations programs and resources.

NSW Government schools may implement some of the suggested strategies and activities suggested in the Framework to support parents, families and the broader community. However, many of these strategies need to be customised to the school context. Schools may have existing, sometimes more sophisticated and relevant processes for engaging families already in place.

7. What tutoring and homework support programs are funded or implemented by the Department for middle years students?

- After School Program for Refugee Students

The After School Program for Refugee Students provides after school tuition, with bilingual support, for refugee students who have been in Australia for less than three years. The program supports students in their transition to high school and increases their understanding of the high school curriculum and its expectations.

The program is operating in 11 schools and Intensive English Centres in 2009: Auburn Girls High School, Beverly Hills Intensive English Centre, Birrong Boys High School, Cabramatta Intensive English Centre, Chester Hill Intensive English Centre, Evans Intensive English Centre, Fairfield Intensive English Centre, Fairvale High School, Holroyd Intensive English Centre, Lurnea High School and Auburn Public School.

- Tutorial and homework support programs for Aboriginal students

Funding provided to schools to support homework programs prior to 2009 was administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through its Parent School Partnership Initiative and Homework Centres. This was part of the Commonwealth's Whole of School Intervention Strategy.

The Whole of School Intervention Strategy is due to be replaced by the Commonwealth's Parental and Community Engagement Program which will be administered by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to new Commonwealth-State financial arrangements that included the National Education Agreement. This 'rolled in' the Indigenous Supplementary Recurrent Assistance, all other targeted funding, general recurrent grants, and capital funding into one funding stream.

The Commonwealth no longer funds any individual programs within the National Education Agreement.

In an effort to continue to provide Aboriginal students with access to tutorial and homework support programs, previously funded under the Indigenous Tutorial

Assistance Scheme and associated initiatives, the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate has developed a strategy known as the *Norta Norta* program.

Schools receive additional funding to provide tutorial support to Aboriginal students identified as performing below the national standards in literacy and numeracy on the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Schools can also apply for tutorial assistance for Year 11 and 12 students who require additional support with their learning.

8. Does the Department have a statewide strategy for homework assistance and tutoring?

The department does not have a statewide strategy for homework assistance and tutoring. Schools wishing to provide homework or tutoring assistance for students do so within the context of the relationships developed with their local communities. In addition, as indicated above, some areas of state office provide support to schools for homework or tutoring assistance for targeted groups of students.

9. What would be required to expand tutoring programs like the Refugee Action Support where tertiary students enrolled in education degrees undertake tutoring?

The Refugee Action Support program entails a partnership between the University of Western Sydney, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation and the NSW Department of Education and Training. The University of Western Sydney provides the tutors, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation provides funding and training for the tutors and the department provides funding for teachers and coordination.

In 2009 the program is being implemented in nine high schools in South Western Sydney and Western Sydney regions.

To replicate the program in other places would require the following:

- Identification of further or alternative funding sources

Funding is at present provided by a charitable organisation, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, which funds the training of tutors, and the NSW Department of Education and Training which contributes funds to employ school coordinators and for refreshments.

- Identification of other university partners

Refugee Action Support runs as a component of the University of Western Sydney's Master of Teaching (Secondary) practicum. Participation would need to be sought of

other institutions with similar courses in which the practicum was undertaken in schools with refugee student enrolments.

- Identification of sources of training for tutors

Refugee Action Support requires that tutors be trained. This training is at present conducted by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation. An extension of such programs would require further training conducted by appropriate personnel.

Negotiations are presently being undertaken between Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, Multicultural Programs Unit and Riverina region, to initiate a similar program in a high school with refugee enrolments. Funding will again be supplied through the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation and the department's Multicultural Programs Unit and coordination provided through Riverina region.

It should be noted that there are restrictions to the extent to which further funding can be provided from present sources. The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation is a charitable organisation with limited funding capacity and the department's funds are also limited.

10. Has the Links to Learning program been evaluated and if so, what are the results of the evaluation?

The Links to Learning program provides funding to community organisations to assist young people aged 12 to 24 years to re-engage with education and training, or to gain employment.

In 2009, there are 86 Links to Learning projects across NSW. Fifty three of the projects are for early leavers and 33 of the projects are for students at risk of not completing their education.

A full evaluation of Links to Learning was undertaken in 2000. Each year, the program is internally reviewed to ensure that it remains consistent with the *Premier's Grants Administration Guidelines* and is responsive to the needs of community organisations.

The next full evaluation of Links to Learning is planned to occur during the 2010 to 2012 funding cycle to include the impact of the State Government's raising the school leaving age proposal which becomes legislation on 1 January 2010.