

**REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9 TO 14 IN NEW  
SOUTH WALES**

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**At Sydney on Wednesday 2 July 2008**

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**The Committee met at 10.00 a.m.**

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**PRESENT**

Dr A. D. McDonald (Acting Chair)

**Legislative Council**

The Hon. C. E. Cusack  
The Hon. K. F. Griffin

**Legislative Assembly**

Ms M. T. Andrews  
Mr S. R. Cansdell

**LAWRENCE M**, Ashbury Public School, Trevenar Street, Ashbury,

**SAM M**, Ashbury Public School, Trevenar Street, Ashbury,

**EDMUND B**, Ashbury Public School, Trevenar Street, Ashbury,

**ROSE C**, Ashbury Public School, Trevenar Street, Ashbury,

**GEORGIA B**, Ashbury Public School, Trevenar Street, Ashbury, and

**GIULIA FERRAINA**, Ashbury Public School, Trevenar Street, Ashbury, affirmed and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** I declare the hearing open. Welcome, kids. Before the proceedings commence, I remind everybody to switch off their mobile telephones as they can interfere with the Hansard recording equipment. If your phone is on silent, please switch it off completely. Thank you very much for coming today. I understand that the proceedings for today's hearing have been explained to you all. Is that correct? Do you understand what is happening today?

**Miss C:** Yes.

**Miss B:** Yes.

**Mr B:** Yes.

**Mr S.M:** Yes.

**Mr L.M:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to begin your presentations? After that the Committee members will ask you some questions. We will need to stop after about 12 minutes.

**Miss B:** Today I will be giving you a brief picture of our school, Ashbury Public School. Ashbury Public is located in the inner-west region of Sydney. It is a small school, with around 330 students and 13 classrooms. The classes vary from around 20 in kindergarten to about 30 in the year 5 and 6 classes. Our attendance rate is higher than the average for the State and region. Ashbury has 18 staff members, including a part-time librarian, learning support teacher, ESL teacher and reading recovery teacher. The school has access to a school counsellor one day a week and also has some teachers' aide time. They are all very experienced and committed.

Our school is also very multicultural. Many of our students are exposed to languages other than English and enrich our school through their cultural diversity. We participate in many inclusive activities, like Harmony Day, reconciliation and Anzac Day. Ashbury provides many extracurricular activities, such as PSSA sport, band, choir, dance group, recorder, chess, debating and Tournament of the Minds. Our students achieved above the State average in basic skills results for last year. The school community has a strong belief in education being a partnership, and as a result there is a very active school council, P and C, and SRC. Also, many parents are involved in classroom programs. Our school motto is, "Education forms the minds", and each day we work as a team, striving to achieve this. My fellow speakers will present the data we have collected and some of the conclusions we have arrived at.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you. We have your written submissions here, so if you like you do not have to read them out you can just tell us what you found.

**Miss C:** We conducted a survey on the needs of children ages 9 to 14. Our students in years 5 and 6 were asked to respond to this survey. Some 87 kids completed it. Part of the survey was to collect data on work issues, and these are some of the results. Eighty-four per cent of the mums at our school work. Sixty per cent of them work full-time and 40 per cent of them work part-time. Ninety-five per cent of the dads work as well. Eighty-six per cent work full-time and 14 per cent work part-time. Fifteen per cent of the mums do not work at all and five per cent of the dads do not work either. One of the questions was: Who looks after you when both your parents are not there? The kids were given three options to choose from. They were: A, relatives or friends;

B, before and after school care; and, C, look after yourself. More than one response was acceptable. The results were that 58 kids were looked after by relatives and friends, 19 kids go to before and after school care, and 47 kids look after themselves. Seeing as only stage three—years 5 and 6—completed this survey, the results were not really very surprising because we are all around the ages of 11 and 12 and we are becoming more mature and responsible. With the majority of parents working full-time, there are a great many stage three students at home looking after themselves—that is, unsupervised—after school.

I also asked a couple of questions to the director of our before and after school care centre, Splash. She told me that approximately 20 kids come to Splash in the morning and about 85 to 100 kids come in the afternoon. Twenty-eight kids from stage three go to Splash, with 13 of those booked in five days a week, morning or afternoon, and the other 15 coming two to three days a week. From this information, I can conclude that Splash or any after-school care is really meant for the younger kids at school. I can also say that nearly half of stage three needs to be educated about being home alone or that there should be more low-cost community activities for older kids. The results also show that it may be beneficial to support families and/or friends who look after kids after school.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thanks, Rose.

**Mr S.M:** Children have many needs. As a group, we decided not to think about the basic needs as the majority of our school population has shelter, food and water. We brainstormed about other needs that kids might have, and from that we came up with 12 possibilities. In our survey we asked the children to seek the six most important needs out of those 12 for someone their age. It was important to include this section in the survey because from this we could see what children thought they needed, not what adults think they need, as a child's perspective and an adult's perspective can be very different.

Based on the survey results, the need with the most votes was family and friends social time. This was followed by opportunities to extend their abilities and interests, as in music programs and chess classes. The third most important was having community-based programs, for example, soccer clubs and art classes. Knowing how to handle money, having access to information technology, and having a network of people you can talk to were all tied in fourth place. These needs were picked over things like having an extra focus on drug and sex education, having transition programs to high school, having opportunities for learning support, and access to services like medical, dental and a counsellor.

From these results we can see that the trend is that children think they need things that will help them learn more, like computers, extracurricular activities and community-based programs. Children think it is important to be surrounded by people they can trust, talk to and socialise with, like their friends and family. Also, the results show that many children think it is important how to handle money. Children are realising that managing their money is going to be a big part of their later lives.

One of the results we found interesting was that the need to have the latest equipment and toys, like game consoles and PlayStations, was right at the bottom of the results. Many adults would think this would be at the top, but now children are starting to realise that they can live without these things and would rather spend time with their friends and family. I think this shows a lot of maturity, and that they do consider other things more important than the latest computer games.

At Ashbury we run a lot of programs that are based on children's needs. We have a great music program, a chess class, a debating team, and choir and dance groups. We run transition programs with the local high school, we encourage kids to research with and learn how to use computers and laptops, and classes are run about sex and drug education.

We also realise the importance of community, and a lot of our projects involve parents and the local community. Running programs in schools that children say they need is a great way of making children want to learn more, and making them learn and participate in what they think is important. With more funding from the Government, schools could afford to run many more of these great programs, further enriching students' lives.

**Mr L.M:** The Committee has also asked for some comment on the issue of resilience. Resilience means springing back from a fall. The dictionary defines "resilience" as being elastic, or being able to recover quickly after sickness, depression, grief or other emotional upsets. This is a value which can help us cope with difficult situations that are presented in life. We believe that resilience is a must-have skill and that all children should have some understanding of how to develop their own resilience.

We have a number of programs at Ashbury Public School designed specifically for building up resilience in children. First and foremost, we have the peer support program. This is run by year 6 students. The peer support program teaches children how to deal with social and family problems—for example, how to deal with bullying, not only as a victim but also as a witness. The peer support program is also used to build up relations between students of different ages, kindergarten to year 6.

Resilience is a major focus of this program. We help all children, young and old, learn to spring back from things that make them feel down. With these skills, we hope to train our peers to sort out issues in the playground, on the sports field, and even at home. Secondly, we have restorative practice. This is a step-by-step guide to deal with conflicts, big and small. Restorative practice uses empathy to fix disagreements and disputes. Every day we put signs out in the playground to help children and teachers sort out problems. The signs have a series of questions that help with the process.

Thirdly, we have peer mediation, where year 5 students sort out minor problems in the playground. Children are more likely to cooperate, because they do not feel threatened. From time to time our school runs the seasons for growth program. This is a series of workshops designed specifically for children who have experienced loss, grief, family separation, or divorce. We believe it is necessary for every school to have programs such as the above-mentioned to promote resilience. Our school believes that giving students skills which allow them to respond positively to difficult situations is essential, and this needs to be promoted in all schools.

**Mr B:** From the information we have presented today we can conclude that 9 to 14-year-olds are interested in learning and opportunities that promote this. They need a network of people who they can talk to and trust, and also have social time with. The need for family support and learning opportunities for extracurricular activities, as well as community-based programs, are all essential.

Since many are beginning to spend more time without an adult around, programs centred on independence, problem solving and decision making will assist at this stage of their development. Adequate funding for schools and families is essential for meeting the needs of children aged 9 to 14. To conclude our presentation today I would like to thank this Committee for inviting us here and giving us the opportunity to share our information on children aged 9 to 14.

**ACTING CHAIR:** On behalf of all members of the Committee, I would like to thank you very much for your hard work and for appearing before the Committee today. We are very proud to have such fine kids in our State.

Do you give the Committee permission to make your written submission public, as well as what you have said at the hearing today?

**Miss C :** Yes.

**Miss B:** Yes.

**Mr B:** Yes.

**Mr S.M:** Yes.

**Mr L.M:** Yes.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**MILENA M**, Beverly Hills Girls High School, Corner King Georges Road and Broad Arrow Road, Beverly Hills,

**APRIL B**, Beverly Hills Girls High School, Corner King Georges Road and Broad Arrow Road, Beverly Hills,

**ARMAINE R**, Beverly Hills Girls High School, Corner King Georges Road and Broad Arrow Road, Beverly Hills,

**MEREDITH B**, Beverly Hills Girls High School, Corner King Georges Road and Broad Arrow Road, Beverly Hills, and

**GRACE C**, Beverly Hills Girls High School, Corner King Georges Road and Broad Arrow Road, Beverly Hills,

**HELEN ANTONIADIS**, Beverly Hills Girls High School, Corner King Georges Road and Broad Arrow Road, Beverly Hills, sworn and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to start your presentation? After that, if there is time, the members may wish to ask you some questions.

**Miss C:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, members of Parliament. Today I and four other Beverly Hills Girls High School students will present our findings for the parliamentary inquiry addressing the needs of children 9 to 14. Beverly Hills Girls High School is a culturally diverse school with 82 per cent of all students having a non-English speaking background. We will speak to three of the questions for the inquiry—questions 1, 2 and 3. All questions have been addressed in a written submission to the inquiry. We would be more than happy to discuss any of the questions that are within our written submission but have not been addressed today. We also will be available to answer any questions during the allocated question time. I will now introduce the speakers. The first question—"What are the needs of children 9 to 14 in today's society?"—will be discussed by Melina. April, our second speaker, will speak to the second question—"How do the needs of children 9 to 14 vary depending on their age, gender and socioeconomic status?" Finally, our third speaker, Meredith, will discuss the question in relation to, "What activities and services do 9- to 14-year-old children required to develop resilience during those difficult times they may experience in life?" Also on our committee is another junior member, Armaine, and a senior mentor, Qaanita, who assisted us in our research. Before we begin I would like to draw your attention to page 5 of our written submission, the last paragraph beginning with "This information". There needs to be a correction made. Instead of "13 per cent", we would like to change this to "13 out of 15". Now Melina will address the first question, thank you.

**Miss M:** Today I will be addressing the question regarding the needs of children 9 to 14. In order to obtain these results to answer this question we conducted many surveys and interviews. We not only surveyed children in this particular age group but also child-care professionals who work closely with them. By surveying these young people we discovered that they saw education, a loving and caring family unit, having strong friendships and being represented in today's society as their needs. By interviewing parents and child-care professionals, such as teachers, principals, counsellors and deputies, we were able to identify what they perceive to be the needs of children and young people from 9 to 14. They believe that children in this age group need a safe school, home and community environment, as well as acceptance, respect and also being represented. They also believe that children in this age group need to be more informed about issues that may affect them later in life, such as environmental, global and technological. They also need to be informed on health issues, such as drugs. Parents and child-care professionals interviewed also stressed the need for more structured child-care facilities and increased awareness of services, more support networks and education, and also the education of parents. Although the needs of children and young people 9 to 14 years old varied, we found that regardless of age, gender and socioeconomic status there was a widespread need. That need was family. It was placed as a priority amongst all the other needs. From this information it can be concluded that children and young people from 9 to 14 believe that family is their main need.

**Miss A.B:** Through our research we discovered that needs vary according to age, gender and socioeconomic status. Needs according to the age subsection indicated that 73 per cent of 9- to 11-year-old primary school students said that family and education were their main needs. Other needs were to have a voice in society, the need to be valued and to be listened to. Five per cent of the 9- to 11-year-olds interviewed noted that they needed friendship and more freedom and independence. Seventy-seven per cent of the 12- to 14-year-

olds surveyed were female. We surveyed 154 students in this age bracket. From these numbers 31 per cent noted that having friends and being accepted by their peers was a key factor in their wellbeing, while 69 per cent of these students said that family was still one of their main needs. As a whole, 47 per cent of these students also listed being respected, having input into decision making, having a sense of belonging and the need to have a bully-free society as their main needs. From these results it can be concluded that at a young age children tend to need their parents more, but as they grow older their priorities change and they see their friends and acceptance by their peers as their main needs.

To obtain another outlook on this area we also surveyed professionals and parents. The Head Teacher Welfare, who was among the participants, said that as children become older they develop high maturity levels and are more conscious of their surroundings. Consequently, they react differently to situations and have an increased need for acceptance by their peers. Another professional surveyed was the Deputy Principal. The Deputy Principal said that most young children do not have enough experience to make big decisions. Nevertheless, they still need to know that they have rights and should be listened to. Older children in the age group 9 to 14 were more independent and place more trust in friendships. An interviewed parent of a child 9 to 14 said that as children grow the need for more independence, representation and respect becomes essential. The needs of 9- to 14-year-olds according to gender were interestingly varied. In our survey results, the ratio of female to male participants is 41 to 12. The percentage of male students is 23 per cent, as the majority surveyed were female. All of the female students indicated that friendship and being accepted was one of their major needs, while all of the males surveyed highlighted some sort of sport or sporting facility availability as a necessity. However, the statewide English language and literacy assessment shows that boys generally scored lower than girls. This may indicate that the facilities for learning are less available for males.

Professionals and parents were also interviewed on this topic. The Deputy Principal noted that the statewide literacy and numeracy data indicated that boys on average do not achieve higher than girls. The Head Teacher PDHPE noted that boys were also bigger risk takers than girls and are more focused on the now instead of long term. A parent interviewed said that males aged 9 to 14 years prefer outdoor activities, like sports, which meet their physical demands. The needs of 9- to 14-year-olds do change according to socioeconomic status as well. Children in disadvantaged areas identified money as a need. As a whole, their needs were based on basic necessities rather than wants. The Head Teacher Welfare said that children classified as having a lower socioeconomic status needed money to access more information and buy school equipment rather than to purchase recreational equipment. The Deputy Principal of Beverly Hills Girls High School said that children of a low socioeconomic status often did not have the same access to information, such as extra education like tutoring. He also said that they were sometimes more likely to come to school with a lower expectation of what school can do for them, often based on schooling experiences of their parents or siblings and the community value on education. Our research mainly focused on the aspects of age and gender, rather than on what suburb they lived in.

**Miss M.B:** Children aged 9 to 14 need to have comfort, security, a sense of belonging and positive mental health as part of their wellbeing. Safe, fun and social environments can help to provide these needs. There are many public services that children can turn to when in need. Such organisations as Kids Help Line, Reach Out, headspace, Vinnies Youth, before and after school care and youth groups focus on helping children through hardship and to develop life skills. The Red Cross runs a Good Start Breakfast program, which provides healthy breakfast in a social environment for children who are unable to prepare their own breakfast at home. This helps children to develop resilience. Although services do exist to help children, there is a lack of awareness of these services. Out of 15 Intensive English Centre [IEC] students we surveyed who have been in Australia for only a few months, only 2 could successfully name a support group or service. That is 13 out of 15, approximately 86 per cent of newly arrived IEC students were not aware of one service that can help young people. Many other students surveyed could not identify a service or support group for young people.

The Deputy Principal at Beverly Hills Girls High School made the following suggestions: Promotion of current services available in the community through television advertising, advertisements in teen magazines, flyers, school newsletters and within the school environment; developing more services, such as Department of Community Services, because current organisations are seemingly not equipped with enough resources; further education on welfare issues for teachers so they can assist to develop resilience skills in younger students; learning programs for early detection of learning difficulties; outside support for schools—the need outweighs the resources available; and community support groups need to be supported, expanded and funded.

Through this inquiry we have come to the conclusion that although there are varying needs according to gender, age, socioeconomic status—ranging from money, sporting facilities, friendship, et cetera—we found

too that all participants in our study recognise that one common need for all children aged nine to 14 is family. As a group of young people we recommend that more community awareness and more support for family services are essential if the needs of children and young people are to be met.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Congratulations on the work you have done with your submissions. Is there anything else you would like to highlight that you found during your surveys?

**Miss M:** No.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Why do you think that the boys did not participate in such large numbers as the girls in the survey? Maybe I direct that to April, as you have talked about that.

**Miss A.B:** Obviously our school is a girl's school. We did try to get local primary schools involved by having the males surveyed as well as the girls. But the majority of the males surveyed—all of them actually—said that they needed a sporting facility.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** So probably it was a smaller group of boys being asked the questions in the first place? Would that be right?

**ALL WITNESSES:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** If we as a government could do one thing for you, what would that be?

**Miss M.B:** Probably to create better services and more services for young children and also promoting them.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** As in family support services?

**Miss M.B:** Yes, and also independent ones for students who, maybe, have conflicts within their family so they do not need to do it as a family group, they can go on their own.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** You seem to be suggesting that families could be doing a better job?

**Miss M.B:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee I thank everyone for their excellent written and oral submissions. We are proud to have you here today. Do you give the Committee permission to make your written submission public as well as what you have said here today?

**ALL WITNESSES:** Yes.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**TAONE P**, Hebersham Public School, Andover Crescent, Hebersham,

**KATRINA S**, Hebersham Public School, Andover Crescent, Hebersham,

**JAMIE H**, Hebersham Public School, Andover Crescent, Hebersham,

**BYRON M**, Hebersham Public School, Andover Crescent, Hebersham, and

**BETTY PAPANDREOU**, Hebersham Public School, Andover Crescent, Hebersham, affirmed and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to start your presentation and, if there is time, members of the Committee might like to ask you some questions?

**Miss H:** Good morning. We are from Hebersham Public School. My name is Jamie, and with me today are Toane, Katrina and Byron. Our school is on the outskirts of Mount Druitt. It has 610 students and 55 staff. We come from a very happy school that cares for us and is helping us to become the best we can. The teachers at our school work very hard to teach us and offer us many different experiences in lots of different areas. Our school has children from many cultures and backgrounds and we learn about these different cultures all the time. The school values at our school are about learning, respect and safety. We feel very privileged to be able to come here today and to talk to you about being young people from the western suburbs.

As young people in the present society we see the following aspects as vital for us to become useful adults in the community. The first aspect we feel is very important is being confident and having high self-esteem. This will allow us to take on what life brings. It allows us to be able to handle all aspects of our lives as we get older. For example, as we get older we know we will be tempted by drugs and other harmful things, but if we are confident, we will be able to ignore the pressure and make good decisions for ourselves. We need the ability to say no. Self-esteem gives you the ability to take on new challenges and try to achieve a useful and productive life. We also feel it is important for young people to be goal orientated to have a successful life. We must learn to set goals and to have the chance to achieve the goals from a young age.

**Miss S:** One other aspect that is very important is to have a good education. In the western suburbs we sometimes feel that we are at a disadvantage because we need to travel to have educational experiences such as going to the beach, museums and special attractions in the city. For instance, today it took us an hour to get into the city to come here. It would be wonderful if we had facilities closer to us so we did not need to spend so much money or time on travelling.

Young people need to be encouraged to stay at school and get a good education. School must be exciting and prepare us for our future in the world. The schools and the community need to prepare us to be able to live in an ever-changing world that is full of technology. We need to learn to use technology to help better our lives. School gives us a good foundation for our future. School allows children to get experiences that they might not be able to get from their families. Education allows young people a chance to get their foot in the door of the real world.

We start thinking about going to university and getting a good job earlier and earlier. We need to know we have libraries, Internet connection and specialised subject areas that will assist us in getting the jobs we want in the future. We do not all have Internet access at home so we need to be able to go to public areas so we can study and get the information we need for our learning. Lifeline learning is a focus at our school.

**Miss P:** Another aspect is equal opportunity. We need to have the same equal opportunities as other children from different socioeconomic status. If we are rich or poor, female or male, it does not matter; we should all be treated equally. Children our age need to become resilient to things that might happen in our lives. Bullying is happening all the time so we need to learn how to deal with bullies and how to make them understand that we will not put up with it. We need guidance from our teachers and family members to know how to handle bullies and how to be safe. This too is a fundamental value we learn at our school. Sometimes in our lives things might happen, like family members getting sick, or much worse. We need to have someone to go to and to talk to. We need to learn strategies that will help us cope with these things.



At schools and community centres we need to have someone to talk to about our concerns and fears. We need to be supported and encouraged by our peers, friends, parents and teachers in our lives. It is important for our local media, like newspapers, to write stories about the good things we do as we grow up as it allows us to gain confidence and achieve more. It also helps us to look up to others, and supports us to know that we can achieve whatever we want to.

**Mr M:** All children need to have activities that allow them to grow and develop. In the western suburbs children really need a range of things to do to relax and have fun. We need sporting centres, dance groups, discos, social clubs, facilities for hobbies, and community centres where we can learn new things and just be together, meet new people and talk to someone that can help with concerns and problems. All children need to be part of groups, such as a sporting group. It would be great if sporting facilities could be built around the Mount Druitt area that our parents could afford to send us to. We need sporting groups that are a little different from the normal footy team or netball team.

We also think that it is important to have someone to talk to when things are difficult, such as a guidance officer at school or in the community. This will help us to know that we are not the only ones going through difficult times as we grow up. Church support is also important to some children. As we grow up we need to feel supported, understood, heard, and more importantly valued as members of the community. We want to succeed and develop into worthwhile adults who respect each other's culture and values. Being respectful is part of our school belief system. Thank you for listening to our ideas. We know one day we will be able to help our community as adults.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Thank you, students, that was excellent. Congratulations on the wonderful presentations. If any one of you would like to add anything further to what you have said, please do so. You mentioned more public places for students who do not have Internet at home or a computer at home. Where would they go to do their homework of an afternoon? Do they go to the local library or is there anywhere they can go to access a computer?

**Miss S:** Maybe to local libraries that are near different houses and schools.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Byron, you said that we need sporting groups that are a little bit different from normal football teams. Could you expand on that—what sort of sporting groups you would like to see out there, or just a variety of different sporting things maybe?

**Mr M:** Yes, a variety.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Do you have any facilities at all at the moment? Are there swimming pools that the kids can go to?

**Miss H:** We do have swimming pools, but we would need and want more learning, like more libraries around where we live.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** If there were more things that were in your community for kids to do, would it be a problem for the kids getting to them in terms of transport? Is that ever an issue?

**Miss H:** Yes, that is why we need them near, not so far away.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Not so much thinking about your own families, but just thinking about families generally, do you think that they are doing a good job or could do a better job helping their kids?

**Miss H:** I think they are doing the best they can.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Taone, do you have a computer at home?

**Miss PI:** Yes, I do.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Katrina?

**Miss S:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Jaime?

**Miss H:** Yes, but I do not have Internet.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Taone and Katrina, you have Internet, do you?

**Miss P:** Yes.

**Miss S:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Byron?

**Mr M:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Betty, about how many of the kids do have computer access?

**Ms PAPANDREOU:** It would only be about a third of the school. We actually did a survey in stage 2 and it was just a third of all the children in the school that had computers, and most of them were quite old and not as many had Internet connection.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Is there any access in the area through libraries or community centres for children?

**Ms PAPANDREOU:** The only access at the moment is Mount Druitt library and they have 10 computers with Internet access. I know that because we are doing a joint project together. They are having 20 put in in the next couple of weeks and we are starting to do a program for five weeks where parents can go and get support in technology and their children go with them to learn how to use the computers and how to search the library. It is a joint venture, which is really exciting for us.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Taone, what sport do you do?

**Miss P:** I do basketball.

**Miss S:** I don't do any sport.

**Miss H:** I do netball and dancing.

**Mr M:** No sport.

**Ms PAPANDREOU:** Taone, do you do sport at home or just at school?

**Miss P:** Just at school.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** How many of you have visited Mount Druitt library? Have you been to Mount Druitt library?

**Miss P:** Yes.

**Miss S:** Yes

**Miss H:** No.

**Mr M:** Yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** For those who have been to the library, how did you find it? Did you feel like it was a place for you to be at, or was it more directed at adults? How did you find it?

**Miss P:** I felt it was normal, but most of it was about adults.

**Miss S:** Most of it was for adults and I could not really find lots of information that was for children and young adults.

**Mr M:** For adults and children.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** So you found what you needed at the library, did you?

**Mr M:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee I thank you very much for your written submission and for your excellent answers to questions today. We are proud to have you here and are very pleased that you have come. Do you give the Committee permission to make public your written submission as well as what you have said at the hearing today?

**Miss H:** Yes.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**ELIZA F**, Castle Hill High School, Castle Street, Castle Hill

**SOFIE P**, Castle Hill High School, Castle Street, Castle Hill

**LACHLAN S**, Castle Hill High School, Castle Street, Castle Hill

**TOM W**, Castle Hill High School, Castle Street, Castle Hill, and

**DEBORAH BOSS**, Castle Hill High School, Castle Street, Castle Hill, sworn and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. I understand that the proceedings for today's hearing have been explained to you. Is that correct?

**Miss F:** Yes.

**Miss P:** Yes.

**Mr S:** Yes.

**Mr W:** Yes.

**Ms Boss:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to start your presentation? After that time some of the members of the Committee might like to ask you some questions.

**Miss F** If it is okay I will hand out our submission.

**Mr W:** Before I start I inform you that you have been given a hard copy of our presentation so when we are referring to graphs you will have to refer to the graphs in front of you and the script has been placed in the back of the book. Good morning, members of the Committee on Children and Young People. My name is Tom and I am here today from Castle Hill High School, which is a public, coeducational, comprehensive high school in a relatively middle-class socioeconomic community. Castle Hill High School is found in the north-west of Sydney. Today we will present to you what young people believe are their needs in our community. We will also explain how their needs vary depending on their gender and socioeconomic status. Lachlan and Eliza will address that issue.

Sofie will present how our needs have changed from the age of nine to the age where we are now and she will make recommendations to you about what young people believe the Government needs to fix and provide more of to improve the quality of our lives. To collect our data we surveyed 104 people aged between the ages of 12 to 14 in years 7 and 8 at our school. In our survey we asked them about their most important needs, whether the community satisfied those needs and whether boys and girls had equal opportunities in our area. We also asked them how their needs had changed from the age of 9 to the age of 14 and how money affects their ability to satisfy those needs. This survey allowed us to conclude successfully the following results.

**Mr S:** Looking at graph 1, the three most important needs for males aged between 12 and 14 are entertainment, sporting facilities and technology. Those three examples are an indication that, as we move through our teenage years, we are searching for activities that create or provide us with greater independence in a safe environment. In graph 2 you can see that 78 per cent of males believed that our local community satisfied their needs. However, 22 per cent of the males' needs are not met. The major reasons for this were that males believed there was inadequate transport in our area and that the majority of the sportsgrounds were of poor quality. Some people also said that more footpaths were required on the sides of roads or in open areas for our safety when walking.

If you look at graph 3 you will see that the vast majority of males believed that boys and girls had equal opportunities in The Hills area. However, 16 per cent still believe that they do not. The main reasons for this are that during sports some boys ignore girls and there are only single gender sports teams in certain sports, such as Rugby League, Australian Football League and netball. As shown in graph 4, 94 per cent of males surveyed

believed that money affected their ability to satisfy their needs. The reasons for this usually had something to do with the fact that most needs required money to satisfy. For example, needs such as food, entertainment, sport and education all required money. The girls' results were pretty much identical, with 93 per cent of girls believing that money affected their ability to satisfy their needs.

Graph 5 shows that almost every boy we surveyed believed that their needs had changed since they were 9 years old. The general consensus was that, as you get older, you become more independent and you search for a safe and fun environment in which to be with your friends. Our data also showed that, as you get older, you want your own money and you want to be able to spend it how you want. The final question in our survey was, "What community facilities could the New South Wales State Government provide more of to improve your quality of life?"

The recommendations that males made were that better transportation, such as buses and trains, were required, more recreational areas and parks so that kids our age can go and be kids, and the final recommendation that occurred regularly was that the majority of sports fields in our area were of poor quality and in desperate need of some maintenance. Also, many sports fields require more lights for training.

**Miss F:** Referring to graph 6, from a female perspective the top four needs most commonly answered were entertainment at 15 per cent, and technology, sporting fields and education all at 13 per cent. Graph 7 shows that the majority of females—at 72 per cent—believed that our local community satisfied their needs. However, those who believed that the community did not satisfy these needs were asked to specify which needs were not met. Some of the needs that they thought were not met included: recreational areas, the quality of public transport, retail outlets, clean environments, and sporting facilities.

Graph 8 demonstrates that 84 per cent of the girls stated that boys and girls have equal opportunities in The Hills area. In the instances where girls believed that they did not have equal opportunities, respondents were asked to specify in which cases they did not. The collective results showed that in most sporting teams that have only single gender teams the judges or coaches were sexist and that there were more sports that boys could play as people thought that girls could only play sports such as netball and dancing. Graph 9 indicates that 93 per cent of the girls stated that money affected their ability to satisfy their needs. The reasons for this were that money affects every aspect of our lives. We need money to socialise with friends and to buy things we need such as transportation, stationery requirements, food and entertainment.

Graph 10 shows that 94 per cent of the females believed that their needs had changed since they were nine. The reasons given were that they did not need their parents as much any more; they were interested in different things because they were older; they wanted more entertainment; they used technology more; they needed more money for clothes; and they wanted to socialise more with friends. Finally, we asked, "What community facilities could the New South Wales State Government provide more of to improve your quality of life?"

The suggestions that were made by the females were that there needed to be more tuckshops at parks, sporting opportunities, local parks and recreational areas, swimming centres, libraries, shops and entertainment, gyms for exercising, places for performing arts, improving the quality of our environment, horse riding facilities, places where you can hang out with your friends, more places of worship, more games arcades, more and better quality transportation, and greater access to counselling services and non-religious youth centres.

**Miss P:** Through the results we obtained from our survey we concluded that, on the whole, the most important needs for the 12-year-olds and 14-year-olds surveyed in our school were: entertainment, sporting facilities and technology. However, from our survey we also found that 26 per cent of people believed that our local community did not satisfy their needs. We advise that when considering our presentation you should take the following recommendations into account: 93 per cent of the people we surveyed stated that their needs had changed since they were nine years old, and 7 per cent stated that their needs had not changed.

Of that 93 per cent, many people commented about their increased need for money and recreational areas to go out with their friends. That was because they had grown in independence as they got older and they were less reliant on their parents to provide supervision and entertainment for them. To improve the lifestyle of children aged 12 to 14 in our local area you might consider improving the condition of sporting fields, as many of the fields in our area are of poor quality and can be a risk to players' safety because of reasons such as poor lighting.

Another important need for 12-year-olds to 14-year-olds in our school is education. Education is crucial for our future and is the foundation of our lives. By the way, our teachers did not tell us to say this. Although many of you might think we do not, children our age value their education.

Some ways to improve education for people in the 12 years to 14 years age bracket is to provide more funding for public high schools so that they can improve their classrooms, teaching resources and technology. This brings us to the issue of technology. Technology is very important in today's society with 14 per cent of people voting that they believe technology is a very important need; however, 4 per cent of people thought that the need of technology was not met in our community. Most of the comments we received from participants in our survey about lack of good technology were in our libraries and schools. Some examples of these comments were: not enough up-to-date computers and not enough colour printers or a photocopier.

Several young people also commented on the need for more counselling services in schools and the local community to help young people when they are confronted with traumatic experiences in their lives. Also, youth centres are seen as a basis for recreation and support, and there are not enough of these in the Hills area. If you follow our suggestions, you will be eliminating or at least reducing the number of people who do not believe that the Government satisfies their needs. In conclusion, entertainment and sporting facilities are the most important needs for young people in our society today, but education is the key to our success.

We take this opportunity to thank you for listening to our presentation. We hope that you will take our recommendations into consideration and that we were helpful in giving you an insight into the needs for young people in our society today.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your excellent presentation.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** What do you have in mind that youth centres should address? Should they comprise structured programs?

**Miss P:** Just places in the community that young people can go to with their friends that have computers and stuff, just to hang out when they do not want to be at home.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** So you do not feel that there should be structured programs in these youth centres?

**Miss P:** That would probably be good for some children, yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Thank you for raising the issue of money in your submission; we probably have not received a lot of information about that, and I can see that that is a big issue. Can I ask each of you, if you do not mind sharing, what is your access to money at the moment? What are you using it for?

**Miss F:** I get \$10 a week because I have my phone bill and I pay half of that, and any other needs.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** You have a mobile phone?

**Miss F:** Yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Has everyone got a mobile phone?

**Mr W:** No.

**Mr S:** Yes.

**Miss P:** Yes.

**Miss F:** Yes.

**Miss P:** I do not get an allowance or anything, but whenever I need money my mum just gives it to me. I just get money whenever I need it, pretty much.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** You have discussed that with your mum?

**Miss P:** Yes.

**Mr S:** I get, I think it is, \$10 off my Nan every week because she lives at my house. And my mum, I do not get any money off her, but she pays for my phone credits.

**Mr W:** I get \$10 a week and that is to pay for things I would like to buy. So, if I want anything extra like, say, a new pair of shoes that I need, then I will have to pay for that. But my mum and dad provided basic needs.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Are you able to do any saving from that money as well?

**Mr W:** Yes. I can do whatever I like with that money. So, I can put it in the bank, which I usually do. So then I can save up for things that I want in the future.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** If there was one thing you would like the Government to step in and help you with in your area, what would it be?

**Miss F:** I would say probably youth centres.

**Mr S:** Yes. In our area there is probably one park that I can get to easily just walking or riding. There are not really many others and if there were other places that we could just go to and have fun.

**Mr W:** Yes, places we could go without our parents supervising us so that we can do things that we want.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** And just have a safe environment?

**Mr W:** Yes, because at a park, it is safe, but anyone can access it. If we had places that had a room so that we can just play around knowing that we are safe.

**Ms Boss:** If I could add, in the Hills area there are a number of youth centres attached to various religious organisations within the community. They work very well and they are very good, but some parents would like to have them not associated with any particular religion, if you know what I mean—if they were sort of non-denominational centres with good supervision.

**ACTING CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee, I thank you very much for your excellent written and verbal presentation. We are incredibly grateful for you coming today and we are very proud of you as kids of the State. Do you give the Committee permission to make the written submission public as well as what you have said at the hearing today?

**Mr W:** Yes.

**Mr S:** Yes.

**Miss P:** Yes.

**Miss F:** Yes.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**JULIE ANNE OATES**, Head of Middle School, St Luke's Grammar School, 210 Headland Road, Dee Why,

**SOPHIE-NICOLE M**, Student, St Luke's Grammar School, 210 Headland Road, Dee Why, and

**MITCHELL R**, Student, St Luke's Grammar School, 210 Headland Road, Dee Why, sworn and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** We will commence with your presentation and, if time permits, members of the committee would like to ask you questions.

**Miss M:** St Luke's Grammar School is a member of the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation. It is located on the northern beaches at Dee Why. It is a kindergarten to Year 12 school with a cottage program for four-year-olds. There are approximately 900 students and 80 staff. St Luke's is a private school that offers Christian values in the delivery of our education. The school aims to have students leave believing they can go out and make a difference in the world we live in. The school aims to develop academic excellence and to develop students who are academically, emotionally, socially and spiritually developed. In order to find out about the needs of young people we chose to conduct a survey in Year 6 and Year 9—students aged between 9 years and 14 years. Year 9 leaders wrote the questions for the survey. The students were given half an hour during school time to complete their answers to the survey. The survey was anonymous.

We chose to address questions 1 and 2 to the needs of children and young people, and question 3 to services and support. The results of our survey covered and followed areas that young people worry about. The first question we asked was about the main causes of emotional anxiety in young people. The answers suggested a wide range of areas that contributed to anxiety in young people. Thirty-four per cent of students said homework or school stress, 28 per cent said peer pressure, 26 per cent said peer relationships or friendship issues, 20 per cent said body image, 18 per cent said pressure from parents to do well, 14 per cent said parents splitting up, 12 per cent said drugs, 12 per cent said illness or fear of a family member getting sick, 8 per cent said bullying, and 4 per cent said gossip.

**Mr R:** We then asked about government services to help young people cope with emotional anxiety. The majority of students—72 per cent—said that they thought the Government should introduce more resources or organisations to help young people cope with anxiety. Fifty-eight per cent said that they felt more government and counselling services were needed in the local area. Forty-four per cent of students surveyed thought that there should be more promotion of government helplines and counselling services for young people in the local area.

Almost all the students at our school participate in sport outside school. We felt this was an important way for students to cope with anxiety, so we asked the students what they thought about sporting facilities in the local area. While 24 per cent of students said that they thought the sporting facilities were sufficient, the remainder made a variety of suggestions about the types of facilities they would like to see improved or added to the local area. Twenty-two per cent of students thought that more basketball courts, in particular, should be built, especially in open, public places accessible to all suburbs. Forty per cent said they would like a local ice rink as the closest one is at Macquarie. Twelve per cent would like more indoor swimming facilities, 10 per cent would like more public ovals, 8 per cent would like more tennis courts, and 6 per cent would like to see more skate parks. Twelve per cent of students also wrote that they would like the current sporting facilities better maintained.

We asked about activities for young people outside school to bring people together in the local community. There were a small number of suggestions for dances and concerts, but the large majority of students were not interested in such organised activities. Some reasons were given. Some students said that their churches already provided enough activities, and some other students said that kids wanted to arrange their own free time. One even said that adults have enough to say about young people and they wanted to run their lives themselves. We thought it was important that young people were taught how to protect themselves in difficult situations that may arise. We asked whether students thought that self-defence classes should be provided for all young people, and the large majority of students thought this was a reasonably good idea.

Thinking about what young people are taught, we asked whether students thought that modern education is relevant to young people today. The majority of students believed it was relevant. There were some changes suggested. Some students would like to see homework abolished. A number of students commented that there was too much emphasis on Australian history and they would like to learn more about the world.



Some responses asked for subjects that offered life skills, such as financial literacy. A number of students would also like more sport. Finally, we asked about the impact of government decisions on young people. The majority of students felt that government decisions have little or no impact on young people. Where there was an impact, it was through their parents. Interest rate hikes, rising petrol prices and the budget have led to increases in stress for parents, which has meant more stressful households. When asked whether young people should be consulted when politicians make decisions, the responses were an even split.

**Miss M:** Thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak today.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** You mentioned support and counselling services. Do the kids at your school know about the Kids Help Line and other services? Is that well known to students?

**Miss M:** Through promotion, there is a general idea that there are things like the Kids Help Line. But the people whom I talked to would like more hands-on, face-to-face counselling services. If there are ones like that at present, they do not know about them because they believe there is not enough promotion of counselling services.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Is there a school counsellor available for students?

**Miss M:** There is one school counsellor between 900 students.

**Mrs OATES:** We have two, and the second one is a part-time counsellor and she operates in the junior school—from Cottage to 5.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** If there were one thing that you think the Government could do to assist young people and create a better environment for them in the future, what would it be?

**Mr R:** I think they could include children in decisions more and think of them as people as opposed to younger parts of society that will become important. They should be part of the discussion as opposed to an offset.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Good answer.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Sophie, you talked about the stress that young people are under and the different causes of that. Would you say there is a lot of stress overall? We can see the breakdown of the causes, but just how big is the problem of stress overall?

**Miss M:** What older people would interpret as stress is very different from what young people interpret it as. People may think one thing could be stressful but it will be over. My friends and the people I talk to are very happy with their lives. But then stuff arises and they have a sudden swing and feel very upset.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** So it is more like moments.

**Miss M:** Yes, definitely.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** So you would not say that everyone is feeling overwhelmed all the time; it is in perspective.

**Miss M:** Yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** If it is more about episodes, are you talking about support for those times that arise in their lives when they might need more support?

**Miss M:** Yes. Going through adolescence, you definitely cannot block out the idea that there will be times when someone will feel upset, to an extent, when you need to see a counselling service. Counselling services need to be promoted to tell a person where they need to go.

**Mr R:** I also think that with little issues or small, overwhelming incidents a person may think it is not necessary for them to see a counsellor and that they are wasting that person's time. So it may be better if money spent on training counsellors is spent on training people in the community who are close to young children to

have a small amount of counselling so that they know what to do and how to help them. So instead of making it a big deal and going to see a certain person, young people can talk to someone they know and it will make them feel like they are not interfering with everyone and make them feel a bit better.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Sure—especially with family breakdown. People could know what to say to kids.

**Mr R:** Yes, things like that.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Mitchell, I think you mentioned financial literacy when you were talking about your submission. Can you explain what students want in terms of more support in that area?

**Mr R:** They want a greater understanding of interest rates and all the different things that affect their money and their parents' money—the words that are used. They want to know how the world is structured around them and what they are expected to earn and give as they grow up. Things like that.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** So it is not so much the issue of their financial situation at the moment; it is more about how the world and broader issues affect them and particularly their families.

**Mr R:** It is bigger than their pocket money; I think it is about what they will eventually need to save, earn and use to live.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** I noticed from your presentations that peer pressures, peer relationships and friendship issues rate pretty high among the causes of anxiety in young people. Would either of you like to elaborate on that? Can you see some way of assisting students with anxiety caused by peer pressure? Is there any answer to that?

**Miss M:** Probably not, because there is always going to be pressure from someone to do something. If I could suggest anything, there could even be a bit in school time where—not saying that there is not already—but there could be more emphasis on times when teachers or counsellors, or whatever, come in and tell people who may subconsciously or consciously be putting peer pressure on other teenagers, the effect that that actually has on them, and to acknowledge that you are doing something wrong even though you may not think you are doing something wrong.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Would you like to add to that, Mitchell?

**Mr R:** As a student and as someone who obviously makes friends and sees other people without friends, I think that interference by adults, or by school or a higher authority, makes the person who is being picked on or pressured feel more alienated—feel like "Oh wow, I really do need help. Do I need these people to come and help me figure it out? Am I that bad?" To an extent, children need to learn how to fix their own social problems. In later life, they are not going to be able to get a teacher to come along and to say to them, "He is being mean to me." They have to learn that they have to deal with this themselves, and I think to a certain extent there may be too much pressure from people like teachers to include everyone.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Perhaps an overall explanation to students as a whole as to how extreme cases of peer pressure can affect another student's life, as suggested by Sophie?

**Miss M:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Is the year 10 syllabus in history that bad?

**Miss M:** We are in year 9.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Is the year 9 syllabus in history that bad?

**Mr R:** We definitely look forward to world history, as opposed to Australian history. I like learning about my country, but it has a smaller history than most so I think time should also be spent on the world—as important as it is to learn about our own country.

**Miss M:** At the end of the term we started learning about Pharlap, when there are so many more important things. Even though Pharlap is an important kind of thing, there are more things that happen in the world.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Do you give the Committee permission to make your written submission public, as well as what you have said during the hearing today?

**Miss M:** Yes.

**Mr R:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee members, I would like to thank you very much for your excellent submission and your excellent answers to questions. We are very grateful that you have come all this way and we are very proud of you.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**JOHN JARAS KHILLA**, St Francis De Sales Primary School, Hill Street, Woollooware,

**NATALIA M**, St Francis De Sales Primary School, Hill Street, Woollooware,

**ADEN S**, St Francis De Sales Primary School, Hill Street, Woollooware,

**TARA Y**, St Francis De Sales Primary School, Hill Street, Woollooware, and

**JUSTIN F**, St Francis De Sales Primary School, Hill Street, Woollooware, sworn and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. I understand that the proceedings for today's hearing have been explained to you, is that correct?

**Mr KHILLA:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to start your presentation? If there is time members may ask you some questions.

**Mr F:** Our team is from St Francis de Sales Primary School, Woollooware, which is located in the Sutherland shire. I am Justin, and I will be the main presenter throughout this presentation. The other team members are Natalie, Tara and Aden. They will be called upon in an interview-style process to share relevant views.

Our research relates to the service and support section of the inquiry, in particular Question 3: What are the activities and services that 9 to 14-year-olds require to develop resilience—the ability to bounce back—during those difficult times they may experience in life? To begin with, we conducted a survey to find out what young people see as difficult experiences in their lives, and from this research we were able to identify five common areas. I will now call upon the interviewees to share our findings.

**Miss M:** One of the most common responses to our survey was bullying. Many students are exposed to bullying, either through peer pressure or bullying itself. Another common and surprising result was dealing with death. Students identified that many of them have encountered either close family or friends who have been diagnosed with terminal diseases or have passed away. We found that family issues was a rather large area, ranging from parental divorce to lack of parental support at home, with issues such as drug and alcohol abuse.

**Mr F:** These were the most common responses to our survey. So the areas we focused on were divorce, dealing with death, bullying, puberty and peer pressure. In order to find out how to develop resilience, we needed to know what the actual problems were associated with these target areas. So we conducted case studies where the students formed groups based on personal life experience. Within these groups they discussed the problems associated with the difficult experience. What did your group discover, Tara?

**Miss Y:** There were quite a few problems associated with dealing with divorce. Some of these were: not knowing what was going to happen; not being able to help the situation; feeling as though it is out of your control; not knowing who to turn to for help; watching loved ones suffer; not knowing enough about the circumstances; feeling alone; and other people not understanding your problems.

Dealing with death brought up some similar issues, such as watching others suffer; not having control over the situation; feeling alone; other people not understanding; not knowing who to turn to for help; and not knowing enough about the illness or the circumstances. The last group focused on puberty and peer pressure. They found that feeling different, dealing with change and not being confident enough were some of the main problems.

**Mr F:** When reflecting upon the problems associated with each of these areas in the case studies we were able to identify three main aspects that would assist young people to be more resilient in these situations. These were—

**Mr S:** Knowledge: If the students were educated more about each of these issues it would help them and others to understand more about what they are going through. Support: If they felt there was help available,

they would not feel alone and in more control of the situation. Sense of self: If they had a good sense of self they would feel confident with who they are and have a more positive attitude towards life.

**Mr F:** To conclude the inquiry process we asked the students what activities, services and support would assist them with knowledge, support and sense of self. In our submission there is a list of suggestions. Amongst these are two main recommendations that we researched.

**Miss Y:** Our first recommendation is to have motivational speakers attend schools to speak from personal experience on areas we have identified as common difficulties for this age group. Motivational speakers are used widely in the corporate world to achieve results. We also found they are commonly used amongst athletes to inspire success. Although these companies and athletes are dealing with different issues to those we have highlighted, they are trying to achieve the common goal of resilience and persistence to achieve or overcome a great challenge. From our research we have discovered that motivational speakers create a better understanding among students by sharing experiences that can be compared to those commonly experienced by young children. They also encourage children to develop positive character traits by motivating them to set high standards for themselves by detailing how they overcome difficulties in their lives.

**Mr S:** The second recommendation is to have a councillor available to each school. They would work as a team with the students, school staff and parents; use their expert knowledge to provide education on the various highlighted difficulties for all involved; also educate individuals and students about self and life choices; help to develop strategies for coping with these difficult situations; direct students, teachers and parents where to access further information and assistance if required; and, lastly, provide support to students through individual or group counselling.

**Miss M:** Having a councillor available to all primary schools could be achieved through various schools sharing the councillor's time depending on the size of the school. Our submission also indicates that the availability of a councillor to many students in the school environment is more cost-effective than individual families having to seek the councillors outside of school.

**Mr F:** From our research we feel these recommendations will assist young people aged between nine and 14 years to develop resilience through furthering their knowledge, offering more support and opportunities to develop a greater sense of self and therefore assisting them to cope more competently with the identified difficult life experiences. We are aware that what we are asking might cost a lot of money but we feel the youth of New South Wales is more important.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** This is a great submission, especially with personal stories from Scarlet and James to highlight the concerns and some fears that kids are going through. How do you feel about family support and the value that plays with kids at school?

**Mr F:** We feel that if the child lacks parental support, they might not do as well in schoolwork and they might lack social confidence.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** The idea of motivational speakers is a fantastic suggestion. Have you had motivational speakers at your school? I see you are one of the ones nodding your head, Tara. Can I ask you what did they talk about and how did that affect you, listening to the speaker?

**Miss Y:** The one I did was bullying. She just told everybody that it probably was not the best and asking them all have they gone through all the problems? Then she kind of gave us some ideas.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Was that someone who came from outside the school?

**Miss Y:** Yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Was it easier to talk to someone from outside the school, knowing they were going to be leaving again?

**Miss Y:** Yes, it was a lot easier.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Do you see bullying as a big problem in your school and, if so, is it more amongst the girls than the boys?

**Mr F:** We think it is a big problem in most primary schools, and children can get picked on for any reason mainly. We think it mainly affects everyone.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** A question I have asked the other schools that have been here: If there is one thing the Government can do that you think would help a fair bit, what would that be?

**Mr F:** I think—this is my view—but I think the most important thing would be having someone to talk to. When you have an issue the most important thing is to get it out, tell someone how you are feeling. I think the most important thing would be having a councillor at your school.

**ACTING CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee I thank you all very much for your excellent submission and your wonderful answers to questions. We are grateful and proud that you have come and we are pleased with what you have done today. Do you give the Committee permission to make your written submission public as well as what you have said at the hearing today?

**Mr KHILLA:** We do.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**DIANA ARIDA**, Teacher, Freeman Catholic College, Mount Street, Bonnyrigg,

**CLAUDIA B**, Student, Freeman Catholic College, Mount Street, Bonnyrigg,

**ROBERT A**, Student, Freeman Catholic College, Mount Street, Bonnyrigg,

**MITCHELL G**, Student, Freeman Catholic College, Mount Street, Bonnyrigg,

**STEPHANIE N**, Student, Freeman Catholic College, Mount Street, Bonnyrigg, and

**ALICE B**, Student, Freeman Catholic College, Mount Street, Bonnyrigg, sworn and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to start your presentation for 15 minutes, following which there may be time for questions?

**Miss N:** Good morning, Parliamentary Committee. My name is Stephanie and these are my fellow SRC members: Robert, Mitchell, Claudia and Alice. We represent students in grades 7 to 9 at Freeman Catholic College. Today we are going to speak about several issues, including needs such as education and support systems of 9- to 14-year-old students, and also how these needs vary according to age, gender and socioeconomic status.

**Mr A:** The youth of Australia are our country's future. In order for our future to be bright we need to identify and address the needs of our most valuable resource—our youth. What we view as our needs may be different to what adults view as our needs. What would you classify as our needs—the latest iPod or loving parents? A need is something required for survival. It allows you to have success or achieve a goal. One need that embodies this definition is the need for education. So, what do 9- to 14-year-old children and young people view as needs in the twenty-first century? One of our many needs is education. What type of education we receive and how much effort we put in may very well decide the rest of our lives and our quality of living. Our education may not just include school lessons but rather life lessons we experience and learn at school and from other environments. Society demands that we learn these lessons so as to contribute rather than burden as a maturing group as our knowledge grows. At school we learn not only about history, maths, English, science and other necessary subjects, but also about social skills, such as how to articulate your thoughts and how to relate to other people. We learn basic values such as gratitude and respect.

All these lessons combine to form the building blocks of society. Without these we will be helpless, unable to earn an income or even to complete the most simple of tasks such as paying bills. Society would cease to advance and could be degraded. When surveyed the majority of Freeman students in years 7 to 9, that is, from ages 12 to 15, believe that education was a need for a variety of reasons. Most of these include gaining a job and a good quality of life. Some students also said that they felt education was a need, as society could not advance and improve without it. Another need that has become prevalent in society for this particular age group is the need for a strong support system that we can rely on. Especially as we enter into our teenage years, we find ourselves struggling with some basic issues that we feel uncomfortable talking about to parents, family members or even friends. These issues may include body changes, bullying, stress and anxiety and family issues.

**Miss N:** As you grow older your maturity level rises, as does the amount of work you are required to do. Students in, for example, grade 4 at age nine would not need to access resources that are available at the library. However, students in grade 9 would need to access these resources constantly to complete the barrage of assignments and assessments and to study for exams. Gender is another factor that affects the needs of 9- to 14-year-olds. Gender affects the need of education because each gender requires different programs on adolescence and physical and emotional development. These programs should be tailored to the most effective learning strategies for each gender. The needs of students between 9 to 14 vary heavily depending upon the socioeconomic status in society. Socioeconomic status is an individual's or group's position in society according to their social and financial status. By having a higher socioeconomic status, a student may be able to access a variety of resources. Therefore, they would not need to leave their house to go to a local library for information. A student of a higher socioeconomic status would require services that relieve stress. This is because people of a higher socioeconomic status may have a larger workload and be expected to do better in school. If a student has a lower socioeconomic status they would need a local library to find information. They would also need to have resources at their school made available so that they could work to the best of their ability.

**Mr G:** Above all, 9- to 14-year-old children need support and strong support systems to develop resilience. These support systems may consist of family, relatives, friends or teachers. However, a support system that the students may be able to relate to better will consist of a group of peers that the student feels that they can trust. These peers would have to be on a similar maturity level and be able to take the student's situation seriously. By sharing their issues with this group of peers, students will be able to gain advice from a similar age group who have had similar experiences and will be able to relate effectively to each other. They will also be able to bounce back, as students know that there is a group that they can turn to for support in difficult times. The strong support group may comprise a group of peers of a similar maturity level who are trusted by the student. Instead of bottling up your feelings, talking to a trusted group of people allows you not only a release but also to possibly gain suggestions and advice on how to deal with the problem or issue. This support group also allows students to get to know and understand their peers better, possibly resulting in a positive change of attitude towards working with different people in group work that you may not necessarily be friends with.

Counselling services, such as the Kids Help Line, are also useful in promoting resilience as many students feel confident that they are anonymous and can seek help without serious repercussions, whereas some students may feel that the school counsellors keep records or issues discussed and that they may not have privacy. Children may also need to be made more aware of these services through the use of advertising on television and radio or through the use of print media. Advertisements currently for Kids Help Line, for example, are shown only at certain times of the year, which have been identified as busy times of the year for counsellors. If these advertisements were shown more often, more children would be aware of the services available to them in their times of need. Schools also need to implement initiatives specifically designed for 9- to 14-year-olds which develop resilience but are also interactive, interesting and informative. Initiatives that Freeman Catholic College has introduced for senior students include afternoon classes, night study and teacher support before and during the HSC period. These activities help students to deal with stress and help them feel that they have sufficiently prepared for an exam or given task.

**Miss C.B:** Another major issue affecting children between the ages of 9 to 14 is illiteracy. In our generation illiteracy is a direct consequence of the overuse of technology. Technology and programs such as AMSN have caused a loss or degrading of comprehension, reading, speaking or writing skills, which will affect grades and general understanding. Exercises that improve vocabulary and understanding such as reading and creative writing have been forgotten and are considered outdated and pointless by some students. If the issue of illiteracy is not dealt with immediately, our generation will grow up not knowing and not having the proper English skills needed to advance or even to fit into society. Literacy and you receive tests, such as ELLA, SNAP and NAPLAN are often ineffective, as they only assess the levels of literacy and numeracy and do not help to improve them.

The amount of schoolwork to be completed, such as homework, assignments, assessments and exams, is another issue currently affecting this age group. Stress levels in schools are rising due to the way the curriculum is taught and the way that assignments are distributed. Throughout most of the term students are expected to complete a certain amount of homework per subject. In addition, there is also a small period in the term of two or three weeks in which students are expected to complete a large number of assignments and assessments, normally with one from each subject. These assignments are generally given at the same time, with due dates also at similar times, whereas throughout the year we have large periods of time in which only homework is given. As a result, students may be forced to rush assignments that they view as less important in order to complete other assignments which either are worth more of their grade or are more important. To prevent this, the curriculum should be set out differently, enabling teachers to teach the necessary topics and still spread out the assignments. This would give students more time to complete assignments, ensuring that they are of a better quality and standard.

University is an issue on the mind of many students as they begin to complete their school certificate course. Often students are worried about getting a place at university and actually paying for the course. Courses are often too expensive, thus limiting the amount of people attending university. Scholarships are too few and far between for the majority of students and many simply cannot afford to go to university. University is an essential part of society as it promotes social development. Furthering education allows students to gain the necessary qualifications so as to achieve a job in the future. These students are often developing new technologies, which benefit society in many ways and have positive repercussions. Going to university and working for a degree should be a positive experience without the stress of having to pay a massive debt. After all the evidence that we have presented, the needs of 9 to 14-year-old children must be obvious. This student



representative council requests that you take this information into consideration with the intention of acting upon it. The youth are Australia's future. Take care of our most valuable resource.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** I have asked other schools the simple question: one issue you think should be highlighted by the Government that you feel would be of benefit to young people?

**Miss A.B:** I think two issues that are linked probably are illiteracy and the amount of homework we have to do. Illiteracy is obviously an issue because of the technology available on MSN. Normally we do not use proper language and these skills are being lost, so we need to reinforce that through—I don't know—extra activities at schools. Also the amount of assessments, exams and assignments we are expected to complete—I do not know if this is across the State, but in our school we normally get them in a two-week period of time at around the same date, so we could have at least six assignments at once and it does not allow us to do our best on every assignment. To do our best we need more time.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** So you believe they should be spread out more over the year?

**Miss A.B:** Yes, and I was talking to the group members and we were thinking that maybe also for one subject we could do a more complex assignment that is spread out over a larger period of time, so you could assess several outcomes in the one assignment yet still have a larger period of time to complete it, reducing stress levels as well.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Stephanie, I do not know if you can answer this or direct the question for me, but it was mentioned in the presentation that you concluded that gender-based learning strategies are the way to go, and I wonder if your school has an example of that that you could share with us?

**Miss N:** Currently a few science classes are spread to all girls and all boys and they are testing that to see if it is effective.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** That is separating kids by gender. Beyond that, do you think boys learn differently? Maybe I should ask the boys. Do you think you learn differently to girls?

**Mr A:** Personally, on my experience, I think I learn on the same basis as the girls—whatever works.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Do you find it better to be in a separate class? Is that more effective? You guys don't look convinced.

**Mr G:** I find it better to be in a co-ed class because there is healthy competition and it is actually pretty good, I have developed good friendships with them.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Alice, do you have a computer of your own that is Internet-enabled that you do not have to share with anybody?

**Miss A.B:** No, I have to share with my family.

**ACTING CHAIR:** How many are there?

**Miss A.B:** We only have one computer at home.

**ACTING CHAIR:** And how many people want to share it?

**Miss A.B:** Just my sister and I. There are four in our family overall.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Stephanie?

**Miss N:** I have a computer that is available for most of the time with the Internet.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mitchell?

**Mr G:** I have a computer that is shared amongst my other two siblings and because my elder sister is senior, she is in year 11, it is really hard to get hold of the computer for assignments, so I am often procrastinating a lot.

**Mr A:** I have access to a computer and Internet.

**Miss C.B:** I share a family computer, so I too suffer sometimes because my parents use the computer for work, so that restricts me sometimes as well.

**ACTING CHAIR:** On behalf of the Committee, I thank you so much for coming the long, hard way that you have. We are very grateful for your excellent written and verbal submissions. Do you give the Committee permission to make public your written submission as well as what you have said at the hearing today?

**Miss A.B:** Yes, we do.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**PETER EUGENE WALSH**, Director, Research, Department of Community Services, 4-6 Cavill Avenue, Ashfield, and

**PAUL VINCENT MURPHY**, Director, Strategy and Planning, Department of Community Services, 4-6 Cavill Avenue, Ashfield, affirmed and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and with a brochure entitled "Information for Witnesses Appearing before Parliamentary Committees." Is that correct?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes.

**Mr WALSH:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** The Committee received a submission from the whole of government rather than from each organisation. Is that correct?

**Mr MURPHY:** That is right.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Do you wish that submission to form part of your evidence and to be made public?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mr Walsh, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Mr WALSH:** As Director, Research in the New South Wales Department of Community Services.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mr Murphy, in what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Mr MURPHY:** I am the Director, Strategy and Planning, Communities Division of the Department of Community Services.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would either of you like to make an opening statement before the commencement of questions?

**Mr MURPHY:** I am in the hands of the Committee. I can make a brief opening statement if it is of assistance to you. Equally, I am happy to answer questions.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Mr Walsh, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr WALSH:** No.

**Mr MURPHY:** I am here at the request of the Committee to provide information about the Better Futures program. Better Futures, an early intervention program for people between the ages of 9 to 18, is guided by the Government's Youth Action Plan, the State Plan and also by identified regional planning priorities. It is based on evidence that early intervention can be effective for young people as well as for children. In the context of young people in the Better Futures program, early intervention means early in the transition or early in the life of a problem—it has a focus on transitions in this age range—the transition from primary to high school, the transition from childhood to adulthood, and the transition from secondary school either to work or to further training and education. In essence, the focus of the program is to reduce risk factors during these transition periods and to enhance protective ones. In doing this we have a particular focus on promoting direct participation from young people.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** I think that the Better Futures program has failed in many areas. In my area children aged between the ages of 8 to 15—predominantly Aboriginal children—are running on the streets rather than going to school, which poses a major risk. I think the Department of Community Services has failed badly by putting responsibility for these children in the hands of police when their hands are tied. What other

programs do you have for children from dysfunctional families that have high truancy rates? This morning schoolchildren told us that better educational opportunities and counselling services were required.

**Mr MURPHY:** I understand the comments that you are making. Are you referring to northern New South Wales?

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** I am referring to Coraki, south Grafton and south Yamba.

**Mr MURPHY:** The Better Futures program allocates approximately \$3.6 million in funding each year. It is not a statutory program. My responsibilities at the Department of Community Services are not for the statutory child protection interventions to which you might be referring in co-operation with the police. Better Futures funds a range of programs, although admittedly it is only just commencing to be rolled out in your area. There would not be many service examples that are funded under Better Futures at the moment in the northern part New South Wales and in the northern coastal part of New South Wales.

The process of planning for that roll out commenced only in the last six months or so. Hopefully, over the coming financial year some new services will be commenced. Better Futures, with the budget that it has, is not capable of meeting all the demand for services. That is not what we are trying to do. We are trying to find some services that we can evaluate and do some research on to build an evidence base about what is effective. As I am sure my colleague will say, there is a lot of contention about what services are effective with this age group.

I think it is something with which all governments have struggled to an extent, as have non-government service providers, to find the right sort of intervention and to establish whether it should focus directly on the young person or on the young person in the context of his or her family. Over the next two years we have a large evaluation program to try to do that. I guess that we are trying to find the models that work in the hope that other programs with bigger budgets will adopt those approaches.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Referring to the Better Futures program, how many projects have been evaluated and what types of results have been achieved?

**Mr MURPHY:** Up to this point in time the evaluation of our programs has been fairly limited. Some years ago what we would describe as demonstration projects were funded in the first instance under Better Futures and there has been a limited evaluation of them. In some cases they have showed some early positive indications and in other cases they have showed no positive indications. In those cases funding has been stopped. Up to this point in time there has not been a rigorous evaluation program. I can provide some further information in a written form to the Committee after this hearing to set out what evaluations have taken place up to this point in time. Over the next two years we have allocated a large amount of money to do an integrated research and evaluation program. Currently, about 50 projects are funded in various regions around New South Wales.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** You said that there were positive outcomes for some of the projects that you have done. Could you give us some examples of them?

**Mr MURPHY:** A particular example that is showing early positive signs is the Dapto-Koonawarra project in the Illawarra, which has focused on supporting the transition to high school and reducing the incidence of truancy and behavioural issues in the early years of high school. That project has been positively received in the community and by local high school principals. That is showing some early positive indications. There is another project on the South Coast called the Myimbarr project, which has a focus on Aboriginal young people and families and is something we are hopeful of getting some positive indications out of. The Menai Youth Action project, I think is the name of the project, has been going for some years now. Again, it is very positively viewed in the community and seems to have very effective ongoing strategies to ensure that young people not only participate in the program, but have a genuine voice in the way the various aspects of the services are designed and delivered. From our perspective that is very important to us in the way we look at Better Futures because there clearly is evidence to show that where young people feel they have genuine opportunities to participate, there are much higher levels of resilience and much more positive connections to community and family than would otherwise be the case.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** The Connection to Activities project aims to have an integrated approach to planning for service delivery of the age group we are inquiring into. How much opportunity is there for agencies

such as local governments, youth services and out-of-school-hours services to work together to meet the needs of this age group for after-school and school-vacation activities?

**Mr WALSH:** I am not familiar with that program.

**Mr MURPHY:** I am not sure. Is there a location for that one? I am not sure off the top of my head which program is being referred to.

**ACTING CHAIR:** The Connection to Activities project. You are not aware of it? It will be in the State Government's submission.

**Mr MURPHY:** I am sorry about that.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** It is on page 35 of the Government's submission, the pre-teen's research project supporting young people's connection to activities. It is Waverley Council.

**Mr MURPHY:** I think that is funded under Better Futures, but I am not specifically familiar with the full details of the project. I can take that question on notice and provide the information you are seeking.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** How many young people are in your target group for Better Futures? I would estimate about a million.

**Mr MURPHY:** I do not have the census information off the top of my head.

**Mr WALSH:** Once again, we will have to come back to you on that one.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** It is a pretty large number?

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** A large number of services have already been delivered to those young people, if you counted education or health services and that sort of thing?

**Mr MURPHY:** Indeed, and a number of youth services that have been funded for a long period of time often in partnership with local councils.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Did you say your budget is about \$3.6 million a year?

**Mr MURPHY:** That is right.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** It makes me wonder whether targeting young people as individuals or even targeting their families is an overwhelming task for the size of the project. Are you looking also at the services and the ways of doing things as opposed to direct service delivery?

**Mr MURPHY:** Absolutely. That is absolutely right. We have to keep our goals realistic with the size of the budget we have. We are not funded by government to meet huge levels of demand across the State. We are funded to focus on a whole-of-government coordination in planning activities, which we do through the regional staff of the community's division to improve the coordination of services that are there now and also through the whole-of-government planning forums that we convened to make sure that any new money that is allocated links into what is there now. But the other important aspect from our perspective of Better Futures is providing evidence and research to guide other funding programs as well by trialling particular models of service delivery, whether it is with young people as individuals or in the context of their families. We also do have a focus on early intervention services.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Anyone who has seen an episode of *Yes Minister* knows that coordination of government services is a very challenging task while at the same time having an influence in the community. They seem to be almost two different activities trying to deal with the internal challenges of government to address the need or to even agree what the need is before then identifying coordinated strategies to address it. Working with the non-government sector is another field of its own. Just staying with the internal coordination of services issues for a moment, what sort of strategies are you using to get government to work

together in a more focused way? Do you have an actual program of activities that you are working through with your colleagues within government? I am not suggesting that it is anything specific to this Government; I am talking about the forces of gravity in the way your bureaucracy operates. How challenging is that?

**Mr MURPHY:** It requires constant attention and resourcing. There are long-established senior officer groups in all the regions that are either coordinated through the regional coordination management groups of the Department of Premier and Cabinet or convened originally under the Families First as it then was, now Families NSW, banner. So, there are quite well-established and, from our perspective, effective regular mechanisms for integrated planning and coordination of service delivery. What Better Futures does I guess by bringing albeit a relatively small amount of money to the table just provides a further incentive for that ongoing collaboration and coordination.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Peter, how do you see the major challenges for the Department Community Services and Better Futures?

**Mr WALSH:** As Paul was saying, what is critical is getting a solid evidence base through research evaluation to ensure that the types of services and interventions that are being funded through Better Futures are based on a solid base of evidence. One of the things I have been responsible for has been a review of research evidence around effective early intervention strategies for 8 to 14-year-olds. We have done a literature review, of which I think you have seen a copy. Basically what we have done there is reviewed the evidence for something like 46 programs, both Australian and international. The sad reality is that for many of the studies we have reviewed the methodology is weak for a range of reasons, such as small sample sizes. I think a real challenge from my point of view, and I am speaking here as a director of research in DOCS, is to get a solid research and evaluation base behind the types of services that are being delivered through Better Futures to ensure that those services not only are based on proven and effective interventions, but also, as Paul was saying, hopefully can feed into larger programs and provide an evidence base for what they should be funding.

**ACTING CHAIR:** What does work?

**Mr WALSH:** Some things seem to work. In literature review we looked at parenting programs, child-focused programs and multiple-component programs. The research evidence indicates that, for example, some targeted parenting programs have been found to show some positive short-term benefits for families where they have multiple risks, such as parents with depression, divorced parents, parents of children and young people, and externalising behaviours. Similarly, some brief universal parenting programs also are effective in the prevention of substance use. Some of those studies have demonstrated effects up to six years following that. We have looked also at child-focused and multicomponent programs. The evidence indicates that universal and targeted programs that are largely skills based seemed to be effective in preventing violence. Universal programs that are interactive were effective in preventing substance use. So, there are some indications for some programs and interventions that seem to be effective, but we need to know more about what types of young people and what types of family situations are those programs most effective for. There is a bit of a gap in our knowledge there. A lot of the programs we looked at and the literature are United States based, primarily. Some are Australian based, but I think we need to look more closely at those.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Expanding on Catherine's question about taking a multi-agency approach to these families and issues, I know the Department of Premier and Cabinet has been looking at and trialling a few of them. There has to be a multi-agency approach to children from dysfunctional families—I am talking about DOCS, the Department of Housing, the Department of Education and Training, Mental Health, Juvenile Justice and police. But there also needs to be genuine cooperation. Do you believe there is genuine cooperation to try to resolve these issues? In areas such as Coraki, South Grafton, Wilcannia or anywhere else it is often only half a dozen families who are the problem throughout the town—if they are caseworked and the veil of confidentiality is removed. What is your opinion on the genuineness of the approach taken to this sort of problem? Is it ongoing and part of the program through DOCS?

**Mr WALSH:** Sure. I think there is a genuine effort there. That has been demonstrated, for example, through the memorandum of understanding that DOCS has with the Department of Education and Training. We have also got a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. We are also a party to what is called the Housing and Human Services Accord. Basically, those kinds of memorandums and accords are designed to improve interagency working, particularly where you have families with complex needs.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Multi-issues.

**Mr WALSH:** That is right. We have an evaluation strategy. I am sorry, I should also say that we have the interagency guidelines for child protection, which are currently being evaluated. We are also embarking on an evaluation of our memorandums of understanding with both DET and DADHC, and I think there is some evaluation plan for the Housing and Human Services Accord. So I think those kinds of efforts demonstrate the genuine effort to achieve better interagency working. In order to improve that, we have put in place an evaluation strategy.

**Mr MURPHY:** The focus in Better Futures, because it is early intervention and it is a more universal service delivery approach, is to try to prevent young people and their families from reaching the sorts of situations you are referring to where a coordinated crisis intervention is required from a number of agencies. I guess we are looking for agency cooperation at that early intervention level in some of the service models that we are looking at to try to avoid that situation arising.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** The department's literature review, "Early intervention strategies for children and young people eight to 14 years of age", has identified that universal parenting programs should be delivered early during the transition to adolescence. To what extent are these programs currently available in New South Wales?

**Mr WALSH:** I cannot answer that question in terms of availability. There is some evidence there, as you say, that demonstrates that the transition from primary school to high school seems to be effective. But I am personally not aware of the level of availability of those types of services in New South Wales.

**Mr MURPHY:** Better Futures has roughly between 20 and 30 programs in the broad service category either for adolescent and family support or focusing on building positive connections with family, school and the community. Parenting programs would be aspects of some of those services. But in terms of providing you with exact details about how many of those services use parenting programs as part of their strategy, I will have to take that on notice and come back to you.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Peter, you mentioned that parenting programs are your area of expertise. How does the department develop its parenting programs and how are parents referred to these programs?

**Mr WALSH:** Paul might want to talk about Triple P. But at the moment I can talk about our Brighter Futures early intervention program. We are delivering through that program the Parents as Teachers program. This is a parenting program designed for 0 to three-year-olds, which is the priority group in our Brighter Futures program. Parents are offered that program when they enter the program. They enter in two ways: either through a community referral pathway or if they have been reported to DOCS and they are assessed as being eligible for the program, they are offered the opportunity to enter the program through that route. However, the program is voluntary and so it is up to the families to accept that. But I said, the Parents as Teachers program is one of the evidence-based parenting programs that we have selected for Brighter Futures for the 0 to three-year-olds. But we are also implementing PPP.

**Mr MURPHY:** Yes. Triple P is a world-renowned program that was developed by Professor Matt Sanders at the University of Queensland and that has been purchased. The modules that have been purchased are for the three- to eight-year-old age group. It is part of an election commitment that the Government made about making parenting programs for children in that age group universally available—available to every parent with a child aged three to eight in New South Wales—by 2011. I think that was the commitment. The rollout of that commenced last financial year. I think there is also a Teen Triple P—

**Mr WALSH:** There is a Teen Triple module, yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** What does Triple P stand for?

**Mr WALSH:** It is the Positive Parenting Program.

**Mr MURPHY:** It is a behaviourally based intervention that has been implemented in some jurisdictions in Australia and in a very large number of jurisdictions around the world, including the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada.

**Mr WALSH:** Many countries have been implementing Triple P.

**Mr MURPHY:** It is very positively evaluated in virtually every setting where it has been implemented.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** And it was initiated in Queensland?

**Mr WALSH:** Yes, that is right. We should say that in terms of Teen Triple P there is some evidence that it has less positive outcomes, but the evidence is still a bit thin. There is not a lot of strong evidence about the effectiveness of Triple P with parents at risk of child abuse and neglect. So there are some caveats. Once again, with a lot of these programs we need to look more closely at what sorts of families or parents with children benefit the most.

**ACTING CHAIR:** You have talked about looking for evidence of stuff that works in the nine to 14 years group. What has not worked or has not been evaluated that is used widely?

**Mr WALSH:** One of the things that comes through from the literature review that we have done is that what does not work is when you aggregate together those young people who are already displaying problem behaviours. In actual fact, it leads to a worsening of those problems through what some researchers call "deviant training". It is negative reinforcement. So clearly there needs to be some attention given to that. It seems to be the case that that happens when we bring together young people who already have problems and where they are undertaking unstructured activities with poorly trained leaders or facilitators and there is a lack of monitoring. They seem to be the factors associated with worsening the outcomes for that particular group.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** But our behaviour schools are structured around bringing those young people together for specialist attention.

**Mr WALSH:** I am sorry, I cannot really comment on that. I suppose I am trying to emphasise that where the outcomes seem to worsen is where it is unstructured and there are poorly trained facilitators. It is not always the case that it happens.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I understand; it is the environment. As to Better Futures, it looks like the current three-year program expires at the end of June 2010. How will we know whether you have succeeded?

**Mr MURPHY:** By that time we should have published the outcomes of our evaluation and research program. That is commencing in a meaningful way in this financial year with the services that have been funded and are being selected to be part of that.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Do you have any other performance outcomes that you are working to?

**Mr MURPHY:** Obviously, all the services purchased are governed by the DOCS purchasing guidelines. So there is ongoing monitoring of service delivery in terms of client numbers and compliance of the service with various contract provisions. But in terms of knowing how effective the program is, you often need at least that duration of three years or so, so you can judge whether an effective intervention has been made.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** In the evidence-based approach that you are taking to the services you are evaluating, I guess my question is how you are evaluating yourselves in an evidence-based approach so we know in 2010 what worked and what did not work with what Better Futures is trying to do?

**Mr MURPHY:** How we are evaluating ourselves, you mean?

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Yes. Have you set in place some indicators you will be using after the expiry of the current three-year term to evaluate your own performance?

**Mr MURPHY:** I am not sure—are you referring to internal government performance in the coordination of activity?

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Is there any intention to evaluate Better Futures in 2010?



**Mr MURPHY:** The evaluation of Better Futures is commencing in this current financial year in terms of the services that are funded. There is an aspect of that which is further literature review and review of available international evidence. That is commencing this financial year.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** So we can see what difference you made?

**Mr WALSH:** Yes, the intention is to try, through that evaluation, to compare interventions, people having particular interventions, with those who do not receive them. So we have some robust evidence, hopefully, of what works and what does not work.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**ROBYN GAY McKERIHAN**, General Manager, Access and Equity, Department of Education and Training, 35 Bridge Street, Sydney, sworn and examined:

**MARIANNE MILLAN**, Director, Strategic Initiatives, Department of Education and Training, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, affirmed and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** I am advised you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and a brochure setting out information for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees, is that correct?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** That is correct.

**ACTING CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from the New South Wales Government, but not one from the Department of Education and Training, is that correct?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** The New South Wales Department of Education and Training participated in the whole submission.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would either of you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** I will make a very brief one. To give you a bit of background on our areas of expertise, my responsibility as general manager is to look at and to support the State policy directorates of Aboriginal education and training, disability programs, early childhood interagency programs, equity, distance education and student welfare. Marianne's responsibility as director of strategic initiatives, has a major component of the middle years strategy. I guess they are the sorts of areas we would bring to the Committee today.

Over the past three to four years the Department of Education and Training has made some significant changes in addressing the issues of our young people from nine to 14 years. There are three I would just like to highlight at the beginning. The first is a focus on stages of learning within the continuum of learning. We accept that every child goes through a continuum of learning from P, being preschool, through to year 12 and post-compulsory. What we released in 2006 were three three-year, very high-level strategy documents that provided a focus for each of those stages of learning that recognise that students in the middle years have discrete and specific learning needs. The strategy looked at ensuring schools use all the resources at their disposal to meet those specific needs.

The second area of action over the past number of years has been the encouragement of schools to work in a collaboration, in a community of schools, where the high schools and their partner primary schools work together to identify common areas of need for students in their local areas; to share the expertise from primary to secondary and secondary to primary; and to develop initiatives that are able to be shared across all schools.

The third area that I think has supported our endeavours in this area has been a streamlined and accountability approach where we have an increased number of school education directors who have direct line management for each of the principals in their area. On average there is one school education director responsible for 30 schools. Those school education directors are in schools a minimum four times a year—once per term—and are responsible for performance management of principals. Clearly, their implementation of initiatives, programs and priorities to meet the needs of the early years, middle years and later years students is a key focus of that performance management process.

**Ms MILLAN:** In my own directorate, we have specific responsibility for middle years initiatives. We worked on the development of the middle years strategy. We coordinate statewide conferences on behalf of the department in the area of the middle years. There is a major Commonwealth program, the Australian Government Quality Teaching Program, which is located in my directorate. A number of middle years initiatives run statewide from that. Also within the strategic initiatives directorate we have the transition initiative, which is over \$11 million of funding over the next four years to support the transition of students from primary to secondary schools.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Can you describe the department's middle year strategy?

**Ms MILLAN:** I think when we devised the strategy we tried to start from the child rather than from the system and that each child has individual needs—each child is different, is complex—and also try to identify and spread information around the State consistently that children in this age group face particular challenges. It is adolescence, so there are all sorts of hormonal activities going on, on top of the fact that they are moving from the often fairly comfortable environment in the primary school, to a very different environment in the secondary school, where they have multiple teachers. They have to move with bells still every 40 to 50 minutes or so. Their relationship with parents is quite different between primary and secondary students. So, we tried to focus on the child. We wanted people to recognise there were challenges in this particular age group, that we cannot just assume they are empty vessels, they are all the same, and that everything that operates in the schools will suit every child, that there is a need to look at the needs of each of those students.

So, very much a child-centred start with the strategy, but trying to give some statewide messages about how to approach curriculum issues, school organisation issues, working with communities, schools and communities working together in broad terms and also very much a focus on student welfare. These are years where students, in fact, could be at risk in terms of not only behavioural issues because of the shift from primary school to secondary school, but also there may be some learning issues that need a particular focus. So from a curriculum perspective, let's make sure nobody falls through the net. We need to look at it from an individualised approach from a curriculum and welfare perspective. That is in very broad terms.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** As you said, many kids in lower socioeconomic families and communities fall through the net or through the cracks. What programs are in place to get them back to school? There is a high truancy rate in some communities. On the North Coast there is one of what used to be called the truancy officer, now called the home school liaison officer. I know they are pushing and trying to get those kids back to school. What programs are in place to get them back and what programs are in place to bring them up to scratch so that they feel comfortable coming back?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** There is a range of programs that we have in place. I think the difference that we are seeing in the last few years is the fact that the challenges that you identify are not purely and simply primary school challenges or secondary school challenges. One of the huge strengths of having the middle years strategy is that it is equally applicable to both primary schools and high schools. There are a number of funding programs for students who are in areas of high disadvantage. We have a priority schools funding program that encapsulates 573 schools. Those schools represent the most needy 21 per cent of students in our State. Those schools are given additional funding. Their primary objective is to improve the literacy, numeracy and engagement of those students where you have an inclusive environment in a school where students are achieving success and work collaboratively with their community. One of the key messages we have got with schools in high disadvantage areas is that if you work with the community to address things such as attendance issues you will have greater success.

We have 84 home school liaison officers across the State. They work as part of a team. I take your point about there being one home school liaison officer in the area. That home school liaison officer works with a student services team in the regional office and so has many other support structures to work with. We try to take an integrated approach. The message that we are sending to schools is that they need to plan for every child and they need to ensure that they do their analysis of the students' attendance. We recognise that if a student is not attending school, then they will not necessarily improve their learning outcomes. Any school that has an attendance level that is below State average must have an individual plan to address those attendance programs. That is negotiated with the school principal and the school education director and regional support is provided to the achievement of that.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** In relation to the schools that are not of high disadvantage but have half a dozen kids that come from dysfunctional families who have high truancy rates, what is there for them? What powers do you have to get them back to school and, I suppose, put pressure on the family? I know it is not a whole-of-education issue, it is across agencies, but I am asking from your side.

**Ms McKERIHAN:** I believe that if schools have highly problematic issues of a small number of children who have very poor attendance rates, they would be subject to very early intervention with the Home School Liaison Officer. Earlier this year a memorandum was sent out from our Director-General to all of the schools which gave very clear guidelines as far as time frame for intervention and time frame for referral of a concern where the school has done all it can as far as following up parents, phone intervention, home school liaison intervention, looking at the teacher and learning program that is happening in the school, having a look at

counsellor involvement and having a look at the peer support program within the school. All of those things have happened and there has been no improvement, you would then have regional intervention through the home school liaison officer with the family. If that is not successful, it would be referred to the school education director and the school education director would then refer that on for the consideration of some form of prosecution for early intervention. This year is the first time that we have had specific requirements for that intervention. It is rare, but there are cases when it is required.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** What level of English as a second language [ESL] support is given to this age group, given that they are the transition years from primary school to secondary school? Could that process be strengthened at all?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** We have 886, I think it is, English as a second language [ESL] teachers in our schools. With ESL teachers the primary concern is the level of English. So that we will talk about first phase, second phase, third phase learners with a targeted support of intensive English support, particularly with the 9- to 14-year-olds. So if a young child who is a new arrival, may well be a humanitarian refugee, who happens to be 12, 13 or 14, comes into our schools, the first thing they will be provided with is intensive support for up to five terms in an Intensive English Centre or an intensive English high school. If they are in the second semester of year 6 they are also able to enter into an intensive English high school in that respect. That gives them the foundation. It also helps sometimes with the significant cultural adjustment that many of these children need to make.

So it is not only coming in and not knowing the language, it is coming to a very different culture with very different understandings and the separation from their home country. If we are talking about a child nine to eleven and a half, they enter into a primary school. They will go into the primary school, but additional support is provided. They will be given priority support from a school that has an ESL teacher. They may well be in a school with a very small number of students with high-level language needs because of their language background. They will be given additional resources to be able to employ specialist teachers to be able to support those children.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Does this also carry through in terms of homework support?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** There are cases particularly in the secondary side where some of the schools work with non-government agencies or support groups to provide homework support as well.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Could either one of you explain to the Committee how widespread and effective are the mentoring programs that are provided through schools for children and young people in this age group?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** There are a variety of mentoring programs that are being implemented across the school. We have mentoring support through programs such as Plan-it Youth and allied programs. They are in the upper end. So they will usually work with children who are in years 9, 10, 11 and 12. So the area we are talking about is in the higher level. We will also use peer support programs to provide mentoring. We find that extremely effective where students in years 11 and 12 will be a partner, buddy or mentor to students in years 7. Through the middle years strategy there is a very strong mentoring program where students from SRCs in their partner high school will go in and work very closely with years 5 and 6 students in their partner primary schools to provide them with the assurance that when they make that transition from primary school to high school all those horrible things they have heard along the way will not happen to them. So the mentoring support for 9 to 14—our experience shows that support by peers, older peers, is very often much more successful than support from else.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Marianne, Asperger's and autism—what level of support is provided for these students, knowing that there is soon to be an increasing epidemic? You are the Director of Strategic Initiatives, are you not?

**Ms MILLAN:** Yes.

**Ms McKERIHAN:** However, it comes in under the disability program, so I might address that, if it is alright. We do have an increase in the instance of students who are being diagnosed with autism and Asperger's. There are a number of things we are doing. There is an increasing percentage of students who are integrating in the mainstream who will present with either mild autistic tendencies to quite severe autistic tendencies. Those

students are eligible for funding support. Funding support is determined by the level of learning need to access the curriculum for that young child. It will range from a very mild level, where there is additional support provided for teachers in programming support for that individual child, to the more severe where they are actually provided with a teacher's aide-special, who will work with that child to ensure access to the curriculum. We also have an increasing number of autism outreach provisions, so they are providing specific support for students in the mainstream. We have established a number of autistic classes that again are providing individualised programs for those students. Those classes are in both the primary and secondary side.

One of the things we do where we use regional planning teams is that they have the capacity to shift the profile of their support class provision depending upon need. What we see is that there is a shift of students who may have a physical disability into the mainstream, so that where we had a number of special classes for physical disability, we do not need as many of those classes. A regional committee will ascertain the needs of the region and they may well reorientate a support class to meet the area of autism.

The other strategy we are using with autism is a specific and dedicated training program for every one of our school counsellors. We have more than 790 school counsellors across the State. They are receiving specific training in the identification and support of students with autism. A very important component of that is the knowledge of what are the other government services, be they in the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Community Services or Health, so that the school counsellor can work with the parent to provide them with that information and to make those entrees to providing support for the family because it can be extremely demanding on a family with a young child who has autism or Asperger's tendencies. They would be the areas we are moving towards.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Have you evaluated parental satisfaction with the programs for autism or Asperger's?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** We have not had a formal evaluation of the satisfaction. Anecdotally the families who have their children in either a mainstream or a segregated or separate setting appear to be very satisfied. One of the bases of the type of service a child gets is the fact that it is parent choice, which means that the parent is provided with all of the information about what services are available for their child and they determine whether they really want an integrated setting or a separate setting. One of the things we could look at is the change between those settings. We know that parents often will choose an integrated setting in primary school and then move to a more separate setting in high school. We also know that there is an increasing demand for the specialist classes in secondary because they have had the support of a specialist class in primary. I would infer from that that they are satisfied or happy with the service.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** What research are you conducting into consulting your stakeholder groups as to what are their needs and whether their needs are being addressed.

**Ms McKERIHAN:** The Directorate of Disability Programs works very closely—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I am talking about all groups, I am not confining my question to disability now, and I am particularly emphasising this age group. What data do you rely on to know what they think?

**Ms MILLAN:** If I could use an example of the transition strategy, which is new and we are rolling that out over the next few years, there will be an evaluation component to that strategy, so the schools receive funding. There are specific things they are expected to do with that funding, the primary and secondary schools working together, the whole emphasis on communities of schools working together. We will be collecting data about what they have done with that money to in fact build those relationships.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I guess I am asking at an earlier stage, when you decided to have that program, what input did you have in designing that program?

**Ms MILLAN:** In designing the program and certainly in designing the middle-years strategy, if I could go back to that, we did have consultation with the parents and citizens group and they had input into the strategy along the way.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Is that one parents and citizens group?

**Ms MILLAN:** The Parents and Citizens Federation, yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** At school level, in terms of the teachers, the kids and their families, have you had surveys done to find out what their needs are and what they are thinking?

**Ms MILLAN:** No, not in relation to this. We certainly had input from principals and some teachers and parents through the Parents and Citizens Federation in the development of this.

**Ms McKERIHAN:** On a more general basis there is an expectation that every school does a review of their service delivery for the parents on an annual basis.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I know that the schools are talking to the parents. Is the department talking to the parents, because the schools and the parents often feel that these programs are not discussed with them, they just arrive and there is no understanding of how you worked out that this is what the need is?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** When we are developing any of the initiatives we work extensively with the State bodies, the parents and citizens associations—the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [AECG] is integral to any program that we run in Aboriginal education and training. If we are working in the disability areas we work very closely with family advocacy and the range of support structures there. What we try to do is deliver, and the strategies are a very good example. They are a broadbased high-level statement of expectation. What is then expected is that schools do work with their local community and specifically say they wish to be able to do this, this and this, to be able to address the needs in their area or on a community of schools basis.

In the Office of Schools plan there will be a strategy that will talk about the implementation of targeted strategies to improve the attendance level of students in schools and there will be a whole range of resources, support and guidance that goes along with that. Schools in their school planning process, in cooperation with their school education director, then will take that information and say, "In this school, it needs to be these sorts of things". So we try to work in a complementary process rather than saying that every school will implement a Count Me In Too indigenous program. We would say what we need to do is have a targeted program that addresses the literacy or numeracy needs of the targeted group of students. That is the way we try to manage that process.

**ACTING CHAIR:** What difference has the SchoolLink Program, the partnership between Health and the Department of Education for mental health, made to the level of mental health support available to school students?

**Ms McKERIHAN:** It has ensured that school counsellors right across the State have up to date information on the types of interventions that are most appropriate within the school setting. It has also provided that invaluable networking with local health officers. Clinical psychologists are very proficient in their own area of expertise, but this has provided them with a much-needed specific amount of information in the area of mental health, as well as enabling them to make essential connections with their counterparts in health at the local level. If we want to see true interagency support to assist these families—it is not just to assist students—that is where it happens. It happens at the local level. Our field staff—in this circumstance I include school counsellors as our field staff—need to know who to ring in those urgent cases or in the early intervention process.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee today. It is much appreciated.

**Ms McKERIHAN:** Thank you for giving us the opportunity.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**ANDREW DOWLING**, Principal Research Fellow, Australian Council for Educational Research, Alexandria, Sydney, New South Wales, sworn and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you for appearing before the Committee today. I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference?

**Dr DOWLING:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** You have also been issued with a brochure entitled "Information for Witnesses Appearing before Committees." Is that correct?

**Dr DOWLING:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from the Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER]. Do you wish that submission to form part of your evidence today and to be made public?

**Dr DOWLING:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee?

**Dr DOWLING:** I am Principal Research Fellow appearing before the Committee on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer of ACER, Professor Geoff Masters.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement before Committee members ask you questions?

**Dr DOWLING:** I would. The Australian Council for Educational Research was pleased to respond to the Committee's invitation to make a submission. ACER is a non-government, non-profit organisation that receives its funding from contract research, not from government. Our researchers have compiled their independent views on issues that they consider important relating to the inquiry's terms of reference. I will endeavour to answer any questions that you might have about my colleague's submissions, but I would like to identify some common themes in our submission. I refer, first, to the importance of teacher quality, and, second, to the need for an excellent education for all children aged 9 to 14, regardless of the diversity of that group.

I will deal with the first point. In our submission we have emphasised the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement, and there is a section dealing specifically with that issue. When we talk about indigenous kids needing excellent school leadership and good role models, or the effect that teachers have on student attitudes, intentions and participation, that is what we mean. Teachers have a very powerful impact on the students that they teach. There was once a time when teachers were not thought to have much of an impact on student achievement, but that is not the case now as evidence continues to mount about the importance of quality teachers.

There is a bit of a paradox here. We know that teacher quality is strongly related to student outcomes, but quality teaching is notoriously difficult to define. People generally know it when they see it, but it is difficult to categorise, much less measure. The point I am making here is that the assessment of teacher quality is, in a sense, a new science where definition and measurement problems abound. Great leaps are currently taking place in developing more robust data on teacher quality. However, the study is still in its infancy. There are other ways to achieve the main goal to improve teacher quality, particularly by looking at how other systems select their teachers.

Generally, there are two options that a school system can use to select teachers. The first option selects people before they start their teacher training and limits places in the training program to those who are selected. The second option leaves the selection process until after prospective teachers have graduated from teacher training and then selects the best graduates to become teachers. Australia, like most of the rest of the world, uses the second option. However, that option helps to make teacher training a low-status program which, in turn, makes teaching a low-status profession. Failing to control entry leads to an oversupply of candidates, which, in turn, leads to fewer job offers, which, in turn, makes the courses less appealing to more able students.

Teacher training becomes an option for students who have few other options available to them. The top performing school systems in the world, such as Finland and Singapore, use the first option. In Singapore, candidates are formally employed by the Ministry of Education and paid a salary during their training. Restricting entry increases the prestige of the course and the amount of money that can be spent per student, and potentially it avoids a bad selection decision that can lead to 40 years of poor teaching. In 2006 the New South Wales Government argued to a Federal inquiry into teacher education that Australia should move to the first option—that teachers' courses should be governed by supply-side planning rather than demand-driven provision.

The argument was that the graduates that universities produce should be more aligned to the needs of the profession and employers. That would avoid many graduates not being employed, or of them training in areas of oversupply, such as primary teaching. But the planning of teacher training also has the potential of increasing quality as well as avoiding wastage, which was the main focus of the New South Wales argument. I move to the second theme of our submission—the need for an excellent education for all. In regard to this theme, children aged 9 to 14 are diverse groups in relation to their abilities, goals, attitudes, and even leisure and sporting activities.

Our submission makes reference to this diversity but it also emphasises the need for excellence, despite that diversity. That is particularly evident with indigenous students but it is true for all students, especially those in need of additional assistance. Systems need to provide early support and to continue that support when there is evidence that it is working. The fact remains that educational achievement drops for all students during their middle years of schooling. This trend has been found in both national and international tests. ACER argues that the answer lies in knowing, in more detail, what works. Money is important but so, too, is a knowledge of where it is to be spent.

Governments around the world spend a massive amount of money on school education—\$2 trillion in 2006 alone—but the performance of school systems has barely improved in decades. For example, research in the world's longest running mathematics and science study—the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study—found that over the period 1970 to 1994 nearly every Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development country witnessed an enormous expansion in expenditures for pupils, but their maths and science performance either flat-lined or deteriorated. This year, Australia will spend about \$40 billion on school education, yet the performance of its students decreases on national benchmarks as they progress through school.

The question of whether money matters, or the size of its effect, is the subject of heated academic debate. ACER believes that money does matter, but that in itself is an uninteresting question. The more important question is: Where is money most effective? Educationalists need to know in more detail than they currently know now what works to improve educational opportunities for children aged 9 to 14. This Committee knows that governments can no longer justify their performance in education in relation to inputs, that is, in relation to the amount of new money that they have provided, the number of new teachers that they have employed, or the range of new computers that they have installed.

Governments need to show how they have transformed those dollars into student achievement results. Output measures are the new bottom line in education. ACER argues that those output measures could extend further into education—to the level where school programs are formally evaluated to establish their effectiveness. It remains the case that there is not a culture of measuring and reporting a program's effectiveness at the school level in Australia. That needs to change if school funding is to be used more effectively, in particular, to improve the engagement and achievement at school of children aged 9 to 14.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** How can we help to encourage young Aboriginal youths in their transition from primary school to high school and enable them to feel comfortable with being at high school? They are dragging behind in their scholastic endeavours and they then drop out of schools, on many occasions because they are embarrassed by not being able to keep up.

**Dr DOWLING:** The point we make in our submission is that many factors influence indigenous engagement in education, for example, the relationship between health and education. A common cause of problems amongst indigenous kids is a condition known as otitis media, which is a hearing condition. Amongst the school population as a whole about 3 per cent of children suffer from hearing problems, but amongst indigenous kids it is 9 per cent—that is, three times the percentage. Not being able to hear what is said in class obviously would impact on a child's ability to succeed in class.



**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Is it going unnoticed?

**Dr DOWLING:** No, I think people know that the condition exists. Obviously, efforts are underway at the moment to try to improve that. Studies are consistently finding—and this has always been known—that what influences engagement in education is success in education. Just as you have wider problems to do with health so, too, are there other intergenerational problems for indigenous kids coming from families where education is not valued. Obviously, every Aboriginal parent wants the best for his or her child, just like any other parent. However, the fact remains that the completion of year 12, or of tertiary studies, will often influence the value that is then placed on completing that for children.

At the moment we are getting a perpetuation of that. For example, the retention rates to year 12 for students as a whole in Australia is 80 per cent. So 80 per cent of kids stay in year 12, but for Aboriginal kids it is 40 per cent, which is half that percentage. Not only are they the subject of this intergenerational problem; they will also perpetuate that problem. In answer to your question about what we can do, I do not think there is any easy answer. A whole raft of activities in health and opportunities must be provided to them to assist them to succeed. That would improve the situation.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** How important is it to address the literacy demands created by new technology such as the use of online resources? How would you suggest that that issue should be addressed?

**Dr DOWLING:** I might get you to explain your question a little further. Literacy, in general, is a fundamental predictor of success in life. By literacy I mean that there are different levels of literacy. Being able to read something is one level of literacy, but being able to read and understand it, or read it and critically appraise it and understand what your position is in relation to it, is a different type of literacy—the type of literacy for which schools should be aiming. Referring to the new demands of computer literacy, I think kids are more au fait with computers than we are. Exactly what do you mean by computer literacy?

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** This morning schoolchildren made some comments about it. They were concerned about the loss of literacy because of computers.

**Dr DOWLING:** I see.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** It would be interesting to see whether or not we can get past the point of being concerned about literacy being lost and take into account the new technology and how both can be managed.

**Dr DOWLING:** I am not aware of any research that comments specifically on that. Obviously research has been done, but I am not aware of it. I imagine that there are concerns about technology impacting negatively on literacy. I am sure that those concerns have been around for a long time since the invention of television. People are always concerned about technological improvements disrupting traditional reading patterns or traditional definitions of literacy. The fundamental need for literacy, which I mentioned before, remains constant and is a constant challenge and objective of schools. I imagine that the current use of computers, if anything, would be an aid to literacy rather than a barrier or a threat to it.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** In your presentation you place an emphasis on the quality of teaching. Could you explain to the Committee what clear initiatives you would like to see implemented to improve the quality of teaching?

**Dr DOWLING:** Recruitment is a significant issue. Obviously this Committee does not have the power to change that because the funding of universities is largely a Federal responsibility. The situation we have now is that universities enrol students into teaching courses, depending on the number of quotas that they have to fill, which is not necessarily a sensible way to proceed. They will fill those places for which they have Commonwealth funding, so the tertiary entrance score may be quite low. I think the recruitment of teachers is a key issue. The other issue obviously is salary.

Our organisation recently prepared a paper for the Business Council of Australia which argued very strongly that although teaching has a good starting salary compared to other professions it does not have a comparable salary progression as you continue through the profession. Even though it could be said that people who go into teaching do it for altruistic reasons and that money is not important to them, I believe that that is a

false argument. By using that argument we are hiding behind the fact that society does not value teachers very much. People who are in there obviously are not in it for the money because they are not earning much money.

However, there is evidence to show that money is detracting from recruiting potentially good graduates who may have considered teaching as a career but who do not. I think that the mechanism for selecting teachers, salary progressions and professional development should be addressed. Australia obviously needs a central national body to certify teacher education courses. Interestingly, the Australian Council of Deans of Education has been receptive to that idea—of having an external body that evaluates education courses. That in itself would increase the quality of teaching and there would also be a central body that measures differences in the quality of teachers. As I said, there is not much data about this factor. I will stop there.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** You refer to output measures being the new bottom line. I agree with you that that is desirable but I struggle to think of examples of that. Can you see where output measures are being used in education—in schools—to great effect?

**Dr DOWLING:** Yes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Can you please expand on that and how it might be able to assist us in the nine to 14 age group?

**Dr DOWLING:** Not at all. I will go overseas before coming back to Australia. Output measures is a free market reform that has come into education related to the concept of accountability—holding schools and the systems that run schools to account. A classic example is the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States, which was introduced by President Bush in January 2002. It is referred to colloquially as the "No Child Left Untested" Act. Basically, that Act introduced an incredible array of testing—standardised achievement tests—for students that provides information not only to school systems but also to students and their parents.

That information will be used to penalise schools that are not performing to scratch and students will be encouraged to leave schools that are not performing to certain benchmarks. This is an output measure as defined by standardised student achievement tests. That is what we mean by an output measure. Australia has quite an impressive architecture for non-financial measurement in education—by that I mean student outcome data. This year there is a national assessment program in literacy and numeracy. The United States is an example of a high-stakes testing regime, where penalties attach to poor performance. Australia has got this impressive architecture of output measures in terms of student performance but it is not high stakes.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** So is the US more responsive to the information it is getting from the tests, or does it make no difference?

**Dr DOWLING:** There is huge debate as to the effect of this, and definitive research is not yet available—as I said, it was introduced in 2002. I understand the general consensus is that it is on track but there have been huge debates among quite influential people within the education community in the United States, who say that any gains you see in test results are simply as a result of teachers teaching to the test, which bears little relationship to an improvement in student learning, broadly defined. So I think there are real dangers in terms of that high-stakes regime. It is interesting—most of the highest-performing OECD countries according to the Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, are not high stakes and they also do not have national systems of testing in the same way that Australia does. Finland does not, and it is the top-performing country. That is what I mean by accountability: a system that gets information, if it is focused on the student, on what that student actually achieves in terms of performance. An output measure could be applied to teachers or schools, but often it is applied to students.

**ACTING CHAIR:** To follow on, you talked about the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement. We all know that student achievement in objective exams is strongly socioeconomically determined. How can you measure a good teacher—

**Dr DOWLING:** In that context.

**ACTING CHAIR:** In any context.

**Dr DOWLING:** That is a good question. There are a lot of things. The first thing is the notion of value-added assessment—which I will come back to. It is one possibility.

**ACTING CHAIR:** We know about value added.

**Dr DOWLING:** The other thing is that research generally occurs in this area only on that which can be measured. So most of what can be measured about teachers is: first, how long they have been teaching; and, second, what qualifications they have. Those are the two things that are often used to determine quality but they may have very little to do with teacher quality. They know, for example, that teacher quality rapidly increases after about two or three years. There is a steep learning curve and then it plateaus. In terms of subject matter knowledge, the relationship does not seem to be particularly strong. Although obviously teacher quality is what teachers know and can do—deep subject matter is obviously important—it is what they do in terms of engaging students that is the really tricky bit. Establishing measures of teacher quality is a huge challenge. But I think progress is being made here by the teacher institutes that are around, and the move towards establishing standards for teachers. I think that is a really positive move in terms of beginning to categorise or classify and then perhaps measure what we mean by this area.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Andrew, you referred to research about thinking about a career. What implications do you think that will have for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds?

**Dr DOWLING:** The section towards the end of our submission?

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Yes.

**Dr DOWLING:** What is really interesting about that is I think the conclusion we made in that aspect of our submission is that students should be exposed to a wide variety of options when it comes to a future career. For me, the main implication of that is that it is really silly for a system to start streaming students at a young age into particular vocational directions. Just last year the OECD conducted research based on a quarter of a million student test results from 37 countries from the international assessment known as PISA, the Program for International Student Assessment. What they found was really interesting. It was a double-barrelled study on the performance of students and the equity of students. They found that free market reforms in education often work well and have a positive effect. The reforms they referred to specifically are accountability—what we were talking about before—school choice, or parental choice, and autonomy of decision making at the school level.

Those three things are positively related to both performance and equity—by equity I mean that the performance is distributed evenly. The one thing they found in both studies was negatively related was the tendency to stream kids at a young age into particular vocational courses. It seems that it is really silly to do that. I am not too sure if that is specifically what your question is about. But in terms of vocations and careers for kids, our submission argues that you need to expose them to a wide range, and that kids from low socioeconomic backgrounds often have a lower floor for what they think they are capable of doing. Even though, obviously, they are equally as capable as other socio-economic groups, they often have lower expectations of themselves. So it is important not to stream at a young age.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee and for your illuminating answers to questions; it is very much appreciated by all members of the Committee. Thank you also for your detailed submission.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Do you have information on the school leaving age for various States and countries? Perhaps the question could be taken on notice.

**Dr DOWLING:** I will have a look.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** It would be interesting to know how the New South Wales school leaving age compares with that of the other States, and also with that of other countries.

**Dr DOWLING:** I will ask around.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**GILLIAN ELIZABETH CALVERT**, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Commission for Children and Young People, Level 2/407 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, affirmed and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and a brochure entitled "Information for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees", is that correct?

**Ms CALVERT:** That is correct.

**ACTING CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from the Commission for Children and Young People. Do you wish the submission to form part of your evidence today and to be made public?

**Ms CALVERT:** I do.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement before the commencement of questions?

**Ms CALVERT:** No, I think we should go straight into questions.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Why do you consider it is important to have an understanding of what wellbeing means to children and to focus on the positive aspects to children's lives?

**Ms CALVERT:** Traditionally, notions of wellbeing have been designed by adults, and the elements of wellbeing that have been seen to be important have been decided by adults. I think adults have a very important contribution to make to that debate, but I also think that children's views are important as well. By asking children what their view of wellbeing is, we get to see the world through their eyes. I think that then helps us to understand what is important for them and how we as adults might then provide services or activities, or respond to their needs. I think that when we rely only on adults' perceptions, we are responding to adults' views of children, not children's views of children.

When we asked children what was important about their wellbeing or how they understood their wellbeing, they talked very clearly about the importance of having positive messages about themselves, a positive view of themselves. We know ourselves that the messages we get from other people partly determine our view of ourselves, and it is the same with kids—in fact, it is probably more so with kids in some ways. So it is really important to have positive views of children and to see children in a positive way, because that is what then gets fed back to them.

I also think that most kids do pretty well in our community. If we continually focus on the negative, we are not picking up on most of what children's life experience is about, which is essentially positive sorts of experiences. The analogy that comes to mind is that if we think about health, we can talk about health or we can talk about sickness. We think it is probably better for children that we talk from the health perspective, for example, rather than from a sickness perspective all the time.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** During the last term of Parliament the Committee on Children and Young People conducted an inquiry into children in the built environment. A number of the Committee's recommendations related to the Office of Children and Young People. During some of the previous committee hearings you have referred to a project you were doing with Wollongong City Council in relation to urban planning processes and involving children and young people. Are you able to talk about that a little? Are you able to tell the Committee whether similar types of projects are going on elsewhere?

**Ms CALVERT:** We have two broad types of projects underway in the built environment area. One is with Wollongong City Council, where the council is trying to experiment with ways in which it can include children in decision making, and increasing their participation in the council's work and activity. The other part of our project is that we are trialling a set of indicators for what makes a child-friendly community, and that is with a number of councils around New South Wales.

We hope that from those two pieces of work we will be able to produce some tools and resources for councils that will help them to adapt their practices so they are more participatory of children and more inclusive of children, and also where they, in effect, can become more child friendly. Both those projects are

underway, and we anticipate both projects being available at the beginning of next year or in the first half of next year. We would then back that up with time to work with some of the peak organisations of councils, such as the Local Government and Shires Associations and so on, to provide training and support to councils to use those tools.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Do you envisage that when you get to that point you would involve the youth councils that operate within local government?

**Ms CALVERT:** One of the things that the Wollongong experiment is doing is to involve its youth council. It is also looking at other ways in which it can involve children and young people in decision making. Youth councils tend to be older kids, rather than younger kids, and we need to look at all age ranges of children. One of the indicators of a child-friendly community is the level of participation and involvement of children and young people. Again, youth councils might be one of the things that council puts down as an indicator of their child friendliness, if you like. So, yes, they are involved, but there are a myriad of ways in which they can be involved.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** In your submission you mention that the move towards changes in housing—such as from low-density to high-density housing—is having an impact on young people; they are having less space and so on. Could you outline to the Committee how organisations providing services for adults, such as housing and mental health services, could more adequately address the needs of their clients' children?

**Ms CALVERT:** In relation to adult services becoming more child focused, a big part of it is a mind shift. What happens at the moment is that when services see adults they simply see the adult; they do not realise that often behind that adult there may be a number of children, and that what they do with that adult may impact on those children. How they decide what to do with those children needs to take into account the fact that that person is a parent, or has a relationship or responsibility to the children. So, they need to change the way they view the adult and work with the adult.

The other shift that needs to occur is that they need to stop passing the buck on children and saying that it is someone else's responsibility, that I am just here to look after the adult. They need to say I also need to look after the children and what is it that I can do as an agency or as a service provider to respond to the needs of children? So, there are two things. One, to see the adult more than as adult status, they may also be parents, and you have to take that into account; secondly, if they are parents, you also need to think about how you provide services or you need to assess if they are required and what sort of services and support those children need.

The United Kingdom is beginning to do some interesting work in this area. But, that is really what we are talking about. It is something we have been really promoting in our submission to the Wood commission of inquiry into child protection services, because we think at the moment that blindness in relation to children enables agencies to shift the responsibility and risk onto someone else rather than share the risk and responsibility, which we think all agencies and adults should do in relation to children.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Can I ask you about kids and the way they solve problems? I had a great example of this last night. I took my 11-year-old to see *Hamlet*. It was a big punt and I was worried whether he would understand it. All the way through he said, "I know that," "I know that, mum." I was really impressed and at the end I said, "Lachlan, you did really well with that." He said, "Yes, I already knew the story." I said, "How did you know the story?" It was from *The Simpsons* episode. I do not know whether this is a good thing or a bad thing. From his perspective, he is problem solving and understanding and he does not think it is good or bad. What I am saying is kids are thinking differently and problem solving differently from us, and what is enough for them is a different definition from what is enough for us, if you see what I am saying. I was thinking I am never going to understand this. In an inquiry like ours, trying to understand the needs and the capacity of kids that age, we cannot, as adults, can we? We have to try to find a way to deal with that but it is true to say that kids are solving problems very differently today. They have different technologies and things, do they not?

**Ms CALVERT:** They have different tools and resources. I do not know that they have different capacities. I think the underlying brain processes for problem solving for 12-year-olds is probably pretty much the same it has been for a very long time. I say that because our brains have developed in response to 20 million, or whatever it is, years of development, and you cannot overturn that quickly. So, I think the processes are probably the same. My sense is that we have more tools available to help problem solve and I also suspect what

a 12-year-old knows about today is more than they knew about 500 years ago, but what I know about now is far more than what someone my age knew about 500 years ago as well. Yes, there are differences but fundamentally I do not think there are differences.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** But between our ages though?

**Ms CALVERT:** Well, between me when I was 12-year-old and Lachlan—

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** No, you as an adult and him as a 12-year-old?

**Ms CALVERT:** Yes, very much. There are enormous differences between me as an adult. There are differences between me, as a 50-year-old adult, and a 20-year-old adult, and a 12-year-old child. Absolutely there are differences. We need to understand those differences and to take those differences into account—not necessarily to disadvantage people because of that but to take account of that difference.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** What they need to cope during those transition years, I guess, is what I am talking about. Their ability to problem solve and the way they think about things is obviously affecting how stressed they are feeling or how not stressed they are feeling.

**Ms CALVERT:** All of those things would impact on their capacity to problem solve. So, a child who is in a stressful environment will have less capacity in some ways to problem solve than a child who is not in a stressful environment. As adults we know that as well. We have that same experience. If we are stressed we do not always problem solve effectively. On the other hand, we might have a better problem-solving capacity if we have really heightened stress levels as well. But I am going to say no more about that as I think it is in the minds of neurologists and people like that.

**ACTING CHAIR:** That brings beyond to public health. How do you consider a public health approach to child protection would differ from the approaches that are currently in place?

**Ms CALVERT:** We do not have a public health approach to child protection at the moment. What we have is an approach that overemphasises the statutory response. A public health approach shifts that and says that we need to look at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of protecting children. At the moment I think we probably look a bit at the secondary prevention levels and primarily at the tertiary levels. By that I mean primary prevention being promoting wellbeing, if you like, and generally trying to grow up children and support families in a wellbeing way. So, that would be providing child and maternal support services, providing paid maternity leave that enabled mothers to look after their infants and so on. The secondary prevention level is trying to identify families or children where risk is beginning to emerge and to reduce that vulnerability. So, that would be services like sustained nurse home visiting or, in the case of the nine to 14 year old it might be the drug and alcohol services that work with parents and children to reduce alcohol abuse and so on. Then, there is the tertiary level, which is the statutory child protection service and treatment services and the out of home care services that are available.

So, to shift our system from what we have currently to a public health model requires much greater investment in the primary and secondary levels of protecting children. That also means whole population measures with primary prevention and also quite targeted levels with disadvantaged groups or high-risk groups.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Based on your research, what are the most important types of flexible work practices for parents with children in this age group?

**Ms CALVERT:** In the nine to 14 age group?

**ACTING CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms CALVERT:** We thought about that. I think probably one of the most critical things is job security. We know if there is job insecurity, that leads to increased stress for parents and increased stress has a direct impact on children and family dynamics. So, certainly good job security is an important aspect. Coupled with that is the quality of part-time work and casualised work. A lot of families choose to have one parent work part time but often that part-time work is low quality and that also is creating stress in adults, which then is felt by children. So, looking at the quality of part-time work is something we really need to think about so that we are reducing stress in family lives and impacts on children.

We also think there needs to be a broader range of paid parental leave so that if children are ill, parents can access parental leave on behalf of the children. This has become more of an issue as hospitals have moved to reduce at-bed time and bed nights. Children will be discharged early from hospital. That is good for them to be out of the hospital environment, but they are discharged early when they are still not recovered. In the past they might be in hospital until they were pretty well recovered. Now they are discharged still requiring quite high levels of care. But we have not shifted our thinking about parents' leave in the workforce to account for that shift in the health system. As well, differences in flexibility around starting time and finishing time and also the flexibility to say, "No, I want standard hours." Some parents have said that they preferred to be able to start at nine and finish at three, for example, because they know that they can get home to their children at the time that the children leave school. I also refer to the recognition that you should be able to leave work. The increased 24/7 nature of work is also leading to stress. So the capacity to be flexible, as I said, but also to say no to work is another thing we think needs to happen. Also, the regulation of work in unsociable hours, which is a bit connected to the 24/7 issue. We need to be able to regulate that work does not occur in unsociable hours because that also directly impacts on children.

**ACTING CHAIR:** A submission today from one of the primary schools said that large numbers of years 5 and 6 children are at home by themselves. Have you found that?

**Ms CALVERT:** It is certainly something that kids have raised with us and something that I find concerning. I think it reflects our failure again of that example of the workforce not keeping up with the needs of children or the way in which families need to operate. There are a number of ways in which to deal with that. One is to have flexible working hours, reduced working hours, but you do not want that part-time work or reduced working hours at the expense of the quality of work. So there are a number of things that business needs to do to come on board to help parents raise their children.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** One of the issues that came up was access to money. Children talked about having access to enough money to buy clothes and so on. Has the commission looked at the issue of how much money is appropriate for younger children? I know it is different for every family, but there is not a great deal of guidance for parents as their children move through the different age groups about a healthy amount of money and a good way to provide it.

**Ms CALVERT:** No, we have not done anything around pocket money, if that is what you are talking about.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** A particular school raised it as one of the most important issues, and accessing entertainment. I suppose they were talking about moving from dependence to independence, and the issue of money comes up in that context. It was very interesting.

**Ms CALVERT:** There are a couple of things about that. One is that as they move from dependence to independence, in our wellbeing study children talked about the need to negotiate that and their desire for parents to negotiate with children. They recognise that there are boundaries and limits set by parents and teachers. But they do start to talk much more about wanting to negotiate and have a seat at the table. In relation to access to things, certainly kids have spoken to us about not getting access to fresh fruit and vegetables—aspects of poverty, if you like. As a result, we have put in for an ARC grant to look at children's experience of poverty, which I hope will be successful because there is not a lot of Australian research on how children experience poverty. The assumption is that if we study family poverty we are studying children's poverty. We do not know whether that is the case.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** It is household based.

**Ms CALVERT:** Yes. Over time that might help us understand aspects of that part of money anyway.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** Would you be aware of health promotion, social marketing and public education campaigns that address parental behaviours that have been conducted in other jurisdictions? If so, how effective have you found them to be?

**Ms CALVERT:** I note that the Parenting Centre in Victoria does a lot of public education, information and support work with parents. That would be one of the places that I would start to have a look at. I am not aware of any. Certainly there are not a lot of mass media campaigns, and those that are around I am not sure

have been evaluated in Australia. I know that New Zealand has run some around corporal punishment. I think that was quite successful. That was evaluated and so on. So there are examples of social marketing both in Australia and our close neighbours, but I have to do more research to find how many of those have really been evaluated. I think there is a sense that social marketing by itself has limited application.

I think that is partly one of the things that drove Professor Matt Saunders to try to develop his Triple P parenting program, which looks at a whole range of public education, public awareness and working with parents in parent education groups right through to clinical intervention. That has been evaluated and found to be very positive. I know that when they ran a television program in the United Kingdom where they followed six families through the Triple P parenting program that they did pre- and post-testing, so before the television program and after the television program, on parenting capacity. At the end of the program there had been a significant shift, and I mean significant in the statistical sense, in parenting capacity. That is one anecdotal example.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** In terms of children and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, perhaps some of the new refugee groups, getting access to Kids Help Line and similar services, does the commission have any programs or projects aimed at giving these young people greater access? One of the comments made this morning was about having some anonymity in asking someone for help as opposed to going through the school. Are there any such projects?

**Ms CALVERT:** When we first established we looked at whether we should set up an information service for kids. We made the decision not to because the Kids Help Line was so successful. They have, I think, over a 90 per cent recognition rate by children and they have been able to attract corporate sponsorship to market themselves to children. They have also expanded to provide e-counselling as well, using the Internet and SMS texting. They have in place a structure and a system for anonymous trained supervisors and support counsellors to respond to children's needs. We prefer to support and work with them rather than replicate and set up our own system in New South Wales.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Earlier you talked about children's needs and families' needs and you mentioned when we look at children in poverty we are looking at the family in poverty. The Premier's Department had been looking at a multiagency approach to dysfunctional families, involving Health, Community Services, Housing, Juvenile Justice, Education, Police working together. Do you support this and do you believe there should be a stronger emphasis through communities?

**Ms CALVERT:** Yes, I do support those agencies working together. I particularly support them working together in their planning of services and their planning of what they are going to do. It may be that not every child needs that full range of services, but we know that all children potentially need access to all services. So that when I am at Lismore and I am sitting down planning for services or activities for children in my area, I need to do that with all those agencies and, I would suggest, with some of the big non-government agencies so that we are not stepping over each other and we can together say that there is a gap here and work out together how we are going to solve it.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** Sharing of information?

**Ms CALVERT:** Sharing of data and information and planning, jointly planning, and sharing our budgets, because I may not have the money by myself to fill that particular gap, but those three agencies together might have the money to fill the gap.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** I am not putting words in your mouth, but you are talking basically of case-working with the family and the children?

**Ms CALVERT:** No, I am talking about planning a service system and we need to jointly plan our service system. I think if we get that right it makes it much easier for the caseworkers to work together. I think asking caseworkers to work together when our planning and our service system is not sorted out makes it difficult for caseworkers. For me, the priority is getting that service system sorted out and all bases covered and I think then it becomes much easier for the caseworkers to work jointly. I think, no matter how you cut it, there are always going to be difficulties with caseworkers working together. I do not know of any country that has really sorted that out perfectly well. I also think that if you are serious about getting caseworkers to work together you not only have to sort out your planning system, but you have to be prepared to give the caseworkers the time to negotiate with other agencies and talk with other agencies. You would also be serious



about giving them the opportunity to do joint training with those other agencies, so that they get to know them, and frequently the tendency perhaps has been to say to work together, but not give them the resources, the time, the support and the training that they need to put that into practice.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Are our privacy laws inhibiting your ability to deliver the best services to children?

**Ms CALVERT:** In some ways, yes, I think they are at a couple of levels. It may not be so much the privacy laws but our anxiety about privacy. When I talk about being able to jointly design the service system, you have to know about the kids. You de-identify them, but we have no mechanism for tracking children because they get this bit and they get this bit, and we do not have a way of joining those two bits together, so I think at that level there are real problems.

I have been watching what has been happening in the United Kingdom where each child gets a unique identifier which enables them to then in an anonymous way be tracked for the purposes of planning service systems, service models and so on. I think at that level there is a weakness and I think in particular in certain service aspects, such as child protection, there are problems with privacy laws getting in the way.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Education and community services always seem to be hitting problems over privacy.

**(The witness withdrew)**

**(Short adjournment)**

**IAN GEORGE BAKER**, Director of Education Policy and Programs, Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales, Level 9, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney,

**ANNETTE SYLVIA CROTHERS**, Assistant Director Programs, Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales, Level 9, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney,

**MARGARET MARY CHITTICK**, Senior Professional Officer, Catholic Education Office, Wollongong Diocese, 86 Market Street, Wollongong, and

**CAROLYN JEANETTE HADLEY**, Senior Professional Officer, Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales, Level 9, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney, sworn and examined:

**ACTING CHAIR:** I am advised that you have been issued with a copy of the Committee's terms of reference and also a brochure entitled "Information for witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees", is that correct?

**Ms CROTHERS:** Yes.

**Mrs CHITTICK:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** The Committee has received a submission from your organisation. Do you wish the submission to form part of your evidence today and be made public?

**Mr BAKER:** Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR:** In what capacity are you appearing before the Committee today?

**Mr BAKER:** I am here as Executive Officer of the Catholic Education Social Welfare Coordinating Committee.

**Ms CROTHERS:** I am part of the Catholic Education Social Welfare Coordinating Committee.

**Mrs CHITTICK:** I am a psychologist and I am here as a representative of Catholic welfare.

**Mrs HADLEY:** I am here as a representative of the Catholic Education Social Welfare Coordinating Committee.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Would any of you care to make an opening statement before we commence questions?

**Mr BAKER:** Yes, I will make a brief opening statement. We are all members of the Catholic Education Social Welfare Coordinating Committee. The establishment of this committee speaks to the acknowledgement of the fact that in the interests of children, school and social welfare services need to be coordinated. The goal is joined-up support for children and their families. The strategy might be what has been identified as the full-service school. Any school works best if it is part of a community. Why focus on 9 to 14 years? The year 12 students of 2016, the focus of the State Plan participation targets, already are in year four. They are the missing middle. Australian public policy has concerned itself relentlessly with the post-compulsory years of schooling since the early 1990s and in New South Wales since the Wyndham report of 1957. More recently, the community has come to acknowledge the critical importance of the early years, nought to five.

It is time to rediscover the middle years, though we might still argue over the definition which years are exactly the middle years. Three notes of caution: children are whole persons, they lead whole lives; we must not compartmentalise their experience and concerns; and we must not segment their challenges and needs. Children aged 9 to 14 are not all in crisis: the majority lead happy lives. Likewise, those with difficulties do not necessarily share the same challenges or backgrounds. Children aged 9 to 14 or nought to 5, 15 to 18, are all individuals. What are the emerging challenges facing some 9 to 14-year-olds? Will they include misuse of information and communication technology [ICT], including financial issues and social issues; inappropriate social interaction of peers; disengaged busy parents; grandparents overloaded as parents; inappropriate media models; alcohol and drug misuse; lack of out-of-home care for children at risk?

Who are these challenged, at-risk 9 to 14-year-olds? They mostly include children with low literacy and numeracy achievement; children from low socioeconomic circumstances and backgrounds; children of parents experiencing mental health and/or drug abuse problems; children of families in crisis—marital breakdown most obviously but not necessarily in all cases, of course; Aboriginal children, especially those in rural and remote locations; children with disabilities; children with behavioural problems; and children requiring out-of-home care. What is to be done? We need to identify early learning needs and address literacy and numeracy deficits, remembering that those children of the 2016 target are in year four now.

We need increased resourcing for the provision of school support services for students in need, such as increased resourcing for school counselling across all sectors, government and non-government, and expanding the home school liaison service; the provision of targeted and coordinated government and community services, including through schools, ensuring these services are linked to the communities from which the children at risk come; to expand and better resource out-of-home care services; to encourage and assist those parents who are stressed and distressed to re-engage with their children; to support grandparents who are filling parenting roles; to expand age-appropriate and subsidised out-of-school care, especially for low socioeconomic communities; and to promote and support child resilience, including through each child's spiritual capacity in the context of values development.

I would like to stress that we are not asserting—in fact, we are asserting the opposite—we are not suggesting that all 9 to 14-year-olds are in crisis; they manifestly are not, but there are targeted groups in that age range who are. We believe this is a timely inquiry because, as I said in my introductory comments, there has been a lot of attention, almost ceaseless attention for almost 50 years, on post-compulsory schooling. There has been a lot of recent attention on nought to five but, yes, we agree, a lack of attention to the middle years.

**Mr STEVE CANSDELL:** What sort of programs could be extended or developed to assist school students and disadvantaged children in this age group in rural and regional areas?

**Mr BAKER:** As we know, the drought and other changing economic circumstances have adversely impacted on rural areas: not all, but many of the low socioeconomic status [SES] areas are rural areas. We know that poverty is shifting into the bush in relative terms. What sort of programs? Particularly access to before-and-after-school care, access to school counselling, access to paramedical services such as speech pathology. I could go on with the list, but my colleagues might want to comment.

**Ms CROTHERS:** I would add that the services that are available be made consistently available. For example, allied health services that may assist students in school in rural areas tend to be very inconsistent and spasmodic. If those services are successful, user friendly and consistent, that would help greatly.

**Mr BAKER:** Obviously, we have high concentrations of indigenous children in this age bracket in some, not all, of those rural communities. I am thinking of Wilcannia where we have a preschool—actually it is a kindergarten to year three school.

**Ms CROTHERS:** What is happening at the moment is that we actually are getting that cycle of the lower SES areas being in the rural areas, the lower educational outcomes associated with that, and the cycles are being perpetuated.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Before-and-after-hours school care, of course, is available in primary school. For the kids who go into year seven it could be a bit like going off a cliff, can it not, in accessing before-and-after-school care? Would you care to comment?

**Mrs HADLEY:** I would agree. We certainly are hearing a great deal from parents about their concern of exactly as you describe it. They have this sheltered, protected, supportive opportunity to have their children looked after after-school whilst they meet their demands to be at work and then suddenly there is this huge shift when some of them are still maybe 11, not quite 12, and they are extremely concerned about how their children are able to get home or how they spend their time immediately after school. Additionally, what we hear is that even the services provided for the 9, 10, 11 year-old age bracket are not well targeted and they are not very well engaged. So, parents will express that they are struggling to get their children to go, they are not enjoying it, they are not wanting to be there. I think there is a need to try to target the particular age groups and certainly expand into that junior secondary area.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** How could transition to high school programs be strengthened? What types of initiatives would be most beneficial in that process?

**Mr BAKER:** We would expect that feeder primary schools would be closely linked with the high schools to which students are transitioning. Mind you, that can be a big ask for some high schools. Some high schools draw on very large numbers of primary schools in the metropolitan areas. It is a different issue in the smaller country, provincial town. Basically it starts with the school principals. We encourage and would expect school principals of primary and secondary schools to liaise with each other. We have to recognise that there is transfer across the sectors. We do not live in tight silos. We have students going from Catholic primary schools into government secondary schools, particularly in country areas where we just do not have a secondary school, but also in urban areas where they might be moving to selective high schools and, of course, the other way round coming from government primary schools into Catholic secondary schools. Yes, it is one of those priorities but often achieving it is a challenge, particularly where a secondary school has large numbers of feeder primary schools, which can be across the sectors.

**Mrs CHITTICK:** We have some situations that are made easier where primary schools and secondary schools are co-located where we have had pilot projects that have worked very well of, say, year six groups and year seven groups actually having integrated learning activities. The focus is on learning, but it is also a very effective tool for bridging the gap: developing for the year six's older mentors, because in a primary school up until year six the children have always been used to having someone older that might be a buddy or a wise person. So, we have actually found some of the offshoot of that is that year six's still do have older people that they can link with. That is certainly much easier to work in co-located schools, but it has been productive for both high schools and primary schools. There is an advantage: for a primary school that usually has a single teacher or a small team of teachers with one child, and then suddenly there is a wide range of teachers dealing with a child in secondary school. It can be bridged. It has also been an incentive at times for the high school to continue having that smaller network of teachers staying involved with a child.

**ACTING CHAIR:** My question is about autism and Asperger's syndrome, and the epidemic that is sweeping both the private and the non-government sectors. How does the Catholic Education Commission react to this, and what plans does it have to meet the increase in demand?

**Mr BAKER:** I will make a couple of preliminary comments. Yes, the increasing incidence of children on the spectrum—it is a spectrum—is a challenge. Like all providers, we seek further resources from our resources as well as from government, State and Federal. We are working closely with the Federal Government around its new initiative for families with children with autism. We are certainly interested in working on the early intervention strategies so that appropriate strategies are put in place for those children before they get to school; otherwise it can be a very difficult transition to kindergarten if there has not been intervention prior to that child arriving in kindergarten.

**ACTING CHAIR:** I am more interested in the nine to 14 year age group.

**Ms CROTHERS:** For this target group, this is an age group where a lot of children are not identified until later—until they get to school and we see that they are not succeeding. So our focus is early identification of children's learning needs when they enter school to see whether we can see who needs additional assistance throughout their education and implement the appropriate programs.

**ACTING CHAIR:** How available is the extra help in the Catholic system?

**Mrs CHITTICK:** If I may comment on the earlier point, what we find more critical is in-servicing the staff who are working with children who are identified much later, because there is enormously growing knowledge in terms of how to address those special needs. So we are asking individual schools and staff to commit the time for that to occur.

**Mrs HADLEY:** Certainly within the Sydney Archdiocese of Catholic schools we have earmarked a range of resources to provide satellite schools within an integrated model, and we have plans to expand that and target it particularly at these students along the spectrum. I suppose some of the difficulties we face are around getting a good partnership going with the parents of the students. There will often be some parental resistance to acknowledging the problem, and then it is hard to provide the services that the educational professionals might see as being necessary. Then as the child gets older—certainly in the high school bracket—there is their own individual resistance to being seen as different and having any withdrawal for a particular intervention. I

suppose they are some of the challenges we have faced in providing the resources. But we certainly would look at providing more if we could.

**Ms MARIE ANDREWS:** I notice you mention in your submission grandparents who are parenting and also older siblings who are virtually bringing up their younger siblings because of various issues in the family unit. They face particular difficulties handling children in the age group we are talking about, who are entering their teens. Can you outline to the Committee what can be done to assist grandparents who are parenting and older siblings in their dilemma? Would anyone like to outline what could be done to assist them—whether it be monetary assistance or some other form of support?

**Mrs CHITTICK:** In relation to older siblings who are caring for younger siblings, I think the first thing is having a system that is prepared to identify and acknowledge that that is happening and is the reality for a number of children. That is very important. There should be a realisation that, therefore, when they come to school they are coming laden with a different experience from their peers. I guess it is about having a school environment that is understanding, spends the time with them and appreciates that their circumstance is different and individualised. The pastoral care systems that are in place in schools are very important on those occasions because often within the home unit it is not possible to self-monitor what is reasonable for the child. So the more that family unit is not in isolation and the more we can break it down, the more chance there is to identify critical support needs and then to advocate for them to link up with other agencies, which is something that schools often do. In terms of the grandparents, it is about having a system here that, again, acknowledges, welcomes, and makes sure that its language is open to grandparents being recognised as the carers in that situation. Increasingly, we have a number of grandparents who then can become a network for each other, that is very important.

**Ms CROTHERS:** It is the combination of the services that these families are accessing. Usually some chaos or crisis has occurred to put them in this situation so they are accessing a wide range of services—or they should be; one hopes that the services are being provided to them. Those services should be integrated and the school should be part of the integrated service that is provided, including a school counsellor being part of that process and care plan.

**Mr BAKER:** There are some complicated legal issues that straddle State and Federal jurisdictions about who has the duty of care. When push comes to shove, who can sign the permission note and who can get the report? There is a raft of increasingly complicated family law issues that principals in all schools find themselves trying to adjudicate. There is that level of issues as well. They might seem esoteric but they are often real issues on the principal's table—who can sign the permission note?

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** In terms of the children you spoke about earlier with an additional identified need—whether it be that they are Aboriginal or have a disability—officers from the Department of Education and Training appeared earlier and referred to those children as individuals. Of course, you also speak about them as individuals. The way in which the Government funds special needs or makes resources available to meet the needs of those children is not addressed equitably, is it, across the government and non-government sectors?

**Mr BAKER:** I do not necessarily agree that it is not being addressed equitably.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I will put it differently. Would you get the same funding for Aboriginal students in a Catholic school as the funding that is made available for Aboriginal students in a government school? The formulas are quite different, are they not?

**Mr BAKER:** They are. Yes, that is right. The funding sources are quite different also. There are some State programs that we do not have access to because we are not State schools. We mentioned one obliquely on the way through: the Home School Liaison Program. Our schools have no access to the Home School Liaison Program, although a lot of our Aboriginal students might require the assistance of that service. I am not trying to evade or avoid your question, but the answer is inherently complex because for any school, whether government or non-government, there is a mix of funding: State, Federal and private income. There is private income in government schools—that is what the P and C associations do, quite rightly, amongst other important things. So I would not agree that it is inequitable. I would rather say there is a resource deficit for all schools, particularly in relation to addressing the needs of Aboriginal students.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** I am not referring to inequity between the systems but inequity for the students.

**Mr BAKER:** I misinterpreted the question. It is true to say that historically we have done business—all of us in education—by identifying target groups. Yes, there is a reasonably compelling argument to try to disaggregate those groups. As we have said, and as you have said, and as the DET has said, at the end of the day we are not talking about groups, we are talking about individuals. Yes, it is true: funding comes targeted for groups. Sometimes there can be definitional problems. Going back to autism, it often becomes very important whether a child gets a particular label, and that is an exercise that is fairly unproductive. That is why both we and the DET are trying to explore new ways of identifying students and funding students, rather than groups. I am still not sure whether I have answered your question.

**The Hon. KAYEE GRIFFIN:** Previous witnesses have spoken about the impact of changing workplaces on the parents' capacity to care for children in this age group. What do you consider the most important types of changes in workplace practices that could benefit this age group?

**Mrs CHITTICK:** Certainly one of the areas—which is more a cultural shift as well as the legal parameters—is more flexible work arrangements. It is culturally important because, even when the capacity for more flexible work arrangements is there, the sense of freedom to ask for it is a difficulty for parents, who, for many reasons, are committed in two areas. Particularly when families are in crisis, for a parent to be able to drop everything and to be able to attend to that is important. And the answer is not just in terms of industrial law; it is also the cultural shift.

Also, when we are looking at the work arrangements, to somehow at the same time have a very realistic understanding of what children are capable of at various ages, so that if the work arrangements do not allow the parent to be free to personally care for children, to recognise that there are some ages at which those children are just not old enough to be able to care for themselves. In many ways, schools can lead the way at times, in terms of the leadership and the example they give to others in the community about flexible work arrangements. We have had to struggle with the resistance to having teachers share a class—parents do not really get thrilled about that—but, in a way, being able to sell the fact that this is a very positive way of reflecting work/life balance and making it work well in the classroom; but also the message that is being given to the families. I think we have a part to play in the debate.

**The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK:** Do you have a view about the school leaving age?

**Mr BAKER:** Yes. We have just put our submission to the ministerial inquiry. Our view is that the school attendance age should be kept at 15 but that a new legal requirement should be enacted—what we refer to as an educational participation requirement for 15- to 17-year-olds—and that obligation could be met in a variety of settings: either in schooling or in TAFE, with a registered training organisation, or in approved work, with the assumption that the approved work would have to include training.

Our position is perhaps a slightly more complex one than others are bringing to the debate. We do not think that just raising the age from 15 to 16 will achieve much; it has to be a much more sophisticated approach. But we certainly agree that in a twenty-first century society, to cease your participation in education at 15 is not in the best interests of that child. So we are saying: school to age 15, and then a requirement for continuing education between 15 and 17, but the student could satisfy that requirement in a variety of settings.

**ACTING CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing before the Committee and for your informative submission.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 3.35 p.m.)