

## *Rural and Remote Education - WA*

### **Kununurra Public Hearing - 17 May 1999**

<b>Alan McLaren Principal, Kununurra District High School</b>	<p>Kununurra provides a modern education facility for all children from 4 year olds right through to Year 12s and in terms of Kimberley schools it is often described as a bit of an oasis. It is a very attractive school and very well resourced. We have put in special support programs in 3 identified areas to increase participation by Indigenous students.</p>
<b>[Early childhood development]</b>	<p>Firstly there's a program to assist in the enrolment and commencement of pre-school because traditionally there has been a low participation in the very early years – in the early kindy and the pre-school. Much education research shows that kids when they get to school can have missed as much as a thousand hours of that early education and early language exposure. So we've put in programs to attempt to address that. At the moment our percentage of Aboriginal students in kindergarten is 21%, 31% in pre-school, and that's actually in approximating in Years 1 to 7, so by pre-school we're getting that number up now to approximating our percentages through Years 1 to 7. Two or three years ago it was only 20% or so, so we have increased the number quite substantially and our programs will increase that in the kindergarten because if the kids haven't come to school with that prior exposure to learning programs then of course they're behind from the eight ball.</p>
<b>[Primary to secondary transition]</b>	<p>Secondly there's a transition program established in association with St Joseph's Catholic Primary School because Aboriginal students from St Joseph's found this transition quite difficult. There are a number of reasons for that, and I am sure you will hear a number of different reasons today. From our perspective there are certainly curriculum differences between the Catholic primary school and the District High School. Also, and I wrote this down, there has been an expectation that the students fit in rather than that the school accommodates. That's something that we need to look at quite closely. We're currently embarking on cross-cultural training for all staff plus a fairly rigorous review of our pedagogy so that both teaching and non-teaching staff are more prepared to embrace the needs of Aboriginal students. And I guess I would say I'm pretty proud at the beginning of this year to have stood up in front of the whole staff and said that if they're not prepared to embrace the local population and accept a significant Aboriginal enrolment then maybe there's other places they should be working. I copped some smiles and some flack for that but I really strongly believe in that because I think there's some history up here that needs to be changed.</p>
<b>[Indigenous school participation rates]</b>	<p>Some figures to support what we're doing there. In the primary years the lowest is thirty and the highest is 37% in any year group, in Years 8, 9 and 10 the figures rise from 42 to 49%, that's 49% in Year 9. So clearly our Aboriginal participation percentage is increasing, which would be expected since the kids from high school have got nowhere else to go apart from out of town, so we're getting somewhere there. The third area is the transition from Years 10 to the post-compulsory Years 11 to 12. With the introduction of the</p>

	<p>Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses there has been a remarkable change for all students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Courses are far more relevant, typically our students are VET students, and they would spend three days a week in school, one day a week in a structured work placement and one day a week involved in TAFE. So the linkages are made to TAFE and the structured workplace and the kids love it. It's far more attractive an option for Years 11 and 12 than the old tertiary entrance courses. Basically in all schools the majority of kids didn't pass. So at the moment, with 45 students in Years 11 and 12 we have 12 Aboriginal students. The percentages in Years 11 and 12 are 28 and 32 respectively which means that there's a drop from Year 10 into Year 11 but certainly there has been an improvement on say three years ago when I arrived and we had no Aboriginal students in Years 11 and 12 so now to have 12 is progress.</p> <p>Unfortunately I would add to that though that our very best role models in our Aboriginal student population are plucked to go elsewhere, which is quite devastating to the local community. They're plucked for either sport; we had a student who was just such a fantastic role model who has gone down to play footy in Perth. They pick him up and put him into a private school and just organise everything. Alternatively the kids go off to Darwin or Perth for schooling and our experience is that that is not something that works very well for them. There aren't many students that come back having successfully completed studies. I think we need to look quite carefully at that, and things like local businesses providing scholarships for kids to go to Perth. I have some opinions on that. I think they could be better supported locally.</p>
<p><b>[Curriculum offerings]</b></p>	<p>The range of courses offered here is considerable and that reflects the fact that we are a larger population centre. Again though, and this is a personal opinion of mine, there are some courses like horse mastership or agriculture that I think would be logically embedded in our curriculum and welcomed by our students, particularly with the local the development towards stage one and stage two. The 'catch 22' of that is that to get funding to run courses such as that you have to have numbers, the students won't pick it until you've got the funding to set up a program, so we really need an injection of support to establish some locally relevant courses that lead into the local industry. The other side of that also is that a lot of parents, particularly Aboriginal parents, are very keen for their kids to do what they call 'normal' courses, the 'standard' courses, the traditional tertiary entrance courses are the ones that parents are very keen to see their kids participate in. And we have some work to do there, educating parents.</p>
<p><b>[Barramundi school]</b></p>	<p>The school has two off-site campuses. We have the offsite campus called the Barramundi school; a group I believe you will be speaking to today. From our point of view that represents a group of students that are traditionally school refusers and could not participate in school for a variety of social and behavioural reasons, they just refused to come. Many of those kids have a background which is challenging to them. Limited funds have impacted on the success of that program and also the availability of the staff member; if you get a good staff member you get a good year. This year the program's supported by some Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program</p>

<p><b>[Inter-agency support]</b></p>	<p>(IESIP) funding, some Commonwealth funding, which has greatly supported that. We've got 2 teachers this year rather than 1 from last year, and we have two Aboriginal &amp; Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) supporting the program. This year there's a group of 10 boys and 10 girls and the program is working the best I've seen it work in three years. I'm not totally confident that the education department will pick up the funding in its current form for the year 2000 because currently it's got funding from outside.</p> <p>Again, a personal opinion, I firmly believe there's a need for more inter-agency support. There's a tendency for the education department and me as the local principal, the local office, to be told you need to do something with these kids, it's your responsibility. Where you've got kids involved in drugs, in crime, in home problems, clearly family and children's police, juvenile justice, inter-agency support is the only way that the program will succeed in the long run. If responsibility is continually dumped on education our answer will be, "we've got a school and kids can come to our school" and that's not a good answer but...many parents believe that students need to move away from Kununurra for their final years of education. There's a wide range of reasons that they give for that. Much of it relates to social interaction and sport, parents say their children need to mix with students beyond Kununurra. Also if they're sporting kids... there's a gap between about age 12 and 18 where the kids play junior sport and until they can progress to senior sport they don't participate, so that influences some. There's also an issue, and I feel uncomfortable saying this, with the increase in Aboriginal enrolment in secondary school there are some parents who then believe the school is catering too much for the students with needs rather than the students that are from families with greater influence. Is that clear enough without being more explicit?</p>
<p><b>Chris Sidoti</b></p>	<p>Without saying that white parents want to send their kids to schools where there are no black students?</p>
<p><b>Alan McLaren</b></p> <p><b>[Travel inequities]</b></p>	<p>Yes, it's quite horrifying. So, the additional issue there is that because we are a small school we offer a face to face program but it's limited to a fixed course so that traditionally kids do a mixture. There's four subjects they can choose from at the school and then that's supplemented by Distance Education. Last year we had 2 students who completed those courses and achieved outstanding results. Both of them were in the top 5% of the State. One of them achieved results higher than most private schools. Those students are probably a rarity and we are certainly very proud of them but the potential is there for students to do very well.</p> <p>We have a fairly supportive structure for kids who are doing Distance Education. There are financial disincentives for kids to stay. I am perplexed that students who choose to move away from Kununurra received four free return air fares each year and there's not even really an application process for that, it's a given. Whereas students in Year 11 and 12 who stay here, we really struggle to get any support to take those students down to access the bigger wider world and experiences of tertiary institutions or the School of Isolated and Distance Education. For instance, a recent Department of Transport decision to restrict support for students to go down to participate in the short-term programs of the School of Isolated and Distance Education. The decision</p>

	has been to restrict that to full-time students of SIDE, so if they do one school-based course they are eliminated from that. It's just extreme.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	I haven't heard this one Alan; this is our first formal day in WA. Any kids that go to boarding school, what, including primary kids...
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	Year 8 onwards immediately qualify for 4 free return trips.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	This is from the State Education Department?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	The Department of Transport. And that 's because we are a classification of school which means that students can't necessarily access the courses here that they may want to take but that is just so flimsy.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Well if you had four free air fares for the kids to stay here it would make an enormous difference to meet their sporting, socialisation, well all their needs.
<b>Alan McLaren</b>  (School of Isolated and Distance Education)  [Aboriginal hostel in Kununurra]	Without doubt. That is something that is in urgent need of challenging and again that should be non-means tested and not related to what course the kids are in. Even if they're not in School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) courses they should be receiving that support to access particularly Perth. Our students mix with other students in other schools to see where they're at, how they're going. When you've got a class of three or four in one subject it's very difficult for them to see how they sit. Sometimes they think they're doing very well but if you mix them with twenty other kids it might give them a shot in the arm quite quickly, or a recognition that they're doing very well. So that one is a big one for me. Again, structures to support students, and a similar example might be if you've got students in remote regions, they might need support to come to somewhere like Kununurra, so there's degrees and kind of stepping stones. Kids won't necessarily want to go to Perth straight away, but certainly they need to be stretched beyond their local schooling environment because there are a number of students who stay on at places like Oombulgurri, Kulumburu and any of the remote communities. I think Kununurra could certainly become a centre where students come in and the construction of an Aboriginal hostel which is going ahead, I am trusting that that's the final model that students will have access to come in and have short stays and experiences in town.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	There's presently no supported accommodation system for students?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>  [Technology]	No, but a submission from Ian Trust who will be speaking to you next has managed to secure funding for an Aboriginal hostel. In terms of educational services I don't think there's a lot to raise here because we are in Kununurra and the school is comparatively affluent. As the result of a utilities management program where we receive the funding for our utilities. If we were more efficient in using these funds we could use them elsewhere. We manage to save probably hundreds and thousands of dollars and invest that into educational resources so we are a particularly well-resourced school.  Our technology is up there with any school, I would claim; we have access to the Internet in a number of classrooms, in the library, in the front office, so students do have ready access; all classroom have 1 or 2 computers in them at the moment and we're currently spending money to increase that in line with the learning technologies program. We are quite well up there. Students have access to laptops to take home and things like that; we're pretty well off. There are a couple of things that assisted with that: We've got our own school bus run which creates some revenue and that allows that money to back into the school. Interestingly there's a government policy and local pressure that

<p>[Staffing profile]</p>	<p>we lose that bus run because we're allegedly denying a local entrepreneur the chance to make some money for their own pocket rather than the school. In terms of staff, again it's an unusual situation here. You might see it in Broome but probably not elsewhere.</p> <p>We have 58 teachers occupying 52 positions. Of those only 3 are beginning teachers in their first year. Traditionally we have teachers that come here after they've spent a period of time somewhere else, quite often in a remote school, and then they come into Kununurra for their second or third teaching appointment. We're increasingly seeing more experienced teachers from Perth coming up here so that this year we have a couple of staff who are very experienced. So, teacher experience is not an issue, however of those 58 staff I would say probably 50 or so would be changing every three years, so there's a constant turnover and the current education department policies are increasing the amount of staff change during the school year as well and there's certain parent opposition to that. I don't think it's as big an issue as parents make it but it is certainly an issue when teachers change during the year. If teachers don't change during the year you get a much bigger changeover at the end of the year and I would think that that is a much greater disjunction than a gradual change.</p>
<p><b>Chris Sidoti</b></p>	<p>What incentives are there for teachers to stay beyond three years?</p>
<p><b>Alan McLaren</b> [Teacher incentives]</p> <p>[Indigenous students and English language]</p>	<p>If they stay beyond their three years they get what's called a cash incentive where they get a district allowance plus a half-district allowance which for a single teacher works out to be about \$1500, which is not significant. The education department is currently negotiating a country incentive package but disputes with the union have resulted in that being rejected every time it's put forward. The incentive to come to Kununurra was quite well received by our teaching community. The problem is that people like Wyndham were quite cross at what Kununurra because the difference between here and Kununurra was about \$300 a year. And frankly the difference in conditions between here and Kununurra represent more than \$300 a year, however that was the latest proposal.</p> <p>To make a couple of comments on diversity and initiatives. My background, I have taught for a number of years in English as a Second Language (ESL) schools in South Fremantle where a significant percentage of the population were from overseas, a non-English speaking background, and language is certainly a barrier for those students. The thing that I would make very clear is that language is also the major barrier for Aboriginal students and more language support is essential. Students that in Perth would be deemed to be ESL or English Second Language students are not recognised as such if they're Aboriginal. So students that I'm used to getting support are not getting support if they're Aboriginal students up in the Kimberley. I think there is a very urgent need to review the language support program for Aboriginal students to assist in the way in which we can develop language. One of the difficulties of that is when you ask a parent do you speak standard Australian English the parent of course says yes. So there's not a problem. Obviously you don't even try to convince an Aboriginal parent to say, "no, I don't speak English" because it would be so humiliating. So we need to develop a strategy to assess where students are at in terms of the language and give them</p>

<p><b>[Literacy funding]</b></p> <p><b>[Indigenous language learning]</b></p>	<p>appropriate support.</p> <p>Currently we receive Commonwealth literacy funding for around \$30,000 a year. That's for Years 1 to 12. We have put all of that money into early intervention and we are running language immersion programs where the Aboriginal students in particular, I think they're all Aboriginal in fact, although it wasn't culturally chosen, are language immersed and they're put into programs for half a day four days a week which just intensely work on language development and the recognition of standard Australian versus other forms of English.</p> <p>The community resistance to the teaching of Aboriginal languages is another perplexing one for me because a program that was run several years ago was terminated as a result of parent resistance and Aboriginal languages really need to be part of the school, there's no question of that. I could tell you stories of the sorts of things that get said. A local parent asked that we introduce a particular language because there were twenty people from that country which she spoke about and said we should introduce that language. I talked about the fact that we couldn't get qualified teachers but there are what we call native speakers and if you have a university degree in a language then you can teach as a native speaker without a teaching qualification. The reaction from the group of parents at the meeting was 'no, no, no, we're not talking about Aboriginal language'. They automatically assumed native was Aboriginal, we don't want to revisit Aboriginal language despite the fact that we have 300 Aboriginal students. So for 20 students from another country the demand is on from the non-Aboriginal parents to introduce a language whereas there is resistance to introducing a language for 300 students.</p>
<p><b>Chris Sidoti</b></p>	<p>This is resistance from the white parents presumably? What's the attitude of the Aboriginal parents?</p>
<p><b>Alan McLaren</b></p> <p><b>[Disability]</b></p>	<p>Well the Aboriginal parents would support an Aboriginal language; there's no question of that. The difficulty of that is with 20 to 30% of the students being Aboriginal, it's quite difficult to run it. Because if you run an Aboriginal language you have to use your teacher for it as well, and therefore how do you work it out, because your class either goes to Aboriginal language or it doesn't. The solution is actually to introduce two languages and make it an option. So if we introduced Aboriginal and Indonesian the students could choose between the two. An interesting comment I'd like to make about that is that we ran Indonesian as a club, an alternative from a non-qualified person teaching it, the year before last, and the greatest percentage of kids in there were Aboriginal kids – they were really keen to learn Indonesian. But Aboriginal languages is something that there needs to be more structural pressure and system pressure to actually introduce those, so that when it comes to community opposition we've got better backing. Because currently with the devolution of decision making to schools and their communities, if community pressure is on not to do something it makes it very difficult to do it, because you end up getting hung at a Parents &amp; Citizens meeting.</p> <p>We have a large range of students with disabilities in the Perth metropolitan area and many of our students would not be in the mainstream. Part of the</p>

	<p>acceptance of this situation is that no one knows any different, so our students and staff embrace the inclusion of kids with disabilities. We've got students with mental disabilities, we've got autistic kids, we've got deaf kids, we've got a variety of disabled kids who fit in particularly well and as an example of staff embracing that we've had in the last two years two separate deaf students and we've had probably six or eight staff undertake Auslan courses and our Year 1 class last year was actually taught Auslan to support a young boy who was deaf in the classroom. The kids actually did an assembly item that was completely in Auslan. So embracing kids with disabilities seems to be something that 's happening quite well. They support their disabled peers exceptionally well and that in turn contributes to their understanding and education.</p>
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	<p>Do you good support from outside, from specialised services for that?</p>
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	<p>We've got teacher aides for most of our kids with identified disabilities and I think I'd say yes, we do get good support. I wouldn't be critical of it. If we were in the metropolitan area of course you'd get considerably more support because the visiting teacher for the deaf might come up once a term or even less, whereas in Perth schools those kids are visited once a week. So in that sense the support isn't there and it's up to the school to come up with those supports themselves. But we've got students who just would not be accepted into mainstream schools in Perth. Kids that soil themselves in classrooms, I can just see teachers in Perth saying, "no way, we couldn't do this". Whereas up here it's just part of what goes on, and it's fine.</p>
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	<p>Alan, with the 58 teachers that you mentioned, how many of those would be Aboriginal, or are any of them Aboriginal and how many AIEWs would you have?</p>
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	<p>Right, we have one Aboriginal teacher, and I would make a comment that the support for Aboriginal teachers wanting to get into teaching is fantastic, the support once they get in there is extraordinarily underdone.</p>
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	<p>You mean once they're fully trained.</p>
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	<p>Yes it just becomes our issue, and if they're struggling, as they sometimes do, it becomes very difficult to get additional support. So we've had a bit of a battle to keep supporting and maintaining them. I think Aboriginal teachers leave quite quickly because they have skills that other agencies want so much as well. So we have at the moment one Aboriginal teacher, which on a statewide level is dreadful, but at least we've got one. I am very envious of Derby, which manages to get several more than us. There's good support for our Aboriginal teacher.</p>
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	<p>How may Aboriginal &amp; Islander Education Workers (AIEWs)?</p>
<b>Alan McLaren</b>  [Aboriginal & Islander Education Workers]	<p>We have four appointed AIEWs and then through a variety of Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) placements and group training-type activities we've got another four. And we scrounge funding and support for those elsewhere. So we have eight AIEWs working in the school. We actually have another two appointed to the Barramundi school plus two support people. In that sense, what, that's twelve Aboriginal people all up working with us. Some of the people we get in are not used to traditional working arrangements and there is considerable criticism about adherence to times, days off or all of those sorts of things. The flexibility to support people into a program is not always forthcoming, but certainly is forthcoming from the administration.</p>

<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	On the disability one again. What is physical accessibility like in the school itself?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>  [Disability]	Last year we had a girl come up in a chair. We needed some work done on the school; we needed some toilets altered, some pathways altered and so on and that was all done without a problem. The only difficulty we did have was that she was scheduled to go in an upstairs classroom, which she couldn't go in, so she and the class had to go into what was traditionally a junior primary area because that was a ground floor area. The kids accepted that pretty well. We did have to construct a wall in the open area because we had the Year 1s and the Year 6s side by side. So the access is good. We've access to the library, pathways round the school, disabled toilet. So the student now has her own personal toilet with a lock that she has a key to, with all of her appropriate things in there.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	How old is she?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	She's in Year 6
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	It's amazing that in some schools we've been to they've had the attitude that you can't give the kids a key and so the child actually has to find one of the two or three teachers that has a key to actually go to the toilet. So that's pretty good if a Year 5/Year 6 kid has her own key.
<b>Pat Rhatigan</b>	The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program (ASSPA) committee, is that strong in the school, how does that operate to support Aboriginal students?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>  [Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program]	<p>The ASSPA Committee is fraught with political difficulties. Each year, and I'm very cautious not to be critical of our local community and I don't want to be, the ASSPA Committee changes because people weren't happy with the way it was run the year before. So there's a disjunction every year between ASSPA Committees, but we do have a very active ASSPA Committee. This year, I think, the connection to last year is the strongest I've ever seen it but we still only just got our funding application in on time. The issues of maintaining accounts for instance, are things that people find quite difficult and it becomes then a question. I've offered to provide any support that is requested but I won't ask to do it because otherwise it just creates that dependency. So I'm prepared to help train people with their books. I'm prepared to use our registrar and so on, I even said I'm prepared to be a signatory to the cheque book because one of the other difficulties is if an Aboriginal person asks a friend to sign a cheque and they say no, the paperwork is not in order, it creates a feud. So I said I'd be the one that would be prepared to be the bad man.</p> <p>This year our treasurer said "nope, I can do that" and I think she can. So she said she's prepared to refuse anyone, but it has been a little problematic. We had an open night two weeks ago and we tied that in with ASSPA so that we invited the Aboriginal parents to come along an hour early and we had a huge meeting, that was probably one of our better. So they've asked that we can do that in future. And we also tend to run it with traditionally run parents night – having a formal parents night and an informal parents night. We don't say one's Aboriginal and one's non-Aboriginal, but one takes places in a formal setting and parents talk to teachers in a very formal way, and the other was round a sausage sizzle where you just sat in a corner and had a chat where you</p>

	<p>wanted and the teachers and parents tended to get together. It wasn't exclusively culturally divided between the two but certainly it assisted the Aboriginal parents. I think having done that last year we actually moved to this year and we had a significant participation of Aboriginal parents, which was good. There's still a reluctance of parents to accept that the school is theirs. The parents have told me that they hate the front office because it's so sterile and so non-Aboriginal and so unwelcoming and you walked in the front office and there's a huge big honour board, no Aboriginal art, four ladies behind the counter; it was really confronting. One weekend I went in and took the honour board down and put up some Aboriginal art, which pleased the Aboriginal community immensely and it's much more culturally welcoming. I've had great feedback. They've come back and said "far out, this place has really changed, it's wonderful". At the recent Parents and Citizens Association meeting though the issue came up again of the demand that the honour board be place 'back where it belongs'.</p>
<p><b>Alan McLaren</b></p> <p>[Racism]</p>	<p>What do you do? You make some hard decisions and say, "look, I'm sorry, this one matters". On the original one I consulted with people and we couldn't come up with agreement about what we should do so one weekend I went in with my son, took it down, painted the wall, put up the art. I think we'll probably have a win on that one but it just demonstrates that the town here is so different to others in that it has very little history and it's perceived to be here because the non-Aboriginal people came here to make it so they own it, and there's this aristocracy of, "we say what goes on in this town". It's quite interesting actually. I don't think I've encountered racism as strongly anywhere else as I have here.</p>
<p><b>Pat Rhatigan</b></p>	<p>Have you attempted at all to run an Aboriginal studies program? Is there anything like that?</p>
	<p>We run Aboriginal studies at school. Last year, for example, because not every kid in Year 9 did Aboriginal studies, we had parents ringing up refusing their kid to be in it, saying they must change classes. So our way around it is that this year all kids do it; there's no option. As an example of parent interaction, we ran National Aboriginal &amp; Islander Day Organising Committee (NAIDOC) week activities; for students to go offsite to participate in activities they need written permission from their parents. We sent letters home to parents asking them for permission. One student forged a signature of his parents in order to participate. The parent then went to the Minister or Director, I can't remember which, but I certainly got an on-high serve on how can kids leave the school when they haven't got permission. We looked it up and we did have a permission note, so we called the kid in and talked to him and he'd forged it because if he'd asked his father he would have been refused permission to go. So he forged it so that he could participate in the activities.</p>
<p><b>Chris Sidoti</b></p>	<p>I bet you felt like congratulating him, but that's a bit hard to do.</p>
	<p>So there's some of that here, and I don't feel that so strongly in other places. But it's an issue of time. We're making progress. Participation in the early years of school, Year 8 and then Year 11 and 12, it's certainly indicating that we're getting somewhere. One of our top Year 10s at the moment is actually an Aboriginal girl, we have two or three Aboriginal students on our student council, although I think one's just recently shifted to Perth, and they're elected by the students, so the students are very embracing of Aboriginal issues, it's the parents. When we ran our Sorry Day last year some of the</p>

	teachers who are parents at the school kept their kids at home. And that's why at the beginning of this year I made the statement I did, that if people are not willing to embrace it they will have to look elsewhere.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Do you have any issues that occur with Aboriginal children in relation to fees that cause conflicts with parents and friends?
	There's a fair bit of resentment that students on ABSTUDY actually receive two lots of school fees. They get \$150 at the beginning of terms 1 and 3 and then a smaller amount at the beginning of terms 2 and 4. There's certainly a school fees allowance in ABSTUDY. Because that's paid straight to the parents we all know that when money comes into a family it's used on what's needed at the time and very little makes its way to school, so very few of our Aboriginal students pay their school charges. That does result in resentment from non-Aboriginal parents, with some non-Aboriginal parents saying well if they don't have to pay, I'm not paying. I don't know what the solution is on that one because I worked on school fees and charges in central office for a while and I wouldn't oppose the money going to schools. It takes parents out of the equation. It's important that we negotiate with parents to receive some funding and we need to come up with ways of doing that.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Attendance rates?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>  [Attendance rates]	Attendance rates for students vary, with some Aboriginal students having very good attendance rates and others not having good attendance rates. We have a policy that if students don't attend for three weeks we take them off our books because otherwise we're accused of having students on our rolls in order to attract funding and it becomes an issue. We're required to do that otherwise staffing and funding for the school is not consistent with the numbers in our school. So the majority of kids on our books come quite regularly although there is a number that we really struggle to get there.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	The ones that you take off your books after three weeks, what happens with that information, the names of those children?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	There is no support structure in town to actually follow up on those students and encourage them to get back into school. Unfortunately some of those students come from families where traditionally there's been an adversarial role between the school and their families, so that to actually approach a family and talk through the issues is sometimes quite difficult. I have spoken to parents who just turn away, won't speak.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Do you have an Aboriginal liaison officer?
<b>Alan McLaren</b>  [Aboriginal liaison officer]	We do. They are referred to the district office Aboriginal liaison officer, but I'm not aware of any impact that that's made. It would seem to me that a community or a local group made of community people plus education people or whatever get together to support that so that it's not just the school. Because the school was such a negative experience for many parents it takes a long time for that attitude to break down. We had a teacher who asked for teacher relief in order to go out and meet every one of the Aboriginal parents of the children he taught. He's new this year. So we provided teacher relief and support in order for that to occur and every parent that was approached went into hiding, and they were approached by an AIEW to set up this meeting. The notion of a teacher coming out and meeting a family is still too threatening, which is such a shame. So we still rely on things like the sausage sizzle, those sorts of things.

<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Thanks very much for all that Alan, that was terrific information
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	Well, this represents me, not the department.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	And it's much more relevant than what the department would officially tell us.
<b>Alan McLaren</b>	Thanks a lot. Here's a copy of my statistics.
<b>Ian Trust</b>	My name's Ian Trust. I'm Chairperson of the ATSIC Wunan Council for the East Kimberley.
<b>Helen Wright</b>	I'm Helen Wright and I've been employed by the East Kimberley Aboriginal Education and Training Committee which is a steering group to the regional council of education.
<b>John Rowe</b>	I'm John Rowe, Manager of Kimberley Work Training.
<b>Ian Trust</b>  [Aboriginal literacy and numeracy rates]	<p>What we wanted to do is give you an overview of the problems as we see them in terms of education in the East Kimberley. John will do the conversation and Helen will clarify some of the things as I go through them. I've been concerned in terms of the impact that the low educational achievement is having on the operations of organisations like Kimberley Group Training. According to the Australian Bureau statistics there are 4,089 people who identify themselves as Aboriginals in the East Kimberley in the 1996 census. This constituted 35% of the region's total population and 90% of the state's Indigenous population. This means that the region has the highest proportion of Aboriginal Western Australians but one of the smallest total Aboriginal populations of any region in the state. Based on the latest benchmark tests the Kimberley region of WA also returned the worst literacy and numeracy results for the state. Aboriginality was identified as the major factor in this poor rate. These education outcomes are a major concern to the Aboriginal people and specifically the Wunan Regional Council.</p>
[Indigenous school age demographics in the Kimberley region]	<p>Low education and school levels not only impact on the current status of Aboriginal people in the region, in terms of self-esteem and ability to obtain meaningful employment, but they also have a major impact in terms of self-determination, economic development and the success of the social programs that are currently being put in place by the government. If you look at the scale of the problem in terms of Aboriginal education in the East Kimberley, a quick look at some of the statistics indicates the size of the problem and the implications for the future. Despite the fact that they constitute only 35% of the region's population Aboriginal students comprises a clear majority of 69% of the school population and given the age profile of the region the trend is that Aboriginal children will continue to be the majority of enrolments and the major source of enrolments. This has major implications for the priority that's placed on education in the region; despite all the efforts of the education providers they have clearly not adapted to the needs of the Aboriginal population.</p>
[Shortfall in provision of education to Indigenous children]	<p>The East Kimberley student profile contrasts starkly to other districts in Western Australia. Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) figures for 1998 show that Aboriginal children comprise 8.5% of total State enrolments. Eighteen percent of enrolments in each of the Goldfields, Mid West and Pilbara and 58% of enrolments in the Kimberley. Yet despite being the only district in the State where the clear majority of students are</p>

<p><b>[Indigenous staffing rates in schools]</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal Wunan Council has to suggest that the educational focus of the region differs substantially from the mainstream model of education across the State.</p> <p>Some of these issues are; there's no specialised recruitment of teachers, no intensive teacher-training packages for teachers working in the region, little extra cross-cultural training, and in the last few years only a few attempts have been made to phase in a more relevant curriculum. Despite the fact that Aboriginal students comprise 69% of enrolments in the East Kimberley, this is not reflected by the staffing in the region. The EDWA District Education Office employs only 3 Aboriginal staff members out of 26. There's no specialist Aboriginal education branch and Aboriginal education outcomes come under either curriculum or student services divisions. The position of the ALO, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer in the West Kimberley responsible for the cross-cultural training and Aboriginal studies has been vacant all year. Catholic education has a much better ratio in terms of Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal staff. And they recognise that the training of Aboriginal staff is a long-term commitment.</p> <p>The head of the Catholic Education Office in the Kimberley region is an Aboriginal woman and the Catholic Education Office in Broome has a majority of Aboriginal staff. Based on statistics provided by schools in February 1999, we have 3 Aboriginal teachers in the Kimberley for a total of 1661 Aboriginal students; a ratio of 1: 553 compared with an overall student: teacher ratio of 1:14. There are 2.5 front office Aboriginal administrative positions; a ratio of 1: 664. There are around 73 Aboriginal/Indigenous education worker positions in the East Kimberley, although it's very difficult to get accurate figures on the number of these positions as many of them are shared by several community members. This is a ratio of 1:23, but ranges from 1 to 7 (Aboriginal teachers to Aboriginal students) in some schools, to 1 to 48 in others. Some of the issues that have been raised with regards to specific locations in the East Kimberley are issues relevant to Wyndham.</p> <p>All the EDWA schools in the Kimberley except for Broome, Derby, Kununurra and Wyndham are classified as remote. Receiving a remote classification ensures staff benefits and salary packages and makes schools easier to staff. Having a small town like Wyndham with very few services (certainly no better than Hall's Creek, which is classified as remote) classified in the same league as Broome and Kununurra is not perceived in Wyndham as being fair. As a result they have serious difficulties in staffing schools and they are still short of teachers in May this year. In Wyndham some of the other issues are that there is a perception among the Aboriginal community that the EDWA system is doing little to assist Aboriginal education workers to get further qualifications.</p>
<p><b>[School amalgamation]</b></p>	<p>If there were more commitment to Aboriginal teacher training it would ease teacher recruitment problems and provide stable staff. It would relate to the majority of students and provide role models for students. There is currently only one Aboriginal Indigenous education worker doing training from Wyndham District High School.</p>

<p><b>[Educational standards and aspirations]</b></p>	<p>There 's also a perception in Wyndham, I'm not sure whether it's correct or not, but that the State government intends to close down Wyndham District High School and leave only a primary school in the town. Town members see this as unacceptable. They don't want their kids to go away and board in Kununurra at the non-existent hostel and they certainly don't want their kids to have to commute over 200kms a day to go to school, that's presumably going back and forth from Wyndham to Kununurra each day. These perceptions are fuelled by the lack of remote area packages for Wyndham. The proposals put forward in the local area education plan to amalgamate the administration of Wyndham and Kununurra schools and the continuing discussion over a super-school to be based in Kununurra, which would centre all resources in Kununurra.</p> <p>There's also a general feeling that general standards at the Wyndham school are low, there's little support for gifted children or even children performing at average age level. This leads to parents sending their children away in order to receive a satisfactory education. Students who are achieving need to be challenged more and the school should be placing more emphasis on giving assistance to children so that they can achieve their full academic potential. Just some general comments with regards to Aboriginal education generally. In discussing Aboriginal education it's not feasible to focus on a single plan or issue. There are several layers of society with specific needs and highly divergent views on the value of education and highly different aspirations for the future. The East Kimberley Aboriginal Education and Training Committee see changing aspirations as being one of the keys to improving education outcomes in the region.</p> <p>Aspirations are tied up in a vicious cycle of welfare dependency, poverty and lack of meaningful employment opportunities. The Aboriginal kids graduate from school with such low skilling levels that they are not in a position to get meaningful employment. Just on that point I might just ask John to come in and comment on the experiences of Kimberley Group Training in terms of trying to place people in employment or training positions with a very low education level.</p>
<p><b>John Rowe</b></p> <p><b>[Education levels]</b></p>	<p>Kimberley Group Training has recognised for quite some time now is that one of the greatest problems we face in trying to place Aboriginal people into training and ultimately employment is that the prerequisites are very often not met by Aboriginal people. So when they actually take on a Traineeship they've reached Year 10 and haven't got the academic skills to actually do the work required by the Traineeship, so we're always looking at other strategies to try and combat this. One of the strategies that we use at the moment is that we actually put in, allow more hours in the Traineeship, either off the job, at home or at TAFE. Any other training provided is done to pick up the literacy and numeracy levels and pick up other areas that may be failing. The impact of this on Aboriginal people in general is that quite often we set people up to fail before we've even started. The students say they have these skills and the only way to check that is by looking at the academic records The academic records say yes, they've done Year 10, so we set them up a 2 or 3-month Traineeship and they just can't cope with the work. We also see it in other</p>

**[The effect of the social context on educational outcomes]**

areas that it would have a huge impact on social development and community development where the young people, because of the lack of education and, probably, because of their parents' lack of education, they have not picked up a work ethic and had problems with family violence and legal problems, health problems. A whole range, probably about 10 or 15, of various issues that apply not only work, but to education and training. We quite often look at people that we're working with; who start having problems, and we analyse the areas that they fall out in. We realised that if an Aboriginal person has 1 or 2 of these problems then all of a sudden it affects whether they're actually prepared to work in the first place, and I mean that in the sense of work-ready. So there are very few programs that I would say are transitional programs that pick up those areas that they're lacking in.

You know there are programs that are nationally available like job placement employment and training that target disadvantaged, homeless and at risk young people. I would consider a program like that for Aboriginal people would be most appropriate as well. When people do want to do something about their lives they can come to us and say, 'is there a Traineeship available', and we can actually assess and if we feel that they're not quite work ready, there's another program that we can actually refer them too which can get them to the stage where they're work ready. But the work ready employment side is only one aspect of a person's life, as we know. If we don't deal with the family problems and the health problems and the legal problems and everything else that goes with it; if we don't look at it in a holistic point of view, then it's not good enough just to say we're just going to give you a job and whatever, whatever.

So I guess what I'm trying to say is that education is the key to all that happening and that's been demonstrated throughout the whole world, in Third World countries, in struggling countries, in First World countries. If that education aspect is not in place then you would end up with exactly the problems that we have, as in health problems, training problems and all the rest so there's probably no need to tell you how that impacts. So we see it every day in the group training company.

**[Aboriginal trainees]**

We have an infrastructure that actually supports Aboriginal people in a far more intensive way than any other group training company would, we work with 90% Aboriginal people, and we quite often hear quips about how Aboriginal people don't want to work, how they don't want to do this, they don't want to do that. The only evidence I have is you say that to our 73 trainees who are doing quite well and fitting into society and changing the attitudes of employers and also changing the attitudes of the Aboriginal people themselves. So from a social and community development point of view our job is very, very slow but we are getting results. What we certainly need to back that up is a better education system, and a system that fits people rather than people fitting the system. We've got some opportunities coming up in the near future. We're looking at Argyle, which has been speaking to us about putting in a hundred trainees and apprentices over the next two years and they actually want to pick those trainees and apprentices up from the communities, the outlying communities, that are around that area. The big problem we have

**[Competing interests between employment and community resources]**

is that to pick up 50 to 100 people that are work-ready, training ready or apprentice ready, I can count on one hand the people in those communities that would probably have the prerequisites to take on something like that. Now if you do take those ten or 20 people out of the communities because they do have the prerequisites, what happens to the community? Where does all their talent go? A company like Argyle would actually pick them up and pay them good wages then what's back in the community to attract them and encourage them to stay? I could probably rave on for hours and hours and hours about this but we certainly see it from that employment point of view and people that I work with, training providers and the educators all talk about that lack of ever really making the grade now and I said education's a huge part of that. I also think that, a last statement, that the transitional stuff, even if the education does become a huge priority and we do get people up to that stage, I still think that there should be some transitional programs in place to actually help people through those different stages. So that we throw our hands up and say, "well, whose job is that", because that's what quite often happens. We need to know exactly whose job it is in those stages to actually help that transition. That's pretty much all I've got to say at this stage and I think the report here pretty much says it all – you can imagine the throw-on effects that happen after those types of statistics are thrown.



	<p>have difficulty fitting in and coping. There is a school of thought that an intensive culturally appropriate program concentrating on early childhood and development would be a very valuable way of breaking the current education impasse. There's an urgent need for specialist Aboriginal pre-primary classes, preferably with Aboriginal staff, to cater to the specific needs and get them up to speed before they are disadvantaged (by the system).</p>
<b>Helen Wright</b>	<p>They've got a project running in Perth where they've got a high Aboriginal population in an area and they're got three pre-primary classes one of which has been turned into an Aboriginal pre-primary class with an Aboriginal teacher and they haven't got long term records but talking to the principal, he was saying that the kids who had been through that pre-primary showed no substantial difference in grades later on and attendance ratings throughout their school careers. Whereas the ones who were bypassing that pre-primary were uncomfortable with school and were disadvantaged right through the system. So they were highlighting that as a really important stage. And it was also a way of getting parents involved with the school because they would be coming down with their kids and feeling comfortable in that area, and that became the ATSI area.</p>
<b>Ian Trust</b>  [Conflict resolution and self esteem]	<p>We also felt that the courses that are available should probably be more flexible in terms of the range of courses available to students, especially students who are having trouble with literacy and numeracy. We are of the view that the courses should include things like life skills to try and build up students' confidence and self-esteem. If you weren't able to do those sorts of things and just concentrated on literacy and numeracy these students would have found it harder to cope with the education system. So we felt that there should be some programs and courses that provided life skills to build up students' self-esteem. A thing like conflict resolution is another issue. Apparently the Girrawheen High School have been running courses on conflict resolution skills with some areas of success for some time.</p>
<b>Helen Wright</b>	<p>We studied the school programs in Perth and Girrawheen High School had terrible conflict problems between ethnic communities and Aboriginal communities. I don't know all the details of it but they said that this conflict resolution that they had been working on with had had a measure of success in reducing inter-student problems within the school. And certainly talking to groups of parents around Hall's Creek that was one of the things that they said they really wanted their kids to come out of school with was better conflict resolution skills because they had to learn that fighting wasn't necessarily the way of solving problems; that violence and fighting in the community was a really big issue and that wasn't really reflected in school and wasn't a skill that kids were coming out with.</p>
<b>Ian Trust</b>	<p>Other skills included money management, nutrition and health, general management of administrative skills that people are simply not picking up from life and the communities around them. So they were the major things that we felt that if the system was a little bit more flexible it could pick up on those issues of trying to build those students self-esteem. This would generally give them sort of life skills to be able to cope with the education system generally.</p>
<b>Helen Wright</b>	<p>For kids that were clearly not achieving on the literacy and numeracy front at a certain stage other courses were provided. It's not like social engineering that kids in the desert only get to learn certain skills. Literacy and numeracy</p>

	are still the first ones to go for.
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<b>Ian Trust</b>  [No provision of education]	The other issues in regards to access to education, you've got some kids that just can't get education, especially in the out-station communities up here. We recognise that the government isn't able to provide education services to every little out-station community that is developed or created. But there are some out-stations, for example Crocodile Hole, that have 10 or twenty Aboriginal kids who weren't receiving any education at all for a time. So there's issues like that that need to be looked at from a policy and strategy point of view at some point.
<b>Helen Wright</b>	These kids have tried coming to the Catholic school in Doolboong, which is 60kms away and it hasn't worked. There's no school for them so those 16 or 18 kids have been without education for a year. We've got a few other points written down. We'll just hand that into you shall we. There were just a couple of other issues on the end.
<b>Ian Trust</b>	Yes, one was the Aboriginal Education Training Committee, the Direct Training Council in Perth which is the statewide representative advisory body to the Minister for Education. As far as we know it doesn't have a representative from the Kimberley and we think there should be one.
<b>Helen Wright</b>	You have got representatives coming in to talk about the Barramundi School haven't you?
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Yes
<b>Helen Wright</b>  [Secondary provision]	Another feeling that we have just heard from talking to people around is that the approaches of the Catholic school here, St Joseph's Primary School, and the High School are very, very different. A few people have raised the issue that if there's going to be a St Joseph's Primary School there should be a secondary continuation of it, rather than having the kids go to St Joseph's to Grade 7 and then have to go across to the mainstream system and have this problem of the transition from two totally different school systems. And a couple of people asked us to mention that the problem with that transition has in some way created the problem with things like the Barramundi School because the kids just aren't set up to cope with the system. No criticism of anyone implied, just if they are going to be part of one system up to Grade 7 it seems in a way unfair that there's not a continuation of that system further along.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Thanks Ian and thanks Helen. Thanks particularly for being so specific about what needs to be done, where attention needs to be focused, that helps us a lot. Any questions?
<b>Sr Pat Rhatigan</b>	No, thank you, that was very comprehensive.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Okay, St Joseph's, would you like to come on up?
<b>John Polglase</b>  [Disability]	We've got two issues to bring up today. The first one is about the situation of a profoundly deaf child and his access to special education. And the second one, which Sister Maryanne is going to talk about, is the retention of Aboriginal students with special needs in the secondary area.  The student in question is a profoundly deaf Aboriginal child named Calvin Calway. In 1996 he was enrolled at St Joseph's School in the pre-primary program so that he may receive a Catholic education. Due to his profound deafness funding was sought from various bodies to provide Calvin with the specialised attention that he required. The school was allocated funding which enabled an assistant teacher trained in signing to work with Calvin

<p><b>[Disability and funding arrangements]</b></p>	<p>approximately one day per week. Calvin showed progress and his attendance was quite good. He also received a hearing aid, which was of great benefit. The support teacher also began teaching various family members at school sign language so that they would be better able to communicate with Calvin. This scenario continued during 1997 and 1998. At times Calvin's attendance was erratic due to family circumstances, however it is of special note that he was absent for a total of only three days during terms 1 and 2 of 1998, which is very, very good. It should also be stated that at times Calvin experienced periods of frustration and anguish due to his inability to communicate with the wider school population.</p> <p>At the commencement of 1999 it was felt that in order for Calvin to progress further and reach his potential he needed to be in an environment where he had access to a full time interpreter and sign language teacher. St Joseph's School applied for the necessary funding but was denied. With Calvin's best interests viewed as a priority he was enrolled at the Kununurra District High School (KDHS) where he has access to a full-time interpreter sign language teacher. In this situation his progress showed marked improvement and he happily involved himself in activities set for him. The situation was further enhanced by the fact that there were other children of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent that Calvin could sign to and mix with. Some members of the KDHS staff have learnt to sign which enabled them to communicate with Calvin whilst on yard duty etcetera. To provide further support his elder brother Whelan was also enrolled at the school, however due to illness and the family situation Calvin's attendance at the Kununurra High School has not been good. He has missed a third of a term this year. To further exacerbate the situation Whelan has recently been re-enrolled at St Joseph's School, leaving Calvin with no direct relations at the High School of his own age group.</p> <p>St Joseph's believe that Calvin needs specialised care due to his hearing disability and acknowledges and appreciates the progress that KDHS has made in this. However, it is felt that St Joseph's School should have been able to provide the same service. As stated earlier, it was the mother's original intention that Calvin receive a Catholic education. It was also important to her that Calvin be in an environment where his relations were present. Because St Joseph's could not obtain the necessary funding required to obtain a full-time support teacher for him, he had to be removed from the school. With a better funding arrangement Calvin would have been able to stay at St Joseph's.</p> <p>It is believed that the central issue that needs to be considered is one of equity. The government schools seem to have a better funding arrangement which puts them in a position of being able to offer a service which is beyond that of St Joseph's. Such a situation disadvantages those children who wish to have a Catholic Education along with the specialised care required for them to reach their full potential. It also needs to be stated that it was initially very difficult for Calvin to make the transition to the High School and required much support from his own family, St Joseph's and Kununurra District High School staff. So basically we're saying that we want to be able to offer the same services that Kununurra District High School does. We've very happy with</p>
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	<p>what is going at present but it seems as though Calvin's attendance is dropping off due to different reasons. If it happens that he is not going to the High School and wishes to return to St Joseph's we want to be in a position to be able to offer him what the High School does, and at the moment we can't get the funding to do that.</p>
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	<p>Okay, thanks John.</p>
<p><b>Sister Maryanne</b></p> <p>[Transition and school attendance]</p>	<p>So Helen already brought up that issue of transition and that's the one that I'm addressing and it's particularly of course limited to our school, the transition from St Joseph's and transition for Aboriginal children. So on the yellow sheets the highlighted ones, you'll notice, are all children who are in mainstream. So I've just looked at the three years because I've only been here for two so the kids that left before I arrived are just the ones that I've been able to follow through. Aboriginal children who have been in mainstream education in St Joseph's do quite okay when they go to KDHS or boarding school or whatever, but it's particularly those children that Ian referred to, you know, the initial ones of those who are in community or urban backgrounds that we're looking at here.</p> <p>When I arrived in Kununurra in 1997 I began listening to the community, especially the women, and what was of concern to them was the number of students from St Josephs that were dropping out after leaving primary and beginning secondary school. These children were then roaming the streets. So once I started looking into the issue, this was the sort of picture that faced me. Just beginning with that first sheet there of attendance in 1990, it's showing that there's a mixture. Some attend regularly and on the whole it is regular but there are a number that even in 1996 are attending irregularly and I think part of the beginning of that is that they're starting to get near twelve and thirteen and the age of law in Aboriginal society and then those tensions become even greater. So what they show is about 4 or 5 kids transfer in July to the Barramundi School. So what happens is that the kids are enrolled at KDHS for secondary, and then at some point they have dropped out and gone to the Barramundi school. It's usually when their attendance ahs dropped and people are concerned.</p> <p>The first year of secondary school is a whole new tension in itself without having to swap schools in that first year. These kids have got a fair bit to cope with. Nearly all of them have been to 2 or 3 schools. With the group that I followed, we can see that they have left even earlier. Two of these children wanted to go to boarding school, but they dropped out because of the time that it took to organise ABSTUDY. Some of these children are not attending school because they have completed primary, but they are not old enough; you have to be 13 to go to Barramundi, and so they are outside of the system. They have been offered to go back to St Joseph's but they haven't taken up this option. They don't want to go, and they haven't enrolled at the KDHS secondary school.</p> <p>So what are the issues? Well it seems that children for whom English is a Second Language, struggle to fit in with a secondary mainstream school model like KDHS. The KDHS has to cater for the whole of the Kununurra secondary population. There is no doubt that this works for the mainstream</p>
<b>[Indigenous students and</b>	

<p><b>mainstream education]</b></p> <p><b>[Community liaison]</b></p> <p><b>[Abstudy]</b></p>	<p>children but at the moment it is not working for the community children. Their attendance drops off and remains very irregular. The majority of these children come from the Miriwoong and the Gajirrawoong communities. Eighty percent of them chose to go to the Barramundi school. But the situation is that they have to enrol at KDHS first and then their attendance has to be so bad that they will be accepted into the Barramundi school. They are set up to fail in a way and then they are forced to change schools. Once at the Barramundi school, their attendance improves. At the KDHS the kids feel that they are picked on. I think being Aboriginal at the primary school St Joseph's, the children don't feel different because 70 to 80% of them are Aboriginal. At the High School they are not in the majority and they feel left out. There is a very different culture. For example, if you come late you are given a late ticket, and you get a couple of late tickets and you are punished. What is important to stress here is that there is a very different culture. There is also not a lot of support for children to come to school</p> <p>But with St Joseph's and the Barramundi school we are in the community all the time. We are there as an alarm clock for people who don't have clocks. We give encouragement. We provide transport, food and sometimes clothing.</p> <p>One of the problems is that the parents and grandparents don't encourage the children to go to school. One of the reasons for this is that the parents don't have strong links with KDHS. The kids then get mixed messages. The parents will say that the kids are going to boarding school in Sydney or Darwin. But the problem is that they don't set it up. The next problem is that it is much harder to get ABSTUDY. The rules have changed and now the parents have to make a special case to obtain the ABSTUDY for their children. This is a problem for many of the families. They want their children to go to boarding school because they went to boarding school. It is taking much longer to get ABSTUDY and this affects the transition from primary to secondary school.</p>
<p><b>John Polglase</b></p>	<p>The other thing is that the students want to be with their friends and they need that support all the way throughout. We find that if one person leaves then others will leave too because they want to be together.</p>
<p><b>Sr Maryanne</b></p> <p><b>[Culturally appropriate education]</b></p>	<p>So why do they choose Barramundi? Well they do so because of its cultural appropriateness, the respect for their identity and culture and the links with the community. Barramundi is sensitive to the issues of relationship between men and women once they get to the law stage. That there are certain people that they must not associate with and shouldn't be in class with. Since the Barramundi school has received more funding and is now able to do these culturally appropriate things, its enrolment and its attendance has gone up 100 fold.</p> <p>There is a need for identity and belonging. What works at Barramundi is that the groups are small. Usually 10 boys and 10 girls and this is good for their self-esteem. And the men's units and the women's units at Barramundi have links back with lawmen and law women in the community. They do a least a day a week with people from the community to study law and culture. The teachers at the Barramundi are present and in the community every day and they have established relationships with the parents, guardians and grandparents. Time is flexible, and school doesn't start at 8.00am, sometimes</p>

<p><b>[Problems with Abstudy]</b></p>	<p>it is only getting going at 9.00am. The curriculum is flexible, there are far more individualised programs and there is far more attention to culture.</p> <p>While Barramundi is doing a good job, it is not the choice of all children. Twelve of the 30 children who were in transition from St Joseph's have chosen to go on to mainstream schooling. Six of those applied for boarding school and even some of the Barramundi children have applied for Boarding school. To get to boarding school usually takes so long that we try to get them into some schooling and get a holding pattern going until the boarding school is organised. But of all the children who have gone to boarding school, there is only one student who has got there on the starting date. Problems with the inefficiency of ABSTUDY and transport. Now this is a problem because some of the children miss out on the bonding and the establishing themselves right in the beginning.</p> <p>The ABSTUDY forms are too hard to fill in for many of the parents. They are always being sent back and we spend a lot of time on the phone trying to sort out problems. We have to go through Darwin before we can talk to Perth. All of this takes time and postpones the starting date for boarding school. ABSTUDY can work as a disincentive for schooling. ABSTUDY A is paid for children who stay here for school and ABSTUDY B is for children who go away for boarding. ABSTUDY needs to be linked to attendance. Rather than being paid twice a year, if they were paid on a bi-monthly basis then it could be more closely linked to attendance. Centrelink really needs to educate the communities that when they are not attending they do not receive the ABSTUDY funding and the money is actually deducted from the family allowance. So then the students can realise that they are actually penalising their families. That sort of information is not readily available until the parent receives a big bill, they get terribly upset, and then they want to withdraw the children from school and not send any of the others away or on to secondary school.</p> <p>We had a problem here in Kununurra too with turnover of Centrelink staff. We had 2 Centrelink staff to inform parents in the transition from primary to secondary school about the links between ABSTUDY and school attendance. By the end of the year both staff had left and there was no one responsible for ABSTUDY. There was nobody to help students who wanted to access ABSTUDY.</p>
<p><b>[Recommendations]</b></p>	<p>So what are our recommendations? They are that Year 7 students be given a choice between mainstream and alternate culturally appropriate secondary education. To enable that to be a real choice the Barramundi school needs to be put on a sure footing. It only gets its funding year by year. I know it took us until August last year to get EDWA to commit to funding of the school for the following year. Funding needs to be allocated so that the school can run at least 2 units. The girls need to have a separate unit from the boys. That is just much more culturally appropriate and it has certainly shown in the retention rates.</p> <p>In order to support alternative education, the community needs to have a say</p>

	<p>in the selection of the staff. Children need to be able to enrol in the Barramundi school without having to first enrol in KDHS and then drop out to go to the Barramundi school. It should be the first choice rather than the one of last resort. For those children who feel they must go out of town to get a secondary education, ABSTUDY must offer more efficient and effective support. This must involve a simpler application process and quicker response time so that students can be there for the beginning of the school year. There needs to be some continuity of personnel and of process. I've been here for 2 years and in the first year we dealt with DEET (Department of Employment, Education and Training) and the second year we dealt with Centrelink. Two totally different organisations. There needs to be more respect for the students involved, their parents and guardians and their particular home situations.</p>
<b>Sr Pat Rhatigan</b>	Do you have the retention rates for the children who go away to boarding schools?
<b>Sr Maryanne</b>	There are only a couple of students who are currently boarding and their attendance has been quite good. They have very good family and community support. But there are 2 community kids who have gone to boarding, one has dropped out and the other is just hanging in here.
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Do you find that there are Catholic parents who sent their kids to the State school because there is a perception that the Aboriginal kids go to the Catholic school?
<b>John Polglase</b>	I would think there would be, it would be hard to prove it but yes I think so.
<b>Sr Maryanne</b>	There was a push a while ago to try to get more Catholic parents from non-Indigenous backgrounds to send their children there.
<b>John Polglase</b>	There is a perception though that St Joseph's is a second rate school, even though it is not and this might be because of the 70% Aboriginal population. We have done a lot of work in the community to promote the profile of the school.
<b>Sr Maryanne</b>	The issue to is the ESL one. But our kids seem to do well when they on to the mainstream schools or to the alternative school.
<b>Anne Wright</b>	I'm President of the Parent's and Citizen's Association (P&C) at the Kununurra District High school.
<b>Peter Albin</b>	I'm the Chairperson of the Secondary Steering Committee that is a Sub-Committee of the P&C Committee.
<b>Anne Wright</b>	<p>Kununurra District High School has been a K to Year 10 school for a number of years but now parents are looking to extend the secondary school so that parents don't have to send their children away for Years 10, 11 and 12 or 11 and 12 to complete their schooling. Parents have really got behind this with the teachers, to extend the program.</p>
<b>[Provision of senior secondary schooling]</b>	<p>In 1996 the teachers got together and decided that rather than supervising students doing Schools of Isolated and Distance Education, they could actually run some subjects. So in 1997, four subjects were offered face to face in Year 11 and in the same year a couple of subjects were offered in Year 12. The rest of the course was offered through (SIDE).</p> <p>There are now about 40 children in Years 11 and 12, though mainly in Year 11. About 30 in Year 11 and ten students in Year 12. Many of the students are completing all Tertiary Entrance subjects. The children are staying in Kununurra. The teacher in charge of post-compulsory studies found that the</p>

<p><b>[Transport subsidies for some School of Isolated and Distance Education students]</b></p>	<p>students of SIDE were entitled to some subsidies funding for airfares. This was for 3 airfares over 2 years so that they could go to SIDE, meet their teachers and visit the zoo and hear the lecture on biology that it offers and they could participate practical work for physics and chemistry using the lab facilities because we don't have a lab here in Kununurra. They could also have a whole range of cultural experiences not available to them but available to students in Perth.</p> <p>This year with so many kids in Year 11, the Department of Transport said that the children in Year 11 were not entitled to this funding because you have to be doing 75% of your subjects through SIDE and none of the students quite meet that criterion. We know that parents that send their children away to boarding school from Year 8 are given 4 return airfares per year so that they can see their children at holidays. Yet we have chosen to support our local school and to educate our children in the community; perhaps also because we can't afford to send our children away, yet we are not entitled to the same.</p> <p>In secondary there is a limited range of subjects available, a limited range of cultural, social and sporting activities, and parents are up for a lot of money if they want to send their children to participate or compete in these activities in Perth.</p>
<p><b>[Curriculum provision and staffing]</b></p>	<p>There are changes of focus in the secondary school due to changes in staffing. For example, aviation and agriculture were identified as important areas early in the 1990s. Programs were developed in both, but they have since been abandoned as the teachers have moved on and have not been replaced.</p>
<p><b>[Special needs and gifted children]</b></p>	<p>Special needs children are also penalised because of our remoteness. The talented and gifted children access the Telematics course in the library. Sometimes there is not enough support for those children in the school. These kids are also often in the library outside of school hours, at lunch etcetera, because the times do not coincide with the Telematics classes.</p>
<p><b>[Provision of senior secondary]</b></p>	<p>The school psychologist comes from Catholic Education in Broome and she only comes here once or twice a year. It is hard to access these people, so parents are forced to take their children to Darwin or Perth for assessment.</p> <p>In secondary school there is the problem of Aboriginal education and the cultural appropriateness of the education. We are aware of it, though we don't really have any answers.</p>
<p><b>Peter Albin</b></p> <p><b>[Provision of senior secondary]</b></p>	<p>A number of years ago there was a perceived need to upgrade the facilities of the upper secondary school. This has been an on-going issue for some time. Once a child has reached about Year 9 quite a number of parents are confronted with the decision as to whether or not to send their child away to complete upper secondary, or whether in fact, the whole family should relocate during this time. Many of these parents can't afford to send their children away to boarding school, and also parents don't want to break up the family. So in 1996 a Steering Committee was formed by parents and teachers</p>

<p><b>[The ‘Super School’ concept]</b></p>	<p>to investigate the development of a secondary school model that would meet the needs of the community. We have been working for 3 ½ years now. We have been to Wyndham and we have offered them the opportunity to become involved in the development of the school facilities here in Kununurra.</p> <p>We initially produced an interim report to Mr Colin Barnett, the Minister for Education. In 1997 he announced that a Super-School concept would be implemented across much of Western Australia and this would stop the duplication of educational services and to make better use of the educational resources in any given area and it was also intended to improve student outcomes. The Super-School concept has never been seen through to fruition and it has been superseded by the Local Area Planning Groups that currently operate. Its role was to do basically the same as the Super –School group.</p> <p>So this Local Area Planning committee has been set up with participation from the local District High principals, the District Office Director and a number of parent representatives from Kununurra and Wyndham. It initially included all of the primary schools, though it was realised that they had separate problems.</p> <p>That initial document looked at long term planning for family residency in Kununurra and the sub-region. One of the reasons for this emphasis was to provide quality education from Kindergarten through to Year 12.</p> <p>The Shire of Wyndham did their own study and they found that the main reasons why families were leaving had to do with the quality and provision of education in their area.</p> <p>We also produced a pamphlet for distribution amongst the community for discussion and a draft plan and to find out what the community wants in this region. We are still in the community consultative stage but we have quite a comprehensive submission to send to the Local Area Planning committee.</p>
<p><b>Chris Sidoti</b></p>	<p>From the point of view of the parents, how do you find race relations in the school?</p>
<p><b>Anne Wright</b></p>	<p>It’s mixed, but there’s a general perception that if there’s Aboriginal children in the class they tend to be disruptive and hold down the standard. Some parents are quite able to cope with it, and others find it hard.</p>
<p><b>Peter Albin</b> <b>[Race relations]</b></p>	<p>There is a patriarchal culture whereby the treatment of girls by older Aboriginal boys is not the same for example, as the treatment of girls by non-Aboriginal boys. This has given some parents cause for concern. I don’t know how widespread this is. I haven’t experienced it with my own girls, but the anecdotal evidence is there, and some people have had problems.</p> <p>The other problem is the disruptive nature of one culture coming into mainstream education and not being adequately equipped with the social skills and the support that is available from a European background that non-Aboriginal kids have. That leads to a lot of concern about how efficient the classroom teaching is and the general standard of education. At the P &amp; C meetings there is regular discussion about the disruptive influence in the High School and that the school standard is slipping. This is said frequently.</p>

<b>Anne Wright</b>	What these parents don't say though is that the school gets a lot of money on the basis of the attendance of numbers of Aboriginal children.
<b>Peter Albin</b> [Parents' and Citizens' association]	The P & C parent body is very active. The parent body makes its decisions in the best interests of all children at the school, and not just in the interests in one cultural or minority group. The P & C has its own sources of funding. The school canteen is the main source of its funding. We also have donations and various other funds.
<b>Cris Sidoti</b>	Are parents generally supportive of Aboriginal culture being taught in the school?
<b>Anne Wright</b> [Indigenous language learning]	No. In a word no. There has been a language program in the primary school up to Year 6, but there was a lot of opposition to it. It has now in fact stopped. Children were brought down to the language centre to study it and parents refused to sign the note to let their children go on the bus for it.
<b>Peter Albin</b>	I think also there were attendant problems with duty of care and children being at risk away from the school campus. The parents generally see those types of cultural experiences not appropriate for the long-term educational plans for their children. Most of the non-Aboriginal parents would rather see their kids doing drama in the school or a face to face academic subject, rather than coming down here to learn a local Aboriginal language. It is not advantageous to their children to speak the local language because later in life when they go on to Perth to complete their education, or even to another town the language will not be relevant to another region. .
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Yet research demonstrates that the teaching and learning of language is positive no matter what the language is. I did 6 years of Latin and that is spoken less than any Aboriginal language that I am aware.
<b>Peter Albin</b>	Yes, well I did 6 years of French and had the opportunity to use it when I went to Europe a couple of years ago. Parents don't generally approve of languages unless they are spoken by many, many people like the European and the Asian languages. There is also the continuity of it. When you have several people in one family and they want all their children to do it, but they find that the staff has changed, or the program has changed or the school has decided not to run it.
<b>Daniel Suggit</b> [Traditional communities of the Kununurra region]	<p>I am speaking today on behalf of the Kununurra Youth Services Incorporated, which has sponsored and continually fostered the Barramundi school since 1995. There are so many issues that could be addressed today and I am daunted by the task. And in relation to the language program run here as mentioned by the last speakers, and I actually ran that, I could add some comments about that too. I will focus on some of the same issues that Sr Maryanne focused on in relation to culturally appropriateness of educational services.</p> <p>As you might know, Kununurra is a very complex place with 30 years of white settlement and development on top of what is a very traditional culture. In the early to mid 19970s the Aboriginal communities move in after the closure of stations and the lack of employment at stations. The Miriwoong people are the traditional owners of Kununurra and its surrounding country. Their neighbours, and therefore close relations, are the Gajirrawoong, Jaminjoong, Ngarinyman, Marrinpatha, Gija and others.</p> <p>I have chosen to talk only about these groups of Aboriginal Community</p>

**[Western education systems and Indigenous students]**

people because they are the people that I have worked with for the last 5 years as the coordinator of the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-Gerring Centre. This language Centre is an initiative of the Mirima Council Aboriginal Corporation. It is important to define Aboriginal people as specific groups in this way because it allows you to critically assess claims about Aboriginal participation in schooling and meaningfully discuss there reasons why and why not some Aboriginal children go to school and some others don't.

If we focus on the kids from the traditional communities/groups that I have outlined, we see a distinct pattern in their schooling. Almost all of these kids, at least 95% are enrolled in St Joseph's Catholic School during their primary aged years. Then a few may go to the Kununurra District High School, a few more will be sent away to Aboriginal directed or focused schools in Darwin, There would only be about 10 students who have any connection with the District High School here. Alice Springs or Perth for a time, many will return after a year. The majority, and this needs to be researched thoroughly, spend most of their High School years, say 12 to 16 without any form of continuous Western education. This gap in Western style learning has been addressed to some extent by the Barramundi School program in the last 4 years or so. By the way, many of these kids of course have ended up on the books of Juvenile Justice and Family and Children's Services because they are young adults free from any system on the fringes of a developing white town.

What a number of us have tried to do over the years with the Barramundi school is to create a discussion with the community about the needs of these kids in terms of learning, employment cultural maintenance and identity. Also what we have tried to do is to bring 'schooling' to the community rather than the community to the school which so often happens within the major educational systems within Kununurra. The Barramundi school might then be perceived by the community as an integral and essential part of their direction, rather than something separate and hard to understand. Please realise that most of the parents, grandparents and great-grandparents have little confidence in their own 'white' schooling. This situation of course makes it hard to involve the community and to encourage parents to support the work of their kids at school. This is why the Barramundi school is also attempting to involve traditional learning by community members as a basis for all learning that is done in the program.

Most of the schools here would have a corporate line that goes something like this; 'our doors are open to everyone'. What this fails to recognise is that the very system itself excludes the children from entrance. In 1996, Cheryl Vardon, the then Minister for Education of Western Australia came to the Barramundi school and said that we had created a ghetto. Well, my response to this is that the ghetto was already here and we have just made it visible. Her department has grudgingly supported this school for these 4 years, though this year we employ on teacher through Education Department of Western Australia.

To finish I will simply state that I believe this new form of educational involvement for Aboriginal kids in Kununurra can meet any worthwhile

	<p>outcomes, some white and some black. It is a more effective learning context for teaching these kids Western literacy and numeracy. It is a more effective way to teach these kids to negotiate the White world of institutions, the law, banks, governments and other learning places. It is also a way that the community can involve teenagers in traditional cultural learning. It could also allow the community to gain expertise for the future through its young in terms of community development and enterprise management. That is, the children could be seen, and see themselves as a valuable resource for their peoples' own future. Perhaps then, this traditional Aboriginal community and its individuals might at least participate effectively in Western education.</p> <p>The issues of language education have been an ongoing one and has to do with peoples' perceptions over what constitutes education and learning. This is now a problem at St Joseph's. Some white parents say that it is the privileging of some minority groups over others. That is pretty hard to take when 50% of the population is Aboriginal. If anywhere should deal with this problem it should be the Kimberley.</p>
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	Can you speak about the attendance rates of the children at the Barramundi school?
<b>Daniel Suggit</b>	<p>In the context of most of these children not attending school for most of their lives, attendance is extremely good and we're talking about 80 to 90%. We are also trying to line our kids up with the State and National literacy standards, And yes, the program is fun and the children get to go out bush but in the mornings they concentrate on the core component of literacy and numeracy. The Edith Cowan University is currently undertaking research into the program looking at the attendance of the students and their educational outcomes.</p>
<b>Chris Sidoti</b>	With the teaching of Aboriginal languages, how do you deal with the various different language groups that come into Kununurra?
<b>Daniel Suggit</b>	<p>The view is that this place is Miriwoong and all the names of places in this town are Miriwoong so to teach another language would be a threat. That is quite simply put. If you come to another person's country the onus is on you to learn the language of the local people.</p> <p>There has been some talk of learning Gija at the local school because a number of the Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers speak Gija, though the language centre has not been approached.</p> <p>There has been a native title claim here establishing the direct connection of Miriwoong people here and the Gajirrawoong people to the land of the North of Kununurra. You can see that there is a context to the language here and to bring another language here would be highly political. Given that the Miriwoong people have asserted their rights to this land it would not be possible to teach another language on this land.</p> <p>Three years ago a number of parents threatened legal action if their children were required to continue to learn the Miriwoong language at the language centre. The response of the Principal was to bring the language learning back to the school to avoid the problem of the relocation to the language centre. I took this proposal to the language centre council and the teachers said that this</p>

	<p>is the language centre and this is where the language should be taught. Unfortunately the situation has been left there. The other problem is that a lot of the Miriwoong children do not attend the High School. So what happens is you get a class full of white local children who are Western learners who put up their hands and shout together. Then you have traditional teachers who have a very different style. Aboriginal children are taught to wait and listen and the white kids are taught to speak up and be confident. So there has been some difficulty and problems with enjoying the language learning. We must work more closely with the school to resolve these problems.</p> <p>There are also a number of complex issues at work here too. I have some sympathy with what Peter said about how relevant it is for white kids to learn Miriwoong. There are things also that cannot and should not be taught about the Miriwoong language, things that should remain among the Miriwoong community. Perhaps a more general cultural and language awareness course that outlines things such as family structure should be taught to the white children.</p> <p>In addition, all we were allowed was half an hour per week was not enough time. So then this need to be worked out with the school. Some of the white kids really enjoyed this program and they got to see Aboriginal children being successful at language learning and comfortable in their own context.</p>
<p><b>John</b> [Aboriginal Elder] [Health education]</p>	<p>One of the things that we need to teach children at school is information about health. No one at school told me about the effects of excessive drinking of alcohol. It could have helped. The best person to speak about these problems though is someone who has been through the same problems. There is a danger out there and the kids don't know what is going to happen to them.</p>
<p><b>Peter Albin</b></p>	<p>In answer to your question, John, is that there is now a comprehensive program about drugs and alcohol that starts at Grade 2 at the District school.</p>
<p><b>John</b></p>	<p>Yes, but with all the experts in the world, often the best person to teach this information to the kids is someone who can speak from experience. That is why people like me should be teaching the children about the bad effects of alcohol. This is perhaps one of the most effective ways to get the message across.</p> <p>So many of my relatives are in jail and it all due to alcohol. My granddaughter was killed in 1986 on her birthday and again, that was due to alcohol. We really must address this problem in the community and we must do it through education. It is one of the biggest threats to remote communities like this one.</p>
<p><b>Chris Sidoti</b></p>	<p>Thank you all very much for coming and contributing to this inquiry.</p>