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HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION

MR CHRIS SIDOTI, Commissioner
MS BARBARA FLICK, Co-Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

AT SYDNEY ON FRIDAY, 22 OCTOBER 1999 AT 8.44 AM

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5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** It's Friday, 22 October, the Sydney hearings of the Rural Education Inquiry. I am Chris Sidoti, I'm the Human Rights Commissioner. Barbara Flick is Co-Commissioner for New South Wales for the inquiry. Would you like to introduce yourself for the tape?

MS KNIGHT: Certainly. My name is Deborah Knight. I'm the Director of Dalwood Assessment Centre.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you. Straight into your submission, then we might have a few questions for you at the end of that.

MS KNIGHT: Certainly. Just by way of introduction, I'll give a brief outline of what the service provides for rural children.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you.

MS KNIGHT: I have a handout for both of the Commissioners. This gives more detail about the actual service and what we do provide.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks.

MS KNIGHT: The Assessment Centre, in conjunction with Palm Avenue School, provides an assessment, therapy and remediation service for New South Wales rural children of infants and primary-school age - that's 5 to 12 years old - who are experiencing severe learning, speech and language and behavioural and emotional disorders. The service is funded by a variety of forces or organisations, but principally by the Department of Health and that's administered locally through Manly and Mona Vale Hospitals; through the Department of Education and Training, through the Northern Beaches district. We also have one full-time teacher who's funded by the Catholic Education Commission, and then 2 part-time positions who are funded by a private research fund.

35 Our catchment area for the children is New South Wales minus the major metropolitan areas of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, so we see children from the rest of the state. We cover children from all schooling systems, including government, the Catholic Education Commission and also independent schools; and, as I said earlier, our principal focus is on infants and primary-school aged children who are presenting with significant disabilities.

40 We're a tertiary referral service, which is essentially a medical term, meaning that we only see children who are presenting with significant or severe difficulties. We see children who have been seen by local resources and the local resources have provided some input, but the child is still exhibiting difficulties; so it's a sort of a consultation

service. We sometimes relax that because there are certainly areas around the state where, if local resources exist - they may not exist - or if they exist, the frequency of contact is so infrequent as to be non-viable.

5

[Dalwood clients]

The principal reason for referral for the children that we see is that the children are exhibiting severe literacy - that's reading and spelling - difficulties; but most of the children that we do see present with multiple disorders or multiple developmental disorders, including, most commonly, significant speech and language difficulties, behavioural problems, often anxiety disorders as well and, for many of the children that we see, they are living within a family context where there are significant financial and family stresses.

15

Our referral sources are: around about 65 to 70% of referrals come directly from the schools, the child's school; between 15 to 20% directly from the child's parents; and then the rest are largely medical referrals from community health centres and paediatricians from the major rural centres.

20

[Assessment]

We have a several-pronged system of service delivery. For the assessment process, it's normally around a 3 to 4 day process. The families come to Sydney and they're provided with subsidised accommodation and transportation that's provided by a combination of the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Training. The assessment itself is a multi-disciplinary process where the child receives a comprehensive evaluation in a variety of functional domains that are relevant to the difficulty that they're having or the disability.

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Most typically, that involves assessment of their cognitive functions; their intellectual functions; their speech and language functions; obviously their academic skills, because that's the most common reason for referral. The children often have a medical assessment and we do have a medical assessment, including visual and hearing tests. We have links with the major teaching hospitals if there needs to be further investigation on a specialised level. We also have access to a psychiatrist, if psychiatric evaluation is required.

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40

Throughout the stay, the staff at the centre liaise with the staff, either centre or school-based, within the child's home community, to discuss the results of our assessment, what we're identifying as the child's primary difficulties and their principal needs, and then discuss what are viable means of ongoing support for the child once they return to their local community.

45

[Services; outreach program]

5 We have 4 principal modes of service delivery post the assessment phase, that's once the child and family have come down to Sydney. One is that we, for the less severely affected children and particularly children who live in larger regional centres, provide specific advice to the school regarding instructional programming, that's for their literacy difficulties, and for any other therapeutic or management advice for the child.

10 Our second phase is that we provide an extensive what's called Outreach programming for the children. The staff at the Centre, and principally the educational staff, design a remedial program that's for the child's literacy skills based on the assessment findings. The focus is, as I said, on the literacy skills of the child; but given that around
15 about 85% of the children that present at the Centre also have significant communication problems, the Outreach programs also have a heavy input from our speech and language therapists.

20 The program is then delivered to the child's home school. Mostly, that's done on a personal level, from one of the staff who are based at the centre. The staff visit the school, spend a day or part thereof of a day, at the child's home school discussing the results of the assessment and then training those who are then charged with the ongoing management of the child; how to go about doing or carrying
25 out the instruction or program. We're able to efficiently or quickly access the local schools. Given that we're metropolitan-based and our feeder population or the children that we see are rural, we're able to efficiently access our population that we serve through our links with the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

30 We literally piggy-back on the flights of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. There is a base in Bankstown and we fly from Bankstown out into the regional areas. It means that we can get out to the schools quickly - mostly quickly - and fulfil what we need to do in a day. It's at
35 no additional cost because those flights already exist for these specialist medical practitioners that are going out into the rural regions.

40 Of necessity, because of the sparsity of specialist or special ed staffs in the more remote regional schools, our programs, the Outreach programs that we design or the remedial programs, are specifically designed to be run quite efficiently by non-professional staff or either ancillary staff that exist within the child's home school or local community members, our volunteers. Hence, this has been a process of evolution, really, of program development at the Centre over around
45 about the last 10 years, but the programs are heavily scripted, there are clear instructional directions that are embedded within the programs.

5 Then we have immediate contact with the tutors by way of the visit to the child's school, but the programs themselves have daily monitoring sheets that the tutor fills out as the child is doing the literacy program. Then they're faxed or e-mailed to our Centre once a week, for close monitoring by the staff at the Centre. We're also available for ongoing consultation with the child's school staff and for the tutors during the period that the child is on the program.

10 We currently have 112 children throughout New South Wales that are on the Outreach programs, with around about 21 who are awaiting programs. One of our problems is that we have never received any particular additional funding to cater for the Outreach aspect of the program. It's a service initiative that was developed around about 10 years ago. We have and we only have one and a half staff members
15 who are specifically allocated to that Outreach role. That means program design, implementation visiting and monitoring and consultation.

20 The school part of the Centre is in fact only funded for a population of 18 students - that's over at Seaforth - 6 at any one stage for assessment on a weekly basis and 12 in our residential program, which I'll describe in a moment. But in reality at any one time, we have an active population of 130 students from throughout New South
25 Wales.

[Residential program]

The third aspect of our program is that we provide a residential program on-site at Dalwood, which is at Seaforth in northern Sydney. Each term we have 12 students, again from all parts of New South
30 Wales minus the metropolitan areas, all of whom present with significant literacy difficulties. I guess, to give you a picture, that our classic or prototypical child that would be attending the residential program would be an 11-year-old boy from the north-western or western districts of New South Wales, who is reading at around a 7-
35 year-old level. Typically, that prototypical child would also present with a range of other difficulties of speech and language and sometimes behavioural difficulties as well.

40 Because it's a residential program and the children are on-site for a 7-and-a-half-week period, of necessity, it's limited to senior primary school-aged children because of the adjustment required in living away from home, so the children are Year 5 and 6. It's an intensive program. The children attend the classes on school days, receive intensive remedial help addressing their particular individual
45 needs and the focus is primarily upon creating, enhancing or encouraging active and successful learners. These children all have a history of non-achievement, often are disheartened, unmotivated and

have secondary behavioural problems that have developed in response to their learning difficulties.

5 The clinical staff in the Assessment Centre are also involved
with the residential children in that we provide behavioural
management advice to the classroom teachers at the school. Our
speech pathologists provide individual speech and language
programming; we have group written language programs for the
10 children in the class and also social skills training that runs on a regular
basis.

15 At the end of the school term the staff then visit their child's
home school, similar to what I've already described with the Outreach
programming for the kids, so there's an individual visit made out to the
child's school. There are consultations with the child's classroom
teacher and the other support staff involved with the child or that may
or may not be involved with the child at their home school, most
typically being the support teacher learning difficulties and the district
20 school counsellor. We then put in a program that lasts for the next
school term and it's closely monitored by the staff at the Centre. The
clinical staff are available for ongoing consultation for other issues to
do with the child during that period as well.

25 We're rigorous empiricists, meaning that we have a very set
and systematic schedule of assessing the child's progress while they're
on the program that consists of, largely, 5 measurement occasions,
from when the child comes in initially for assessment through to
12 months after they've been through the residential program. Certainly
the statistics in terms of outcomes for the children that go through the
30 residential program, particularly given that they're senior primary school
aged children who are known to be notoriously difficult to remediate
because of the secondary characteristics that develop around their
learning failure, the outcome statistics - which are included in the
booklet here - are, said with due humility, quite impressive.

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[Language and literacy]

Our fourth means of program delivery is through what we call
an intensive language and literacy program. This is a relatively new
addition to services provided at the Centre and was largely begun as a
40 pilot project around 2 years ago by 2 of our staff members, a speech
pathologist and a special education teacher. It's designed particularly
to address the learning needs of children with very severe literacy
difficulties; that's even more severe than the children that are serviced
by Outreach and residential programs. I guess the prototypical child
45 there would be a late infant school-aged child or early primary school-
aged child who is essentially a non-reader; so an 8 to 10-year-old child
who reads little more than their name in spite of adequate educational
opportunities.

5 That program runs on a schedule where the children attend for a week of intensive remedial input, where the child has alternating sessions run daily by both the speech pathologist and the special ed teacher. The program is then devised while the child is at the Centre, videotaped and then a visit is made to the child's school by the speech pathologist and special ed teacher, and then a program is run for another 10 weeks. The children then come back to the Centre and repeat that process.

10 **[Support to rural staff]**

15 We also have a number of other services that we provide when we have time. We provide a direct consultation service to support staff throughout New South Wales, largely within the schools and again covering all the 3 major school systems principally to the support teacher learning difficulties, meaning that on a day-to-day basis or practical level, we're available for consultation around difficult to teach kids and difficult to manage kids within the rural sector. We have 4 clinical psychologists on staff who provide ongoing and regular advice and consultation to rural school counsellors, district school counsellors; 20 so we quite often have calls from school counsellors saying, "I've tested this child and am a little uncertain as to the results. Can you help me out?" Our speech pathologists also provide a consultation service to rural speech pathology services.

25 We also have a training and development program which is important, for the reasons which I'll go into in a moment. We present an annual conference on-site at Dalwood that is accessible for both metropolitan and rural health and education staff. They are largely on issues around developmental learning disorders in children, both 30 assessment, understanding and the management of the disorders. In general, over the past 4 years of the conferences that we've held we have an attendance of around about 200 to 250 people, around a third to a half of that from the rural sector.

35 We also make regular visits. Through our trips out into the rural areas we try to maximise our time by providing in-servicing to rural and education staff and on issues of assessment and instructional methods for children that are experiencing learning disabilities on behaviour management and general adjustment issues of the children within the 40 rural sector. We also sometimes do research, and we currently have 3 research projects that are being run at the Centre.

45 Largely, really, in summary, we're a service that provides support to those that are working with children with significant learning disabilities in the rural sector who have worked with the child themselves but who are struggling. We provide a specialist service in terms of adding assessment and instructional help to those that are working on the ground with the child. We also provide in a number of

instances and to a significant proportion of children, we provide a means of access to special education services that the children would otherwise not be able to access.

5 **[Financial constraints]**

In terms of problems or issues that come about as a result of our contact with the rural sector, which is certainly our singular client base, there is an enormous demand on our service. We have long waiting lists and largely created by the demand itself but that our own staffing levels cap the number of children that we can see in any aspect of the service. Our recent history is that from the beginning of this year, in February of this year, our assessment appointments were filled for this year; for 1999. We had children booked up until the end of December this year.

15 A decision was made in fact to close our referral book, so from February of this year through until last week in fact we accepted no new referrals; we were not in a position to accept any new referrals. We opened our books, so to speak, for new referrals last week and we now have - it's in fact timely in terms of the commission, in terms of information - 142 children booked for assessment next year. Those referrals have been received in the last 10 days.

25 The obvious effect is that it's a truism in special ed or special ed services and certainly in terms of behaviour management, that the earlier that you can intervene and the more regular that the special ed services can be provided for the child, then the more likely are like chances of success; chances of success, obviously, for the child's learning. Obviously, the long waiting lists are distressing for the parents involved, having to wait sometimes up to 12 months from the point of referral through to assessment. It's alarming for those staff who are on the ground who make the referral because the referral is being made because they need the assistance; and from, I guess a more selfish or professional perspective it's also fairly distressing for the staff to be overwhelmed by the numbers that we have.

35 In terms of our residential program, our residential school is fully booked for the year 2000, so there are 48 children that are booked in for next year and we have 9 children who are booked in for term 1 of 40 2001. Partly our situation of referrals to all aspects of our service has been exacerbated by the recent closure of the remedial reading program that has been available through the Royal Far West Children's Health Scheme, and we're getting a number of referrals of children who had been initially referred to that service.

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[Disability assessment in rural schools]

That's the problem for us, but by implication, for the families and children as well. There are more general problems that our service

is aware of by virtue of servicing the regional populations. I guess, to put it in summary, for children who present with significant reading and spelling difficulties, any appropriate programming or consequential skills progress that they may make as a result of the programming is
5 contingent on several critical factors. One is that there must be expertise at the assessment stage when the child is presented, meaning that those that are conducting the assessment need to have an up-to-date knowledge of the child's disorder or of the various
10 disorders that can present. They need to know the appropriate tests and the methodologies required to assess the child and clearly, obviously, the most suitable and effective interventions for the children.

Secondly, the assessment needs to be broad based. That means that it necessitates a multi-disciplinary focus. When you have a
15 child presenting with a significant learning disorder the chances are, or the rule of thumb is, that the more severe the disorder the more likely it is that the child has disorders in other systems as well. Therefore, to have a single professional assessing the child often means that the child is receiving an inadequate assessment.
20

Thirdly, the instructional help that the child receives must be individually tailored to the child's needs and delivered on a very regular basis. By regular, I'm not meaning once a week for half an hour contact with the special ed staff at the school, but needs to be delivered daily.
25

For all of those 3 issues, the professional expertise, experience and ready access to developments of knowledge of developmental disorders of access to multi-disciplinary staff to conduct the
30 assessment and certainly of access to individuals who can run programs regularly with children are the 3 principal issues for children with learning difficulties where, certainly on the basis of my experience over the last however many years of working at the Centre, would be the major 3 areas where children from rural districts and particularly the more remote schools are at a significant disadvantage relative to their
35 metropolitan peers.

Will I expand on those issues?

THE COMMISSIONER: I don't think you'd better.
40

MS KNIGHT: Okay.

THE COMMISSIONER: Although you're quite welcome to put it in in writing afterwards if you like.
45

MS KNIGHT: Certainly.

THE COMMISSIONER: Just a couple of things by way of conclusion, if that's all right.

5 **MS KNIGHT:** By way of conclusion, issues from a professional perspective - I know that this has been well canvassed, having read the transcripts of your visits from the north-west parts of the state - access for individuals working in schools to have professional in-servicing is a major issue, problems of cost of transportation and accommodation, of providing relief staff. It's a rapidly-growing area of knowledge of
10 childhood learning disorders and their management and treatment. Staff need to keep up to date and need to have regular access to in-servicing and it is a major concern or prohibitive, often, the costs involved for regional staff.

15 The other issue which is significant and is a significant stress for the families that we see in our Centre is the multi-disciplinary aspect. It exists for children in major regional centres, but particularly for children in more remote areas where assessment can be got through travelling to the regional centres or to the city to services like
20 our own, but it's the issue of ongoing management; for instance, of receiving not only input from the special ed teachers at the school and the counsellors, but also psychiatric intervention where required and particularly speech and language intervention.

25 Unless a child lives close to a major regional centre, is of very young school age in New South Wales rural districts, the likelihood of them receiving ongoing speech and language therapy is virtually non-existent. That's certainly different from the situation that exists within metropolitan areas of New South Wales. Clearly, the
30 ramifications that that has for the child's learning and ongoing adjustment and development are significant.

The final point being also that the frustration for the parents and for our own staff, I guess, is that the more remote that one
35 becomes in New South Wales, the less immediate access or regularity of visits by special ed and support staff to the children's schools; so the issue of skilled and regular intervention for children - regular to meet the needs of the child - is far less available than is available in larger centres and in urban centres in spite of - I should add - my experience
40 in working in both metropolitan, regional and rural districts is that that's in spite of the extreme commitment that exists within staffing in New South Wales rural schools.

THE COMMISSIONER: Is there an answer to that?

45

MS KNIGHT: The answer is more staffing. I'm not so sure that that's a viable answer. The answer is probably supplementation to services such as our own - I'll put in my own pitch here - where we do have the

5 expertise and the facilities to in fact provide the programming for children. The answer is for more access to in-servicing for those that are working out in the more remote areas and certainly for more professional and peer support and for certainly supplementation and support staff.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much. Barbara?

10 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Just a couple things, Deborah, thank you for that. Are you the only organisation that's trying to meet the needs of these children in the state?

15 **MS KNIGHT:** Certainly not. We're the only organisation that is a fully-integrated health and education facility with a large staff or that meets that multi-disciplinary focus with the combination of staff that we have on site. There are services within school districts - this is speaking from a state government school perspective - where there are the learning support teams that exist that are primarily staffed by or have access to a district school counsellor and a support teacher
20 learning difficulties.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Is it fair to say that you're the only organisation that has this complete - - -

25 **MS KNIGHT:** To my knowledge, yes, for rural children.

[Ethnicity of clients]

30 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Do you keep data on the break-down of the ethnicity of the children.

MS KNIGHT: We do.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Can you give me some broad overview?

35 **MS KNIGHT:** Yes. The general ethnicity, taking into consideration that the ethnic diversity of rural New South Wales is different to that in metropolitan New South Wales, we see for assessment - around about 4% of our assessment children are of Aboriginal background. That's disproportionately low, relative to the proportion of Aboriginal children
40 in rural schools. We have a number of children whose parents are of European background, but a very, very low proportion of ESL children, in fact almost nil, that are referred to the centre. I don't think that we're not tapping into them, I think that they're in fact not there in the main in the general regional centres; but the issue of disproportionately low
45 representation of Aboriginal kids is a real one.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Do you have Indigenous teachers or teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds?

5

MS KNIGHT: In the centre, no.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: When you talked about assessment of the children, are there issues about assessment being culturally relevant?

10

MS KNIGHT: I think in the main, no. I don't know the answer to the low proportion of Aboriginal children that we do see. I should stress, we do see Aboriginal children and there is nothing, from our perspective, that is thwarting that process. The issue for us is that we take who's referred to the centre. I think that in the main, the emphasis on management for the Aboriginal population of students is that the push is much more at a local level, where there is access to Indigenous aides and assistants.

15

[Assistance from hospitals]

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Just one final question from me. What sort of relationship do you have with the children's hospitals in the metropolitan area to assist with assessing hearing and behavioural problems?

25

MS KNIGHT: Very good. For hearing, we have access to an audiologist within our own district, so each child has the capability to have a hearing test that comes through for assessment. The behavioural assessment - we have 4 clinical psychologists on staff and access to a psychiatrist, so we do a pretty good job of that ourselves. We have good links with the child psychiatry units, particularly at Westmead Hospital. In terms of more medical difficulties that the children may present with - and that's not an infrequent concern - we have good links with the paediatric services at Royal North Shore Hospital.

30

We're part of Northern Sydney Area Health Service anyway - the health side of the affair is - with the New Children's Hospital and with the Sydney Children's Hospital, so the answer is that the links are very good.

35

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Deborah.

40

[Other remedial and assessment services]

THE COMMISSIONER: You mentioned about the other services that may be available; yours is the only multi-disciplinary one. Are the others, what, entirely educational, entirely health? How do they operate in contact country (indistinct)

45

MS KNIGHT: The most frequent and most established are largely educational and operate pretty well. They, as I said earlier, consist

5 mostly of - as you would well know, most schools have some kind of access to a support teacher, learning difficulty, who work in cahoots as necessary with a district school counsellor and the special education consultants in each district. Some areas also have access to some limited speech pathology services, through secondment with the local community health staff. That varies enormously across the state.

10 The Department of Education and Training certainly has systems in place to provide support, but not with the same depth of that multi-disciplinary focus. The Catholic education system is more variable in terms of the specialist support available. Each diocese, in my understanding, has or has had - probably the emphasis is on the past - access to school psychologists who can provide the cognitive assessment of the child, but the access to speech and language therapy is largely through organisation through the community health centres. The independent school system is a different matter entirely and that's largely done through private work, so the child is assessed through referral to private practitioners.

20 I should add, our service is - obviously, given that we're a public sector service - entirely free of charge for the families.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** How would someone decide which service to go to, whether it would be appropriate to go to Dalwood or one of these others?

30 **MS KNIGHT:** The system is a sequential one. Given, again, that we're tertiary referral, all of the children that we see in the main have gone through the system. So, for instance, a government school child would already have been seen by the district school counsellor and the support teacher and any other support staff that exist within the school. It's generally them who are then saying, "We need some more advice and direction as to what to do in order to help this child and to help the child's family." I guess we're the centre of last resort, to put it rather crudely.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much.

40

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you all very much for coming along. Would you like to introduce yourselves for the tape, first?

45 **MR SUTTON:** Thank you. My name is Sutton, John Sutton. I'm Assistant Director-General, with responsibility for primary education in New South Wales and distance education delivery and rural education

policy. I have with me George Green, Assistant Director-General, Student Services.

5 **MR GREEN:** Thanks, John. My title is student services and equity programs and I'm responsible for, as the name implies, the implementation of student services and equity programs across the DET, which is schools, TAFE, adult and community education; all the other works of the department.

10 **MR SUTTON:** And Dr Alan Rice, who is Executive Director, Early Childhood and Primary Education. Alan has been responsible for the compilation of the submission which we've previously submitted to the commission. Alan, you might just like to say a word.

15 **DR RICE:** Commissioner, my role basically covers the early years and principally a range of issues in city and country, rural areas around primary education.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks very much. Thank you for your submission. I think, of the ones that I've seen - I've seen a good number at this stage - it's about the most comprehensive that we've had; so I'm very grateful for the work you've done on it, the volume of material, the statistics are very, very helpful, indeed, and the description of the programs. I particularly thank you for having it in
25 before we actually sat. Although I can't say that I've been able to analyse every single word of it, I've certainly read the 30 to 40 page introductory section and I've found it extremely helpful. Thank you very much for your efforts.

30 **MR SUTTON:** What we'd like to do, Commissioner, is each of us to make some comments derived from the submission, to take up some questions that have been directed to us by some of your officers and to try and deal with those as succinctly as we can.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** That would be fine, thank you.

MR SUTTON: The things that I'd like to talk about, in particular, are the range of provisions that we have in New South Wales, including, particularly, distance education provision - an issue over which I
40 believe you've had a number of questions and comments; to look at some issues of staffing, but to assure you of a more detailed provision on staff, particularly as it relates to our smaller secondary schools and primary schools and the additional resources allocated to that; to look at the access program which is providing Years 11 and 12 to areas of
45 the state that previously didn't have that provision.

Then, Dr Rice will go through some of the other issues that have been raised, particularly in your terms of reference 1 and 2, and George will take up issues from terms of reference 3.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks very much.

[Schools for specific purposes]

10 **MR SUTTON:** As we've said in the submission, the department meets its responsibilities by providing 2,222 schools across the state. We mentioned in the submission that some 97 of those were schools for specific purposes. The commission has asked if those 97 schools, those 97 SSPs, included schools for students with disabilities. In fact, they are all for students with disabilities and not for other students at all. The Commission also asked if the 97 SSPs included specialist secondary schools and the answer is that they don't. They're specifically for kids with disabilities.

20 We do have a range of other specialist schools. They are agricultural high schools, one creative arts high school - which is in the city - languages high schools, one marine technology high school, we have performing arts high schools, we have rural technology high school, senior high schools, selective high schools, sports high schools and technology high schools. So that's the other range of specialist facilities on top of the 97 SSPs that you've asked the question about.

25 **[Access scholarships]**

30 We're aware that for some students in our remote and rural areas that the local high school - because of particular talents that they have - may not be the most appropriate school for them to attend. We're also aware of financial difficulties that have been facing families in the western part of the state, the isolated areas, for some time now and we're now in the second year of what we're calling our Access Scholarship Scheme for Isolated Students. The Commission has, again, asked a question about that.

35 The Access Scholarship Scheme is for students who meet a number of criteria, but first and foremost, the scholarship carries with it a fixed value of \$1560 annually that we hope assists parents to put their boy or girl in a secondary school which is more appropriate for them. To make sure that we get that level of support to the most needy and the most isolated, the first criteria, about which the Commission asked, is that the student qualifies for our living-away-from-home allowance. That assures us of 2 things; the scholarships do go to the most isolated and do go to the most needy.

45 The living-away-from-home allowance qualification is 48 kilometres from the nearest appropriate school and a means test of around about \$27,000 annually. The students must also be currently attending a government school and must be in Years 9 to 12.

5 Just to give you some examples of the impact that this is having
in its second year only. We have a student who would normally go to
Wade High School in Griffith, but resides 97 kilometres from Griffith,
who is now through the provision of the scholarship attending Yanko
Agricultural High School. We have a student from Lightning Ridge who
would normally attend Lightning Ridge Central School, but because of
the scholarship is now studying music and agriculture at Farrer Ag High
School. We've got a student living 53 kilometres from Crookwell who is
10 now boarding at Hurlstone through the scholarship.

[9.25 am]

15 There was a limited number annually, we've put it at 40, the
demand on them in the second year has only got to about
18 applications, so we haven't had to knock any back at the present
time because of the number of scholarships we had to offer. That, of
course, is one way of trying to improve access.

20 **[Distance education]**

The Commission has asked a number of questions about our
distance education provision, and of course the distance education
provisions have a range of provisions there that go from full-time
distance education for extremely isolated students at both primary and
25 secondary level. We also have a preschool program running out of the
Dubbo school of distance education for about 80 preschool students
who will, we expect, do all of their primary education through the
distance mode. We also have full-time secondary education students,
and we have around about 4 and a half thousand secondary students
30 who are doing a single subject through distance education to broaden
their curriculum choices, or because the subject they want to study isn't
available in their home school.

35 Our distance education centres are located across New South
Wales in an effort to try and bring the service closer to the families that
we're working with. We have them at Broken Hill, Dubbo, Tibooburra -
outback school of the year - we have the Open High School, we have
the Sydney Distance Education Primary School, and we have
integrated centres at Ballina, Balranald, Bourke, Casino, Cobar, Hay,
40 Port Macquarie, Queanbeyan and Walgett.

The distance education courses are delivered in a far broader
range of media than we've used in the past, which has been
traditionally print. At the present time of course we're using not only
45 print, but radio, that's been part of the Far West for some time. We're
also using other electronic media such as e-mail, electronic classroom
Internet passages, teleconferencing, facsimile, audio tape, video tape. I
think Alan will talk more fully about a satellite trial that we've just

completed, delivering to 6 or 8 extremely isolated homesteads in the far west of the state out of Broken Hill.

5 The Commission has asked for information on the criteria for accessing distance education, and following our delivery today we will present to you the Distance Education Handbook which goes annually.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks.

10 **MR SUTTON:** It indicates that, in the full-time enrolments, we have isolated students, we have students travelling within Australia, we have students temporarily resident, or travelling overseas, we have students from the ACT and Papua New Guinea, students with medical conditions, students exhibiting severe behaviour difficulties, and we
15 have an extraordinary circumstances category which seems to pick up all of those that don't fit elsewhere.

In the single-subject criteria we have students who can't get a subject they want in their local high school - it's secondary only of
20 course - who can't get a subject of their choice in their local high school. We have students who have shifted school and had their subject disrupted. We have students who want to take up or previously wanted to take up 3 unit courses, but that will not be there any longer. I'll leave that with the Commission later for their information.

25 The Commission has asked a question about the need for each part-time secondary student to have an in-school supervisor, and also for the principal of the home school to certify that the student is capable of studying by the distance mode. We're particularly wary of, and
30 concerned about, the welfare of students who decide to take a single secondary subject by distance. Because of the variety of media used in delivering the courses, we have to be sure for the welfare of the student that they are a student, a boy or girl, capable of studying by the distance mode. We need the principals of those home schools to make
35 a professional judgment about that, and to certify that in their belief the student is motivated and capable of dealing with distance.

We also need an in-school supervisor. I know that comments have been made that the in-school supervisors aren't capable of
40 teaching, say, some of the subjects that the students are covering, and they were not meant to do that. The in-school supervisor is again there as a link between the distance ed provider and the student. The in-school supervisor is there to ensure that the organisation in the school for the student to study individually is appropriate, that
45 resources are managed properly in the school, that work is returned on time, and that the student contact with the distance ed provider is facilitated to look at examination requirements. All of those sorts of things, but not teach the subject. The teaching materials stand alone.

THE COMMISSIONER: If I may I interrupt. Does the school get a staffing allowance for that function?

5 **MR SUTTON:** What we do differs between students in Years 9-10 and students in 11-12. What we're actually doing is saying to the school, "For part of your core you won't have to teach that student a subject." In 9-10, the home school remains fully staffed as if that student was studying all of their courses full-time in the school.

10

THE COMMISSIONER: Right.

MR SUTTON: In 11/12 one course is the equivalent of 6 periods per week. What we do is take 3 of those periods away from home school staff, but leave 3; that covers the provision of the supervision of the student. There is quite a difference there, in that government schools suffer a 3 period loss for each Year 11 and 12 student enrolled in a single subject, but 41% of our single-subject enrolments in, say, the Open High School are currently from non-government schools who pay or suffer no corresponding reduction in staff and make no other payment for the service.

20

[Staffing formulae]

25 I think that the only other thing that I want to talk about very quickly is the staffing issues that were raised. I will present information to the Commission that shows that the staffing formula that we use are quite heavily weighted towards our smaller schools. There is built into the staffing formula consideration for the needs of schools, particularly those schools which are under, say, 150 students. That's both at the primary and secondary level.

30

In listening to some of the Commission's hearings around the countryside, I was aware of comments made that the staffing formula, particularly in the primary it was being used as an example, was quite inflexible, and that if a school, say, fell below 54 students they would lose a teacher, whereas if they maintained 55 students they would maintain the teacher. So one student made the difference between one teacher. Basically that's correct. We do use the formula to allocate right across the state; but when it comes to issues of one teacher we look at that situation very, very carefully.

35

40

In fact, for each time the teacher is removed there's a corresponding occasion when, because of situations existing in the school, we'll leave the staff member there. It might be that we're quite confident that another family will enrol later in the year, or it might be that we're quite confident that a student currently on leave or on vacation will be returning, and we obviously don't make the reduction in staff.

45

5 The other side of it is that we staff schools on a census date
which is usually the second week back of first term. If the school
qualifies for 2 teachers or 3 teachers at that stage, but subsequently
during the year loses students and may then only qualify for a reduction
of one teacher, we don't make that, we don't touch that until the end of
the year, so technically the school could well be overstaffed for 3 terms
of the year. Similarly, if a school increases in numbers and becomes
eligible for an additional teacher, we put that staff member in
10 immediately.

[Senior secondary clusters]

15 The only other comment I'd like to make is just about the
Access Program. The Access Program is referred to in our submission
in tab 5. It's a program whereby a few years ago we realised that in the
central schools that didn't have Years 11 and 12 - in other words they
finished at Year 10, the school certificate year - students wishing to
study the HSC were faced with the choice of distance education or
moving from their home. We didn't have in the central schools - and I'll
20 just name some of them in a moment - a critical mass of students that
would support full-time 11 and 12 in each school. But what we did
have, if we linked the schools was a mass of quite viable classes in
each subject.

25 We appointed coordinators to each school. We linked them by
telematics. We now have across the state access clusters which
include - one access cluster is Condobolin, Lake Cargelligo,
Quandialla, and Ungarie. Another is, Boggabilla, Collarenebri,
Goodooga, Moree and Mungindi. The largest and the first that we
30 instituted was Peak Hill, Trangie, Tottenham, Trundle, Tullamore,
Tullibigeal and Yeoval. In total we now have in those clusters
328 students who previously would have had to leave their home to
study the HSC.

35 The program has been evaluated by Charles Sturt University in
an evaluation report entitled 'I Can Be Near My Horses'. It was a
comment made by one student who was saying how much she
appreciated the program because she could stay at home and be near
her horses and still study the HSC. One of the outcomes of the
40 evaluation was that the university found a very strong correlation
between stated aspirations and post-school destinations for those
students who studied by that mode. The second was that the HSC
outcomes reflected a pattern of results similar to those achieved in the
more traditional secondary school situations. I might leave my
45 comments at that and just ask Alan if he would proceed.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, John. Alan?

[Satellite trial]

DR RICE: Yes, Commissioner. Thank you, John. John mentioned the outback trial, the outback satellite trial and the important role that distance education and the technological delivery of subjects make in the provision of a curriculum for students. I think, we're on the verge of something quite magnificent through the outback satellite trial. It occurred in the first semester this year and it has concluded at this point.

10 A teacher at Broken Hill had 12 Year 3/Year 4 students who were located in the area north of Broken Hill. That area was selected because radio broadcast is quite scratchy from there, and it was an attempt to put in place something that would improve the delivery of services. It's recorded in our submission at item 7, which gives an overview of the kinds of facilities that operated; at each day for an hour, a teacher interacted with the 12 students, could call up and look at the work they had. The teacher's face was on the screen at all times. The students had telephone contact if there was difficulties or if the teacher was teaching too quickly. They were all fairly inexperienced with computers when the program commenced, but developed those skills as part of the overall program.

25 The significant fact: it was some Israeli software that was being used. Telstra was another partner to the project. The result is that an evaluation has just been concluded. It was undertaken independently by Charles Sturt University. The department has only just received the report, and, as I understand it, we've not had time to process that at this stage, but it was indicated to me that the report will be made available through the Director-General to the Commission so that you'll get the most up-to-date information in relation to it.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much.

DR RICE: The report itself is looking at a whole range of factors, the technology itself. I understand, there are recommendations that will seek to improve the technology and make it more accessible. They are also looking at the mode of learning and the students' experience in learning through that particular trial. I think also there is the issue of the financial viability of that particular program. I believe the report will address those kinds of issues and will point the way ahead for what may well be a much more appropriate, much more modern, contemporary way of providing distance education.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

[Improving teaching and learning quality]

DR RICE: I was wanting to speak with you about, in terms of quality; we were looking at a range of approaches to it. In other words, achieving

quality through working with teachers and administrators, providing them with support, providing them with training, providing them with up-to-date materials. There are also a range of services and options that are available to students which have a place in increasing their confidence and self-esteem, improving their learning outcomes, and enhancing generally their experience with schooling. I wanted to also mention thirdly, some community development strategies in which the department is playing a role, which also contribute to the development of quality, improvement of communities, and the improvement of learning opportunities for students.

I thought if I could take some examples, or perhaps an example in each area and speak to them very briefly, and then pull together some of the things which are in a fairly lengthy chapter of the submission.

THE COMMISSIONER: Fine, thanks.

DR RICE: First of all, the department has a key planning document which indicates the focus areas for the year. That document is very important because it enables the system, that is the department itself, the districts that are part of the department, and the individual schools, to work out a coordinated way towards improving classroom practice and achieving more effective service delivery. In establishing the priorities and the programs that are associated with the priorities, the level of funding and resources for a rural and remote area takes account of the particular needs of communities and students, as well as their distance from services.

[Literacy strategy; Basic Skills Test; Reading Recovery]

In terms of the work with teachers and also with students, I thought that perhaps I'd make some comments on a literacy strategy which commenced in 1996 as a state government initiative with additional government resources. The strategy has been a commitment to ensuring appropriate literacy programs for students are available at all stages of schooling to confront in an explicit and systematic way their literacy needs. A key element in that program has been the introduction of an early intervention program, Reading Recovery, which assists students in Year 1 to reach the level of their peers.

This program in the year 2000 will be available in 389 rural schools, and will assist around 4,000 students to improve their reading and writing skills. These students are students, as I said, in Year 1. So, they are assessed at the end of their first year at school with an observation instrument through teachers working closely with students, and they then become part of this teacher-student dialogue. It's a one-on-one, 30 minutes per day program that operates between 12 and 16 weeks.

5 The allocation to rural New South Wales is 49% of the total Reading Recovery support available to the state. Each teacher in the program receives intensive training and development and on-site school support from a trained Reading Recovery tutor. Our records indicate clearly that the program has been effective with students from non-English speaking backgrounds and with Aboriginal students.

10 A second component of the literacy strategy was to ensure that diagnostic information from the Basic Skills Test in literacy and in numeracy Year 3 and 5, and from the English language and literacy assessment test, which is code named ELLA, in Year 7, would be used by each school's literacy team in planning individual programs and support for students at risk. Information from the statewide
15 assessments is used also by the department in monitoring standards across the state in identifying problems and in allocating resources to schools. Parents also receive a detailed report as part of the process of reporting back following the basic skills and the ELLA assessment test.

20 I noted that some questions were raised around the countryside about the Basic Skills Test. In the development of the Basic Skills Test, the diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students are taken into account. It is a curriculum-based assessment, it draws on the nature of literacy or numeracy that's outlined within the state
25 syllabuses, but it goes through a systematic and thorough process of development. The trial of materials before selecting a final test covers a range of schools and student backgrounds represented in the total cohort to eliminate negative effects. In fact, the trial of the material was undertaken in another state. The trial and review of items in that period
30 of development and following the use of the test materials is undertaken by curriculum and assessment experts who carefully monitor the process and monitor the materials that are included in the test.

35 Cultural appropriateness is one of the criteria used in the assessment of the materials. I'm informed that in 1998 it was the Year of the Ocean, and the material that related to the ocean, or the theme of the ocean, was selected on the basis of its being a contemporary
40 issue. The 99 material was our earth, which contained many texts and questions which reflected country life. The tests have included a range of texts which have been written by Aboriginal writers, or which feature Aboriginal people, customs, stories and heritage.

45 I wanted to move on to then mention to you that schools and teachers have access to training and development, carefully developed curriculum and teaching materials, and support networks, all of which focus upon implementation and delivery in classrooms. In each district there is a specialist literacy team which assists schools and teachers to

5 review and improve the classroom practice. The intensive training of support teachers, learning difficulties, has ensured more support for students who are experiencing literacy difficulties. These positions are allocated to districts and then to schools on the basis of the learning needs of students.

10 Of interest, teachers in rural schools have had access to literacy training and development through technology. The Log On To Literacy program was delivered over the Internet. It's an early intervention, a Year 1/Year 2 training program for teachers, in which teachers undertake an assessment of one of the students that's in the school and they communicate with a mentor located in Armidale and receive interaction and advice about how the course is progressing, and the assessment of the student, and the progress of the student is being fostered.

20 We also have a series of satellite broadcasts on early literacy, and video print materials which follow, to schools to enable staff to reflect and further develop the ideas of the broadcast. There are particular programs - the Country Areas Program, the Disadvantaged Schools Program, and the Early Literacy Initiative - which enable consultancy support, resources and additional funding to be available in over 400 rural schools to achieve improved literacy outcomes. In fact, the CAP program has funded over 80 programs in literacy in the Moree district alone.

30 I wonder if I might give you a very particular example of literacy at Walgett Public School. The school has developed a comprehensive plan to support the education of its students. The district consultants have worked closely with the school to improve the teaching of guided reading and writing, which has been the initial focus, and to work with teachers to create a positive learning environment for students. The school has received an additional home school liaison position to improve school attendance, and an early childhood education facility has just opened to ensure that we begin looking at pre-literacy activities prior to children coming into the school.

40 Funding has been provided to support students with low literacy and numeracy in both the junior and the upper primary school. I think George will talk about the IESIP initiatives. An additional teacher to work with students on individual literacy programs has been employed. The school has an allocation of 1.5 support teachers, and it receives 1.0, an additional teaching position which involved 2 teachers in the teaching of Reading Recovery in the school. So it's a broad and balanced support program. If I may mention to you the outcomes of the literacy agenda in relation to one of our country districts, the Moree district.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

5 **DR RICE:** 1997 was the year in which Reading Recovery started, as well as the intensive training of support teachers, and the major training of teachers in the teaching of reading. The support services of the district were all organised into the literacy team concept. So 1997 was the year in which the program commenced with a focused and systematic way across the state. So, Year 1 students who were part of Reading Recovery, or teachers that were part of that program, would have been part of the basic skills testing this year.

15 In band 1 in 1998, which is the lowest band - and Moree has been noted as being a district where literacy levels have needed to be improved to reach the state levels - in band 1 there was 31% of the students in 1998 in Year 3. In 1999 that has decreased to 25%, and that reflects the largest reduction of students at that level across the state. Of note, though, is that in Year 3, the students who participated in 1997 in the basic skills test are now in Year 5. In Year 3, 30% were in band 1. In 1999 there are only 6%. There'd be certainly a developmental factor in that, but, I think, also that it highlights the considerable improvement that has occurred over 2 years.

25 The figures from the Moree district also indicate that there has been an increasing standard in Year 7, each year in the ELLA test in literacy. It is now becoming much closer to the state average. Whilst I outline to you the strategies and the range of resources, I do believe that I can also point to, as an early opportunity, the development and outcomes that we're seeing in that particular district.

30 **MR GREEN:** Thanks Alan. Commissioner, I'm going to respond to the specific questions raised by the Commission. I'd rather use that as a framework for some other general comments as well.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Good, thank you.

[Equity programs]

40 **MR GREEN:** The first question was around the definitions of equity, and whether the department focuses on outcomes as the sole criteria for equity. There are as many definitions of the term equity as there are people defining equity, but we base our definition around the word fairness. In fact, the subtitle that we use for a lot of our equity programs is A Fair Go For All. It doesn't just refer to outcomes.

45 Outcomes are of course very important, and ultimately it's through outcomes that we must measure the success of our equity programs. But equity needs to be expressed in terms of resource inputs, in terms of access to services, in terms of opportunities people are given to benefit from the resources provided. It's measured in terms

of participation of people and particular groups of people, and that includes participation both in enrolment processes and decision making processes. There needs to be equity in the procedures and processes used to implement the services, so the actual programming must have equity embedded in it as well. Then, finally, we look to equity in outcomes.

The ultimate goal of the Department of Education and Training, and in fact government, is that each group, each cohort of people within the community will achieve equivalent outcomes, that we won't be able to identify disadvantaged groups in terms of outcomes. We freely admit that we're a long way from there, as is every other education provider in the country, and probably the world. However, we have a real determination to work towards that as the goal.

Another question is closely related around features of a socially just education, and just what that meant. The principles of a socially just education are set out in the New South Wales Charter for Equity in Education and Training. Have you had access to that?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR GREEN: And in the New South Wales government's equity statement, the direction statement, Fair Go, Fair Share, Fair Say. They're also embedded in the Adelaide Declaration, which is the national statement through the ministerial council, the council of the ministers for education, training and youth affairs. In a nutshell, a socially just education system ensures: that fairness is a key value in the provision of schooling; that all students, regardless of their backgrounds or geographical location, receive a high quality education; that education provides recognised credentials and clear pathways to employment and lifelong learning; that the outcomes of education and training do not depend on factors beyond the learner's control, or influence; that priority is given in the allocation of resources to reducing gaps in outcomes where those gaps exist.

A socially just education system also needs to ensure that all young people, regardless of background or location, are able to complete school education to Year 12, or a vocational education equivalent. A socially just education system recognises and values the diversity of the population through inclusive approaches to the development, conduct and evaluation of programs. A socially just education system is one in which everyone in education reflects their commitment to social justice in all their work practices. I'll provide copies of the text, but it's something that is very much on both the national and the state agenda.

[Compensating for remoteness]

On some more specific issues that you raised, you asked whether features of rurality and remoteness are factored into the measurement of educational disadvantage. They're certainly factored into the allocation of resources. Within the Disadvantaged Schools Program a distance factor is used, and putting it simply, the longer the distance from the school to the district office, which is the source of support, the greater the support provided. The Commonwealth programs, and in particular the Commonwealth Aboriginal programs, factor a remoteness component into their funding. The Country Areas program, the state program, also uses a remoteness factor in its funding arrangements.

In addition, some of the more mainstream programs such as the Home School Liaison Program and attendance program, has a distance factor built into the resourcing of rural and remote districts to recognise the fact that officers will have to travel further. There is a small distance adjustment in the allocation arrangements for support teachers learning difficulties in the primary. In the general staffing operation it's not directly related. There is a small schools supplement which tends to favour schools in rural and remote areas.

[Disadvantaged Schools Program]

One question was asked about the Disadvantaged Schools Program. Quite specifically it asked about the DSP formula for the provision of additional staff. I think, it's necessary to point out that the New South Wales Disadvantaged Schools Program is essentially a literacy-based program that's directed to addressing issues of low socioeconomic background, the disadvantages that children growing up in communities of lower SES status often face in their literacy development. There are 478 schools in New South Wales on the DSP. 238 of those are in rural areas. DSP funding is about \$6 million a year across the state, that's direct funding to schools in the form of dollars. In addition, there is a staffing differential, a staffing supplement, to schools. There are 87 additional positions applied through that to schools in rural areas.

The primary school staffing supplement is quite straightforward. There is a little formula and a sliding scale based on enrolments that just gives the school a little bit of an advantage in its staffing. It's roughly equivalent to, I think, reducing each class size by about one student. In the secondary school it's much more complex, and we'll provide you with a written statement. It's an historically-based arrangement where - and it's very hard for me to justify this - schools that have been on the DSP the longest have the greatest level of supplementation. It's a result of history and some industrial intervention. We're currently reviewing all the ways of allocating DSP resources to schools. The DSP runs on a quadrennium, a 4-year cycle. 2000 is the end of a quadrennium; so we plan for 2001 following

consultation with the interest groups to introduce a new more equitable way of distributing this equity funding.

[Programs for students with disabilities]

5 There was another question about the formula for the allocation
of support teachers learning difficulties and teachers' aide integration.
I'll answer the question and then I'd like to speak a little more about
both programs. The simple answer is that there are no formulae for
10 those programs. The Support Teacher Learning Difficulties Program is
now resourced on the basis of identified need. In the primary we use
the basic skills test results to identify those districts that have the
greatest need, and we share the available support teacher learning
difficulties position, which from memory is 780-something, I think,
15 positions

DR RICE: 88.

MR GREEN: Thank you, Alan - 788 positions across primary schools
clearly on the basis of need; they go to districts on the basis of need.
20 Then each district has a learning difficulties committee that makes
allocations within the district team on the basis of the BST results plus
local factors that may be of relevance and may be known to the district,
but don't show up in statewide statistics. So there is flexibility at the
district level.

25 Secondary schools, it's a straight allocation to schools. This
was an insistence of the Secondary Principals Council given the
smaller number of high schools; and each school in the state is given
an allocation of support teacher learning difficulties time that directly
30 reflects the number of students in that school who have performed in
the lower bands of the ELLA test that Alan has mentioned earlier. So
it's a straight needs-based arrangement.

35 With the Integration Program we go through a process that
allocates funding according to the assessed support needs of each
student in the school setting. We'll make available the paperwork on
this. We're currently working through a process with the University of
Newcastle on a needs ascertainment model. We've done extensive
40 research interstate and across the world on this. In a nutshell, each
student with a disability will be considered in terms of the support need
to maintain their enrolment and progress in an educational setting in
their school. The parents are involved in the process; school
counsellors and the child's class teacher probably has the major input
to it. It will ensure that every student in the state receives the support
45 they need to maintain their enrolment in the mainstream classrooms.

On Monday, the Minister announced a reorganisation of the Learning Difficulties Program, so this is very up-to-date information. We

5 have recognised over the last few years that we had a gap in our service around the needs of students with severe learning difficulties, or learning disabilities. These were students whose needs were such that the support teacher learning difficulties based in the school, who is a regular school teacher with some additional training in most cases, was unable to adequately assess, or to remediate. On Monday, the minister announced that we are establishing 40 district-based learning difficulties support teams across the state.

10 They will be established in district offices as far out as Broken Hill, Moree and Deniliquin. Schools in the Broken Hill district, for example, up until this initiative, have had to rely on the Special Education Support Centre based in Bathurst for expert assessment support. That will no longer be the case. Each district will have a small
15 team of what we're calling designated support teachers learning difficulties, who will be people with particular skills and qualifications in the area. We will maintain their levels of training so that those people are able to provide support for those relatively few, but still very significant group of boys and girls whose needs are exceptional in
20 terms of their learning difficulties. We're currently going through the planning process on that, and that will be implemented for the year 2000. We'll provide you with a copy of the Minister's press release and some background information on that with our later report.

25 The Integration Program, which is really a funding program for children with identified disability, as opposed to a learning difficulty, has made a huge difference in country schools. There is now a capacity to provide support to children with disabilities in our most remote school, to provide additional funding to the school usually used
30 to employ a teachers' aide to support the child, but sometimes used to provide additional teaching time, sometimes used to provide training and development time for the teacher of the child. That's only been in operation really for the last 3 or 4 years in its present form, and we've seen very significant growths in funding and take-up rates. I think, in
35 the report there's mention of 2 students in the Moree district, for example, with physical disabilities who are enrolled in small schools and are now able to be supported in their own small school through the employment of a teachers' aide special.

40 There was a question, Commissioner, that baffles me a little, and I'll just read it. It says:

45 The inquiry has received evidence that the community nurse, dentists, speech therapists and occupational therapists no longer make school visits, and that this is a result of DET decisions.

5 You've actually given the source of the submission. I won't repeat it here. If you'll forgive some intemperate language, that's an outrageous assertion. The Department of Education and Training does not and never has provided therapy, medical or dental services in schools. Those services are provided in schools, and have been provided in schools historically, by other agencies. It is true that those other agencies may have reorganised their services in some ways and in some forms. However, to assert that that is a result of DET decisions is absolutely false, and I want to put that right on the record.

10

15 The community nurses that work in schools - there's a network of community nurses still working in schools - and the school dental service is provided by the Department of Health; and therapists working in schools or delivering their services in schools are provided by the Department of Community Services, Department of Health and other private providers. From time to time, those agencies do reorganise their services, and it has to be said that from time to time, that's interpreted by parents in particular as having been a reduction in services when quite often it reflects more a change in the way services are provided.

20

[10.10 am]

25 We're currently cooperating with the Departments of Health, Community Services and Ageing and Disability in the implementation of a new Therapy in Schools program. That's currently being implemented in 6 areas of the state, including the far north coast and the central west of New South Wales. It's a new way of providing therapy or supporting therapy to children with disabilities. The program, as the name suggests, is school-based, but it's only one part of the therapy provided by health professionals to students with disabilities.

30

[Indigenous students]

35 There were a number of questions around Indigenous education. One in particular, "What are the special needs of Aboriginal students for which support is provided in regular schools?" As stipulated in the table on page 5 - that table simply points out that there are specific Aboriginal education programs operating in schools. The special needs are, I guess, many and varied. One that comes to mind is that many of our Aboriginal students come to school speaking

40 Aboriginal English and therefore, if they just arrive in a classroom, in a kindergarten classroom, where standard Australian English is spoken, those children are at a disadvantage in language terms. So there is a particular emphasis on supporting Aboriginal children in schools in their literacy development.

45

Some of it is quite specifically provided for Aboriginal students. For example, we have 315 Aboriginal education assistants who assist teachers in classrooms, we have a number of Aboriginal early language

development teachers, 9 preschools located in Aboriginal communities. That's a very good way of addressing that issue. But as Alan has said, many of our other programs, our mainstream programs and, in particular, the Reading Recovery program has been, I think, very, very successful in working with Aboriginal children.

There are some health issues. Clearly, otitis media is a major health issue for Aboriginal families and children and any child with a conductive hearing loss is going to be at a disadvantage in the classroom. It is, however, essentially a health issue, but schools certainly work to assist in the mitigation of otitis media; and our itinerant teachers, hearing impairment, who work across the state with children with a hearing impairment of any kind, in areas where we have large enrolments of Aboriginal children with otitis media, of course support those children in their learning.

There are other issues related to Aboriginal students which could be called special needs. One that has recently come to notice more specifically than usual, it's one we've known about for a long time, is the issue of mobility. We've known anecdotally that Aboriginal families tend to move their children because of the extended family arrangements. Children tend to change their place of residence and therefore their schools quite frequently. But one of the IESIP programs that we've been running, one of the Commonwealth-funded programs on mobility tracking, has produced results that indicate that that factor is probably a more significant one than we had thought, but at the same time that project is also developing ways in which we can mitigate the effects of mobility on Aboriginal students by developing ways of using technology to provide very rapid information to the new school when the child changes school, so that we don't get the timelag we've had between when the child leaves one school, arrives at the next school and the teachers get to know the child and their learning needs. That could be a lag of another few weeks until that happens.

Under this system, the information is transmitted to the receiving school very quickly. It can also help the home school liaison officers to make contact with families in order to ensure that the child comes to school quickly after the move, rather than has a settling-in period at home before coming back to school.

There were issues raised around Aboriginal school retention through to the Higher School Certificate. The apparent retention rate from Year 7 to 12 of Aboriginal students in rural government schools in 1998 was 25%. That's the figure that we would put on the record. This was half the retention rate for all rural students. While we consider retention as a major issue, it's not a separate issue. Retention of Aboriginal students links to the entire school experience. We would

regard the current initiatives in attendance and literacy development to be, in themselves, retention strategies.

5 The expansion of vocational education and training in schools is also potentially a very powerful retention strategy, as is the provision of relevant curriculum. The efforts there are continuing. At the moment, we're having discussions with our own people internally about vocational education and training for Aboriginal students before Year 11. Clearly, if we have a problem with Aboriginal students disengaging with schools in Year 9 or 10, putting in good Voc. Ed. programs in Year 11 is not going to be a terribly effective strategy; so we're looking at ways of providing vocationally related and more practical courses for those students - not just Aboriginal students, for a whole range of students - in the early secondary years.

15 There was a question also about the teaching model imposed on Aboriginal children which fails to take into account cultural differences. We've currently trained 21,000 departmental staff since 1996 in the implementation of the Aboriginal education policy. That includes a significant cultural awareness component and sensitises teachers to the need to use culturally appropriate practises in classrooms.

25 I did want to mention, just in responding to that one, that many Aboriginal educators across the country are very resistant to the notion of an Aboriginal learning style, which was a very trendy notion of several years ago. It has even been said to me that they see that as a form of institutionalised racism that seeks to separate Aboriginal children and can therefore work against them. Our aim is simply to provide the best possible education for every student within the context that they're working. Clearly, where we have large populations of Aboriginal children, we need to have culturally appropriate practices in those schools.

35 Questions were raised about how the IESIP programs are funded. Given time, would you prefer just a written submission on that?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please, it would be easier.

40 **[Teaching Aboriginal languages and history]**

MR GREEN: Again, that's fairly complicated. A question was raised on provision of Aboriginal languages. I'll, again, deal with that quickly and we'll respond in writing.

45 The number of first language Indigenous language speakers in New South Wales is minimal. There are very, very few; and if we compare New South Wales to, say, the Northern Territory, there are virtually no first language speakers. Currently, though, we have a great

5 deal of interest in Aboriginal language in our schools. It's usually from the point of view of maintenance or even revival of Aboriginal languages and it's often addressed as part of a larger Aboriginal cultural program. I've seen a number of those programs running. There are currently 18 government schools running Aboriginal language programs across the state, but predominantly in rural areas.

10 You asked whether Aboriginal studies was compulsory in any year anywhere. The Aboriginal studies syllabus itself, like most other syllabi, is not compulsory. However, there are mandatory sections on Aboriginal studies in other syllabuses, namely history and geography, Year 7 to 10 syllabuses; and the new primary human society and its environment syllabus also has mandatory Aboriginal education components.

15 You asked for a copy of the anti-racism policy. We'll be pleased to provide that and also the multicultural education policy.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks very much, George. Do you mind I've got a few questions for you? Do you want to say something first or can we shoot?

25 **MR SUTTON:** I've got one comment I'd like to make, perhaps now if you agree.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, go ahead.

[School non-participation – Moree]

30 **MR SUTTON:** I was at the Commission's visit to Moree and during information that was put forward there, the claim was made that in and around Moree there were 300 children who were not attending any school. In fact, the claim went on to say that these children received no support from any government agency and most of them were not registered at birth and in fact were non-persons. That claim received quite widespread media coverage. It was picked up by the state news and carried quite widely.

40 We responded to that claim through a joint investigation that I actually organised, with the support of Lynda Burnie from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Moree Place Management Project. We actually carried out an investigation over a period of a month and it was led by the ex-principal of Moree High School, who is still a resident of Moree and is held in very high regard in that particular town and knows people from all walks of life in the town. He worked with students, with teachers, with the AECG, with community members and with local government reps. He held interviews and visited most of the surrounding and outlying areas.

5 The result of the month-long process was that no such student was found, but a very small number of students - who George has already described as having moved in from other areas and not, at that stage, registered in the school - they were less than 10. I think - in fact I'm sure - that the investigation was reliable and valid, and I believe that the claim that there were 300 non-children in and around Moree was quite erroneous. I'd just like to put that before the Commission.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks very much. I must say, I thought the number somewhat excessive, although I believed that there could have been some. It's interesting if you've done all that work and not found a single one.

15 **MR SUTTON:** Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

20 **MR SUTTON:** Commissioner, we're at your discretion as far as questions are concerned.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you. Barbara?

[History teaching]

25 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Thank you for that. Thanks for the opportunity to be able to explore some of these issues which I think are really important. I started school in 1956 in Collarenebri, 5 years before Aboriginal children were allowed into schools and I went on to do correspondence through Blackfriars, so I have some - some things have changed, some things haven't changed in my experience.

30 I wanted to ask questions about the policy that's being debated about the use of language around race relations in this country and whether we're still using invasion or settlement of this country or whether that has been resolved.

35 **MR GREEN:** I don't know that it has been resolved and it is partly contextual. There are other words used, such as the arrival of Europeans, etcetera. The Aboriginal studies syllabus will use the word "invasion". I've heard teachers use the word "occupation", European "occupation" of Australia, which they believe accurately describes what happened, because the word "occupation" can itself be interpreted in different ways. But nationally, I don't believe that it has been resolved and there has certainly been no determination from the ministerial council that one word or the other will be used.

45 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Is it part of the Aboriginal studies program to talk about the border or the frontier wars that took place?

MR GREEN: I can't answer that.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: You don't know the answer.

MR GREEN: We can get you a copy of the syllabus, if that would be helpful.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I would like to see that. I would like to see the current one.

MR SUTTON: The general Aboriginal education policy, too, I think, would be valuable to you in terms of those 2 questions.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: You remember, John, that at Moree we talked a little bit about the Myall Creek massacre.

MR SUTTON: Yes, I do.

20

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I asked the children whether or not they were aware that massacres had taken place close to the town. Local history - is that being taught in the rural communities, about exploitation of people; movement of people under government policy; what tribes live in the area; why there are different tribes living together? Is that kind of being part of the curriculum now?

25

MR GREEN: I think it's fair to say - John and Alan might like to try on that one - I think that has depended very much on the particular school. The new unit in the primary HISE syllabus does have a mandatory component on Aboriginal matters, Aboriginal studies and that would be focused on the local area. But my experience has been, as someone moving around schools and observing programs, that it's taught very well in some schools, but that's not to say there are other schools where it's not taught very well.

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I'd suggest that it's probably more an issue in city-based schools where there is a very poor recognition on the part of students and communities of the Aboriginal heritage of particular parts of, say, this city.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: It was raised as an issue through our hearings in western New South Wales and it still concerns me. These were places like Brewarrina and Bourke, where people have been taken to Angledool Mission and then had tried to find their way back. I'm just wondering whether or not - I think that's an exciting and interesting part of the history and whether children locally knew about it, because they're still connected to family; they're still the same

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families that went through that kind of history. In terms of socially just education, I think those questions are challenging and need to be addressed.

5 **[Wilcannia]**

I'm currently working in Wilcannia in western New South Wales, where the attendance rates at school last year were probably less than 10% and there were issues around the principal who put up a fence around the school. My question is: how much autonomy do
10 principals have in these schools with regard to their interaction with the community and their responsibility to the department?

MR SUTTON: I've been associated with Wilcannia now for over
15 13 years.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Is that a true statement, John, for me to say that attendance rates dropped close to 10%?

MR SUTTON: I'm not aware - I'm not sure - I know that attendance
20 rates over the last 2 years in Wilcannia, that's 97/98, declined. Whether they were down to that figure or not, I don't know. I know the tremendous impact that a principal can have on the operation of a school such as Wilcannia. In fact, since I started working out there in
25 1986, that particular school has been remarkable for the peaks and troughs in its performance and that generally reflects the skill and the attitudes of the principal.

I can remember taking the governor-general out there once to
30 look at Wilcannia as a showpiece in western New South Wales education. I can remember other times that I've been quite distressed over the conditions applying in the school. The answer to your question is that principals are the people on-site all day, every day and their attitudes affect dramatically the sort of outcomes we get for kids in
35 schools. The last 2 years have been quite concerning. We now have a new principal on-site who is a male who is active, who has quite high expectations and who has now achieved a degree of community participation in the school that was more apparent, say, 10 years ago when Steve Buckley was out there as principal.

40 The Aboriginal community is now coming back into the school and working in the school. My own view is that that's an absolutely essential element of education in that particular school. I don't think it has ever run better than when we had the 5 women from the 5 major family groups operating on a daily basis in the school.
45

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And he's Canadian.

MR SUTTON: Yes, that's true.

[Indigenous education]

5 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** The other question I wanted to ask was about people in those places where there is a high percentage of Aboriginal children - 80 to 90% of the children attending the schools are Aboriginal. Are resources provided to them to develop around their own curriculum?

10 **MR SUTTON:** Yes, but not only resources. It's becoming more and more the case now for young teachers going to work in those communities to begin the week before school begins with a very concentrated introductory program which brings them into the town, lets them get to know people in the town, and goes through the issues of Aboriginal education, the issues of teaching in Walgett, the issues of teaching in Brewarrina, and gives them initial contact with the family groups and the leaders in the communities. Someone else might be better equipped than I am to talk about the learning materials, the teaching materials that are available, but they're quite extensive.

20 The other thing that is now absolutely essential is for each of those teachers to go through an introduction to the Aboriginal education policy prior to going in and teaching in the schools.

25 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** So there is funding available to the local community to develop curriculum. Is that what you're saying?

30 **MR SUTTON:** Not so much to develop curriculum, but to develop an awareness of the requirements of the curriculum in those areas. We've put a particular program into Walgett which is the Walgett Community of Schools Program, which carries with it quite considerable additional funding. What we want to see happen there is the development of programs on Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal history, delivered to all students in Walgett. That's one means of doing what you're saying, through additional funding.

35 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Given that a lot of the schools that we're talking about rural and remote areas don't have a lot of resources, especially for adults, are the schools available for adult literacy and other programs?

40 **MR SUTTON:** I might mention some of the work we're doing in TAFE. TAFE New South Wales does use school facilities for program delivery. The representation of Aboriginal people in TAFE programs is very significant. I was out in the Western Institute of TAFE recently and 10% of the students in Western Institute are Aboriginal people, which is still way above their population numbers; and across TAFE New South Wales I think the proportion of Aboriginal students is 2 to 3 times the representation in the general population.

5 A lot of the programs that are being undertaken by Aboriginal
people in TAFE, it must be said, are entry level and re-entry-type
programs, but the emphasis is very strongly on using those as a
stepping stone to vocational education and training. Adult and
community education - that's the old evening colleges - are gradually
moving into an equity role and are offering more and more programs
that are of interest to Aboriginal communities or even driven by
Aboriginal communities, so there's a lot of community education going
10 on there and it will grow. In addition, some schools themselves take the
initiative and run particular programs and activities for parents as part
of getting parents and the community into the school.

15 Schools as community centres. Who can comment on that?
Alan.

[School-community collaboration]

20 **DR RICE:** I've moved away from commenting on community
development. John has mentioned the Walgett project, where the
community are engaged in the development of the educational process
and programs, but in a number of country schools we have the school
established as a Schools as Community Centre Program with a
facilitator who works with the community in providing a range of
programs and services. It's an inter-agency, whole government and
25 using non-government services as well. We have one at Coonamble to
which the Aboriginal community are very closely linked. An Aboriginal
playgroup operates at the centre and it has been linked also with some
literacy programs at the TAFE.

30 Parents as Teachers is another program in 5 country schools,
which works on an inter-agency basis with families on parenting and
working with parents. The program at Moree is linked with an Aboriginal
program and it provides support for parenting processes that the
Aboriginal community are engaged in leading.

35 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** If I can be a bit more specific. If we're
going to rely on parents as we should to support the work of the school
and to do all the things that parents are supposed to do - spelling lists
and listening to reading - if the parents aren't literate, that's obviously a
40 problem. If we're going to introduce adult-literacy programs in the
school, will the department support and pay for the teachers to work
after hours to run these adult literacy programs in these communities
where TAFE courses aren't available?

45 **MR GREEN:** It is possible for that to happen, particularly under some of
the specially funded programs, such as the Commonwealth programs;
but given that our department is now a very broadly based education
and training department, we'd be more inclined to try to mainstream

5 those programs for those parents by using the resources of adult and community education or TAFE. The huge advantage of using TAFE as the delivery point is that you can start people on an education and training pathway that can take them into proper employment-based training. You can actually put people in jobs.

10 I was in Orange recently and saw some marvellous programs at Orange TAFE being run for Aboriginal people. There was an extraordinary class of people aged from about 16 or 17 to people in their 60s. The thing they had in common was that they all felt that they were missing out on opportunities, mostly employment opportunities, but even some in recreational-type opportunities. So they were there at TAFE engaged in their adult basic education course.

15 As I say, there is a substantial resource going in there. So if we have an area where a need is identified, I think that we'd be more inclined to see whether we can make provision through the TAFE program.

20 **[School-work transition for Aboriginal students]**

MR SUTTON: We also have the Aboriginal employment and career development program operating. We've given you some detail of that in the submission; and it relates to the initiative designed to increase employment and promote career development opportunities for our
25 Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal students and Aboriginal community members. It includes a Bachelor of Education in Indigenous Studies, community-based Indigenous teachers' education, Aboriginal mentor program, Aboriginal Teachers Career Pathway Program and Aboriginal skill leadership initiatives. The detail of that is in there.

30 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** The practical difficulties with TAFE programs in some of these remote areas is that the TAFE isn't open; there's no flexibility about opening hours; there has got to be a prescribed number of people enrolled. Sometimes when you want 4
35 people who are really interested in doing adult literacy, they can't because you have to have 8 or something like this. This is very soul destroying, I would think, as a parent, if you were trying to support your children at school and you weren't able to access that; and the resources of the school, I think, as a community resource, aren't used
40 well enough in this instance - computers, library, other resources. We've put to some of these teachers would they be interested and they're interested but they need to be paid to do that work.

45 **MR GREEN:** They also need to be trained.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Absolutely.

[Parental involvement]

MR GREEN: There's a very big difference between teaching children and teaching their parents. If we just go back, anecdotally, to my own experience; some years ago I was principal of Condobolin Primary School and we had great difficulty in engaging some members of the community in the life of the school. Many were involved, but there were large numbers who weren't. Quite often, that didn't come down to literacy, it came down to the fact that those people themselves had had very unhappy experiences at schools and saw schools as being alien places almost.

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So we put a program in and many schools put a program in, quite often through the Aboriginal community liaison officers or the AEAs to go out reassure people and connect the parents back to the school as a starting point; but for some people it was extraordinarily difficult just getting them to come through the gate.

15

[Reading Recovery]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I know. We've heard a lot about the Reading Recovery Program and the success that it has had. Are the reading materials used relevant to the particular community?

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MR GREEN: Alan is the guru.

DR RICE: Increasingly, we're extending the range of materials that are part of that program to ensure that we're building in materials that are culturally relevant. In our project at Walgett we're drawing on some materials from publishers, we're drawing on materials specifically developed by our distance education centre to ensure that we do have relevant, appropriate and culturally appropriate materials.

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MR SUTTON: We've also attempted to do that through the Country Areas Program over the years. One particularly successful initiative was the Western Readers Project, which resulted in a whole range of reading books for kids that were based in the local areas of western New South Wales. They're still being used, although that was a program that operated some time back now.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And for metropolitan children, like children from Muslim families or Asian families - are they involved with these Reading Recovery Programs as well?

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MR GREEN: Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: That material is culturally relevant to them?

45

MR GREEN: Yes.

[Race relations]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: It would be interesting to look at some of that. We heard a lot about inter-racial tension in a lot of the places we visited, and I was wondering how the department was addressing that or planned to address that in the long term. Some of it reflected the social response in the community between mainly Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but disturbing to hear about what was happening within our schools. I was wondering whether the department sees that as a priority issue to be addressed and how it attends to address it, if at all.

MR GREEN: If I could, this is one of the areas that I skipped over a little while back. The department takes all forms of discrimination very seriously and we have a particular emphasis on anti-racism within the department. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training won a Human Rights Commission corporate award in 1995 for the Whole School Anti-Racism Project, which has now been implemented in many schools across New South Wales and in fact has been adopted by schools in other states. We have very strongly worded anti-racism agreements procedures that were published in 1992, and they're currently being revised.

I might mention that a very exciting development is the national project on racism in schools, which is tentatively titled 'Racism, No Way'. It's a project that is being actually run by New South Wales, and in fact I chaired the national committee. It's looking to develop anti-racism educational materials for all schools right across Australia. Thus far we've produced the core booklet that will go to every school in Australia. We've just become the largest partner in the Commonwealth's Living in Harmony anti-racism initiative, and, through Living in Harmony, are sponsoring a Web site that will be available to all schools and provide extensive information about racism as an issue, ideas for classroom practises in anti-racism and will link schools so that schools can open up a dialogue about how they're dealing with racism issues.

We've had quite an amazing committee or group working on that, which has included people from non-English speaking backgrounds and people of Aboriginal background. I think we have the Aboriginal programs managers from 4 of the 7 - is it 7 states and territories, yes - plus representatives from the National Catholic Education Commission and the Association of Independent Schools. So we're very hopeful that that will provide schools with material and then it will be up to systems to implement them.

I agree with you, though, that racism is, while it manifests itself in schools it is much larger than a school-based problem. It is a major

national problem and it's one that needs to be addressed at a national level.

5 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** The major social issues in this country, like reconciliation, like the whole public debate around land issues - I'm just wondering how much information gets to children in schools to help them to understand what the issues are, what the opposing debates are about, because they're surely ones that these young people have to engage in later on and may be part of the conflict that happens or the
10 tension that's within the schools now.

MR GREEN: There has been a very high take-up rate in schools of the reconciliation issue, and Sorry Day was strongly supported in schools, including some unlikely schools. At the national convention in
15 Wollongong recently we had a delegation of 200 students from New South Wales schools that we sponsored to the convention, plus a large number of our own staff. The State Student Representative Council, that's the peak body of secondary students across the state, has adopted reconciliation as one of its major priorities. The SRC sent a
20 group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to both the national student conventions in Darwin last year and in Geelong recently.

So there's a lot of work going on and there's a lot of interest in schools. There's a lot of interest among young people and it's very
25 positive in terms of what's happening.

[Gay and lesbian students]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thank you for that. Thanks for that information. How are the schools reacting to or supporting young
30 people who are either gay or lesbian within the school system? Is there a policy around these children's support?

MR GREEN: Yes, there is. The anti-discrimination procedures apply, but there is, through the personal development, health and PE
35 syllabus, there are whole sections on discrimination and a recognition of differences among people. The issue of discrimination against gay and lesbian students and teachers comes up occasionally as a major issue where there is an incident or a case or a major complaint, but in the main, it bubbles away as it does in the community as a whole in
40 schools and teachers deal with it. Our judgment would be that they are dealing with it effectively and sympathetically.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Within the parameters of the framework or the policy that you have in place?
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MR GREEN: Yes; and in terms of their practices within the school. Again, there are issues of discrimination against gay and lesbian people that are community-based, they're out there all the time. They're

sometimes quite subtle and they permeate into the schools. School is just part of the society it serves.

5 Could I just say, too, that the issue of gay and lesbian students
in rural and remote areas has been of particular concern to us because
there are support structures in the city, but quite often a young person
who's gay or lesbian in a remote area is not only isolated but dealing
with some quite intensive discrimination. We've had specific programs
and curriculum materials around that. There was a program 2 or 3
10 years ago called 'Out in the Bush' and we were impressed enough by
that to buy the rights for it and we've made that available to every high
school in New South Wales, and it's still well used.

[Education funding]

15 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** It's raised as a major issue in Bush Talks
with relation to youth suicide to send a strong message to us all. Can
you just give me some ballpark figure of what contribution the
Commonwealth makes for rural and remote areas through the
education program?

20 **MR SUTTON:** No, I'm sorry, I can't.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: It doesn't matter. All right.

25 **MR GREEN:** I can give you figures on the Aboriginal component,
ballpark. It's about \$13 million. In a state education budget of \$7 billion,
of which almost 5 goes to schools, the Commonwealth contribution is
not a significant proportion. However, it is very useful in that it comes in
as extra money and then can be used quite effectively. We believe that
30 the Commonwealth funds are very well used by our system and by our
schools and greatly appreciated.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And the ASSPA programs we've had good
reports about.

35 **MR GREEN:** Yes, excellent.

[Otitis media]

40 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Just one last question. I was just listening
this morning about a report about Aboriginal education in the Northern
Territory, which is pretty damning. What collaboration occurs between
New South Wales education and New South Wales health in terms of
screening and treatment of children with otitis media?

45 **MR GREEN:** Very strong cooperation. We work with health on - as you
could imagine, given that we have three quarters of a million children
on our premises every day, health sees the education system as a very

5 good partner in a whole range of community health initiatives that involve children. The health workers across the state have very good access to schools, work with schools, work very closely with the itinerant teachers hearing, in helping children with their education problems. I'd be very positive about our relationship with health on that one.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thanks for that.

10 **[Staff incentives]**

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Barbara. Can I just, as quickly as I can, get through a few issues with you. There are a number of things I want to raise. It's too good to have you here to let you go before we've actually raised them. The first relates to some of the issues on teacher incentives, not just for attraction but also for retention. I certainly picked up in your submission this issue and it's one mentioned to us constantly. What do you see as perhaps the best way to retain teachers for longer periods in country towns, particularly retention of principals?

20 **MR SUTTON:** We've got a real problem in that historically our incentive programs have been based on recruitment, but not retention. One of the major improvements we've made is the Rural Leadership Program for principals, where we're actually packaging a salary package for them which is significantly higher than they would normally have had. I talked last night, for example, with the current principal of Louth Public School. Louth has been down to 4 students when he arrived there; it's now up to 12 students again. But in terms of on top of what he would normally receive in a salary, there is around about \$25,000 of additional package made available to him.

25 Louth was in fact the first principal's position advertised under the Rural Leadership plan. We've received, as I think you have, a submission from the principal of Bourke High School, which sets out a whole range of retention strategies which are currently under consideration now by our employment people in the system here, but we haven't come up with a final package of incentives that would address the retention issues. The other side of it, we that some communities are delighted to retain certain people.

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[10.55 am]

THE COMMISSIONER: But not others.

45 **MR SUTTON:** But not others. Wilcannia, your example, is a very good one. If we were putting a lot of additional dough in to retain principals in some of those areas, I think we'd have a lot of problems; but we do

need to maintain a mix of experience and youth in the western schools, and retention-type incentives are a way of doing that. We haven't come up with an additional package at the present time, though.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Do you have a time-frame, John, in which you think that would be developed?

MR SUTTON: I don't have a time-frame at the moment, but it's being discussed through the system. It is an issue of great concern to us, but I can't put a time-frame on it.

[Relief teachers]

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks. The next issue goes to the question about teacher relief for teacher release. I know that you've got the extra dollars and provisions in New South Wales to enable that to occur; but one of the issues raised with us has been that even if the money is available, the relief teachers aren't. Are there particular strategies that you've got that can actually provide release whether it's for professional development, or any other purposes, so that the teachers can in fact get out rather than just in theory be able to?

MR SUTTON: That's a problem that's not faced only by the rural and remote areas.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes, of course.

MR SUTTON: It's a problem in Western Sydney as well. We've done some major work on that in the last 12 months, particularly by the appointment of mobile staff. We find that in a lot of country and city areas where we've got long-term absences, say, from maternity leave, or long service leave, that the available casual teachers end up locked into those long-term relief positions, so there's no day-to-day relief for people who want to go and take part in all sorts of activities.

35 By putting what we call mobile teachers into those positions; for instance, if we had a maternity leave position of 6 months at Brewarrina, rather than taking up probably the only casual teacher available in Brewarrina, we're now more likely, particularly at the request of principals, to fill that position with a mobile teacher leaving casu-
40 casu-als still available. We've also got a program in place whereby principals can contact our staffing officers in Sydney, and the staffing officers will advertise for casual teachers to go and take up positions in the country. There are 2 or 3 other initiatives that just escape my mind at the present time, but we can certainly provide them. I think, we did
45 have a statement from the director of staffing on that matter.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

MR SUTTON: They're just 2 that come to mind. The use of mobiles, and the centrally advertising vacant positions.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** There's no possibility - or maybe it exists already, I don't know - of having permanent relief teachers attached to district officers in the western region who are literally short-term mobile, that is a day or 2-day relief teachers?

10 **MR SUTTON:** We actually did have those people until, say, 8 to 10 years back, and we found that their use was very minimal and that they ended up being an additional teacher on their home school's staff, and that they were travelling very little and moving out into the other schools very little. We did away with that. I just forget actually where
15 that resource went into, but it went back into the schools, we didn't remove it from the system.

MR GREEN: I remember.

20 **MR SUTTON:** Go ahead.

MR GREEN: It was, I think, when we put the global budget in other schools and schools were given a dollar-based budget to employ their own casual teachers. The equivalent salaries of the former district relief
25 teachers - and John was spot on, they were very ineffective - were pooled and then each school has its own budget; so everybody got a share of the money. It didn't improve the number of casual teachers in the field, but it improved the capacity of schools to be flexible in how they dealt with the issue.

30 I can remember a conversation with the principal of Balranald Central who said, "Well, we're still having trouble getting the casual teachers, but because we've got the money at least if we don't get the teachers we get to keep the money."

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes.

MR GREEN: There was an advantage, sort of, it wasn't as good as, but there was an offsetting advantage to the school in those terms. He
40 could then use that in other ways to assist the students.

MR SUTTON: The other quite successful strategy has been to identify casuals in the city willing to go and work in country areas and to guarantee them 3 days a week employment. Where the principals are
45 quite happy to do that, we find that they end up working a 5-day week anyway; say, we've had one go to Bourke Primary School where the principal is prepared to give a written guarantee of at least 3 days

employment per week. The principals control those budgets. It's very seldom that they're on the wrong side of the ledger out of it. So that's another strategy that's working for us.

5 **[Professional development]**

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks. With professional development, does that responsibility lie at the district level, or the school level, or does it lie centrally? There are budgets provided in each school, as I recall.

10 **MR SUTTON:** I think Dr Rice.

DR RICE: We have a state program, we have a state director that manages the total budget, and they have a range of priorities. For example, the literacy is a state-funded initiative. We have programs developed at the centre which were then provided out to schools. There's an allocation to districts which enables the district to go about its task of implementation of training and development activities across all of its schools, that allocation relates to the priorities that exist. Then there's an allocation to schools. I think, the actual figures are listed in our report. It varies; for example, in a very small school, as I recall, it was \$683 per teacher, but in schools in regional centres the figure was much less. That funding is provided for the school to conduct its own training and development activities.

25 You ask about the involvement of non-government schools. In joint programs, for example, the changes occurring to the Higher School Certificate, there are over 700 courses available for teachers that are conducted across sectors for government and non-government teachers; otherwise non-government teachers pay to join in the particular activities that are being conducted, but it's really just a cost recovery rate.

30 **[Cross-sectoral co-operation]**

THE COMMISSIONER: Perhaps, we could stay in that area for a minute, or not the professional development, but move into the co-operation. Are there other areas that you know of, Alan, where there are activities jointly between government and non-government schools in some of these regions? Are there are sharing of resources, for example, to increase subject choice for Years 9 to 12 students? So you might have joint classes? You mentioned professional development. Any other particular ways in which resources, or opportunities, are being shared?

45 **MR SUTTON:** There's no formal structure for that to happen. We find in particular cases relating to the individuals in charge of the schools, that it will happen, but there's no formal relationship between that and other systems to structure it in a way that that does occur.

MR GREEN: It's worth mentioning the Nerimba precinct.

5 **MR SUTTON:** Yes, it is, but can I just say one other thing. I might suggest if you go on with Nerimba because that would straighten out (indistinct)

DR RICE: You've got the language (indistinct)

10 **MR SUTTON:** Yes. The issue of our distance education single subjects being available to non-government schools is one that's been with us for quite some time. We are at the moment, although moving to - and I've mentioned this briefly a minute ago - moving to recover some costs from the non-government system in terms of the provision we make
15 there.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right.

20 **MR SUTTON:** Sorry, Nerimba?

THE COMMISSIONER: Just on that for a minute. Do you have something that's a face-to-face equivalent of that, that if you get kids in a non-government school who want to do a subject which is only available in Year 9 and 10 at the local state high school, that they can
25 actually the school for that course?

MR SUTTON: No.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** It doesn't occur, right. Nerimba?

MR GREEN: I was just prompting John. The Nerimba precinct is probably one very good example of close cooperation where we have on the old naval site at Quakers Hill, a campus of the Western Institute of TAFE, a campus of the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, and then virtually co-located, a Catholic senior college and a
35 government senior college. Those senior colleges share core facilities such as library, assembly halls, and the like. The last time I was in touch with it, which was a little while ago, the principals were looking to do exactly what you're talking about, to enhance the curriculum offering across the 2 schools by combining resources and having students moving across the 2. We have some industrial reluctance to that model service delivery in New South Wales, which has to be worked through with the union.
40

45 **MR SUTTON:** The other thing that I should mention in regard is that the provisions are under the Country Areas Program. The Country Areas Program is Commonwealth funded, but administered by the

state, as you'll know. We now have a representative state advisory committee, and that program is based on sharing between schools and across systems, and has been since its implementation. Of course most of the western part of New South Wales is covered by the Country Areas Program. Through that there are quite a number of initiatives shared by government and non-government schools.

[TAFE access]

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks. I'm very sensitive to time. We have people waiting as well, but I'll just try and push a couple more things if I may into the program before we finish. Again on the question of cooperation. As we travel the country we see different systems handling different things differently, I must say, and you expect that; but there seems to be much more school/TAFE cooperation in New South Wales than what I've found in some of the other states. One problem that was identified to us in Queensland - and I don't know whether it's a Commonwealth or a state problem - is that TAFE is simply not available to provide courses for under 15-year-olds. Do we, in New South Wales, have that age bar as well? And is it a Commonwealth, or a state, decision to do that?

MR GREEN: There is a bar there, and it is a national issue. I think, it's - I'm not aware that it's a Commonwealth imposed barrier, but it could be related to funding arrangements and subtle means that I'm not aware of.

THE COMMISSIONER: Right.

MR GREEN: It's really based on an assumption that TAFE is an adult learning environment, and that while some students 15-plus will benefit from a TAFE learning environment - and we've got students studying in TAFE institutes now who would normally have been at school, or may not have been anywhere - once you go much below the age of 15 you run into great difficulties just as to how you manage children in an educational setting, as opposed to how you manage adults. There is also an emerging issue around child protection that we've been working on. With Joint Secondary Schools TAFE Programs and various other programs, we have about 60,000 children studying in TAFE in New South Wales, and yet we don't have the duty of care child protection structure in the TAFE setting that we have in a school setting.

MR SUTTON: Having said that, we're absolutely committed to breaking down that barrier that still exists between TAFE and schools. It just seem a little ludicrous to me that the Department of Education and Training can have it operating as 2 separate arms. For instance, if you just take teachers in TAFE and kids moving from a school to a TAFE college to take a particular course with them, but the teachers not moving back into the schools. At the present time - although we're

looking at it in respect of the current award with the Teachers' Federation - there's no movement of teachers across the 2 systems.

5 I remember visiting a country high school in western New South Wales. It was suffering greatly declining enrolments and the principal telling me that it was not possible to send kids across the road to the TAFE college. We started to talk about what is the curriculum doing to keep kids here; and the answer was nothing.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes.

MR SUTTON: The curriculum they needed was across the road. Those barriers are going, they're breaking down, and that's happened since we've become the Department of Education and Training.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** That was going to be my next question. Do you find the combining of TAFE and school education in the one department helpful?

20 **MR SUTTON:** The objective is a seamless interchange, a seamless progression for kids through the whole system, from preschool to university or TAFE colleges. It's going to be a lengthy process to achieve; but it's significantly different in 1999 to what it was in 1997, significantly different.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** In Queensland, in Normanton, we visited the town and the school there - which is a nice school, but struggling, as schools do in remote areas - a TAFE college a block away that had an absolutely fantastic carpentry workshop that had not run a course for 2 years, and a fantastic metal work workshop that had not run a course for one year, and were not available to the school kids to use. Could that arise in New South Wales?

30 **MR SUTTON:** Less and less. For instance, some of our courses now needing a commercial kitchen could not be taught in schools. Gilgandra is a place that comes to mind. Now the school is confidently and quite acceptably using TAFE facilities.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** That's for under 15-year-olds as well?

40 **MR SUTTON:** Yes; and that's our objective to make those moves. In new schools that we're building now, in some instances - some only - were putting in commercial kitchens so that the TAFE operation can be in the school premises, rather than the separate institution.

45

[Students with disabilities]

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks. The next question I had - John, is in the disability area. You mentioned, I think, or one of you mentioned, the objective being to ensure that every student in the state has support required to maintain in mainstream education. One of the difficulties
5 that we've found is actually planning ahead for particular children. The individual young person I'm thinking of came up in Bourke.

The child was at the Bourke Primary School and over a number of years excellent facilities were provided to actually change the
10 physical plant of the Bourke Primary School; but there hadn't been enough forward thinking and so the child should now be in Year 7 at the high school, but when we were there still couldn't go because plans had not been made early enough in advance to adapt the high school to be able to accommodate the child. What are the processes for that
15 kind of forward planning so that kids aren't left in Year 6, so that we're actually able to anticipate rather than have to try to catch up?

MR SUTTON: That shouldn't happen. If it has that's a real problem for us, but it's more George's area. I'll ask him to speak on this.
20

MR GREEN: We have, at this stage, about 12,500 students with disabilities enrolled in regular classrooms within the Integration Program; so it's a lot of young people with disabilities. In the beginning of this year we probably had about 20 problems around placement.
25 Being perfectly honest, as one should be, most of them were around the properties area, where work that was supposed to have happened, didn't happen. We've done an analysis of the reasons for that. Interestingly, a major reason was that there was just lack of coordination between the people coordinating the work, which was
30 another government department, and the subcontractors. So, work that people thought was going on during the school holidays, in fact, wasn't going on. There were delays with wet weather in some cases, and in some cases there were delays with the supply of equipment from specialist providers.
35

We sat down with the properties people over the last few months, and we've thrashed all those processes out. We have a senior officer now from within the special education area who has been designated to liaise with properties across the state to ensure that the
40 transition planning is in place because, as you say, if it's not, everything falls over.

THE COMMISSIONER: The primary school, I think, have done a fantastic job in supporting this particular child. It's such a pity that at
45 that stage - and maybe, I would hope, she's in the high school right now.

MR GREEN: Interestingly, I'm not aware of that one.

5 **MR SUTTON:** I was aware of that one, but I'm sure that child is now enrolled. Equally you could take examples of where it's worked quite well. We had a student in a wheelchair at either Coolabah, or Byrock - I'm not sure which; but well before the end of Year 6 we had put in place the planning to allow that child to enrol in Bourke. When he finished, the boy went off to a non-government school. Really, the situation should not arise where they're held up in their progress from primary to secondary because of poor planning.

10

[Fees]

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. My last question is just the issue of free schooling and fees and charges, becoming an increasing topic around the country. So much so, in South Australia there are proposals for the amendment to the Education Act to make school fees and charges debts that can be recoverable through the courts. In New South Wales, I understand, that's not the case, that essentially they're optional or voluntary fees and charges. Are there limits on the level of fee or charge that can be imposed and provisions for waiver?

20

25 **MR SUTTON:** Yes, I actually did 2 reviews of school contributions for the previous Minister, Virginia Chadwick; and what we have in place now is a system of voluntary school contributions and voluntary subject contributions. The contribution is set at the school level. We pegged the level of contributions when we completed the last review. They're only allowed to increase, if they're at the maximum level, via the CPI annually. We also have in place a code of practice which principals must follow. Basically, it says that no child will be discriminated against because a lack of funded voluntary contributions for either a subject or a general school contribution, and that the entire curriculum has to be open to every child irrespective of whether they make contributions or not. We can make a note of that and provide you with the actual code of practice and our policy on that.

30

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks, and also the peg levels if you don't mind, John.

MR SUTTON: Yes.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Give us those as well.

45 **MR SUTTON:** We did find of course when we did the second of the 2 reviews, that there were over 40% of schools in New South Wales which don't levy any contribution at all, certainly not 40% of secondary schools. I think, all secondary schools have a contribution.

THE COMMISSIONER: Are there particular systems that have resources available to support kids whose parents haven't got the money to put them on excursions and that kind of thing?

5 **MR SUTTON:** Yes, the Needy Student Program.

THE COMMISSIONER: That's run at the school level?

10 **MR SUTTON:** Yes.

DR RICE: Yes, it is. We've actually provided you with, in our supplementary briefing.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** That's in there. I see?

DR RICE: There will be a detailed couple of pages indicating criteria and allocations.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you.

MR GREEN: The equity programs, such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program, also have the capacity to assist in those cases too.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks. We've kept you well over, and we've kept others waiting. Thank you very much for the 3 of you, and to all those who contributed to this and to the rest. As I say, it was a terrific submission and very good to have the information in advance of your coming. I very appreciate the assistance that I've had. Would it be okay if we took a brief, 2 or 3 minutes only? Is that all right? Thank you very much.

[11.23 am]

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you very much. We'll start again. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I apologise. I hope you found it at least not boring listening to the answers that we were getting.

40 **MS MCGILL:** No.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** We're Chris Sidoti; Barb Flick is the Co-Commissioner for New South Wales; Bill Jonas is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and the Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner.

MS McGILL: I'm Edna McGill from the Ethnic Communities Council. I'm a former chairperson - I'm now on management - and our chairperson sends his apologies; he wasn't able to come today. Enza is from Newcastle.

5

MS DI STEFANO: The ECC of Newcastle and the Hunter. I also send the apologies of our chairperson who is unable to be here.

MS McGILL: For your information, the Ethnic Communities Council of New South Wales was the group that was asked to come today, and because we have close links with our regional people, and that includes not only Newcastle but Albury/Wodonga, Wollongong, Wagga Wagga, Lightning Ridge, people in Coffs Harbour. I think that's about it.

MS DI STEFANO: Illawarra.

MS McGILL: Illawarra, sorry did I forget Illawarra? Yes. Whilst we didn't have the funds to bring them all to Sydney, you may be seeing some of their areas anyway in your travels, but I did ring them all and try and get some flavour of what they were thinking in any case. Since Enza has to catch a train - - -

20

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, you might like to go first.

MS McGILL: Yes.

25

MS DI STEFANO: That's all right?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, of course, Enza. When you need to wander off just feel free to do so.

30

[Role of ECC]

MS DI STEFANO: Okay. Thank you very much. The Ethnic Communities Council of Newcastle and the Hunter region has operated for over 22 years, and has been supporting and advocating on behalf of ethnic communities in the Hunter, and up until recently up in the north coast of New South Wales. It's conducted numerous rural Outreach programs which have endeavoured to address emerging issues pertaining to access and equity in education. Only just recently, our multicultural children's support team has been recognised as a quality provider, and it's been given the responsibility for Indigenous and disabled support services in the whole Hunter region.

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The ECC has taken a proactive role facilitating dialogue to raise awareness of special needs and the moral, ethical and legal obligations that educational service providers, both government and non-government, have to ensure that children in rural and remote areas

45

have the same opportunities to achieve their full academic, social and economic potential as active participants in Australian society.

[Rural disadvantage]

5 When addressing these issues certain matters need to be considered that extend beyond the mere quantitative classifications normally formulated to inform decisions regarding degree and level of service of funding support. Too often government decisions, particularly in recent times, have been motivated by economic rationalism, namely, is the service cost-effective. This context presumes significant numbers and critical mass to make the service viable. Yet, the reality of isolation in rural populations is distance and sparse client numbers.

15 Rural areas have also had the problem that bureaucrats located in capital cities often fail to appreciate the degree of need that exists in a regional community because they use urban logic and perceptions to inform their recommendations and decisions. A recent example has been the withdrawal of a community settlement officer by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs; it presumes that there is sufficient community and ethno-specific infrastructures in rural areas similar to large urban areas that can advise, guide and support a person attempting to get access to appropriate educational, training and employment services.

25 Confronted by linguistic cultural barriers and a lack of knowledge, these young people are doubly disadvantaged. The need for empathetic, familiar and competent transition support is as critical as the service itself. Yet, decisions to maintain such community development and settlement services is premised on case workload and demand, often benchmarked against high ethnic density in urban areas.

35 It's also important to recognise that rural areas in matters pertaining to Indigenous people and persons of non-English speaking background, have been more affected by current political extremes, such as the One Nation movement. Despite politically proper statements by rural local governments and service providers, there's little doubt that there has been underlying hostility in the country towards those who are perceived as having special privileges because of their ethnicity, physical capacity, or other perceived disadvantage. In the face of rural unemployment, social and economic disadvantage, migrants and Aboriginals are often seen as privileged. There is often a failure to recognise that equality is not equity, and that unless affirmative action is taken to address linguistic and cultural barriers, equal treatment merely ensures that these special needs groups will always lag behind their mainstream counterparts.

[Literacy program]

5 Recently, the Federal government has amalgamated the Disadvantaged School Programs and the English as a Second Language Program, that's in the general new arrivals area, and called it a Literacy Program. While supposedly maintaining its ESL and Indigenous target groups, educational administrators have been given the opportunity to utilise the funds in more generic programs that benefit all students. In cities like Sydney with significant numbers of ESL students, educational authorities, state and private, have maintained a credible and effective ESL program.

10 In contrast, decisions in the rural areas, motivated by a reliance on numbers to inform needs, as well as populist perceptions about equality, have effectively dismantled the ESL programs and implemented generic literacy programs that fail to count for the recognised specialist requirements of English as a Second Language teaching. The application of general literacy development principles fails to address the cultural and linguistic factors, and subsequently diminishes the capacity of these children to achieve in the same way as their mainstream colleagues.

20 The terms "ethnic" or "non-English speaking background" appears to have lost its value as an indicator of educational disadvantage. Our decision makers and politicians shy away from multiculturalism, as evident by the New South Wales Minister for Ethnic Affairs and Premier changing the name of the Ethnic Affairs Commission to Citizenship and Community Relations. This is a terse example of an attitude that influences decisions in the country where minority groups lack critical mass and, therefore, are considered not worthy for consideration. The most common statement made by schools and educational institutions is, "We don't have any of those," even though small highly disadvantaged groups, or individuals attend the school or institution.

35 In accessing quality educational services, children of non-English speaking background and other minority groups need to overcome a culture of denial. To do this they need the understanding and advocacy skills that they do not have because of their disadvantaged position, and the barriers that stand in their way. There is, therefore, little doubt that clearly defined and mandated parameters need to be set to ensure compliance. There needs to be a positive and active action to raise and maintain awareness through compulsory elements in the Teacher Training Program, through targeted funding, through specific accountability structures, and through ongoing opportunities for awareness raising within the professional and decision making structures.

[Technology]

5 While access to technology has some significant advantages
for isolated and regional communities, technology remains a high cost
which limits access to those who can afford their purchase. The
maintenance of access, even when such hardware is made available, is
also costly in regional areas. Therefore, there needs to be a rural
strategy that compensates families and balances costs with those of
urban counterparts. It's also worth noting that while technology can and
does challenge the tyranny of distance in Australia, children of non-
English speaking background need to overcome the linguistic barriers
10 before learning yet another new language, that of technical language
with a specialist vocabulary and complexity.

15 Televised lessons of foreign language learning in Australia,
while useful, have not achieved the levels of linguistic competence that
are possible in a face-to-face situation. The same paradigm may be
applied to students who are endeavouring to learn English as a foreign
language. There is a need to acknowledge the importance of the ESL
teacher as the critical guide to English competence, and the key to
educational success for ESL students. Attempts at alternatives,
20 however well-intentioned, need to be moderated by the measurable
outcomes that endorse successful progress towards a successful
achievement of every student's academic potential despite the barriers
they need to overcome.

25 Simply put, rural and remote areas, even larger regional
centres where a significant number of minority groups students are not
present, require affirmative and targetive strategies in decision making,
funding and educational provision that will mitigate against populist and
simplistic perceptions of a complex problem.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you, Enza. We might just see if we've
got some questions for you first so that we can take the advantage of
you being here. Barbara, have you got a question?

35 **[Community relations]**

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Just 2 things. You've just talked briefly
about the fallout from One Nation; it's emergence onto the political
scene. Aside from policy and funding issues, what are the social issues
that's been looked at in the schools for these children?

40 **MS DI STEFANO:** I believe, there's a lot of renewed racism, if you want
to call it renewed, which may - I mean, sometimes people may have
racist thoughts, but not until they're actually brought out into a public
arena that people start to think, "Maybe what I was thinking was
45 justified, and, yes, these Asian kids may be the problem." That's where
we sort of see it on that scale in the school yard.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: So, it's putting permission - that's bringing, that's allowing, yes, that's permitting you to express what you might have thought?

5 **MS DI STEFANO:** Yes; and I suppose, where we as an ECC have found a program that was working extremely well with our community settlement worker that has been de-funded, he did a tremendous lot of work with youth in the schools. He did a lot of anti-racism cultural awareness workshops with them, and it really made them understand where a new arrival comes from. A lot of role playing was an excellent way. We've had tremendous feedback from schools wanting this program to still continue, but unfortunately our worker is no longer with us because the program has been cut.

15 **MS MCGILL:** Sorry, following on from that. The ECC of New South Wales has a program which is Community Harmony. We supplied a lot of material to the multicultural consultants in most districts in New South Wales. In that, of course, was HREOC's Face The Facts book, and we want to know when it's getting re-printed. We did our best to work with the Department of Education about the anti-racism policy. They have got schools that are taking up the project that they've got going all over the state. How it's going is another question. After all, I suppose, we have to allow that the schools themselves are only part of a community, and if there's people outside the school who bring those values, those false values, to bear on their children, it makes it very difficult.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Enza, you've raised several issues. Have you also thought about some strategy, or made some recommendations about what needs to be done now? Just tell me what you think - - -

MS DI STEFANO: Positions.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: If you had a magic wand, what would you do?

[Rural funding and service formulae]

40 **MS DI STEFANO:** I think the rural area and the remote area needs to be looked at differently. The equation needs to be looked at differently than the city model. We don't just look at numbers. I can give you an example of our children's services. We've just been regionalised, which means we take in all of the Hunter, and we have to service or support all of the child care centres federally funded, etcetera. The ones that are in the remote areas who have never had a support worker before, they can't wait to get the person. The person comes in and they're saying, "Oh," and there's open arms. They just can't get enough information. Yet, in Newcastle, where we've had the service for a

number of years, sometimes you tend to get the service provider, you think, "Oh, God, here they come again."

5 So it's looking at making an equal distribution of the money, and it's not about numbers, it's about everybody having an equal right to education and to the opportunities that they should have.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Given that there are many different ethnic groups in these communities - there are Asian people, there are people from Muslim families - it seems to me to be a difficulty to assign one worker to try and work with the whole of the community.

MS DI STEFANO: Not necessarily.

15 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Not necessarily, good. Tell me why?

MS DI STEFANO: The basic needs are the same, and I think, if you have a competent worker who has a real understanding of community and of the needs of NESBs, and Aboriginal needs, we have Indigenous workers. I mean, in the Indigenous community there are different levels of - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Absolutely, yes.

25 **MS DI STEFANO:** Again, that person needs to be up-to-date, kept abreast of what's happening, and follow that on out in the community, and in the mainstream community, not just focusing on the - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Are the ESL programs funded by the Commonwealth, or the state?

MS DI STEFANO: From the Commonwealth, I believe.

MS MCGILL: That's something I was going to say about that.

35 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** You were going to talk about that after? Okay, let's stay with Enza. That's all I wanted to ask.

[Role of ECC]

40 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** Can I get you to just clarify something for me? Before, when you said, you also now have to take into consideration Indigenous students and disabled students, what were you exactly saying there when you said that? What's your role there?

45 **MS DI STEFANO:** Within the children's services they're the special needs group, which is non-English speaking background, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and disability. We have that

whole portfolio, I suppose, you want to say, in those children's services within our area, but that's not saying that ethnic workers are the Indigenous workers. We have Indigenous workers, we have people who have got the disability background, but again they're all learning
5 about cross-cultural training from the whole team, so everybody has an understanding of everything. You can have a disabled child who's from an NESB background, or an Indigenous background, or whatever. We look after that.

10 Within our children's services we also do out of school hours; so we're looking at children from the age of 5 to 12. We also support those children and those teachers.

15 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** We talked before I came in here, we were sitting out there and we had a little bit of a talk about some places that we're both familiar with. If I can bring it back to numbers; if you take it outside the Newcastle area - because we wouldn't have any doubt about the fact that Newcastle itself is not remote or rural, but just take
20 the rest of the Hunter - how many people have you got meeting the needs that you're talking about there, about how many individuals? What would be your guess, or your very informed knowledge, about what you actually need? How many people have you got on the ground, and how many people do you think you need?

25 **MS DI STEFANO:** We're talking about the education area obviously.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Yes.

30 **MS DI STEFANO:** In terms of the children's services where I'm talking about mostly under fives and that out of school area, in the rural area we have 3 workers. They're actually based, we have a Kurri office - you're familiar with where Kurri is - and they service the Great Lakes of the Hunter, mid-Hunter. But in terms of youth, we're looking at youth and looking at the school-aged area and university area, we have no
35 work because that funding is gone, and we think that that's a huge gap. There's no other body that is looking after that in our area for non-English speaking background.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks, Enza. We might move onto Edna, and please join in if you're still here when we start questioning again, don't feel constrained, but let Edna go first, I think.

[Education funding]

45 **MS MCGILL:** I think, first of all I'd like to start off with the funding arrangements. The Commonwealth has decided that special education projects will no longer be funded separately, so all the funds to the states and territories are now in a broad banded, and in one big bucket. Whilst this allegedly allows the states and territories to make decisions

on their respective priorities, it's open to question as to whether the equity issues will be seen as important as some other educational imperatives.

5 The equity projects previously funded discreetly by the
Commonwealth include the Disadvantaged Schools Program, Gender
Equity, ESL Teachers, New Arrivals Program. They are still funding
Aboriginal programs because, I think, it's coming from another place,
10 and also some disabilities programs to the states. Early Literacy - and
I'll reiterate what Enza has said about the literacy notion - there are
some people in government who believe that ESL is really a literacy
problem. They do not understand that it's a language problem. Similarly
with Aboriginal English they don't understand that is another area in
15 which they ought to just forget about literacy until the students can
actually perform in whatever language is required in the school.

 The Disadvantaged Schools Program is still being run by the
Department of Education in New South Wales as is the Early Literacy
20 Program. The Early Literacy Program and the Disadvantaged Schools
Program are statewide and deliver some very good funds to schools all
over the state. Each of those programs have consultancies that are
spread right around, and there's a lot of in-service training with regard
to the needs of those children. It's not all good because in some remote
25 areas - again, I suppose, it's the numbers - but there are not
necessarily teachers who have full understanding of what the programs
are about.

 When it comes to other funding issues, both the
Commonwealth and the state are funding non-government schools now
30 to the detriment of public schools. As they increase the funds to the
former, they so decrease the similar amount from the funds of the
public schools. This can call into question any sort of government
commitment to the education of the mass of the children, particularly
since so many in the public system have special needs.

35 I don't know whether you understand that. That's the
benchmark, the EPO - I forget what it is - it's a way that they decide
what the enrolments are for non-government schools, and that
increases the amount of funds, but because they're only using the
40 same big bucket of money for education, it means a decrease in the
state schools. Fortunately, the department and many schools and
teachers in New South Wales do provide excellent teaching programs
to cater for the particular needs of their students, but there are many
issues in education vying for the attention and the funds available to
45 school.

 Going back to government again; it's a multicultural society,
and everybody talks about Australia being a multicultural society; but

cuts by governments, both Commonwealth and state, under the guise of mainstreaming are absolutely devastating. We can talk about DIMA, about the lesser numbers of migrant resource centres, about the way that the translation and interpreting services are constrained, not
5 always available at the right time; they're just a small part of it. The health issues, you know, you could go on and on with those things.

[11.45 am]

10 The ECC has requested over the last 2 years, the release of a Multicultural Education policy by the New South Wales Minister for Education and Training. This policy will cover specialist staff, such as
15 ESL teachers, multicultural community liaison officers, consultants who are employed at the school and district levels, as well as other staff relative to the policy. In the same way, the Aboriginal Education Policy states the need for Aboriginal support staff, and that sort of support staff always seems to be the first to go because they're seen as extras rather than an integral part of the system.

20 **[Education administration]**

The state department of course now is the Department of Education and Training. It is responsible for schools and TAFE, as well as the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES), the adult community colleges, Ethnic Schools Board, Migrant Skills and Qualifications
25 Advisory Board, the Board of Vocational Education and Training and all its advisory industry training committees. All of these are involved in dealing with students from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal students, and those living in low socioeconomic circumstances, and they're detailed by state policies. That doesn't
30 mean that they are well covered, and we need to keep on harping about the sorts of policies and procedures that go on.

The ECC believes that tertiary training institutions should be included in all their courses, particularly teacher training, compulsory
35 segments related to cross-cultural training and equal opportunity and understanding. I think, that should cover all of the equity issues. The department does offer some in-service courses to assist at school level, but this is frequently not taken up because of time and financial considerations. I heard the Department of Education people talking
40 about global budgeting and the rights of the school itself, the principal deciding on those things; but again you can't leave those sorts of important issues to chance with the competing interests of whatever is happening at school level.

45 **[Rural NESB students]**

In particular instances we've got a record of some incidents. There are cases in rural areas where the numbers of immigrants may not be large, and understanding is quite small, and support is small too.

For instance, a 16-year-old Croatian new arrival of some 4 months arrived in a secondary school in the Riverina region, needed English, there was no ESL teacher; but when asked to choose his electives he was offered German as a language. The student understandably found that this was unreasonable.

A family settled in the Riverina, they had a son with major behavioural problems, and he was expelled from school before they actually moved to the Riverina. The principal interviewed the father through the translation and interpreting service with his son present - the mother wasn't there. There was no sensitivity shown about having a relationship growing between the school and the family. The son, to the best of my knowledge, is not attending school at this stage.

A Hungarian immigrant appointed as a community liaison officer, he has been in Australia for 8 years, sought the attendance of a community worker in Wagga Wagga ECC because she wasn't afforded proper attention by the staff at the school. Frequently these people are seen as fringe dwellers, and they are seen as something extra, and not really part of the staff, you know, they're an add on; and she was gradually being blocked out of everything that happened in the school.

Several years ago, an immigrant family, again in the Riverina, arrived at the school with 3 or 4 children. The school didn't have any ESL staff, and the principal took the easy way out by telling the children to stay at home in the mornings because that was where the real subjects were, and only come after lunch because there's less important subjects taught there, and English isn't so important. That was rectified quickly when it came to our notice.

A complaint has been received from a Croatian lad, for example - this is just one of many - who was labelled as Bosnian. Anybody sensitive to the Yugoslav situation over many years now would take the time, I would imagine, in a school setting to find out just where the boy came from.

Our community worker at Wagga Wagga has run a number of workshops with schools because of their lack of knowledge, but new arrivals ought to have someone at the school to assist them to learn all of the everyday procedures involved simply in being at school, let alone the lessons that went on.

[Moree district]

In the Moree district, generally in primary schools, specialist services are available, and there's a very good consultant in the Moree district office. However, in secondary schools the picture is different. You asked about joint programs. This is an illustration of how far we are from that. There's a Catholic school which has mainly white, I think it

5 may even be all white, enrolment. Many of the other locals are sent away to boarding school. The result is that Moree High School has a large population of Aboriginal students, many from poor communities, so you've got black and white division there. There's no special school in the area so there's no school with a range of students reflecting the composition of the community, which we believe is very important.

10 Moree High School has one of the highest suspension rates in the state, and one of the lowest results in the basic skills testing. The result is that no teacher wants to transfer to the public schools in this area voluntarily, they don't ask for it. Those who do come do so for promotion purposes, and they only stay for a couple of years. There's a high turnover of beginning teachers. There are currently 11 relieving principals in that district; two-thirds have been appointed in the last 15 18 months. All executive staff, I've been told, are first-time appointees. There's no mix of staff when a broad range is desirable. One result is the need for constant retraining to assist teachers to deal with local education. You can never say that the school is okay, that they've got a really good understanding now and they'll be right.

20 In Lightning Ridge - and I understand you've been to these places too - there is an opal recession, but the school numbers have increased, and they've got similar difficulties in staffing to Moree. Nobody wants to go there, or to Wilcannia, or to Brewarrina. This is the 25 first year at Lightning Ridge that there will be a Year 11 at the school. There's a vibrant principal who's got a good relationship with the community, and it has a very big non-English speaking background population with little or no support.

30 One thing that's not measured in any of our schools, and particularly where you've got students with special needs, is the value that's added to students for the time that they spend at the school. We judge governments, judge everything by exams, by basic skills tests, by the ELLA test, by the school certificate, by the higher school certificate 35 results and so on, but it doesn't give you a picture of what the school adds on to the student in valued skills, or in understanding about the world around them. Lightning Ridge say that they have an estimate of a 21% increase generally over all their kids in their basic understanding of what education is about. They have value added by 21% over a 40 given period.

[Distance education]

45 I'd like to touch on distance education, and you should know that this is a very small program in the total scheme of things; it effects about 16% of students in New South Wales. It's got a small directorate based in Bathurst, and it has several centres around the state where students can actually talk to their teachers, and they go in there for

specific demonstration lessons, and so on. There's no extra staff available locally, and there's no particular plan regarding the program.

5 Firstly, it's very expensive to teach by distance. It costs about \$13,000 per student, which is about 3 times as much as it costs for a student in a school. Secondly, distance education is fabulous. It delivers any subject to students no matter where they are - that's in New South Wales, or in some cases overseas. The learning material is very good and it goes to every child. Sometimes teachers have been
10 sent to the properties where students live, those that are in remote areas, and students are brought to the centres in various parts of the state. We've been informed that New South Wales delivery is better than the one that's lauded in Canada, and it's better than in any other state or territory and indeed the world. So it does have a lot going for it.

15 There are some program problems. The radio system doesn't work a lot of the time, and that's due to sunspots, or storms, or cockatoos eating through the wire, or whatever it might be. Telstra has no plans to upgrade the system between the centres and the
20 properties. Distance education could really do with a system of satellite dishes. I thought, when I went to an Isolated Children's Parents' Association meeting 10 or 15 years ago that there were some properties who were installing satellite dishes at that stage, and some of them in the far west were actually being serviced by Adelaide
25 Distance Education, but it's taken a long time for this to happen.

New South Wales has had an outback satellite education trial throughout term 2, and this was very successful, I'm told. The students could see their teachers. The lessons in all subjects were interactive.
30 For example, it was highly successful in music, things that the students couldn't get hold of in their homes wherever they were. The estimates running for the program seems to be that it's within bounds, within budget. That's a funny thing to say, isn't it? They just say, "It's within the bounds of the budget."

35 Students currently enrolled include sick children, whether they're in Sydney or out in the bush, the isolated children, Aborigines in juvenile justice centres, those with behaviour problems. Mostly the behaviour problems currently are Aborigines or those from low
40 socioeconomic backgrounds. All of these should be able to access distance education. As far as Aborigines are concerned, the programs seem to be having an effect. I think it's interesting to go back over the number of students who are suspended in New South Wales, who the students are who are suspended, and those who are deemed to have
45 behavioural problems, are so often Aborigines, and so often kids that are poor.

5 The Aboriginal program seems to be starting to have an effect. There are groups, however, in the juvenile justice centres which don't access distance education. In other places, like Ballina, Port Macquarie centres, some are returning to study. In Sydney, the distance education centre are linking 12 Kooris in the city to primary schools, but in secondary schools it's a bit different. The Department of Education ought to ensure that an interest is taken in the benefits of distance education, and indeed that the provisions are increased to cover all circumstances.

10 One thing that you might like to think about is the argument for another category of students to take part in distance education, and this would have to be taken up with the community. There are youngsters in the Aboriginal community who don't want to go to school, and certainly don't go to school, and there's a lot of reasons behind that. Their community may make a conscious decision that the young people would do better educationally by becoming part of a small group supervised by the community and serviced by distance education. These would be certain types of kids at risk, unmotivated by formal education, but still able to learn in desirable environments.

20 It's obvious that the Department of Education and Training should better publicise its success stories, and wherever possible produce good policies and planning and programs that are covering all areas of service in an attempt to overcome shortcomings or perceptions of problems. They also need to ensure that there is sufficient in-service education to achieve the results that are required, not only by the community, but by their own policies. I think, that's about it. There is some cooperation with the Health Department and with DOCS, but I don't think it's sufficient, and I think that's a state problem that really needs to be ironed out.

[Disadvantaged schools program]

35 A couple of things that the others mentioned about the Needy Schools Program. I've been part of a group that has been quite critical about the Needy Schools Program, which instead of going direct to families who have a low income or who are deemed to be in difficulties, it goes to the school and the pundits there decide who gets the funds. That is a bit demeaning, in our view, for a parent to have to actually approach the principal to say, "I'm poor. Can you help me out," rather than get an amount that would assist them to give them more dignity. Again, it's a state problem and we've been very vocal about that in the past.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks, Edna. Bill, do you have questions you want to ask?

[Distance education]

COMMISSIONER JONAS: This is a question that's been triggered by what you're saying about distance education. Whatever happened to the old Blackfriars Correspondence School in New South Wales?

5 **MS McGILL:** That went years ago. That became a school after that. What was in the correspondence school in William Street was disbanded some few years back. There was some criticism about that. Teachers who were unable to cope with the classroom were put into there; and the department decided - it might have enough been a
10 government position - some 7 or 8 years ago, maybe 10 years ago, that they really needed to revamp it. One of the good things was that they would set up centres around the state which would be closer to where the students were, so that they could have that interaction, not often, but at least they could come to meetings. The one in Sydney now is the
15 Dover Heights High School.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: As a product of that system I'm all for it, you see. I just was wondering, when you said before that distance education is very expensive, were you saying that it's very expensive
20 per student?

MS McGILL: Per student, yes. It's not expensive if you look at it in terms of what the results are for individual students. What the figures show is that it costs about 3 times as much to educate a student at home no matter where they are; and that would be averaged, I'd
25 imagine.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Why is that?

30 **MS McGILL:** Because it's labour-intensive mostly.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: It's more one-on-one.

MS McGILL: Yes. And there also has to be individual packages going out all the time, and then it comes back and the teachers have to mark it, and then it goes back again.
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THE COMMISSIONER: Edna, does that include incorporating the infrastructure costs of school buildings and plant and all that kind of stuff?
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MS McGILL: It probably does.

THE COMMISSIONER: I think it does, doesn't it?
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MS McGILL: Yes. I mean there's a figure which the Commonwealth and the state have agreed upon, the cost of teaching an individual student. The biggest costs, of course, is salaries.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes.

MS McGILL: The capital works is something - I think that's set aside.

[Alternative schooling]

10 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** Just another one. Edna, you know when you talked towards the end about a particular model for mostly Aboriginal kids, I think, you were talking about, not going to school, but being supervised by the community and learning through distance education. Could you see that working in other situations, not just for those kids
15 with those particular problems, but, say, in some areas which are disadvantaged simply because their remoteness makes them small; and small groups of students learn in that way even though they might not have the problems; they would go to school if there was a school?

20 **MS McGILL:** Yes, there was a Commonwealth program a few years ago called Participation and Equity Program, and part of that was, I think it was a small amount about \$300,000, for community organisations. Some of those community organisations were in remote areas; some were around the western suburbs, and so on. They took
25 students who were reluctant to go to school, mostly in the 15-year-old class area. They treated them as individuals about what their needs were educationally, and how they could get those - some of those kids have been truanting for years.

30 The programs that they served were pretty basic, like on literacy, numeracy issues, or if a student might have a bent towards some particular manual work, or whatever, and they built a program around the needs of that student. The aim was to get them back to school if possible, or to TAFE, and to get an interest in what they really
35 wanted to do with their life. Some of those kids were in Penrith, Mount Druitt. I remember one program that was up on the tablelands and in the New England area, one down in the Riverina area; so there were a measure of those, and it worked quite well. That was with community workers in neighbourhood centres, or I think there might have been
40 some migrant resource centres, and so on, that sort of thing. Is that what you - - -

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Yes.

45 **MS McGILL:** As with has happened with a lot of Commonwealth programs, they fund them for a few years and then they go out of fashion, and so it goes.

[Education administration]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of having a Department of Education and Training?

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MS MCGILL: The advantages ought to be - and I heard this before - a seamless movement from preschool to tertiary education, or post there. To be honest, currently the disadvantage is that it's too big. The director-general will tell you it's the biggest organisation in the southern hemisphere. It employs more people than BHP, it has a whole wide range of different competing interests, if you like, and I mentioned some of those at the beginning.

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I really think that the senior officers of the department are still struggling with that, they're still struggling. You've got a director-general and you've got 4 deputy directors-general, only one of whom has come from TAFE. The others are all schoolies. You get down to the next level and there's about 8, or 9 of them, 2 of them are from TAFE. It's been a very steep learning curve, and I've talked to senior officers about that. I think there are some difficulties. They have to rely very much upon the information they're getting from the bottom up, which isn't a bad thing sometimes, but one hopes that they take the advice of people who really know what the business is and I think they might be.

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We've just had a review of the migrant skills and qualifications area, for example. Bill Cope did that review - and some of the recommendations in there that the steering committee helped him to come to, have been taken up by the director-general. I suppose, I'm an optimist, Barbara. I hope that the understanding will go to those other officers who have never dealt with adult education before, for example.

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I've always been disappointed that the program that the department started some 20 years ago for preschool education in day schools, in the primary schools, hasn't gone further than the 30 or so schools that were set up at that time. That would really have been something that would have led children in to the infants school gently, and brought the community in too, by the way.

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[Ethnicity of teachers]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Do you know what percentage of teachers now within the department come from a non-English speaking background?

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MS MCGILL: Less than the general population. We do get updates from ADEOPE on that from time to time. I think the last time we asked it was about 9%. It's time we asked them again.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Time you asked again.

MS MCGILL: Yes. You know what the proportion of Aboriginal teachers are. It doesn't reflect - - -

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: No. Thank you.

MS MCGILL: I'm quite happy to leave that.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please, if you could leave that.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Good, yes.

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THE COMMISSIONER: I think we need to move on, in any event. Thanks very much for coming in, Edna. If you could leave both those texts, it would be very helpful to us.

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[12.10 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: The Independent Education Union. Thanks for coming along. Sorry to keep you waiting and hold you up. We got a bit behind and we're still catching up. Bill Jonas on the end is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner. Barb Flick is Co-Commissioner in New South Wales. I'm Chris Sidoti, I'm the Human Rights Commissioner. Would you like to introduce yourselves for the tape and go straight into your submission?

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MR WATT: Chris Watt from the New South Wales-ACT Independent Education Union.

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MS CALLIOPE: Diet Calliope, the Indigenous adviser to the IEU, New South Wales-ACT.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

[IEU membership]

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MR WATT: I'll refer to ourselves as the IEU from now on, to save some time. The IEU obviously welcomes the opportunity to address the Commission's hearing and comes here representing the interests of teachers and support staff working in the non-government school sector throughout New South Wales and the ACT. The union currently has coverage of about 19 and a half thousand members, and those members work in a range of education institutions, from early childhood sector through to non-government schools, including both the Catholic

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schooling sector, as well as the independent school sector. We cover teachers and support staff in all of those areas. We cover teachers in the business college area, English colleges. We even have counsellors and teachers at Junee Correctional Facility. So it's basically everything other than the government school and TAFE sector in New South Wales and ACT.

Presently, around about 28% of all students enrolled in schools in New South Wales are in the non-government school sector, and our comments - both Diet and myself - will focus primarily on the school sector and focus primarily, I guess, in the context of my presentation, on some particular issues in the remote areas.

What we'll seek to do is to look at things such as: commitment to and cultural appropriateness of education services in relation to Indigenous children in their communities; look at the broad aspect of teacher professional development, teacher incentive, teacher retention; and matters in relation to - I suppose - the industrial matters. The reason for doing that, as hopefully will become apparent, is that, without appropriate strategies and recompense for teachers in, particular, remote areas, at the end of the day, the education of the children and the value added to the communities greatly suffers. I'll give you some examples that will make it apparent that people working in those areas not only suffer remoteness but a series of other financial and economic disadvantages. We'll make some comments about the current arrangements in terms of non-government school funding and the technological support for teachers and the learning situation.

Diet, obviously, will deal mainly with the issues in relation to Indigenous communities and Indigenous children within those schools.

[Teacher recruitment; pre-service training]

In terms of the first theme, in terms of teacher industrially-related matters and professional issues, many of you will be aware of the most recent senate report 'A Class Act'. If I just quote one excerpt which will illustrate, perhaps, what we're talking about, it said that:

While there may be an excess of teachers in city locations, this does not guarantee that those people will be able or willing to move to rural and remote areas to take up teaching positions.

We have to look at why that's the case and I'll show you some structures as to why.

Firstly, we would suggest that the issue of pre-service training needs substantial consideration and looking at. There needs to be

serious looking at the nature of what students attending teacher training institutions are being told and assisted in, in terms of preparing them for work in rural and remote areas. Some students have an idea because they've come from rural areas.

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Very few come from remote areas, by virtue of numbers and percentages, quite clearly; but what we get is illustrations of where teachers arrive, for example, at a place like Hillston, hundreds of kilometres from where they attended university in Armidale, at UNE, and further hundreds of kilometres from where they grew up in their home and with their family in Lismore; their first teaching appointment, know nothing about Hillston, were lucky to find it when they looked on a map, because they were expecting something a bit larger than, you know, something that the Darling at some stage might pass by.

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So, for those people, when they move into those situations, removed from family and friends and a whole lot of areas, and working in a school - particularly non-government sector - often, most often than not, with just one or 2 other colleagues; very, very difficult in their initial years. What we continually see is people falling over - and I mean falling over in the sense of being able to perform as an effective and adequate teacher - and not necessarily because they're not good teachers but, to the contrary, because of the lack of social support and lack of professional support. The pre-service training certainly is one area where it's not sufficiently supported or considered.

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[Staff accommodation]

In terms of another matter in relation to teacher industrial areas, for example, the issue of accommodation and security teachers. We've had teachers working at Wilcannia, by way of example. What I'd like to try to do is give examples throughout that illustrates it.

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Teachers working in the Catholic school at Wilcannia, for example, have raised concerns with us over a number of years about the quality and adequacy of their housing that's provided - well, provided in the sense that they pay rent to live in it. In some cases, it's little better than some caravans - well, you know, modern caravans, one might say. In the case of one teacher, it was the old dispensary at the school which was still being used as a storeroom while she was living in it; so that, during the day, the students would be given the key by the principal and go in and get particular things out, and that was her private area. She was paying considerable rent, \$80 or \$90 a week, for the privilege of living in what was basically a room and which basically still had items from the old dispensary left over from 30 or 40 years prior.

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[Professional development]

Limited access to professional development almost goes without saying in some ways. It's not just a remote area issue, it's a rural issue as well. Teachers are required to, you know, by virtue of where they are, spend large amounts of time travelling and often at their own expense and often finding avenues - in terms of professional development avenues - closed to them; and some of that can be related to an ongoing struggle, which, if this Commission was able to solve, would be a wonderful thing; and that is the tension between the government and non-government school sector. That's manifested at a variety of levels and not the least at local levels, where there is the ongoing issue of the question of state aid debate.

We find, sadly, in a number of rural and remote areas, where there is the tension around whether non-government schools should receive any funding or not is presented in structures such as not inviting or not notifying teachers in non-government schools of opportunities for professional development that are run by, for example, groups like the Department of School Education or other. In some townships it's not an issue; where such opportunities are available, people are broadly invited and asked to attend and gain through that and be able to pass those skills on through their teaching and for the benefit of the students. But what we do find is that there is that tension, and we find that what limited opportunities there are in rural and remote areas are often closed off to teachers in the non-government school sector.

[Subject choice]

By virtue of the fact - and this cuts across both the non-government schools sector - of remote areas, the schools invariably are small. Where we have, for example, a high school of ours in Broken Hill, it's a very small high school, it only caters 7 to 10; it, as a consequence of its size - and I believe at the moment there are something like 120 students - by virtue of that, 4 years into 120, 30 students in each year, the curriculum opportunities available to those students are hugely limited. It's just impossible to offer the range of subjects that you would find in a high school within Sydney or Wollongong or Newcastle or even larger regional towns such as Wagga or Tamworth. The smaller, as we move out, we find that the curriculum opportunities, particularly at the secondary level, are, by virtue of size, restricted to the students.

[Staff transfer opportunities]

The issue of, once you get out there as a teacher, how do you, for want of a better expression, get out: once you've served your time, as some teachers see it, or once you've had enough time at a particular place, is it easy to move on? What our teachers are finding in our sector is that it's very difficult. Whilst the government schools sector, by virtue of arrangements with the Department of School Education, has

opportunities for transfer - having done a few years, you get onto transfer lists - so there are opportunities, in terms of interview processes and getting jobs in preferred locations.

5 Once you're a teacher at, say, Bourke - and I have a letter I've received just recently from a teacher who was teaching in our Catholic school at Bourke, who actually taught when I was in Tamworth, so our association goes back quite a few years - wrote to me, saying he'd left the school, disappointed that, after several years of trying, was unable
10 to secure very many interviews at all in relation to getting jobs closer to either his original town of Tamworth or even to the coast, which was their preference; and that, even when the occasional interview was made available and when he did achieve an interview, there was very little assistance and support given by his current employer, in terms of
15 making available time to attend an interview in a place like, for example, Lismore.

 To get from Bourke to Lismore is not like attending an interview between, say, Marrickville and Bondi; it's not the same, as we're aware;
20 it's not the same logistics. What he was feeling was trapped and, despite pleas that he'd made to his employer and to various other groups, he just felt that his only option was to get out of the non-government sector, a Catholic systemic school, and took up a job in the government school, literally, across - almost literally, across - the
25 road, where his wife was teaching, with the view that within a couple of years they would both be able to apply at the same time for transfers. So, a good teacher, an enthusiastic teacher, was lost to the non-government system, as a consequence of basically feeling that there was no opportunity for him to move on from where he was.

30 I guess, the inverse of that is, if that's the way the situation is and you feel, "I wouldn't mind going and doing some work in particular townships but I don't want to spend 20 or 30 years there - I wouldn't mind spending 5" - or whatever number of years - " if there's a feeling
35 that you can't ever get out, do you therefore put your hand up to ever go in?"

[Salary and conditions]

40 Teachers' salary and conditions. Whilst there's, I guess, a general community perception in New South Wales that the salaries of non-government school teachers and those of government school teachers are linked - and, in fact, in the Catholic school system throughout New South Wales that is generally the case; the exception being, of course, in our remote areas.

45 In the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese, which covers a very large area, obviously, from Broken Hill down to Wentworth, across to Hay and up to Hillston, then into Forbes, up through Parkes, then into

Warren, Brewarrina, Bourke and Wilcannia, in that area, since 1993, ever single wage increase that has been achieved by teachers in the Catholic school system in the rest of New South Wales has been delayed in payment in the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese. Not only that, people who hold promotion positions are paid less, have been paid less and continue to be paid less. In the case of assistant principals, it's currently \$2,000 a year less. That hardly seems to me be an approach that would encourage teachers - when you're looking at a conjunction of these issues together - to move and undertake service in those areas.

[Staff incentives]

Related to that are issues of allowances, where teachers working in the government school sector, for example, access a variety of things like locality, climatic, isolation, socioeconomic allowances, can range in value, depending on whereabouts you are. By way of an example, without going into detail, a teacher in a Catholic school in Wilcannia, for example, currently receives \$750 from the employer as the sum total of allowances in terms of all those matters: socio-economic, isolation. An equivalent teacher in a government school in Wilcannia would receive allowances - and there are additional allowances if you have a dependent partner with you, but just on the basis of a single person working out there with no dependent - of each of these amounts: \$2,085, plus \$241 for each dependent child, plus \$1,246 motor vehicle, plus 3 vacation journeys, plus reimbursement of certain medical costs.

When you take a salary delayed, plus lower rates paid for coordinators or assistant principals - in other words, promotion positions - and then allowances that are substantially different, there seems to be a huge disincentive to providing the best teachers to the kids and the communities in isolated and remote areas, in terms of New South Wales. Clearly, as a union, we have a concern about that from an industrial matter, but I think it's a broader, and should be a broader community concern about the fact that, if that's what's going on, then those kids aren't being served as well as they possibly could be. Therefore, it's a fundamental issue to the general community.

[Catholic school funding]

What's that related to? Well, I come to the next point about funding, just very quickly and briefly. Catholic schools receive a New South Wales funding from both the federal and state governments, related to what we call and what's generally known as (indistinct) funding currently. That doesn't matter - whether the diocese is Wilcannia-Forbes or whether it's Parramatta or Sydney diocese. Per kid, the same amount is paid.

Clearly, there are going to be greater costs as you move out, in terms of sharing your overhead costs when you have smaller and smaller costs, and so we find difficulty in bush areas, but there is no distinction made in terms of the funding models. So we get these odd occurrences of where, for example, in 1997, the Parramatta diocese committed \$1.5 million over 3 years to, particularly, dioceses such as Wilcannia-Forbes. That money came from the government. Both federal and state government funds that they received, they redistributed.

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As well as that, the New South Wales Catholic bishops redistribute money on an annual basis and the 1998 Wilcannia-Forbes budget showed there was an additional \$360,000 on the basis of that redistribution. As well as that, in 1998, the diocese of Canberra-Goulburn donated an additional \$20,000 to the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese.

15

So there's a bit of an acknowledgment, de facto, amongst the Catholic hierarchy, that there is a problem in terms of funding, and it's done on an ad hoc basis. I have to say, I have no idea about how that's done, who makes representation to whom or how that happens or whether it's appropriate and sufficient and necessary; but the reality is that, clearly, the current funding models aren't working and may be one of the reasons why teachers are suffering the sorts of economic consequences that exist out there.

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[Professional development]

I've mentioned briefly before the issue of professional development. Again, because of dollars, there are limited PD budgets, greater travel costs, there are accommodation costs that aren't encountered in urban areas. A PD day in Sydney often means driving to a particular place and driving home that afternoon. When you're in the bush, that's not the case; invariably it's, you know, in many places, overnight accommodation, it may be 2 nights. If you're travelling from Broken Hill to Forbes for a diocesan-sponsored thing, it's a day travel each way and a day at a thing; so it's 3 days relief from school, not one - it's the associated travel and accommodation costs.

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As well as that, what we find is people increasingly travelling long distances at night and on weekends, to avail themselves of opportunities, at the detriment often of their own families, in terms of time. We have people taking sporting and other commitments, in terms of schools, where it often means taking your team away on the Friday evening or Saturday morning to play against another school, but that other school happens to be hundreds of kilometres away, and then returning home on the Sunday afternoon, returning back to the school. So, in other words, regular weekend commitments on top of their, literally, 9.00 to 3.00 five days a week.

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5 Then, of course, the impact of major changes such as the new HSC and the lack of funding for PD and even information in terms of materials from the Board of Studies on line, and, where those do exist, often, you know - even if the technology exists, often the technology just isn't working. Teachers in many of these places are very happy if the television works, let alone a computer link-up to some PD course or access to material from the Board of Studies.

10 **[Female staff]**

15 There are a number of issues in relation to women in rural areas. Recently, at a women's conference we held in Sydney, we had delegates of ours from our country areas throughout New South Wales and our city colleagues come together and raised a number of matters; and those include: issues of professional isolation; issues of discrimination, particularly harassment and bullying, that seem to be more manifest in some of the rural areas; the need for more specialist teachers, particularly in areas where there's a need for kids with behavioural and learning difficulties - those specialist teachers are so thin on the ground anywhere and are almost non-existent in rural and remote towns.

20 In terms of clerical and support staff - I've been focusing on teachers but I mentioned that we do cover that area in terms of schools - and they're invariably women in schools - and they find that their career opportunities are greatly limited, and access to things like professional development for themselves, in terms of computing courses is, similarly, greatly limited.

30 **[Rural social issues]**

So what we finish up then with is a variety of community and educational concerns such as:

35 lack of timely and appropriate access to services that diagnose children's behaviour and learning problems;

40 concerns about depression and risk-taking behaviour of young people, including attempted suicide, and teachers and the school communities feeling unable or powerless to deal with any of that because of lack of support, counselling services and, even, training;

45 lack of recognition and the distress that students often feel, particularly in regard to their own sexuality, especially those identifying as gay, and, again, lack of support for those students;

students from language backgrounds other than English, difficulty accessing ESL, limited cultural understanding - in fact, the access to correspondence LOTE courses is very difficult in the

non-government school sector and is, in fact, quite restricted in terms of choices for our students in non-government schools;

5 the closure of banks - and you've heard this before, without any doubt - and other services, and the impact of that on our students, who see limited opportunities in terms of their potential careers and employment, and the impact that has on the classroom; and obviously other post-school options;

10 **[Internet access]**

Internet access - it's a question of quality and it's a question of cost - it exists, but there are genuine cost implications that aren't cheaper in the bush, as we well know; it may get more expensive, depending on how Telstra further privatises - that's another political debate, of course - getting Telstra currently to rectify line faults which are manifest throughout the area.

[12.30 pm]

20 If I try to conclude it by saying there are implications for the status of teachers and therefore, the ability of rural and remote communities to attract and retain qualified, experienced and competent teachers, then the manifest implication of that on education services and quality. Teachers are having to do more with less and trying to do catch up and therefore the potential in the longer term, that students won't have the same or at least reasonable access to education opportunities and experiences.

30 **[Recommendations]**

If I could make a couple of quick recommendations at this stage and perhaps one we'll come back to after Diet's response. There needs to be a review of the current funding arrangements in relation to non-government schools and also in relation to the way that the New South Wales Catholic Education Commission, for example, handles the reallocation arrangements. That needs to be examined because it's clearly an indicator that there are problems. There should be an employer commitment to improving teaching conditions in remote areas. There should be government commitment and process to ensure inclusiveness of non-government school students and teachers in sporting, educational, professional development and other cultural opportunities at the local level. Any of the barriers that are there should be worked out and broken down.

45 There should be: the commitment of additional appropriate funds to ensure adequate professional development opportunities in technological hardware, both in government and non-government schools; a commitment of additional and appropriate funds to provide for specialist teachers and services to diagnose and support children

with learning and behavioural problems; and a review of New South Wales government policy and procedures in relation to non-government school and student access to government services, such as correspondence education and support for curriculum change.

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There should be commitment of appropriate funding to address issues of depression and suicide in young people and issues arising from sexuality discrimination; and a review and report by the New South Wales government on vocational education, industry workplace availability and careers information in rural and remote schools. I think that will encapsulate the sorts of concerns we have. As I said, although we do deal generally with industrial matters, clearly those impact greatly on the services that our members are able to provide in those communities.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Chris. Diet?

[Indigenous education workers]

MS CALLIOPE: I bring today to the committee from the opposite side where I actually used to sit here myself for 5 years, in terms of the Indigenous education officer advising 11 dioceses and congregation schools and seeing how the funding actually was from nothing to what it is today. But my concern on the other side is in terms of the efforts that we have to deal with in terms of Indigenous education workers who I feel constitute a large proportion of education industry right across Australia. From an industrial point of view, we feel that people have been exploited and I believe very strongly as an Indigenous person that those persons working within any sector, but perhaps my sector at the moment, are exploited.

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I say this because of the consultation I've had in the last 9 months working with the union itself and dealing and have met with personnel in both north Queensland, which is Cairns and Townsville and Palm Island, and also New South Wales. The areas that I've actually visited are Wilcannia - with my colleague - Bourke, Armidale, Newcastle, Bathurst, Dubbo, Forbes, Lismore and Broken Hill. And to speak directly to Indigenous workers who were employed - or do we say employed - by the Catholic system in New South Wales. Of course, Chris actually gave you an idea what the make-up of the system is all about.

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If we can actually just look at the numbers of schools in New South Wales, and I think that incorporates ACT, there are about 622, in comparison with the others. The number of teachers in Catholic schools is 6,300; the number of Indigenous students - that's also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students - is 2,155. This is the big interesting thing, the number of Indigenous workers or Aboriginal education workers is 90. Also, my other responsibility is to deal with the

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preschool teachers because the other arm of the workers themselves have dealt with another union. So I've actually had on those occasions, to travel and talk intensively about the working conditions of Indigenous workers.

5

The things that we actually found arising from the consultations is that Indigenous workers - I think I can use just 2 cases; one diocese had somebody working in the diocese for 17 years temporary. The person didn't know that they were entitled to so many other working conditions like everybody else. Another stage - and that's in 3 dioceses - you had people working for 8 hours one day a week, also studying at the same time and, to feed oneself and one's children and the family, had to find voluntary work. People did not know that they were covered under an award and what the condition was and it just broke my heart to actually hear all of this coming from people in those remote areas that Chris talked about before. I think the incident happened in Bourke.

20 People did not actually know that they can have long service leave. Their working conditions would be - and I've set it down here, if the committee would like to see it: some of the things that they actually performed were monitoring the attendance and behaviour and progress of Aboriginal students; interviewing and advising students in relation to the above; attending to personal needs of Aboriginal students in relation to health, injury and hygiene; advising students on matters relating to school, family and personal matters and problems; working with the parents of those students, who may feel ostracised by going to the school because of their previous experience; assisting teachers with individuals and small groups of Aboriginal students in classroom; assisting teachers with the literacy and numeracy; and assisting teachers and principals in ensuring that there is the appropriate Indigenous perspective across all curriculums.

35 Of course, on the other side, they must have very strong links with the community also; inviting the community to participate in DETYA funding programs so that communities are familiar in terms of what to tap into. They also have to have liaison with parents, to be able to sit on committees; that if you're implementing an Indigenous policy, you must have Aboriginal input, which is stated by the national education policy, through DETYA.

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45 Of course, nobody else, I feel, has a task more great and covers so much in terms of Indigenous workers because they are the link to the community, they are recruited from the local community, they understand the politics of the community, and also to the school community in doing all of those things. Yet, people are still being paid far less than the normal pecking order.

5 Many of the people that we spoke to have only worked on one-year contract. We call that term time; and this was term time, I suppose, in Queensland, whereby when term finishes on 18 December people have to go to unemployment benefits. There's no continuity and there's no consistency for those persons to actually, perhaps, go and get a loan. That has been demonstrated very much to us, that if they did go for a loan, because of a one-year contract or temporary employment they were knocked back.

10 One of the other things that we also found, was that when we spoke to diocesan directors, coordinators of Indigenous education within the Catholic system, it was all a matter about funding. Having the experience myself working in this very place and initiating that in terms of 3-year triennium, there should have been that flexibility of employing people more than one year, rather than not at all. Some dioceses felt that they needed to employ somebody for one day a week.

20 I'd just come from Nowra the other day, where I spoke to 2 people and they were only employed one day a week. I spoke to the students and the students have said very clearly that, "We would like Auntie to stay with us for 5 days rather than one." Yet, there's an injection of funding going through all of those dioceses and no commitments as such, which means that perhaps in parallel with what the remote teachers are wanting is to seek employment somewhere else; but at the same time, the majority of the people we spoke to are from country areas. They have a community, they have a family, they have the mob, and they don't want to move, and made a total commitment because of the children's future.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** We're starting to run tight for time, Diet, I'm afraid.

35 **MS CALLIOPE:** Yes. One of the other things, too. At the same time, whilst the Catholic organisation or the dioceses have signed an agreement with DETYA to say that top priority would be professional development, we can actually look at professional development in 2 phases. One is to ensure that there's a clear path for those persons within this structure. The other is professional development in terms of attending Australian Catholic University, in which case we have 50 of the present people currently employed as AEWs in school attending either first, second, third or fifth year.

45 At the same time, while they're actually receiving that tertiary qualification, there is no encouragement for those persons to be taken up by the system, which means, at the end of the day, those persons will go somewhere else, which means that the trust and the connection that they had with the students and the community and, most

significantly, I believe, to have an Indigenous teacher is such a role model for the students that they're actually serving.

5 I'd like to actually just give some emerging issues, some recommendations and perhaps give you this later on that you can actually have a look at.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, please.

10 **MS CALLIOPE:** We have identified 4 points:

15 the lack of effective training of AEWs for the school-based roles in many parts of the state; I say not just in this state, but my findings in Far North Queensland, north Queensland and specifically in Palm Island;

the lack of permanency in the employment of AEWs which comprises career-path opportunities for AEWs;

20 poor record of employers' responsibility towards AEWs in some parts of the states; inconsistencies across dioceses with regards to conditions, continuity, employment, classification and levels of AEWs' employment;

25 the limited vision of some employers' authorities for the support of Indigenous students through the ad hoc approach which are short term, poorly thought out and executed rather than a longer-term view with a coordinated and cohesive plan.

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you very much.

MS CALLIOPE: Thank you.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** If you could both leave those with us, it would be greatly appreciated. As I mentioned, we're well over time, but do we have quick questions, Bill or Barb?

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Just a point of clarification.

40 **MS CALLIOPE:** Yes, sure.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: The 19 Aboriginal workers that you talked about - - -

45 **MS CALLIOPE:** 90.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: 90, 9-0.

MS CALLIOPE: That's across 11 dioceses, yes.

5 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** The 11 dioceses which make up New South Wales and the ACT.

MS CALLIOPE: Yes, just Canberra-Goulburn. The other side, Bega, and the South Coast.

10 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** They're Aboriginal education workers.

MS CALLIOPE: That's right.

15 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** How many Aboriginal teachers are there?

MS CALLIOPE: Four.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Thanks.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** My quick question was on a similar issue. At the moment, you mentioned, there's no guaranteed employment, obviously, after teacher quals are obtained by AEWs.

25 **MS CALLIOPE:** There's no encouragement.

THE COMMISSIONER: So they don't actually say, "We'll give you a job"? Is there teacher release as AEWs so they can attend courses?

30 **MS CALLIOPE:** There's discrepancy about that also in terms of different personalities in dioceses, whereby they feel that why should they go into residentials at the ACU. Some of those things have been (indistinct) through the universities themselves. I believe that if all dioceses have to sign an agreement with the major funding organisation, DEETYA, in terms of its performance indicators, whether it's to retention or to attendance, but specifically to the professional developments and ensuring that they're secure - and if anybody has
35 seen the national AEP guidelines, you can actually see those targets.

40 I feel that that's not being addressed as we go around from the other side, with persons. The thing is that, you know, you just can't have people working one day because there's no rapport and particularly when your students are saying, "Why can't you stay a bit longer?" I think that sends a message, myself; and the importance of having Indigenous workers who are under-classified.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I've got a number of questions for you both, but I would like to give clarification. Thank you for your presentation.

5 **MR WATT:** Thank you for the opportunity both.

MS CALLIOPE: Thank you very much.

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you both. Again, my apologies for keeping you waiting.

MS CALLIOPE: That's okay, we're used to that. I waited all this time for North Sydney and they still haven't won a premiership.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Don't hold your breath; they're gone, aren't they?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thank you, Diet.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks, Diet.

[12.47 pm]

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** My apologies for keeping you both waiting so long. As you saw, we hear so much interesting material. It's very hard for me to maintain discipline and cut off people who have got terrific things to say to us. Were you here when we introduced ourselves?

30 **MS SWEENEY:** Yes.

MR FOLINO: Yes.

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Would you like to introduce yourselves for the tape and then go straight into your submission.

MR FOLINO: Ben Folino. I'm the policy officer at the Disability Council of New South Wales.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thanks, Ben.

45 **MS SWEENEY:** My name is Megan Sweeney and I'm a parent of a child with an intellectual disability. I was invited to come on behalf of the Disability Council.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

MS SWEENEY: I also put in an individual submission before the council asked me to come up, so you might find my name on something else. You know, put in a paper.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Appearing in another capacity.

MS SWEENEY: Yes, some of the issues.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Megan.

MR FOLINO: Just to let you know that the council is actually an official advisory body and its main role is to advise the New South Wales ministers on disability-related issues and education has been a long-standing interest of the council. We didn't actually have time to prepare a submission, but we knew that Megan Sweeney had done one and we're asking her to present on our behalf. Her views are consistent with the council's.

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THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks. Megan, take it away.

MS SWEENEY: Like all the issues, there are many things I could touch on, whether it's systemic issues across the state, teacher-attitude issues, the actual experience that families are facing, you know, just depending on which angle you haven't heard from and perhaps you'd like covered or whether you want me just to give you a little snapshot of each and then you can ask me questions.

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THE COMMISSIONER: I think if you do that, give us a quick snapshot of the particular, most important issues to you, then we'll follow that up.

[Right to integration]

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MS SWEENEY: Okay. One of the overriding issues for children in rural - because there is a clear difference, I'm sure you know, between large, urban centres in the rural areas and isolated rural communities or people out in the backblocks, out in the far bush country. For families who live out in those isolated places, if their child is not accepted at their local, one-teacher school or the school in town because they have a disability, then the child, more often than not, ends up in residential care or the family shifts; the family sells up and moves to a bigger rural town or city or the child ends up in residential care.

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My position and the position of the Council is that that is not a choice. It's not an option for schools to be able to lock kids out purely because they have a disability and then the child, as a result of that, ends up in a segregated educational setting and living setting, which often then goes on for the rest of their life because of the limited

capacity of their own, they very rarely get out of that. The links between their family and their community are really severed because it can't be initiated from the child very often and because of what happens at home with family and a whole heap of other pressures, very often that is the event for the rest of their lives.

So it starts out just as an educational question and ends up a lifelong issue. That can happen for some children quite young. We still have children being admitted into large residential facilities, institutions, in New South Wales, although it's less now than it was.

[Funding for integration]

The question about why are children being refused access to schools comes in. It happens in state schools as well as the private sector, but the private sector hasn't got the infrastructure of funding to support. The funding to support a child with a disability in the private sector comes from the Commonwealth unless it's derived from the actual school community out of goodwill or whatever. Any actual funding comes from the Commonwealth. It's very limited, I think the maximum amount you can get from the Commonwealth is about \$1,000 a year or \$1,200 a year to support a child and then that's it.

Whereas in the state system, there has been significant change over the last 5 years, I suppose, since the McRae - you may have heard, David McRae did a report into inclusion and integration into New South Wales schools. Since that time, the Department of Education has changed their funding structure for kids in ordinary classrooms and it's a lot more equitable now. Kids with moderate to severe disabilities get the sort of support they need, like in aide time or resources to be maintained in an ordinary classroom.

But at risk, still, are the children that fall into the mild category, the kids who might have a mild intellectual disability, have behavioural problems, who generally come from low socioeconomic backgrounds - also have social implications of that with the family. That funding is still capped, it's spread thin. There's not a lot of infrastructure and those still are very much at risk in the school system. They usually become enrolled but they are expelled or suspended fairly speedily if they don't toe the line. So those kids are still really at risk.

[Disability discrimination]

As for refusing enrolment to children just on the basis of disability, apart from the fact that it's illegal, lots of schools still do it. The way they do it is by guilt and power control with the families. Often it's, "Well, we don't know" - they'll use talk to their own advantage - "We don't quite know how much funding we'll get to assist your child, so perhaps you're better off bussing them the hour and a half away to special school in town because there there are smaller class sizes and

there is less of this, more of this and more of that, but you might only get half an hour a week funding here with an aide with us."

5 Unless the parent has a lot of knowledge of their own and stuff
like that, it's a very powerful argument for them to send their kids
somewhere else. That still goes on a lot in areas. Again, often it comes
down to the personal philosophy of people making the decisions
10 themselves, you know, the principals or the district personnel. If they
believe that segregated education is the way children with disabilities
should be educated, they will promote that line and they will put as
many barriers in the way as they can to prevent children entering the
regular system. Whereas if you get a principal or district personnel who
believe that they should be educated in ordinary classrooms with
support, then they'll promote that line.

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20 Across New South Wales there are pockets of resistance and
there are pockets of pretty good stuff happening. I think that that's a
clear indication of personalities at work. A lot of that is actually being
changed from the grassroots up; it's being changed by parents
networking with other parents in other parts of the state. The Disability
Council ran some workshops on inclusive education through
organisations like family advocacy and other advocacy-based
organisations or disability-specific newsletters, like the Down Syndrome
Association newsletter or Autism Association newsletter.

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30 Parents find out, "Well, if that child in Tamworth" - for instance -
"is getting aide time and they have a similar profile to my child, then
how come I can't get it in Griffith in the same system?" So it comes from
the parents muscling the department along, but then the parents often
cop a lot of heat. They're being seen as unreasonable, they're perhaps
in denial about their child's level of support need, they're pretending
their child is normal; a whole range of those types of assumptions can
get placed on parents and the parents then have to try and negotiate
their way through that minefield.

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[Staff training needs and expectations]

40 One of the overriding things that I see happening is that more
children are getting into ordinary classrooms across the state. There is
no doubt about that; more kids are getting in; but what I see happening
is that there is within the teaching community not a lot of understanding
about the why. There is very limited understanding about why the
children with disabilities are now in the ordinary classroom. The whole
issue about the social change aspect of it that the people with
45 disabilities have - which has been pushed around adults with
disabilities, around citizenship and rights, and where ordinary people
were entitled to an ordinary life regardless of the support need we
have. Those types of issues that have happened in the adult world

have largely been neglected around children with disabilities and particularly within the teaching profession.

5 So you have a classroom teacher who has the child in their class, but the whole notion about why the child is in the class or what the expectation of the child being in the class is, is largely lost. That then comes down to individual parents to have to do that type of work, if you like, with the individual teachers. That can become very difficult in the relationship, too, between parents and teachers about that.

10 I've picked up - it has never been quoted or said - in my dealings with the Department of Education or DET in New South Wales that largely, their idea is that teachers are professionals, it's their job to work in a professional way; teaching a child with a disability in the ordinary class is now part of their job description, it's part of what they should do as professional teachers. What they think about it doesn't matter. Their value system about whether or not children belong if they have disabilities, all of that stuff - the department doesn't see that as being necessary to talk about. They're a professional, this is the job description, they just have to do it.

20 In my experience, unless the teachers understand that shift in thinking about - we're talking about an inclusive society now, we're building networks between children and people who have been left out forever, for centuries, locked out of our communities, how we're affording them the same rights as other people and the whole purpose, you know, we're not trying to make people fixed. Sure, some kids will never learn how to write, some people will never learn how to walk. That's not the expectation, to make everybody the same; it's that everybody belongs even though they have difference, and that's okay.

25 Unless teachers understand that, they don't get then how to actually include the child in the classroom, how to modify the program, how to modify the curriculum, what a goal is for that child. Unless they get that first step first, they then can't see any other purpose. Then you get a lot of stuff happening, like they feel that they're baby-sitting the child or the child is a token enrolment. That's something that I think really needs to be addressed.

40 **[Industrial issues]**

As well, within New South Wales, there is still - I know the Teachers' Federation in New South Wales is opposed to inclusion to mainstream education of kids with disabilities.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** We're talking to them this afternoon, so we can ask them then.

MS SWEENEY: That will be an interesting conversation. There is a direct conflict of interest between the working rights of teachers and the human rights of students with disabilities and I'm sure that's not lost on you. I'll have to say, from parents' perspectives, I think I've met a
5 handful of parents who have the attitude of hammering home, "My child has the right to be here and I don't care what you think," and all the rest. The majority of parents aren't like that. They want their child to go to a school where they're welcomed, where they're valued, where their gifts are seen and where their brothers and sisters go and the school
10 community goes. They want the teachers to be resourced, supported and all of that sort of stuff.

I'm really looking forward to the day where the parent movement can work with the Teachers' Federation to actually get the
15 sort of supports the schools need to make it work, rather than this position of opposition. It's hard to work with. From a personal perspective, it took us 2 years of negotiation to get our daughter enrolled in our local school in an ordinary class.

20 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** Where is that?

[Wagga experience]

MS SWEENEY: In Wagga Wagga, it's in the Riverina. It has been known as one of the difficult areas in the state for getting kids into
25 ordinary classrooms. The stuff about school is very connected to the community you live in. In Wagga, we have a large non-government service provider that's a charity model, that has always provided services for people with disabilities; for 50 years. It's very well supported by the community, you know, they buy their raffle tickets and go to the ball and all that sort of stuff. The perception in the community
30 is that, "We do that as a community to provide for these children there." "There" being the separate place where, "They all go."

Then, when you're a family like ours and you come into a
35 community and you say, "Well, we don't want that. We don't think our daughter belongs there. We think our daughter belongs here, with us," it really challenges the whole community's perception about, "Well, what does that mean?" So that whole stuff about where the resistance comes from is very closely linked to that; and I think that's why in some parts of the state, you do see that there are differences in how well it's
40 taken up and kids get into ordinary classrooms with not too much trouble and other parts of the state where it's really not seen as the right thing to do and people have a lot of resistance to it. So it's very closely linked.

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[Health services]

One of the other things, too, is about the really rurally remote families for kids who have very high levels of support needs. They may

5 have fragile medical conditions, they may have a lot of physical support needs. Unless you have really good coordinational models of the service provision between education, community services and health, the child generally will not remain at home or the family will move, because for those young people you need all 3 or it won't work. That's a real problem in the rural areas; medical stuff is just being slashed in New South Wales. A lot of towns can't even get a GP.

10 Everywhere I go - because that's an area of interest of mine, because in one of my work roles I see kids in residential and that's often how they've ended up in them, because one of those 3 components was missing out west. I'm not aware of any models that were particularly good to support those families in other states as well. So if one the outcomes of this inquiry is identifying somewhere where that is happening, I think it really needs to be publicised.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

20 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** That's a good overview of the issues.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: It sure is.

25 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** In fact, some of the things that you've mentioned, we've heard more detail about and it has been brought to our attention, so thank you for that.

[Intellectual and physical disabilities compared]

30 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I was just going to ask, Megan, whether you find from your parent contacts that there's greater difficulty for kids with intellectual disability than physical, or the reverse, or it's the same.

35 **MS SWEENEY:** It just depends on what part of the state you're in, too, because some parts of the state have had kids with what are considered really high support needs, you know, who use wheelchairs, who don't speak, who need help to eat who perhaps may die at school and they've been in an ordinary classroom for some time with support; yet in another area of the state those kids are definitely in special schools, you never see them in ordinary classrooms and the department or the teachers would just fall over if you even suggested that they would be. So it depends on where you are, where you just happen to be.

45 What I'm seeing more of now is that the kids who, regardless of what type of disability they have, if they're fairly compliant, if they're fairly quiet, which might mean they don't speak, then more or less it's okay. Whereas if you've got a child who is ambulant, who is loud, who might want to wander around the classroom or makes involuntary noises, generally they're the kids who are not welcome. Sometimes the

level of disability that falls into that can be from very, very minor through to quite significant. What I'm seeing is that there tends to be a trend where they're the kids that - if they are enrolled, they generally get excited before they reach primary school. Sometimes they're set up to fail because schools want them out.

I know an example. A parent once told me the story about her child and they had a school principal - it was a small school, I think there were 4 years, 4 classes - he son used to like to zip up all the kids' bags. He had to do it every morning, zip up all the kids' bags closed before he could go into class. One principal was, "Oh well, you know, if the kids weren't so lazy it would have saved you all that trouble." It wasn't a big deal. A new principal came, "We can't have him touching other people's private property, that cannot happen" - blah blah blah, caused a huge stink and the child no longer attended the school, which meant he ended up in residential care.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you both very much for coming along and, again, my apologies for keeping you waiting.

MS SWEENEY: That's all right.

THE COMMISSIONER: It's good to hear from you, Megan, personally, and not just read what you've sent in. Thanks for making the effort to come along and actually give us that insight.

MS SWEENEY: That's okay. I hope it was helpful.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And to be reminded of those difficulties of those children.

MS SWEENEY: The families.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: And the communities.

MS SWEENEY: Thanks a lot.

THE COMMISSIONER: We'll adjourn until 1.30.

(Luncheon adjournment)

[1.35 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you, we'll start again. John, you know Bill, I would assume.

PROF LESTER: Yes.

THE COMMISSIONER: You're both from Newcastle Uni, originally. Barb, you know. I'm Chris Sidoti.

5

PROF LESTER: G'day.

THE COMMISSIONER: Would you like to start off with whatever you want to say, and then we'll have a couple of questions for you.

10

PROF LESTER: You're going to be very tight with the time-frame, I suppose.

THE COMMISSIONER: We're always tight, but we've got time for you, don't worry.

15

PROF LESTER: No worries. I'm pleased, on behalf of the AECG [Aboriginal Education Consultative Group], obviously, to be here. I've been through, just recently, some discussions with the AECG as of last night and today to gather as much information, so it comes very broadly to you. Therefore, there's a lot of information that I'd like to talk about. But prior to doing that, I'm probably not telling you anything new here, but quite clearly, I think you need to hear it again.

20

25 **[Community relations; rural social issues]**

The atmosphere in the rural community is grim, for a number of reasons, I think. Racism and Hanson, the move to the right, is creating a whole lot of dilemma and emerging or latent racism is now coming to the surface in a far bigger way than, perhaps, at times, we've ever experienced. Compounding that is the rural economic framework, which is at downturn. Hence, there's a hell of a lot of competition and when resources are short in the rural communities and we see disastrous things happening in terms of closing down services, etcetera, the opportunity for poor, non-Indigenous people to further emphasise and compare themselves to Indigenous people becomes heightened and the frustration - I also believe, politically - that has been fed.

30

35

Of course, youth suicide is a primary issue; petrol sniffing is becoming a big problem; and the AECG obviously wants to talk in terms of you've got to look at education holistically. While I will address a number of educational issues, quite clearly, without looking after health and housing and those other issues, employment, etcetera, it would be a disaster to schools not to look at them simultaneously.

40

I also highlight that the AECG had the pleasure of providing an input some 18 years ago to another rural task force, that the then New South Wales Schools Education Commission had on rural education.

45

5 It's interesting that at that level - and I was part of the team that wrote the document - we argued then for things like Year 13, participation with TAFE as an outcome, giving people advanced standing and credit from things that they were doing in the community, such as males and females in school playing first grade football and netball, giving them some credit, so credit in life experiences, those sorts of things.

10 It's interesting that some 18 years on, those things have become mainstream, yet Indigenous people - when we were asking for them in that period of time - in this current sense, have not gained significant advantage out of those. So the capacity for Indigenous people to show the way in terms of outcomes for mainstream is very, very important. I believe that the proof is there and also in areas like TAFE.

15 If I could address the issues. They come to me in a couple of headings: cultural studies, teaching pedagogy, liaison, some general issues and obviously, I'll talk very briefly about disabled and those connotations.

20 **[Cultural immersion; Aboriginal English]**

I've recently attended the World Conference of Indigenous Educators in Hawaii, and quite clearly, the overwhelming push amongst Indigenous people in education worldwide is for cultural immersion. There is a huge rejection of perspectives to curricula because they believe they're piecemeal and won't work. To quote one of the Maori elders of the time, "We need to bring in and immerse" - he was talking, obviously, about his own culture - "their kids in Maoritanga language and live it and breathe it in the school environment." That has extended and flowed on to tertiary levels; so they now have, right through to tertiary levels and teacher training in Maoritanga.

35 Quite clearly, I see that that's where we need to go and the AECG would be of that opinion. I have some figures which aren't mine; they're from Eric Jamieson in the Department of Education and Training. Very, very quickly - I'll pass this on, some of the others have seen it - it's a breakdown of Year 10 results, of ELLA tests, of those sorts of things. I don't know whether the Department of Education has shared these with you, but they're public documents. The gap in every one of these is not getting better over a period of time. I might pass that along.

45 Quite clearly, there's a real problem there. Our schools are failing our kids in large numbers and we need to do something urgently about it. The AECG, in particular, is really concerned that those things aren't taking place and improvements aren't taking place. That's not to say that there hasn't been a large amount of effort in terms of additional resources, but the outcomes aren't there. It is now time for us to think

5 outside the square and think very laterally on outcomes that we need to look at. I think cultural immersion through Indigenous schools, publicly funded, are a real option that we need to look at, where we can give back culture and regenerate that in terms that Indigenous people control. It's very similar to what's happening in Polynesian countries and in the United States, North America.

10 One of the fears that I have, as a colleague of mine - Barbara would know him - now Dr Bob Morgan - has recently been doing some research on Indigenous youth suicide. He went into communities like Walgett and areas like that and started asking kids a very basic question, "Are you Aboriginal?" The kids readily and proudly said, "Yes." Then he asked the follow-up question, "What makes you an Aboriginal?" The kids couldn't answer it. I think that's very salutary in terms of saying that these kids are probably more influenced today by the Michael Jordans of the world and rap music from America than they are from their own cultural aspects.

20 Consistently, I am hearing cries in our community that our elder system is beginning to break down, more so than it has ever done before, and I think it is critical that we now start to immerse Indigenous people in these cultures.

25 Maoris talk about the hue and cry that it's very monocultural in outlook, but their argument is quite clear, they get plenty of the other culture outside of the school environment; they don't need that reinforced. In actual fact, they need their own culture reinforced. That becomes critical.

30 With that as a background, there are other particular difficulties that the community have asked me to pass on. Transport becomes a problem with cultural studies in remote communities. An example was at Broken Hill, where they refused to go on excursions because there's no bus transport, it's too costly or it's too much trouble. That's a major concern. There is lack of support for Aboriginal English. While it's fairly mandatory in the Aboriginal education policy, in reality, it doesn't transfer itself in terms of reality for kids; so it's not being embellished and appreciated. Obviously, there needs to be more resources in terms of Aboriginal English support and, more importantly, other language programs.

[Pedagogy; Aboriginal Studies]

45 We then come onto the teaching pedagogies and the difficulties there. Probably one of the most significant parts is that it is still not compulsory for teachers to do Aboriginal studies in their training. That's critical; that needs to be done. For a single reason as being a taxpayer, if we don't pick it up in preliminary training then we have to pick it up because it's a compulsory component of the policy in

terms of Aboriginal education. As a taxpayer, we have to pick it up in staff development. Quite clearly, teachers are underdone extremely with regard to understanding Indigenous culture, understanding Indigenous kids and understanding the fundamentals of what makes an Aboriginal community tick. That leads to all sorts of difficulties.

Racism in schools I don't think has changed. While I moved out into TAFE for a period of time, the Department of Education, when racial problems blew up, had a habit of sending me back for holidays into schools to have a look at the situation. What I can say is that it has been disastrous. My excursions back into those domains have proven that teachers, in many instances, are not up to date with policy, nor are they - it's like going back in history. 12 years on, after the first policy was released - an innovative approach back in 82 - I went into a school that was having, obviously, racial difficulties and I was amazed to think that 12 years on that policy had little or no effect in that school or amongst the teachers.

The current policy is also proving to me that while it is better staff developed than it was previously, I believe those results are still not being reflected, although the policy is now nearly 3 years old. I think that needs to be evaluated.

There is an amazing set of circumstances - I was the principal of the TAFE college at Maclean, which sits in the same environment. I'm talking about - you need to walk across the road, you need to walk a path of 20 metres and you can move out of a high school environment into a TAFE environment. The question I'd ask is, why do Aboriginal kids who are excluded from that school walk that 20 metres and all of a sudden become successful in TAFE? I think, quite clearly, in terms of pedagogy, we need to look very closely at the total different aspects that high school teachers, in particular, have, which is opposite to adult learning techniques that TAFE teachers have as part of their pedagogy. It's an amazing set of circumstances, a kid that's failing and being pushed out can walk in and there not be a discipline problem or anything because of the different way of pedagogy in that environment.

There were calls, obviously, amongst Indigenous people, that we do not identify executive positions in schools for Indigenous people. We are now gathering large numbers of Aboriginal teachers in the our communities, yet we're not seeing that transfer into executive positions in the schools. One of the key areas that we would like to see is that we need to begin to identify those positions - and I'm talking principals and deputy principals, executive teacher positions - for Indigenous people. The parliament seems very, very reluctant to do that, even when large numbers of Indigenous people exist, particularly in these remote and isolated areas.

Another concern in terms of pedagogy is the discouragement of Aboriginal Studies as a subject. Our numbers and retention rates to
5 Years 11 and 12 are not good at all, about 30%. But when the kids get there, because of the numbers, and particularly in rural communities, they have not got access in reality to Aboriginal Studies. I've also heard anecdotal evidence that would indicate that schools - today I heard this - are actually discouraging Aboriginal Studies in schools, and the
10 recent decision, as I understand it, of some university entry, not treating Aboriginal studies as a full, 100% subject. Only giving a maximum of 86% is a real concern, especially for me who sat on the board of secondary education when we first approved that.

15 **[Mobility; teacher expectations]**

The transient nature of Aboriginal students becomes a heightened difficulty, especially as employment becomes more difficult. Our community is travelling around for jobs. It's become obvious that if
20 we are going to produce results in terms of literacy and numeracy, then the kids can't afford to do a restart at every school, we need to develop some sort of mobility tracking so that those students' work and levels can travel with them. There is a program that I think is of some merit, called Tracking Mobility. It was a one-off program which needs further development, so that technologically now those kids can have their
25 results moved with them, so that they can be picked up in programs of literacy and numeracy.

One of the big problems in terms of pedagogy is low teacher expectations. Non-Indigenous people - and I've addressed a number of
30 discussions in Dubbo and out west, where teacher expectations are low, and hence results becoming self-determining. In terms of liaison, and poor liaison with schools, at a senior level within the department the AECG has been very impressed with the responsiveness of senior management. Unfortunately, at a school level it breaks down. We still
35 have principals, schools, especially in rural communities, who don't encourage as effectively as they should liaison with the Aboriginal community. Suspensions and expulsions are blowing out of the water. The recent policies would be having larger and larger numbers of Aboriginal people being suspended and excluded from schools for all
40 sorts of reasons. So I think the new policy has had an adverse effect on Indigenous peoples' enrolments.

[Funding for Aboriginal education; Indigenous staff]

There is a concern that the allocation of resources out - so,
45 instead of centralising the monitoring, resources have been allocated out for special programs, targeted programs, like literacy, numeracy and attendance grants. Community are reporting back to me last night that in many instances schools are misusing those resources, and not

5 using them for what their original intention was. It has become an increasing opportunity to employ more non-Aboriginal teachers in schools. Hence, I think those resources should be targeted to special programs where we can teach Indigenous people to come in as para-professionals, or existing AEAs, to perform those tasks more effectively.

10 I had a huge concern expressed to me today about the liaison capacity, in particular to the Country Areas Program. The example that was given to me was a meeting was called, and the Aboriginal community were invited; but when they didn't turn up in numbers, the question was asked, "Why not?" It became fairly obvious that the notices were given to these people to attend critical discussions on the policy and development of the Country Areas Program 2 days prior to the meeting - in rural New South Wales we're talking - with the added complexities that there were resources made for their transport, but the resources couldn't be paid for a month after the meeting.

20 Hence, it was called during a difficult period in a fortnight, when community resources would be low, and Aboriginal people were expected to pay their own way there and get reimbursed, which would take anything up to a month to come. On fixed, limited incomes, that becomes an impossibility to get involved. That was a real concern.

25 There has been a suggestion that the Aboriginal student liaison officers should become part of each district, and attach to the home school liaison officers. Apparently, the feedback we're receiving is that home school liaison officers are not effective amongst Aboriginal students, and we need to increase the Aboriginal liaison officers' numbers to make that happen.

35 In terms of potential racism, we cannot forget the front office staff, and we need some affirmative action there to either train existing office staff in terms of culturally appropriate programs, because if an Aboriginal parent's going to be switched off, quite often that happens before they get past the front desk; and quite clearly we need some affirmative action in terms of making sure that Aboriginal people get access to these fairly elite and, in a community, very influential positions, especially the smaller communities.

40

[Technology; distance education]

45 I also sit on the Rural Communities Consultative Committee, which has a broader mandate to go and advise the Premier on rural issues. Broader issues that affect and impinge Indigenous people are obviously the lack of technology and infrastructure in rural communities. We have the potential now with the Internet to tap into some amazing resources. I think priorities need to be given to those rural and remote communities, so that they can readily access those

technologies. That is especially so for Indigenous students who may want to tap into the best resources for things like Aboriginal Studies, etcetera, where in smaller school numbers they don't have an opportunity to study.

5

Distance education needs to be used, and associated with that improved technology use. In terms of rural isolation, we need to extend the possibility of mobile preschools, to make sure that they work amongst Indigenous people. In summary - and I know I'm getting much past where I need to go - I think we are - and the AECG, at a recent meeting with the Minister, has said - we're at a very pivotal point. The stats would clearly indicate that there's no improvement, regardless of the amount of effort that's been put in, say, at least in the last 5 to 10 years. We need urgently to sit down, and I think as Indigenous people, in partnership and work out what are the true options that we need to look at, because the existing ones don't work. Quite clearly, we need to look towards more cultural immersion and Indigenous schools publicly funded, so that we can saturate our community in culture and understanding.

20

[Evaluation]

I think another big issue that we're really concerned with is we need to effectively monitor outcomes. So the community is now starting to ask itself questions about the education system: with all the effort that has gone in, why aren't we getting the results? Quite clearly, that's a big issue. Above all, because of the diversity and distances that rural communities obviously suffer, any change to Abstudy will have disastrous effects. You'd only have to change the margins, and all of a sudden you disenfranchise whole groups and whole communities from educational opportunity. That is starting to be witnessed at tertiary institutions, which are starting to look reasonable. Those numbers could fall and deplete very quickly in the next round of major Abstudy changes, which are due in the year 2000, and we could actually in fact see a whole lot of disincentives for Aboriginal people, in particular mature-age adults attending university. Hence, that will have a disastrous effect on local communities.

35

I remember the effect of myself going to teachers' college as one of the first group, with people like Barry and Neil Thorn from Walgett. We went through teachers' college, on completion of which we weren't offered jobs, because at that stage it was the first time of an over-supply of teachers, and they were only employing bonded teachers. We were one of the first groups to go through on Aboriginal study grants; so there was no commitment to employ us. I remember how that was felt in places like Walgett, where they saw 2 of their own finally make it to a tertiary institution, only to find at the end of it they couldn't get jobs.

45

5 So the repercussion of that, in terms of that community - and in those days Walgett was, in terms of education, a heightened community of understanding, and moving ahead well, with the Laurie Craddocks of the world, and people like that, doing work in the community. It had a disastrous effect at a community level of discouraging kids into Year 11 and 12 at that stage, and I think these Abstudy changes, when they see people part-way through courses that now find they can't afford to continue in these courses will have that very damaging effect.

10

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you very much, John. It's a very sobering assessment. Barb, do you want to go first?

15 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Yes, just 2 things. I'll be interested to hear from you about why - if it's true that we've got more Indigenous teachers, more resources, more policies, more programs, why haven't we seen that translated in better education outcomes?

20 **PROF LESTER:** It's a specific question I ask. From the figures I've been given, we now have in the Department of Education and Training 900 Aboriginal people employed. That's an amazing statistic. I asked my own community last night, "What are the results? Where are we going?" I think what you do is you put Indigenous people into sets of circumstances where they spend all their time fighting racism, and aren't in there assisting the kids. They become the new repository for the anger, racism, ethno-centric bias. They're continually trying to re-educate teachers and executive; and therefore their capacity to work effectively with students is greatly diminished.

25
30 **[Cultural immersion]**

35 However, my argument is that more of the same is not going to improve the situation. We need to think laterally. My vision would be that we need to target no differently than we target schools for those that are intellectually enhanced. So that schools that are selective high schools - and we've been doing that for decades - and schools now where we see - sporting high schools, music high schools - I think, in the same vein, we need to create a number of at least pilots, and I would think in rural locations, well supported by hostel support, these cultural immersion schools, where we can put Indigenous people into these environments, and provide them with the best in terms of executive support staff. So we identify all those positions, we put the best people in these sets of circumstances. I think those sorts of things need to happen outside of it.

40
45 Also, if you looked at the history of Aboriginal education on 2 scales - and I was part of the development of the policy; basically all we say in the documents is: you tip up a little bit of culture in Aboriginal people - so you prop that up; you prop up a little Aboriginal Studies -

again, you water that in the kids and the schools; and you sprinkle the Aboriginal Studies through perspectives; and all of a sudden everything's supposed to germinate. It's just a myth, it's not happening, and as the Maori said, it's a waste of time doing perspectives to curriculum. They are token, and quite often they're not there.

[Staff attitudes]

In terms of preparing the teachers, we have an ongoing battle where the teaching community does reflect, unfortunately, the community at large. I've seen a handful of racist teachers in a school - like Moree in my first year out teaching - alienate that whole community. I've seen teachers make statements like, "The only answer is the Tasmanian answer for Aboriginal people." The other one is, "Don't worry about those Aboriginal kids" - and these are experienced teachers talking to young teachers going into these rural communities, saying things like, "Don't worry about them, they're the closest things to chimpanzees."

The most horrific thing that I have ever heard in my life, going around the school at Moree at the time, was, "Why do Aboriginal people smell?" and the answer was, "So blind people can learn to hate them." Until we undo that environment - and we're still a long way short of it; even though the Aboriginal education policy has been in-serviced, in reality you don't change those entrenched attitudes; and our kids deal with them on a day-to-day basis. We need to look at alternatives to take those kids, who are good kids - 30 wonderful preschool kids, I saw today. The question I have to ask is the health and welfare of those kids. What do we do with them between now and by the time - probably they're alienated by the time they're 14. Why is it so?

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: You said that, given these latest findings that don't show any improvement, if you're going to sit down and have a discussion with people at senior level - ministers, director-generals, others - how much influence do you think we bring to those discussions?

[Consultation]

PROF LESTER: I think at this stage not a lot, and that's very sad, because I've come from the environment where I've seen a very good operator, like Bob Morgan in the early days. For instance, the AECG should meet with the Director-General on a regular basis; it's something Bob Morgan established 18 years ago. In those days it was the old Doug Swan, director-general of education, and it was a meeting between Bob Morgan and Doug Swan, one-to-one, about what needs to take place. Then Doug enacted, or worked on what was happening.

We're now in the ludicrous situation where the head of the AECG, Charles Davidson - no fault of his own - now meets with an

assistant to an assistant to an assistant to a director, and they still call the meeting the director-general's meeting. I'm really worried that that level of negotiation isn't taking place. We've ceded, a few weeks ago, with a meeting with the minister, and also with the director-general of education, the same things we've spoken to you about, we are in crisis. Our situation isn't improving. We actually said to him, "We're not saying that the effort isn't being made, but the effort's not being made in the right direction."

10 What we ask from them - and I'm still waiting to hear a reply - is that we need a major search conference, where Indigenous people can get together and critically look at where to next, because the current policies aren't working.

15 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Thanks, Chris.

THE COMMISSIONER: Search conference at the state or national level, or both?

20 **PROF LESTER:** Beg your pardon?

THE COMMISSIONER: Are you talking about that conference at the state or the national level, or both?

25 **PROF LESTER:** Our major concerns at the AECG would be on a state level at this stage - - -

THE COMMISSIONER: New South Wales.

30 **PROF LESTER:** - - - bearing in mind the primary responsibility rests with the state government. I'm not saying that they're not conducive to it, but at this stage we need to start thinking very creatively.

[Pedagogy]

35 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** When we're talking about pedagogy before, a thought came into my mind; do you notice if there is any marked difference in the pedagogic approaches between, say, the major urban areas - I'm thinking probably Sydney and Newcastle - and the rural and remote areas, the schools in those areas? What's behind it is this; you actually mentioned before there's not sufficient consideration taken of the diversity of situations that exists. I'm just wondering if - and I'd like you to comment on this - perhaps there should be a diversity of pedagogies. Maybe there's not one pedagogy alone which is suitable for the whole range of Aboriginal conditions.

45 **PROF LESTER:** No, quite clearly not. You can move from community to community and you have a different set of circumstances. The

biggest single influence, in terms of performance in schools towards Aboriginal people, are individual teachers. Aboriginal education has relied on the goodwill of a handful of teachers, and if you look at successes you don't look at a school, you look at individual teachers
5 who are in there working their guts out, quite often at their own expense, where they become known as 'nigger lovers', all those sorts of difficulties, and have enormous adverse effects on them.

10 But in terms of pedagogy, I think it is different, because the circumstances are far different. The teachers can't withdraw from their school as you can in a big city, so the pedagogy changes. There's one community that I went to that had racial problems, where the primary aim of the kids, at one stage, was to come back to teach in the same school. So in this rural racist community, the average length of
15 time stay of staff was 20-odd years. Two of the staff had been - no, more, 3 of the staff had been not only from the school, but had never had another experience outside the school outside of prac teaching. So the pedagogy does change.

20 I know Paul Hughes's research is saying things like, "There's no such thing as Aboriginal pedagogy," but I think there is a difference in pedagogy in approach. I come back to the example, why is it kids can walk 20 metres from one environment, where they're "failing" and walk into another one where things start to turn around almost
25 overnight? That is directly related to pedagogy.

[Best practice models]

THE COMMISSIONER: Amidst this dismal picture you paint, John, are there some great examples you can tell us about, where things are
30 doing well? Individual schools or individual programs that you've come across in New South Wales?

PROF LESTER: Yes, there are lots of good one-off stories, there are lots of good things happening. You show me a good teacher, and I'll
35 show you good things happening. So there are a number of projects; but I think - what's that legal term, buyers beware on property.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, caveat emptor - buyer beware.

40 **PROF LESTER:** I think we need to be very, very careful of any process which assessed the success of, say, policy looking at project by project. I had the disastrous situation of having to do a summary on equity at a conference a couple of years ago, where we had women, disabled, Aborigines, all the normal groups, non-English speaking backgrounds.
45 What it was was a collection of best practice programs. This was at the same time when we were dismantling EEO, women's units were going out the door, Aboriginal programs were under attack, non-English

speaking background programs were moving into a different era, so there was a disaster as far as equity was concerned.

5 But you come away from the conference and everything's rosy, because we assess project by project. It's very easy to put your hand up and say, "There's 20 really good projects." The reality, in the outcome of project-based assessment, is those figures which I showed you. In reality it makes very little difference to the norm across the state, and we need to be very, very careful because I think it is a very
10 cunning way for government to cut; to be seen to be doing things which are very superficial and rely on the goodwill of staff, which can be whittled away very quickly project by project, until you get a transformation.

15 It produces a very good image about projects. There are good projects, there are very dedicated teachers in our community. Unfortunately, they're too few in number. Those group of kids I saw today, wonderful things are happening to those kids. Wonderful things.

20 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you very much, John. Thanks for coming along, giving us your views.

[2.10 pm]

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Would you like to introduce yourself for the tape, and then go straight into your submission?

30 **MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH:** I've just prepared a little statement. Is that useful?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes, that's great. Thank you.

35 **MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH:** My name is Belinda Epstein-Frisch, I'm here today representing the Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development. Was there any other background information you needed?

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** You might just tell us a little bit about the Institute, if you don't mind.

[Role of Family Advocacy]

45 **MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH:** Yes, of course. The Institute for Family Advocacy and Leadership Development is a statewide advocacy group that receives funding from state and Commonwealth government. Family Advocacy, as it's known for short, undertakes a range of programs. We do significant work in what we call advocacy and

leadership development, where we go around the state meeting with families, helping families to strengthen their voice as advocates on behalf of people with disabilities.

5 It's always the best interest of a person with a disability that is foremost, we're not advocating for families. But given a person with a disability is so much more safeguarded if they have family around them that can speak strongly and effectively for the best interests of that person, that's a very useful role. We have networks helping local
10 people to get together in networks to act more effectively in their own communities on behalf of their sons and daughters.

[Students with disabilities]

15 We do a lot of work in the area of systems advocacy - and that's mainly the work that I'm involved with - in negotiating with government departments and policy and legislation to make a difference for people with disabilities. Over the last 5 or 6 years we've done a great deal of work in education. We're faced with a situation
20 where the New South Wales education policy with regard to students with disabilities was, and still is, extremely discriminating, and did not allow students with disabilities to attend the regular class of the local neighbourhood school.

25 The whole funding and administrative system worked against children being able to be included in their local schools. So we have done a great deal of work. Through a network of families we ran a Kids Belong Together campaign at the time of the 1995 state election, where families had public meetings, saw local MPs, requiring a change of education policy so that children would be able to go to their local
30 schools. We were unsuccessful at that time in getting a change of policy; instead we got a feasibility study. But we worked with the feasibility study, and there's been some recent changes in the administrative arrangements within the Department of Education and Training that makes it easier for many children.

35 In my submission I'll talk to you about a great deal of the obstacles that still exist. They're the main areas of what - we provide information and resources to families to help them, etcetera. So that's the main work that the agency does.
40

[Policy of inclusion – international framework]

45 Now, perhaps, if I just talk a little to - I've prepared a statement. What I would like to talk about is the availability, accessibility and quality of inclusive education for children with a disability in the regular class of the local school in rural and remote New South Wales. Perhaps, to contextualise "inclusion", it's the practice by which a child with a disability is enrolled full-time in the regular class, and is accessing the regular curriculum, with or without modification.

UNESCO recognised inclusion as a goal in education in its Consultation on Special Education in 1988, so it's not new. UNESCO stated that the responsibility for special education is the responsibility of the total education system, and the wider education system itself will benefit from making the necessary modifications to accommodate the needs of disabled children. This was followed in June 1994, when the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs, Access and Quality, held in Salamanca, Spain, recognised that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities and building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

Moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children, and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. The Salamanca statement from UNESCO went on to say:

Those with special education needs must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them with child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs.

The Salamanca statement called upon all governments to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in the regular schools unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise, and to ensure that in the context of systematic change teacher education programs, both pre-service and in-service, address the provision of special needs education and inclusive schools.

So what I hope I have done there is set inclusion within an international framework that says, it's not a new thing, it's not a New South Wales thing, it's something that has been happening over the last decade across the world, and is seen as best practice, not just in terms of the child with the disability, but in terms of the educational benefits for other children in growing up in inclusive school communities.

[Barriers to inclusion]

What I want to talk to you about, though, is the factors that affect that, in terms of rural and remote New South Wales. Broadly, I'd like to indicate that there are 3 areas that make a difference, in terms of the availability, the accessibility and the quality of inclusive education. One is the attitudes of the school, and here I'm - the last parts of what I heard from the gentleman before, they're not new issues, as I'm sure you can imagine. But I want to talk about the attitudes of the school, the availability of resources to support the school, and the quality of that

resource support, and then, finally, just to go on to give some suggestions to improve the situation.

5 In terms of the attitudes of a school, when a family is seeking an inclusive education for their sons and daughters parents are looking for a school with a clear value orientation that welcomes all comers, that values diversity and recognises a responsibility for the education of all children in a certain catchment area. Of course, large distances in rural and remote New South Wales means that there's often only one school that is geographically possible, and so parents have to take what they get.

15 When that local school is not prepared to enrol a child with a disability, the family faces 2 impossible options; one is total family relocation - and I can tell you of families who have done just that, who have moved from Cobar to Orange, and far parts of the state, had to physically up and move in order to get their child into a school that would be welcoming; or, the other disastrous effect is that the child is placed in out-of-home care, which contravenes the right of a child to grow up in a family, and the child loses those opportunities that we all take for granted from growing up in a family that cares for you.

25 Not every school in the New South Wales metropolitan area, of course, is welcoming of all students. I'm not telling you anything you don't know there. But in the metropolitan area or in large towns, you might travel past 2 or 3 schools to get to a school that would welcome your child, whereas in a rural and remote area those options aren't available.

30 **[Resource support for inclusion; staff attitudes]**

Secondly, I want to talk about the availability of resources to support the school. Resource support is provided to all local schools by the Department of Education and Training - when we're talking about integrating or including a child - through grants that are allocated on behalf of the individual student to purchase specialist teacher and teacher aide support. That was an important administrative change that the government made some 18 months, 2 years ago. Previously, resources were all tied up in locations so that it went to special schools and units. There was a certain allocation of money for integration, but that allocation was a capped pool that hadn't grown in about 5 years, and yet more and more students were being integrated.

45 So the slice of resources that each student got was less and less and less, which attests in fact to a great deal of goodwill on the part of many teachers and many schools, that they did in fact continue to integrate children with ever-decreasing resources. This feasibility study reported on the inequities that were involved in that, and in fact the funding formally did change, so that resources are actually

allocated on behalf of the individual students. So in principle you can go from this school to that school, be in a support unit or be in a regular class.

5 That's something to be applauded, and it has made a
difference for many children. But in practice, however, when a school is
allocated on behalf of a particular child less resources than they think
they need, what happens is that the parents are asked to pick up the
child at lunchtime 4 days a week, or what have you. So in fact, you end
10 up getting part-time enrolment, although it's not recorded through the
department in that way, because there is no part-time enrolment with
the department.

15 They would say, "It shouldn't be going on," but in fact it is, and
there are many families who are picking up their children - there are
many children who are in fact only enrolled part-time, only get half the
time of education. Of course, they miss opportunities, and it further
hampers children and young people who are disadvantaged in
education. So in terms of the availability of resources, there is often not
20 perceived to be sufficient resources to actually support the child.

25 The final thing I just want to talk about is in terms of the quality
of that resource support. The gentleman before was talking about a
particular geographical area where teachers had been there for
20 years and hadn't necessarily changed in their orientation and
practice. Unfortunately, it's a similar thing that I need to report on. Not
in all cases, but in many situations, geographical isolation has led to
isolation from newer principles and practice, and in many remote areas
- as is the same in areas in the metropolitan area - there is a view that
30 children with disabilities shouldn't be in the regular class. They're
special people who should be educated in special places anywhere but
here. Given the critical nature of the attitude and values of staff, this
can be a very big obstacle.

35 This is one of the things that needs to happen. The department
of education and the government has made administrative changes,
they haven't made policy changes. Until they make policy changes that
will take a leadership role to say that children with disabilities have a
right to be in a regular class - yes, but they can do it; they have the
40 choice, you know - but they have a right to be in the regular class with
appropriate support, then that will take a leadership role in terms of
local schools to start to address attitudes and values. As I'm sure you're
hearing all the time, it's not a quick thing to change attitudes; I don't
have to tell you, but a leadership role. Government is being very slow
45 and lax in leading in terms of what is the appropriate thing.

Another feature of the quality of resources is that parents consistently express frustration at the very poor quality of resource

5 support. Parents report that the so-called experts don't really know very
much, and the things that they do know about people with disabilities
and students with disabilities come from segregated settings. So the
kind of suggestions they're making to teachers involve the student with
a disability in a corner with a teachers' aide velcroed to them, or out in
a little room in some little cupboard, for individualised; whereas the kind
of support teachers need as to how to help that child learn within the
context of the full curriculum - and there is expertise, and there is
10 knowledge and skills that are developing in that area, but people in
rural and remote areas don't seem to have enough access to it.

[Teacher aides]

15 Some of the other factors that contribute to the poor quality of
this resource support; I've mentioned a lack of suitably qualified and
experienced people who are keen to take up the specialist jobs in rural
and remote areas. There's another area though, in lesser skilled and
lesser trained positions, of teachers' aides. Many of the students with
disabilities, part of the resources allocated to that student is a teachers'
20 aide, who is there to assist the whole class. It's not a student aide, it's a
teachers' aide, to be used by the teacher in an effective way, including
that child.

25 Parents talk about the selection of the person is on the basis of
jobs for the boys, that people don't come into those positions because
they were interviewed through an open process where people were
able to apply, but it is the husbands, wives, mates of existing staff,
because in many areas, of course, there's high unemployment, and
here's a good, valuable, secure job at a school. So it's more a process
of jobs for the boys.

30

[Specialist support]

35 Another critical problem relates to the specialist resources. The
Department of Education and Training has some specialist resources,
but they only are of experts, particularly - for example, there's
something called the resource support unit, which is there to assist
teachers in dealing with students with challenging behaviour. They
provide, I understand, very effective support, training, monitoring, help
set up programs, but they're not available outside the metropolitan
40 area, and are critically needed. Or, very occasionally, they might go
outside the metropolitan area and do an assessment, but they're not
available for ongoing support and consultation. So some people have
actually said that coming for an assessment is worse than not coming
at all, because you get a sniff of what might have been possible, but
without any opportunity to actually implement it in any way.

45

[Staff training needs]

Staff training is another critical factor in terms of contributing to
the quality of resources. The staff training that's available is very

limited, as probably you've heard in other areas, and it absolutely doesn't take into account the extra costs of travel, both in terms of actually moving as well as the additional time of course away from face-to-face responsibilities, so that it's seldom undertaken. Many
5 parents talked about the main training that took place, they provided to their individual teachers and to the full school community, by sharing their own knowledge and skills, and what have you.

10 Whilst a partnership between parents and the education system is most desirable, it is also an unfortunate fact of life that when information is conveyed by parents it tends to have less status and authority - rightly or wrongly, I would say wrongly - but the bottom line is it does have less status and authority in the eyes of the experts, than
15 if it was provided by a person who was similarly qualified to the people who are giving the training.

20 Lastly, I just want to talk about 3 strategies which, if taken together, would improve the availability, accessibility and quality of inclusive education for students with disabilities in rural and remote areas. These are: (1) a change in state education policy to remove the barriers to all children having the right to being welcomed and educated in their regular class. A change of policy would clarify the responsibility of the school to all students, and force some teachers to recognise a need for change.
25

30 Secondly, improvements would come through the provision of significant quality training in the philosophy and practice of inclusive education, ensuring all teachers have skills in assessment, curriculum design, instruction and classroom management consistent with today's reality of classrooms of students with mixed abilities. Finally, I think what we need is to ensure that there's effective planning at a local school level, so that teachers and parents can prepare from year to year, confident that the teacher will have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach all the students in the class.
35

40 The fact that you only find out, mostly, when you return to school in first term who the teacher is makes it impossible for that teacher to have had the appropriate orientation and training. You've got some students with very specific needs; signed English interpreters, specific learning strategies and what have you. By not having that appropriate planning no-one, neither the teacher nor the parents, can feel confident in ensuring that there's the best education.

45 I think that those 3 things are not so enormous. The change of policy doesn't have resource implications, because the changed funding administration has already done that. The training, yes, that has resource implications, but I think that the benefits - it's investing in teachers who are going to be there forever. The planning, once again,

that's an administrative system that allows decisions to be made in a timely way so that people can be appropriately oriented. That's my statement. I'm happy to take any questions.

5 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Thank you very much. Bill?

COMMISSIONER JONAS: No, I haven't got any questions, but I'm grateful for that overview.

10 **[Participation in excursions]**

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: One thing you didn't talk about, which I'd like your comments on, is the ability of those children to participate in excursions and sporting activities.

15 **MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH:** It depends on the school and the welcoming attitude and the level of expertise they have in accommodating, and in making the appropriate differences. If a child, for example, uses a wheelchair, then transport can become - you know, you can't just use the same local bus. There needs to be some sort of - in fact, both in the metropolitan area, and rural and remote, kids often miss out altogether on excursions because there isn't - there has to be negotiation; maybe a taxi. Then the school has to pick up those costs. Or maybe there's a community neighbourhood centre that has an accessible bus that might need to be booked and used, or what have you. It's all about planning.

25

There is expertise; there are ways to include students with a mixed range of abilities in the vast majority of activities that make up a school day, week and year; but that's where traditional teachers, many of them need training and orientation or just a little of problem solving to look at how they might go about it.

30

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: So in practice, are those children included? Are we saying these children are included - - -

35 **MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH:** Many children are physically present but not really socially and developmentally included. Do you know what I mean? What I'm saying is that they're actually - there are an increasing number of children who are in the regular class. If you look 10 years ago, there were hardly any children with disabilities in the regular class. There are in New South Wales an increasing number of children in the regular class. The challenge is, now, to help the teachers to teach them effectively in the regular class, and to teach all of them. These are areas on which we need a lot more staff development to assist those things to happen.

45

[Indigenous children with disabilities]

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Do Indigenous kids fall under your umbrella? Do you have much to do with families - the families on behalf of whom you advocate - many Indigenous families?

5 **MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH:** We have contact in Sydney and do quite a lot of work with Tony Pearce, the Aboriginal Development Corporation, I think is the - but, no, I can't say that. It's partly, perhaps, about opportunities to get information to people when we go into local areas and what have you; but, no, I'm sorry to say that it's not something that
10 we've had very strong links with.

THE COMMISSIONER: We get, over the years, quite a significant number of complaints about children who aren't being admitted to schools. Do you get any anecdotal impression as to whether the
15 situation is getting better or worse?

[Barriers to DDA process]

MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH: We get significant information that says people
20 feel, now, unable to use the human rights system because of the costs following the event, and that makes people extremely fearful of - because the Human Rights Commission is no longer - the findings are not - in the vast majority of situations it is perceived that the school would not accept the decision of the Commission; that it will go to Federal Court; and families are terrified of the cost implications.
25 Families see that to use - and the few cases that have both, at the federal level, the one case, and the few that have gone through state anti-discrimination boards across the country, people watch very clearly and they see that it takes a great deal of time; sometimes a child is out of school for a year; that the costs, sometimes financially, but always
30 emotionally, to the family, is just daunting and overwhelming.

So, unfortunately, people are very, very reticent and, particularly, in relation to - people watch the Scarlett Finney case and they think that here we have a child who, to us in the disability field,
35 hardly has a disability: here she was - I mean, I only saw her in the press - a 5-year-old who was articulate; who was already reading, I understand; who was mobile but uses - my God, hardly seemed to have a disability and yet, they hindered her enrolment and now are appealing. That sends a message to all families to say, "Wow;" and to
40 say that people are frightened to use the complaints processes. So you might get less complaints but it's not because the situation is not bad.

Some of the administrative changes - there are fewer children, these days, in New South Wales who are actually excluded from school
45 because of the administrative changes; but within the schools, everybody is struggling as to what is the best thing to do and how to do it. Sometimes that happens in a welcoming - no-one pretends it's all

easy. If that happens in a welcoming, problem-solving environment, then you can have a sense and you can move forward together.

5 I know children who - the school has enrolled - this particular
situation: the school enrolled the child because they felt that they had
to because of the changed administrative situation, and they used part
of the teachers' aide time to put someone in the classroom to record
10 head turning behaviour of other children; to collect the evidence that
this child was disruptive and needed to be out. So they didn't use the
resources in a constructive way, "Let's plan together to how we can
effectively include", but "let's get the evidence on this kid". So, yes, you
might get some less formal complaints but all is not well.

15 Here, in New South Wales, we've been negotiating for some 2
years now the Department of Education, Training about an independent
appeals mechanism because, in terms of appeals within the
department, they're all internal and it's cover up for your mates; it's just
a not accountable process. There's been a system that I've been
20 actively involved with, with the legal people from the department and
people from the Disability Discrimination Legal Centre, and we've come
up with something that, I think, met everybody's needs, but it's being
stonewalled.

25 It came from pestering Ken Boston, in fact, who gave
permission for it to go ahead; but now, the last thing in the world they
want is that kind of accountability. I think merely having an independent
appeals process tightens the ship, makes people more accountable
because they know that there is a capacity to review decisions.

30 **[Intellectual and physical disabilities compared]**

THE COMMISSIONER: A last thing: do you find any significant
difference in ease or difficulty for kids with intellectual disability as
compared to physical disability, or is it pretty common for both?

35 **MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH:** In terms of general community attitudes to
people with disabilities, yes, there is a hierarchy, as inappropriate and
devaluing as that is. One finds that some people might say that it's
easier, in terms of a student or a person with a physical disability or
whatever; however you put it, people with an intellectual disability and
40 people with a psychiatric disability tend to be the least valued and what
have you. It depends on the welcoming - these days when we have an
educational philosophy that talks about meeting the needs of individual
students and you have individualised curriculum outcomes, there's a
whole structure in education these days, and a rhetoric, that absolutely
45 is consistent with inclusion; because it's about teachers aren't
supposed to teach the norm.

5 They're supposed to identify and understand the range of
students in their class, and inclusion of students with any kind of
disability sits very comfortably within that. The bandwidth of skill level
of students might be a bit broader but the research says that in any
primary school class without a child with a disability - an identified -
there will be a reading age band of 5 years. So that's without anyone
that comes with a label and a kind of a package and what have you. So
they're already teaching students of mixed abilities; it's consistent and it
just fits within.

10

Is there more discrimination? It's hard to say. Numbers: there
are more people with an intellectual disability than there are, if you look
at incidence figures, with physical disability or sensory disability and
what have you. So, in general, I think there are more complaints and
concerns about students with intellectual disability but I couldn't make a
broader comment than that.

15

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much.

20

MS EPSTEIN-FRISCH: I've got this - if it was useful.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes; that would be good; thank you.

25

The Teachers' Federation is now on at 3.30, so we've actually
got a 15-minute break.

30

[3.05 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: Dee, would you like to introduce yourself and
then you can go straight into the submission.

35

MS WILKES-BOSE: Yes, thank you. Dee Wilkes-Bose; I'm the director
of rural affairs for the New South Wales Farmers Association. I thank
you for inviting us to present to you today. The association represents
about 15,000 members throughout New South Wales, so that
represents quite a few farming families obviously, and as such we have
a keen interest in education issues from the point of view of education
being a right of children wherever they live, of course; but also the
impact on rural communities and the competitiveness of agriculture and
rural industries, as well.

40

[Impacts of isolation]

45

I'm sure I'll probably go over a lot of things that you've already
heard evidence about. I just wanted to really give you some of the
issues that our members have brought to us and some of the solutions

on some of those issues that we've thought of. Obviously, the geographic isolation means reduced physical access to education facilities, but also increased costs of education, whether people are teaching their children at home or having to send them away, especially for secondary schooling. The education service is obviously of vital importance to rural communities as well, in terms of attracting other professionals, such as doctors. Services that the rural communities need: those people tend to look and see whether there are education services in a town before they relocate.

10

[Resources for rural schools]

Adequate primary education, of course, is the essential building block of education and we feel that there is a need for increased real funding to give rural schools the resources and teaching capability that they need to deliver high quality education. Schools often find it difficult to attract experienced and high quality teachers to schools, and to stay for a period of time to give some continuity. I know that the New South Wales government implemented a trial scheme some time ago to attract and retain principals at small, particularly disadvantaged rural schools.

20

[Staff incentives; staffing]

I don't know whether that's been evaluated; I'm not sure where that's up to but I know, at the time, we welcomed it and suggested that it probably needs to go more widely to teachers as well as principals; and to more schools not just the very disadvantaged ones that they had identified, although you possibly need other incentives for them. So we've advocated a scheme whereby there are incentives, both in terms of promotion on merit and non-material incentives, but also material incentives in the form of whatever is required: whether it be housing assistance, bonuses; being fairly flexible to keep teachers in those areas.

30

We also understand there's a need for more relief teachers to allow teachers to leave for sick leave, holidays, continuing education and things like that. There is inadequate access - at least in some areas - to resources and teachers for special needs children, whether they be children with disabilities, learning problems or particularly gifted children who would benefit from extra resources.

40

The other issue which has come up quite a lot, particularly recently, is the formula by which schools are staffed. We have had a lot of people say to us there's a problem, when the staff-student ratios fall to a point where they close the school; they lose teachers; and it seems to be a bit arbitrary and, perhaps, not enough use of flexibility, but also part-time teachers or sharing resources among schools which are close geographically; because, once a community loses resources or loses a school completely, it's pretty hard to get that reopened.

45

5 So there perhaps needs to be a bit more flexibility and look a bit long term, not just what the student load is now but what it will be in the next few years; and think about that when they're making decisions about resources. The same thing goes for school bus routes because we've had quite a few occasions where the student load has dropped down and they've lost the bus route and they don't get it back open again.

10 **[Telecommunications]**

15 The role of telecommunications, obviously, is a pretty huge one; huge potential for education right through at all levels, including continuing education and training for farmers. I think that has played a role in lots of places but it's still limited because of the poor access that country people have to Internet and data transfer services. We welcomed, when the federal government amended the universal service obligation to say that the USO should now include access to ISDN wherever you live; that's great, except ISDN is still prohibitive, in terms of cost; for most people it's not a real alternative.

20 So we're pursuing cost-effective access to those services, not just in schools but also on farm for lots of reasons - education only being one of them, but a pretty important one. Of course it's essential that if they're going to have these services and they start to depend on them for education, that they're maintained properly, so that faults are repaired within a reasonable time-frame and they do get connections when they need to, because that failure would throw things out considerably.

30 **[Education costs]**

35 I would imagine you've heard a fair bit about the difference in costs between educating children in rural areas versus city or metropolitan areas where children can stay at home. I suppose that's twofold: one is, sending children away when there's no other alternative, particularly in secondary school, to board, and the extra accommodation and travel costs for the children, but also the families in accessing their children during the terms so they do get to see them; and going to parent-teacher nights; things like that. There are extra costs for the family in travelling to see their children; down time when they're not with their business, whether it's a farm or a small business, because they are away.

[Home tutors]

45 The flip side, I guess, is when children are supervised at home, there is a cost associated with that, in terms of they employ a governess, which is happening, I think, less and less, with just less money in rural areas; and it's one of the parents - usually the mother - who acts as a supervisor. There is, as I understand it, a need for

constant supervision; particularly now, I think it's changed. I actually did correspondence - went through my primary school - and I think you could supervise yourself a little bit more than, apparently, you can now; it's a full-time job.

5

That means that that person is not contributing, either off-farm income, which they would possibly have the opportunity to do; or on-farm, and there's less labour being employed on farms. So both parents, or both partners, are more and more needed on the farm and less ability to do that. The isolated children allowance doesn't take into account any compensation for the supervisory role that the parents play in that. So that's probably an area that government could look at because it is a real cost.

15 **[Travel]**

We had a case of a family out near Broken Hill, who are travelling 5 hours a day to send their kids to a primary school, as opposed to having the children at home, and there were a couple of reasons that they need to do that; but that mother finds that's wonderful, compared to what it was like having them at home the whole day, so it's a fair indication of the stress it can put on the family.

20

[Subsidies]

With regard to the allowances that are around for isolated children, rural and remote children: we've always been concerned that the assets test discriminates against farmers who have a high asset base because of the capital intensive nature of agriculture; often low income but the assets still count against them in accessing those, particularly the youth allowance, which I'll mention again in a minute. We've also advocated that if those allowances are to be subject to an income test, it should be averaged over a period of time, to take account of the fluctuating agriculture farming incomes.

25

30

[HECS]

We also have some concerns about the higher education contribution scheme and increases in HECS. It seems that this is perceived as being an added burden and sometimes, I think, is the straw that breaks the camel's back in determining whether or not children go away to university. We've had contact with quite a few of the students within tertiary education over the last couple of years, particularly we run a tertiary education scholarship program, and those costs are a real concern to them; particularly for students in things like vet or medicine, which are quite a long time before they start earning any money. So, we've certainly advocated a close monitoring of that to see what it does do to participation rates in tertiary education.

35

40

45

[Subject choice]

Another issue which affects a lot of students in rural areas is the limited subject choice in high schools. There are people who would like to be able to do things like physics and chemistry at their local school but can't, and either they don't do those subjects, and that limits them in the things that they can go on and do when they leave high school, or they go away to other regional centres which do offer those subjects. Both ways, if they decide not to take up those subjects, that means there are less rural students going and getting those skills which rural communities need, and medicine is a pretty good example of that. Most universities - at least the 3 in New South Wales - that have medical schools have now got a rural entry program which acknowledges that rural students don't do as well in their HSC - on an average - as other students because they have disadvantages.

I guess, the solution is to provide better subject choice, and I know we had an example at Peak Hill Central School: they do have, I think, 3-unit maths, and a couple of subjects they have computer links which allow them to deliver those; and then have a tutor coming around once a week; but they still don't offer some. So, I guess, more ways of increasing the subject choice and, perhaps, in the medium term, at least, there is a need for more rural entry programs or more recognition at universities and tertiary institutions that country students may not have quite the marks that you might have got in the city school but, on interview and other criteria, they do stack up well.

[Youth Allowance]

Just one other issue is the Youth Allowance, which I mentioned before: we have 2 major concerns with that and one is the assets test as I mentioned. We have long advocated that there should be a 100% discount on farm business assets for that test; obviously not off-farm, they should be counted as assets. In 1996, the federal coalition promised to increase the discount on farm business assets to 75%, from 50%, and that has yet to be implemented; so that's something we're pushing very hard to have implemented. That was a discount on farms and small business assets. At the time, it was estimated that another 2 and a half thousand students would be eligible for what was then Austudy, if that was implemented.

The other issue with the Youth Allowance is the actual means test which, whilst we understand the rationale for it, in making sure that the scheme is not abused, there is an exemption for primary producers who are sole traders, and we have said that the rationale - they include partnerships - and there is no real rationale for that where all the people in that partnership, husband, wife and child/children partnerships - all income is captured within the income test and income tax test if they want to use those. So there's no rationale to then go through an actual means test which is very intrusive and doesn't take

into account the differences in costs between educating your child and living in rural areas versus city.

5 I think that that test has been the straw that just has - some
people have decided that they won't even bother because it's just all
got too hard or they have applied, not got it and that's been the end of
it. I know others who have sat down for 2 or 3 days and gone through
the test and got it, but a lot of people don't have the time or the
10 inclination to do that. So we've said there should be an exemption for
those partnerships from that actual means test.

I think that's probably covered most of the things that I just
wanted to raise with you. I'm obviously happy to answer any questions
or, if there's any further information that you'd like us to try and source
15 from our members, then I'd be happy to do it because we have quite a
good network across the state. Thank you.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Dee. Barb, did you want to go first?

20 **[Student options]**

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Travelling throughout western New South
Wales for the inquiry, I was surprised to see the large numbers of
Indigenous children in primary schools and fairly small numbers of non-
Indigenous children and some of those non-Indigenous children being
25 sent to the nearby town for their schooling. Is that pattern across the
state?

MS WILKES-BOSE: I'm probably not qualified to answer, I actually
come from western New South Wales; I come from Ivanhoe, so I know
30 a bit more about that area personally. I really don't know. I mean, I did
correspondence and I think, in some of those schools where there's no
high school, or they know that they have to send their children away in
high school, that impacts quite a lot; but I really don't know whether
that's the case across the state; really not sure. I mean, I think,
35 certainly there are hostels more out in that area: Cloughton House at
Hay and most of the hostels are out in the west of the state but I've
always thought that's probably just because of the distances and the
lack of education resources; but I don't really know that it's across the
state, I'm sorry.

40

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The other thing was the traditional - a lot of
people of my generation sent away to agricultural colleges, like Farrer.
Is that still happening now?

45 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** Yes.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Are they coming back to the farms?

MS WILKES-BOSE: Some of them are concerned that there are not enough people going into agriculture, not enough young people. I know John Chudleigh, Orange Agricultural College, has written papers about this and is concerned that parents are turning their children away from
5 agriculture, whereas in fact there is a strong future in agriculture, either directly or indirectly. Those institutions are still very important: Yanco, Tokal - those sorts of institutions are still important. I think there is probably a trend away from going into agriculture, which is concerning.

10 I guess, we're not sure whether that's triggered by a lack of access to agricultural subjects in high schools or earlier in the high schools, and that's something we're concerned about from an agricultural point of view: (a) if country children aren't able to access
15 agriculture, or it's not pushed as an attractive subject; and (b) if city children aren't given access to that subject; both are obviously important.

[Post-school options]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: So what are the chosen careers for
20 children from rural communities now, do you think?

MS WILKES-BOSE: Difficult to answer; I think there's probably a
25 feeling that you need to go away and you need to get into the city and, possibly, that you need to stay there; that there's not much future in coming back to rural areas, and that's a real concern. I don't know whether you've heard of the work that's being done by a consultant, or
30 an organisation, called Ideas, from Western Australia. Michael O'Meara has been in New South Wales recently, talking to people because he's looking at education and employment opportunities for rural people, and it's across Australia.

I went to a consultation that he did, and his organisation had
35 done quite a lot of work and done work on why children weren't coming back to rural areas and what they thought was wrong with it. Actually, you might be interested and I can give you his contact - I'll send you his contact - because he'd done some good stuff; and these young people were saying, "We'd like to, but it's not seen as being a very good thing to do." Both the parents and people in the community were saying, "Go
40 and get yourselves a good career and stay in the city." Everyone else fed off that and felt, "Even if I wanted to come back, it wouldn't be seen as a very good thing to do."

45 So they're now looking at ways to try and get over that and encourage those people to come back into rural communities. I don't know if there's a particular career choice but I think that's a disturbing trend.

THE COMMISSIONER: We've done nothing scientific but when we talk to kids in country areas their preference, in most places, is to be able to continue to work in their own towns.

5 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** If there's a job there.

[Work experience]

10 **THE COMMISSIONER:** If there was a job there; that's what they all say. My question is in that area: does the Farmers' Association have any relationship with the education system, or through some of your branches, that actually tries to tie in to the work experience, vocational education training programs at the local level to provide kids with jobs in their own towns?

15 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** Not formally across the whole organisation, although there are farmers who are involved in providing work experience and things like that. I've actually had discussions recently with somebody who is looking with the vocational training becoming more popular; particularly for agriculture, they are looking for farmers who can do that quite formally and really be involved in taking students on for that. So, hopefully, that will increase because there's certainly, I suppose, a desire among our members to make opportunities for young people to come back into those communities; but we haven't done anything really formalised with it yet.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I know the Cotton Growers Associations in Moree and Bourke are both heavily involved now with local schools.

30 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** Are they?

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes.

35 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** I think that probably happen in various places but it depends very much on the local people and both schools and our organisation. One thing which we are doing, which isn't really my area but it may be of interest to you; the association is looking at setting up a trust to create education material about agriculture and issues surrounding agriculture, for the curriculum across New South Wales. We have a committee together with the Catholic Education Board and the Board of Studies, and various players, so that we produce material which is suitable and given the Board of Studies stamp of approval to try to raise the awareness of agriculture and rural life right across the primary - probably more focusing on primary first but then secondary as well - so that they have an awareness of those issues

45

That would be across all subjects, not a subject, agriculture as such, but as part of the learning material for all subjects. That's a very

5 long-term plan. We're in the process of trying to raise \$300,000 from our members now to start that off and that would, hopefully, be ongoing; it will be reviewed in 3 years but hopefully it would be in perpetuity. So that would be a very positive thing to do when it gets the money.

THE COMMISSIONER: Bill?

[Staff retention]

10 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** You might not be in a position to answer this question, and indeed, Chris and Barbara might already know the answer to it, but what's in my mind was triggered off by something you said before about the absolute significance of the good primary school education. The difficulty of retaining teachers in rural areas: is there a
15 difference between retaining secondary school teachers and primary school teachers? Are any more likely to want to leave more quickly?

20 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** I couldn't give you an absolute answer. I think from what I know, though, particularly in the very small schools, which usually are primary schools, because you have smaller stand-alone primary schools, the professional isolation and the need to carry across several years of schooling, that all impacts on them and that it makes it more difficult for them to stay. I think it's quite often young teachers,
25 who go into those areas, that find it really difficult because they haven't got the base just to go, or the experience, I suppose, to handle that. So, I would say intuitively, that it probably affects primary more and certainly the concerns that I've received from our members relate more to primary than secondary.

30 **COMMISSIONER JONAS:** Thanks.

[Rural Summit]

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** The last question is looking forward. Next week is the Rural Summit: do you know whether, either your association or the National Federation is going along with particular education objectives to get out of that process?

40 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** I know both are going, both will be represented; and I would certainly hope that education will be high on both - I know it will be on ours because I'm writing the notes for John Cobb. So, yes; and I suppose, particularly, things like federal focus; so, youth allowance and some of those things. I would imagine NFF would have a similar view because education is high on their agenda, as well as ours. So, yes; I think there will be (indistinct)

45

THE COMMISSIONER: That's good. I know that education is one of the theme areas but I'm just concerned that it may take a very segregated,

economic focus without looking at the whole situation and what is happening in country communities.

5 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** It will be interesting to see what it does do because - I guess you're looking at children but - education for us goes up to the training and education of adults; and because that's a separate but quite a difficult issue to get better business skills for farmers. So, I guess, that at the summit it will be a really broad range of issues that they'll look at under education; but I'm sure that we'll be
10 pushing these sorts of issues.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks, Dee.

15 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** Thank you.

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Where are you actually based?

20 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** In Bligh Street; we have 12 area managers out in the field but we're in Sydney, close to Macquarie Street.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Where you've got to be.

25 **MS WILKES-BOSE:** Yes, that's right, unfortunately. Thank you, and if you do have any other questions, don't hesitate to give me a call.

THE COMMISSIONER: Yes; and thanks for the submission copy too.

30

[3.25 pm]

THE COMMISSIONER: Teachers' Federation; come on up.

35 **MR IRVING:** I'm John Irving; I'm a country organiser based in Wagga Wagga.

40 **MR PATTERSON:** I'm Wayne Patterson; not Wendy Curry. Wendy had a family emergency, a son in the hospital, so I've been called in at the last moment. I am also a country organiser based in Bathurst.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much, Wayne and John. Would you like to make whatever submissions you want, or comments you want, and then we'll ask you a few questions.

45 **MR IRVING:** Yes, sure; we've just got a copy of some of the questions that you might like to answer, so we'll be able to answer as many of those as we possibly can.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay.

[Teacher shortage]

5 **MR IRVING:** I suppose there's a couple of areas, one in particular that
should really have been in a bit more detail, and that's the concern we
have about the permanent teacher shortage that various groups have
been warning the various governments about for maybe the last
10 decade. It's certainly our view that you can have all the best curriculum,
all the best programs, all the best technology, the best training and
development, etcetera, etcetera, but we really do need to make sure
we've got a more than adequate supply of fully trained and qualified
15 teachers. I mean, teachers, at the end of the day, we believe, are the
backbone of the system and those other areas are there to support
those teachers, and in that way, give the kids in schools the best
opportunity we possibly can.

We've been saying to governments now probably, as I said, for
about a decade, that we are concerned, from the information that we've
20 been getting, about the impending teacher shortage. The last number
of salary campaigns - we've called it our Salary and Status campaign
because we're particularly concerned to make sure that we do attract
young, qualified, trained people into the system. We note that the
vice-chancellors have also been saying that for a number of years; the
25 deans of education have been saying that to governments for a number
of years; and we've been told, even recently - I read, since our
document was put together, that the deans of education have said that
by the year 2004, if current trends continue there may be a third
shortfall of primary teachers across New South Wales and a fifth
30 shortfall of secondary teachers across New South Wales. So that has
real concerns for us.

It's not just an issue that's a state government or a New South
Wales issue, I suppose: it seems that it's going to be a western world
35 phenomenon. Once upon a time, we used to poach teachers from the
Unites States or from Britain or from Canada; certainly in the 60s, a lot
of American and Canadian teachers. Poach is probably not the right
word I should have used there. I notice in the press recently, too, that
Queensland are going to spend a quarter of a million dollars
40 advertising in Victoria to get as many Victorian teachers as they can to
teach in the sunny state. So it's not going to be one of those areas that
we can go to other states and get teachers, etcetera.

I spoke recently at a university in Wagga, Charles Sturt Uni,
45 and there were a number of different guest speakers, and the person
who followed me was a person who was there to try and recruit as
many of our students as possible, to go and teach in the United
Kingdom. So, it's one of those areas that is of great concern. I don't

believe that this is just around the corner. I mean, we've been told that when the baby boomers retire in their tens of thousands - and they will - the average age of the teaching service at the moment is about 47-48, I think; so really, by the year 2002, 3, 4, there's going to be a crisis and we are most concerned about that.

The national teacher supply - and it was mentioned in the submission - are already saying, now that there's going to be a short supply of maths, science, industrial arts teachers, and that's certainly the case in a few of the areas where I certainly visit, that problem is only going to double the impact on those areas and rural and isolated schools, we believe.

We've noticed, over the last couple of years, that the most isolated state and the most isolated areas of that state, is where it really started to hit. I know the West Australian teachers had a campaign over in Western Australia in the last couple of years, again, to try and encourage teachers to leave Perth; leave those metropolitan areas; and go out into remote parts of Western Australia. The more isolated state, the more isolated parts of that state, we knew that's where it was going to start and it's now starting to impact even in New South Wales. It's not just around the corner, we believe it's impacting now.

[Specialist staff recruitment]

I'll just give a couple of examples of that. One of the areas that I cover is Griffith. Griffith is by no means the end of the world; it's a substantial community in town size. In fact, I think it's got one of the fastest growth rates for a country town in New South Wales and one of the lowest unemployment rates, at the moment, in New South Wales. Their maths teacher, after many years at Griffith High School, transferred. The principal advertised in every major newspaper across Australia to get a maths head teacher, and got one applicant for that particular position. So those sorts of things really make us start to worry in 1999, when, really, the year 2004 is obviously not that far away.

An industrial arts teacher, again at Griffith High School; they couldn't get an industrial arts teacher, so a senior staffing officer from the department went through some names on the list of casual industrial arts teachers; spoke personally to this particular person who was a casual teacher, industrial arts trained, from Newcastle. There were some emergency staffing procedures put in place; some deals were done. The teacher was flown, paid for by the department, to Griffith; guaranteed at the end of 12 months - and that's coming up at the end of this year - he would be guaranteed a position back to where he basically wanted to go, and that was back to Newcastle; and he'd be paid to fly back to Newcastle; and he'd be also given \$100 every week while he was there, rental assistance.

5 So, I mean, they're the sorts of just 2 anecdotal things from one
school where the shortage, particularly in, as I said, maths, science,
industrial arts. One of our concerns is, obviously, there's a whole range
of reasons why we need to attract, or how to attract young teachers or
10 mature-age teachers into the system. We're finding that, quite frankly,
when kids are leaving school, going to university, doing their degrees,
particularly in that information technology area - the computing, the
maths, the science, the industrial arts areas - they're going off into
private enterprise because that's where there's probably a bit more
money. There's a whole range of issues: money, of course, is one of
them.

[Impacts of teacher shortage]

15 What we're concerned about in all of that, then, is that there
may be pressure down the track if the same number of students, less
teachers: there will be pressure in terms of training qualifications and,
of course, on class sizes; and that's a real worry. I had a meeting with
20 some academics from Charles Sturt University, a couple of months ago,
and with someone there from the Department of School Education, and
they were tossing around a whole lot of ideas about attracting young
teachers and training and development of young teachers, or teachers
at the university; and one throw-away line from the department was on
25 the job training "What we could really do in their 4-year course, is have
them complete that course after 3 and a half years, give them
conditional casual approval, and they could teach for that last part of
the 6 months."

30 Universities have some real concerns about that and so do we.
I mean, if tell students they've got a 4-year course - they already do an
extended prac, which is a full term in term 2, I think it is - and it's a 4-
year course. We just really that the department are now, after years of
being warned by a whole group of people, trying to put people in front
of classrooms that, quite frankly, we don't believe are fully trained, fully
35 qualified; and that's a real concern to us.

40 As I said, class sizes down the track, that's a real worry in your
smaller central school. You already have a problem in central schools
where you may have an English head teacher and you may have a
maths head teacher. The English head teacher would do the English
and would do the history, and maybe some social science; the maths
head teacher would also teach some science and other subjects; but if
we can't get a maths head teacher to go to Griffith High School, we're
going to have some real problems down the track about attracting those
45 sort of people into some of our smaller and larger central schools. So
that's an area that I have particularly of concern. I think Wayne might
want to mention some stuff about the collegiate.

MR PATTERSON: Just to follow up on John: of course, the problem is that it will affect the rural and isolated places first. When there's a shortage of teachers, it doesn't happen in Bathurst and it doesn't happen in Tamworth or in the leafy suburbs of Sydney; it happens in
5 the outlying, smaller towns; probably in the western suburbs of Sydney as well. So that those places that are already disadvantaged are the first to suffer is there is a shortage and the first to experience the sort of compromise solutions to those.

10 **[Dubbo super-school example]**

One concern that I have: I cover the area, not Dubbo but around Dubbo, where the department and the government are planning an amalgamation of schools creating a large high school that will serve the whole city, and we'll no doubt offer an expanded curriculum and
15 expanded opportunities in extracurricular activities, sport, drama, music and so on, which we'll be able to do because it will be a very large school, one of the largest in the state.

My concern is the outlying communities, those that may be 100
20 or 50 kilometres outside of Dubbo. If it is an attractive opportunity in Dubbo, some people will take advantage of it. Now, it will probably be those who are already better off that have the aspirations, the educational background and the family and so on. Outlying schools will lose students and they'll lose their more capable students to the Dubbo
25 Senior College. A small school, a central school, like Dunedoo, for example, where they have only a dozen or so students in the senior years, if they lose 2 or 3 of their more capable students, it has a disproportionate impact. Not only do they lose teaching staff because of that and the number of students they need to offer the more
30 advanced subjects. but those students also play a role in a school, in terms of leadership and competition example and so on.

I would be concerned that there will be a skimming-off effect, where the more affluent, the more ambitious and so on move into
35 Dubbo. The communities around Dubbo will actually be worse off because of something that will, superficially - I mean, it will certainly advantage some but those who are left behind will end up being worse off; the schools will lose staff, they'll lose curriculum because they won't have enough teachers in a particular subject to justify retaining a
40 teacher there. The same towns that have already lost their banks and their doctors will now find that they have a residual high school or a residual central school as well.

[Technology]

45 We advocate technology as one of the ways of remedying that. Those schools have been promised technology but that promise hasn't been clarified in terms of the actual details. If they can't have good technology where they can both receive and initiate curriculum, then

the status of those skills will be enhanced by that. They don't want to just be watching other people on TV. If students in Wellington have the option of watching a class out of Dubbo or being in a class of Dubbo - well, I know which one I would choose for my children. But, if in fact
5 they can say, "Our teachers provide lessons which go to Dubbo," it's not just a one-way street, then it will give people in Wellington a bit more confidence that their own school is a suitable place for their children.

10 The experience so far in technology in rural areas hasn't been entirely positive. It's been used quite a lot, different names like telematics. The teachers are quite enthusiastic but there are basic technical problems, like phone lines and maintenance, which are
15 problems in remote areas. You have to have good telephone lines in order to use the Internet effectively. If it only works some of the time, it's just a cause for frustration for all concerned. That's not likely to happen in a larger centre; it's very common in remote areas. I have schools in my area, within the 100 kilometres of Bathurst, who haven't been able to use the Internet because the phone lines simply don't support that
20 service. So, when we're told technology is the answer, we have some sympathy for that view, but it can be a glib answer that fails when you actually put it to the test.

25 The proposal at Dubbo for an amalgamated school - there are many similar proposals across the state. It could be a model that spreads, so our concerns about the bigger centres growing at the expense of outlying communities is one that we think isn't unique to Dubbo, it could be a model that happens over and over again.

30 John, do you want to talk about some of these questions about the statewide staffing system? There's quite a number of them there.

MR IRVING: Did you want to go through these one at a time?

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes, if you can run through those.

MR IRVING: Okay.

40 **THE COMMISSIONER:** One at a time or collectively, it doesn't matter; whatever you like.

[Staff incentives]

MR IRVING: Okay. Well, I mean, the first one is about incentives.

45 **THE COMMISSIONER:** Yes.

MR IRVING: They're dealt with in the submission. We had used the word "scholarships" - mentioned in terms of incentives. Now, scholarships have existed in the past, and they still do exist. For instance, if there is a shortage of, say, science teachers, scholarships
5 are in place; they're advertised from time to time, depending on the demand or the lack of demand in those particular areas. So scholarships do exist. They certainly existed when I started teaching. I got a telegram back in 1974, living in Sydney, to say, "You will be at Urana Central School on such and such a date," and that's all there
10 was to it. So, look, they exist and I don't see why - we've supported those in the past and would continue to support something like that.

THE COMMISSIONER: The present scheme, though, is a very, very small scheme, compared to the one back in your days.
15

MR IRVING: It's a very small scheme, really, really small scheme, and it's only from time to time and it's only when the department or the government sees that there might be a shortage in a particular area; so, very, very small scheme.
20

Yes, the incentives have been negotiated with the Federation but, the problem with that, one was the locality allowance. Now, the locality allowance was negotiated, originally, 20 - maybe even more than 20 - years ago, and the same with the transfer points. The problem
25 with both of those schemes, there hasn't been an ongoing review, and that's really caused a whole heap of problems. I mean, once upon a time, a little place like Wakool, out the other side of Deniliquin, Barham, used to have a rail service, used to have a doctor, used to have access to other services. Now, with the change in the rural situation over the
30 last 20/25 years, and more recently, those sorts of things don't exist any more.

So there really needs to be every - maybe every year is too much - 2 years, at least, a proper review negotiated between the
35 Federation and the department, to look at both the locality allowance and also the transfer incentive scheme. I mean, the suggestion is there. I mean, I just had a quick word to Wayne before, and we'd be quite happy to look at those suggestions. One of them there, in particular, the rental subsidy; if you teach in Balranald, you would pay almost the
40 same rent that you would pay in Wagga; that was the case, certainly, when I was there a few years ago. It's based on market value, and because of the sheer shortage of residents in a town like Balranald, the market value is very, very high. Then you get a 20% subsidy because it's an isolated school, 6-point school. So, really, yes, 50% or whatever
45 would be a good idea. All of those things there, I don't think we'd have any hassles with looking at any of those suggestions.

MR PATTERSON: Certainly, our members remind us regularly that many of the incentives are about getting out. Those are important because the ability to leave is one of the things that makes people comfortable in accepting an appointment to a town; they know that they won't have to stay there the rest of their life. But many of them do, and it's a good thing that many people do settle down and stay in those places, they provide stability and so on. There's not much in it for those people, a transfer points scheme or an incentive scheme that says that you can move to the coast. If you marry a local person, a local shopkeeper, a farmer or whatever and you stay, you're really providing a very important contribution to that school and that community but many of the incentives are based on the fact that, after a period of years, you'll get an advantageous transfer, and that's of no value to those who stay.

So, people who do stay remind us regularly that we should be looking not just at promising people the opportunity to leave after a number of years but some sort of reward for those who stay. I don't think we have any specific policies as to what those rewards could be but there's a number of them that come to mind.

[Professional support and development]

The other area that I think is important is the professional support. When you go for an interview for a promotion to become a principal or whatever, they look at your CV, they interview, they ask you questions. There's a perception - and, I think, probably a truthful perception - that if you're in a remote and isolated place, you don't have the same opportunities professionally as you do in a larger place. So, rather than it being a career - being recognised, the service that you've given, when it comes to your career, you're actually at a disadvantage compared to someone in Bathurst who has access to a university, who has access to professional organisations that meet in town, who can go to the local library, museum and so on.

A teacher in a remote place, for a one-day in-service course, it costs their school 3 days, because there's 2 days travel. It comes out of the school's budget. They're balancing that need up against others, and it's difficult to justify the cost of a person being away for 3 days, being replaced by a casual teacher; and often there is no casual teacher. To go away for 3 days, knowing that there's no-one to take your class and the children are going to sit in the playground, is a decision that teachers simply don't make; they don't go. So that there is almost a stigma attached in saying, "I've spent the last 10 years in an isolated community," and there are some real disadvantages in there as well.

So, incentives that not just deal with the life issues of housing and so on but also with the professional issues of you're staying up-to-date, getting the in-service, I think, are equally important.

[Relief teachers]

THE COMMISSIONER: Can I just interrupt for a minute on that point, since we're there, Wayne, and that's the relief teachers. When we had
5 the department here this morning, I referred to the fact that we're
always told precisely what you said, and asked whether the department
had considered having permanent relief teachers attached to district
10 offices, who would go out to communities for 3 days, because you can't
find relief teachers generally in most of these communities. The people
from the department said, well, that had been done and was
discontinued 8 or 10 years ago because the relief-teaching provision
was not being used and, in fact, nobody was calling them in, and they
wound up being extra teachers at local schools where they were based,
15 rather than being relief teachers in the country schools around them; so
they scrapped it.

MR PATTERSON: I'd agree with half of that. They certainly - there was
a program. They were called district relief teachers. They were
20 attached to individual schools. When they brought in the finance
system called global budgeting, where each school was largely
responsible for paying their own bills, the base school became liable for
the cost of that teacher if they weren't used. Now, no matter how much
the demand is, people don't get sick on an even basis, some days you
need lots of relief teachers and there will be days when no-one is away.

25
The school that that person is based in would have to pay for
that. That made the system instantly unviable. My belief is that it was
global budgeting that destroyed the concept of district relief teachers,
rather than any lack of demand. I mean, it was a lack of demand but it
30 was the financial impact that that would have on the school on those
odd occasions.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay. Thanks.

35 **MR PATTERSON:** If a person was the responsibility of the district
office, rather than the individual school, I think that would disappear
very quickly. The department has, this year, tried to alleviate some of
those problems on a half-basis. When the Dubbo principals complained
40 that they couldn't afford to send teachers to the meetings about the new
super college, the department recruited teachers in Sydney, brought
them to Dubbo, promised them continuity of employment, so that that
program could go ahead. Individual schools that have made a fuss,
sent faxes to the minister and so on, have found that an additional
45 teacher, a mobile teacher, has been appointed - Wellington probably
could be an example of that - and those who have been quiet haven't
received that.

So, the department has recognised that problem and dealt with it on an ad hoc basis. I would suggest it's all squeaky wheel stuff, that those people who complained loudly have had the problem fixed to some extent, and others haven't.

5

[Staffing]

MR IRVING: One of the questions there was about senior executives in more isolated schools should not be first-timers. Probably, ideally, that would be the case but, I mean, the problem is getting people to apply for some of those positions now is very, very difficult. You know, when you talk to the district superintendent in Deniliquin, he's pulling his hair out trying to get people to put in for the advertised positions in some of those small schools, whether it's a principal or another executive position. Usually they're P6 schools; they've only got the principal, and maybe a casual a couple of days a week. They're just not applying for those positions, so it's very, very difficult. Now, with more incentives, I suppose, or other types of incentives, maybe.

The P6 people, in particular, are concerned because once - okay, young teacher decides, "Okay, I'll have a go at doing the principal of Bunaloo Public School" - the other side of Deniliquin - and they might serve their 3 or the 5 years there. They don't necessarily want to go to another small P6 school, they'd like to go, maybe, to a larger school; but invariably they miss out on those positions because they've been told they haven't had any supervisory skills, etcetera, etcetera. So, a lot of people are now really steering off applying for P6 positions, because they know, at the end of the day, all they're going to get, really, is a transfer to another P6 school, and there aren't many P6 schools at Byron Bay.

30

[Transfer destinations]

That's another point I was going to make that I mentioned about transfers, and it's not the case that all teachers want to do their rural or isolated service and want to go to the coast. I mean, the vast majority of them, the last lot of staffing figures I saw, really were happy to go to Sydney, some coasts, south and north, but a lot of them just want to really go to your Alburys and your Waggas and your Dubbos and your Bathurst and Tamworth and places like that. So, sure, if you can think of some incentives to attract those people to go to Bunaloo, that would be great.

40

[Integration of students with disabilities]

MR PATTERSON: There's another issue on there that's probably worth a mention, and it's a very difficult for one for us, and that is the integration of children with various handicaps. We have difficulty with people who would normally be our political allies over this. We are concerned that students with disabilities are often integrated into mainstream schools without adequate support, or if they receive

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adequate support initially, that is withdrawn after a period of time, leaving both the teacher and the child disadvantaged. It's most extreme in a one-teacher school.

5 I was called by a principal recently to a one-teacher school, where a child, I believe, with cerebral palsy in a wheelchair is currently integrated part-time and the department wants to integrate the student as a full-time student, which is a desirable thing for the student. The question is: how does that happen in a school that only has one adult
10 there most of the time? That child could at any time require assistance, toileting, and so on; there are another 20 students, as young as 5 or even younger, who also need constant supervision. So the principal believes that they simply cannot do the right thing by the school, all the children, and provide that child with what they need.

15 The cost of having a second person there in an isolated community would be quite high; probably have to have travel and so on. Yet, anything short of that would raise a number of problems. So it is a difficult issue. Teachers are very reluctant to say no. They will say
20 no if there's a special school already in the community that is fitted out for children with disabilities - and the proposal is that a child would be integrated into a conventional school with steps, and not having the resources - teachers will sometimes say no, unless we can look after the child to the same standard they're currently getting. Despite the
25 social advantages of integration, we don't believe in that, and that leads to all manner of conflicts within the department and the community.

THE COMMISSIONER: You don't agree with social integration?

30 **MR PATTERSON:** No, we don't disagree but we won't support integration without adequate resources. One view is, you integrate the child first and then use the child to get the resources; or the other one is, you say, "We don't do it until the resources are here." Now, I suppose that's a tactical thing; but teachers, particularly in primary
35 schools, that's what we're usually talking about - when I go and sit in the staff room, the things most commonly raised are problems around integration of a child with special needs, and the teachers feel that they are in a tug of war between doing the right thing by that child and doing the right thing by perhaps 29 others.

40 They have one day a week or a few hours a week of aide support for that particular child, but the rest of the time they're trying to do 2 things at once. The teachers don't believe that they're getting the support. The people in the department, of course, would have a
45 different view.

THE COMMISSIONER: It's one of the major difficulties in country areas, the formulas that provide a few hours a week support from an aide.

5 **MR PATTERSON:** Yes. The argument about what is fair - the department people that I complain to say, "We're very fair; we give everyone their fair share." That is, they cut the pie up and everyone gets their piece. My concept of fairness is that everyone gets what they need, not that everyone gets the same share of what is inadequate.

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[Teacher recruitment]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Has there been any collaboration between the Federation and the department to encourage people to take up teaching as a career? Are there any goals for the year 2010?

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MR PATTERSON: There have been some. We've done some joint advertising; the department, a few years ago, did some useful TV advertising, but it's pretty small. John and I visit universities and talk about teaching in the country as a career; the department does the same sort of thing. I think it's pretty small scale, though.

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MR IRVING: And very few males coming into the system is another issue that may have been brought up before, too. In fact, we've just raised our Federation fees by 33 cents a week so that we can start to publicise the worth of public education and teaching and teachers. That was a very contentious issue because a lot of our members are saying, "Hey, that's the government's role." Government should be supporting public education and promoting the status of the profession etcetera, etcetera; but we know they won't so we've in fact taken that upon ourselves to do that.

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Bob Carr had talked to us about a review to look at lifting the status of the profession. I don't think that has ever come off. That was a promise before the 1995 state election and that hasn't eventuated, so it's a real concern.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: So you have the former Prime Minister talking about Australia being a clever country and you're talking about the serious situation of shortage of teachers. Yet, there's no big campaign to encourage people to enter the profession.

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MR PATTERSON: I would suggest it's just the opposite. The comments by politicians of all parties are critical of schools, of problems of literacy, unemployment and so on. It is a disincentive. If people lose faith in education and in schools, then you wouldn't want to be a teacher. There's always opportunity for some point scoring by politicians about issues like literacy and unemployment and for

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teaching standards and for the golden era when everyone could read and so on. All politicians seem to engage in it.

5 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** And its relationship to the cost on society, with imprisonment rates; you know, people with low educational status comprise a large percentage of people who are incarcerated. We all know that it costs a lot for people not to receive an education.

10 **MR PATTERSON:** That's right, unemployment.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Unemployment.

[Rural social issues]

15 **MR PATTERSON:** One thing that you've reminded me of is a problem that I've noticed - this is anecdotal but I think it's true - the tendency for people to leave the city, that is, people who are disadvantaged, to leave the city to move into rural areas because of the lower cost of living. In smaller places, probably the central coast - my wife works at
20 Sydney, moving into these communities because there's very cheap housing. You can buy a house in Portland, a decent house, for \$50,000, so they move there.

25 I think it's a very wise thing, but the support isn't there. The social workers and the community agencies and so on don't exist. The school is in fact the only social agency in those small places, and the school then tries to play a role that they were never intended to play; that is, they become social workers and employment counsellors
30 etcetera, not just for the children but for the parents as well. I think this is a pressure that teachers in outlying places are going to face more and more.

[Cross-sectoral collaboration]

35 **THE COMMISSIONER:** A question I wanted to ask takes us much more into the realm of ideology. In many of these small country towns, there are 2 schools, 2 school systems, struggling to cope, with varying degrees of success. Yet, it struck me time and time again that there is next to no cooperation between them, whether it's, for example, having
40 shared classes to widen subject choice for kids from Years 9 to 12 - where a 11 and 12 school exists, but they're often 10 and 11 schools; shared use of facilities of different kinds, whether it's sporting fields or libraries or computer rooms and so forth. One of the comments that I've received when I've said that is that one of the issues is an industrial
45 Federation's actual view, as distinct from the alleged view?

MR PATTERSON: That's probably true. We believe that the obligation of government is to provide a safety net for everyone, that they need to provide at least one good school in every town, rather than 2 poor schools. If the relationship is perceived by the public system as being parasitic, that is, "They're taking our students and then coming back to use our library; they're taking our students and coming back to use our science lab, and we're losing funds and staffing because of that," it's not welcomed.

10 Teachers would resent it if students leave their school, their school loses staffing, resources and so on because of that transfer, and then those same students are back at their school taking over part of their facilities as well. So there are some real barriers towards that cooperation.

15 **THE COMMISSIONER:** What about, though, genuine sharing? "We'll run the visual arts option, you run the drama option. We'll provide a gymnasium, you provide a library."

20 **MR IRVING:** To start with, there's a real concern about - you might pick me up on this - the qualifications of some of the teachers in the other system. They aren't necessarily the ones that we have in the state system, and there would be some concerns about that.

25 **THE COMMISSIONER:** I'd be surprised if that was still the case now. That certainly was the case a quarter of a century ago.

MR PATTERSON: Probably not as much as - - -

30 **MR IRVING:** Not as much as it probably used to be, but I think it's an issue. It gets down to an ideological - the Teachers' Federation is the industrially registered union for public school teachers in New South Wales. The Independent Education Union covers teachers in the Catholic system and the systemic system. We work fairly closely together - the 2 unions - on issues. We have our disagreements from time to time. But I think it gets back to more what Wayne said, about resources. It brings out the whole debate about funding of public education and private.

40 **MR PATTERSON:** Particularly at a time when the federal government has a system, the benchmark adjustment scheme, whereby every student that we lose costs us money. It's not a theoretical thing that more funds for private schools mean less for public; it's a bookkeeping reality now. That, while as a percentage is not high, symbolically it has probably caused people to move further apart. We are compelled to cooperate in a number of ways. If you go into country towns, for example, sports, you'll find that St Michael's plays netball with the public school and so on.

5 In vocational education, because of the way that federal
funding is provided, schools are under great pressure to approach
vocational ed cooperatively and you'll find students from the local
Catholic high school and the local high school, both at the local TAFE
college in the same class doing their joint schools TAFE programs. So
it would be wrong to think that there is none of that going on.
Sometimes it is just because of practical reasons, sometimes it's
because government pressure forces it, and the reality is that in small
towns people live next door to each other, know each other and
cooperate informally. They're not all as political as we are.

THE COMMISSIONER: But to go back to the point that there's this
worry about losing dollars because of losing students and to look, as
governments want to do all the time these days, in the good old supply
and demand and the activities of the market. If there were 2 Years 7 to
10 schools - let's take 9 and 10, where options first come in for the
time; in a smallish country town and by cooperating they could increase
the number of options available to the kids in that town by 50%, that
would be an inducement for those parents who are currently sending
their kids out of town to boarding school to stay in town. So there may
in fact be an increase enrolment in both schools, which would bring
more dollars into both of them.

[Bathurst VET example]

MR PATTERSON: Yet, it works both ways. This is a real example. In
vocational education in Bathurst, there is a program where all the
schools work jointly together with the TAFE, to provide vocational
education. When it became known that students from the 2 big-name
private schools in Bathurst in fact were going to be taught by a teacher
from Bathurst High, I have to admit, I asked questions about, who's
paying for this? Are they going to pay for the cost of training a
vocational ed teacher which is something we can offer that they can't?

35 One of the private schools pulled out because of parental
complaints, "We're paying good money, we're paying a lot of money to
send our child to a private school and we're getting a public school
teacher. We could get that for free." The problem - if it is a problem - is
on both sides of the fence.

40 **[Aboriginal schools]**

COMMISSIONER JONAS: Can I follow up the ideological vain, for want
of a better term? Given that you talked about agreeing and supporting
the fundamental right of Aboriginal people to determine their own
affairs and you're supporting the principle of self-determination and
also supporting social justice and human rights under international
covenants, what's the Federation's view about all Aboriginal schools or

Aboriginal-owned schools for Aboriginal students, at least for some students as part of their education?

5 **MR PATTERSON:** We had a debate about that. It has been nearly
10 10 years, I suppose, 8 years, since that occurred because there were
some fairly serious suggestions about that in Sydney. We supported
the concept of Aboriginal schools, that is, schools that would have an
Aboriginal focus, would have Aboriginal teachers, not schools that
would have an absolutely selective enrolment. What we were prepared
15 to support - I think this was the proposition - would be that the schools
would clearly advertise what they had to offer but that others in the
community could also attend that so that they would be substantially
Aboriginal schools.

15 I think if it was actually race-based, it would raise concerns
about issues like the discrimination laws in the States and apartheid
and so on. But we did support the concept of schools that were run by
Aboriginal people for Aboriginal students.

20 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Which is the case in the Northern Territory
and there's primary school at Yipirinya which is for Aboriginal children,
and there's IAD, which is the adult education scheme.

25 **MR PATTERSON:** There are also schools that are de facto Aboriginal
schools because of the communities that they serve. I think we'd be
quite sympathetic to any of their requests.

30 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** Let me take this a little bit further now. At
some of the places we've been there are Aboriginal enrolments of, in
primary schools, maybe 80 to 90%.

THE COMMISSIONER: Whereas Central is 97%.

35 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** 97%. It seems to me that it's strange to
have this large population, almost complete population of one group,
one social group, who are bound by the curriculum and by the focus of
non-Indigenous schooling or education. I think that would be the perfect
opportunity. Certainly if I was there I'd think it was a great time for the
community to be more involved in the school and to adapt their
40 curricula and to work out education for what, "These are our children,
they're going to stay in this community, there are not a lot of
employment opportunities. How are we going to think about what kind
of education we provide for them to live a good quality and useful life in
our community?" Have you thought about those issues.

45 **MR PATTERSON:** I think we'd be sympathetic to that.

MR IRVING: We'd be sympathetic to that.

5 **MR PATTERSON:** We certainly have concerns about anything that would close off options. Hopefully the students at any school would have the opportunity to do the school certificate and the HSC, that they wouldn't have a curriculum that didn't provide them the opportunities that others had; but I wouldn't think that people in the community would want that either, so I wouldn't expect that that would be a problem.

10 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** There are models for that, I mean, there are Jewish schools - - -

MR PATTERSON: Sure.

15 **THE CO-COMMISSIONER:** - - - where children are brought up in the faith but do the regular academic school work and then they - - -

20 **MR PATTERSON:** We initiated many years ago - I'm trying to think of the name for it - a special-fitness appointments before we had local selection as a way of choosing principals - when people became principals by going through a process of an inspection that went onto a list, so it was a mixture of merit and seniority - we initiated a scheme where schools with high Aboriginal populations could in fact bypass that in order to select people that they thought were more suitable for their community. That process is not as important any more because
25 we have a lot more community involvement generally.

30 We're probably not very happy with that, but we've always seen the need for, particularly in Aboriginal communities, for some flexibility within a fairly bureaucratic system to make sure that you had a person there who wanted to be there and that the community would want to have there.

35 **MR IRVING:** We're very keen to ensure that we have a statewide system and we've got guarantees from government - funding, resources, the whole bit - for a statewide system, but we certainly would be interested in flexibility in certain areas of that system. We want to provide the basic, we want to provide the core curriculum, etcetera, etcetera, to every kid across New South Wales, but we want
40 flexibility as well so that we do have your Aboriginal community school or you have in fact a lot of the central schools - basically in some of the places you would have visited are really community schools. That's the call to those little communities and more flexibility in terms of what they can do.

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But we want to maintain the statewide system and we've been very concerned after the heady Metherall days that to break the system up and have, you know, that school over there run by that board and

you have another school over here - it opens up all sorts of problems for transfers and the whole bit. We want a statewide system with core guarantees from government, but also flexibility for the individual schools.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: The Health Department of New South Wales has done that, so there's a model for that. For example, the Health Department contracts an Aboriginal organisation now to run the hospital and health facility at Wilcannia. There's an awful of control now by the community to do that; so it's a contracting basis where you have some agreed outcomes.

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MR PATTERSON: I would think that the primary would be different from secondary in that, too. Secondary is very much driven by the Board of Studies by the examination system, and to not offer a child in a school the opportunity to compete in that system would be doing them a disservice, but that means that the flexibility that you might have in a primary school where you can cater more to the community disappears more as you get closer and closer to that Higher School Certificate. I'm not sure what the answer is there.

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THE COMMISSIONER: The alternative, of course, is to deprive all young people of New South Wales of the annual ritual of child abuse that we call the Higher School Certificate.

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MR PATTERSON: That's exactly right.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: But the evidence that we've been shown this afternoon clearly shows that Aboriginal education hasn't improved or success or retention for Aboriginal students hasn't improved in the last, maybe, 15 to 20 years; so maybe it's time now to think about what other ways we should be educating our own children.

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MR IRVING: I agree. I think in a number of areas, quite frankly, the department and the government pay lip service to certain areas and I think Aboriginal education is a classic example. Every district has a certain consultant for this and a consultant for that, or in some cases there's a consultant for 2 districts. The Aboriginal consultants have to work over 4 districts, 4 districts. That's, in most cases, 160 schools, 40 schools in each district. That's just outrageous. Aboriginal education is meant to be part of the overall curriculum of every school in New South Wales, you know, supposed to try and cover all of those sorts of things. Those people - it's tokenism, it's lip service, as far as I'm concerned.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Are you telling us it doesn't happen?

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MR IRVING: It doesn't happen.

[Aboriginal Studies]

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: What about the policies of the department? Aboriginal Studies isn't mandatory?

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MR IRVING: Yes, but when you've got the Aboriginal consultant who's got a huge area to cover, where you've got, say, your English consultant or your maths consultant, one for every district; 40 of them right across New South Wales; you must only have, if there's one for 4 districts, that's going to be 10 Aboriginal consultants right across New South Wales. Their workload is just enormous; and there's very little training and development for teachers as it is, let alone the training and development for classroom teacher and the Aboriginal consultants.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: How is the Federation, then, trying to address the poor outcomes for Aboriginal students in education? Are there special measures in place?

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MR IRVING: We have a full-time Aboriginal organiser, coordinator, and I know Pam does her best. We've guaranteed a couple of positions on our executive now that are guaranteed to Aboriginal people, so I suppose we're coming to grips with all of that. I agree, I don't think we've done enough in the past to try and push governments, but we're slowly getting there.

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MR PATTERSON: I don't believe we know what the answers are, frankly. I think we've demonstrated goodwill in terms of being prepared to spend money and make certain that Aboriginal people are involved in conferences and are members of the executive and so on, but in terms of having the answers, I don't think we do have them.

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THE CO-COMMISSIONER: But you would support Aboriginal leaders who are concerned about this issue to have dialogue at ministerial level or Premier's level?

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MR IRVING: Yes, absolutely.

MR PATTERSON: Absolutely.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: You would see that as an issue, acknowledge it and so forth?

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MR PATTERSON: Certainly.

MR IRVING: Certainly, yes.

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[Dubbo super-school example]

MR PATTERSON: One issue in my area - I mentioned earlier the concerns about the large super schools, the collegiate models, having an impact on outlying communities. The one that is about to happen in country New South Wales is Dubbo. It involves 3 schools - Dubbo High, Dubbo South and Dalroy. Dalroy is far and away the school that has the majority of Aboriginal students. One concern that many people in Dubbo have expressed is that when the students at Dalroy reach Year 9 and will then have to move to the large - they haven't named it yet - senior school, the 10, 11 and 12 school, there's already a significant drop-off rate at the end of Year 10.

Rather than locking them in to keep them in to Year 12, they may well in fact leave at the end of Year 9 because of the radical change that it would mean to leave a school in their own community, which is physically across the river and so on, to move into a very big institution that will involve a university and TAFE college and a large high school. One fear would be that the Aboriginal students in Dalroy might leave at Year 9 and that retention could actually be moved downward. Lots of people nod - when this is talked about at the table - as "we can't let that happen".

I haven't heard many suggestions for how it can be prevented. Of course, no-one knows for certain that that would happen, but I think it's a legitimate fear.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: I know the kids from western New South Wales that go to Dalroy see it as their school.

MR PATTERSON: Yes; and they may not have the same view about - - -

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Yes, the other one.

THE COMMISSIONER: Okay, thank you both very much.

MR PATTERSON: Thank you.

MR IRVING: Thank you.

THE CO-COMMISSIONER: Thank you from me.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thank you for coming in and thanks for your help, too, in adjusting the timetable for this evening. It meant you didn't have to wait all that long and it was also just to deal fairly with others.

THE COMMISSIONER: Thanks very much.

AT 4.21 PM THE MATTER WAS ADJOURNED ACCORDINGLY