



Education and Health Standing Committee

**A child who is healthy, attends school,
and is able to read will have better educational outcomes**

**Report No. 18
November 2012**

Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Western Australia

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Education and Health Standing Committee

A child who is healthy, attends school, and is able to read will have better educational outcomes

Report No. 18

Presented by

Dr Janet Woollard, MLA

Laid on the Table of the Legislative Assembly on 15 November 2012

Chair's Foreword

This Report marks the sixth and final Report of the Education and Health Standing Committee's *Inquiry into improving educational outcomes for Western Australians of all ages*. This Report's principal focus is on three core issues, namely: attendance, literacy and primary health care, all of which are fundamental to achieving improved long term educational outcomes.

Attendance

In 2012 there were 267,268 children enrolled in the public school system in Western Australia.

Table F.2: Enrolments in Western Australian Schools 2010-2012¹

Year	Public Schools	Private Schools	Community Kindergartens	Independent Pre-schools	Total
2010	256,912	134,069	1,203	266	392,450
2011	259,940	137,170	1,073	202	398,385
2012	267,266	139,780	863	226	408,135

In 2009, the Auditor General (AG) conducted a performance examination to provide Parliament with an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Education Department's attendance policy and strategies. In reviewing the position as it relates to improved attendance since that date, the Committee notes that, despite a number of initiatives, the figures remain largely unchanged.

A student's educational risk is determined by their level of school attendance. For a student to have minimal or no educational risk, he or she must have a school attendance of between 90 and 100%.² The level of educational risk is illustrated in the following table.

¹ Sourced from Department of Education, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 2011, p. ii. Note: Figures are the first semester cohort, including half cohort. Also Department of Education, *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 2012, p122, available at <http://det.wa.edu.au/about/detcms/education/department-homepage/annual-report/department-of-education-annual-report-.en?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-13313350> Accessed 8 October 2012.

² Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19.

Table F 1 Educational risk through non-attendance

Period of Absence (years 1 to 10)	Rate of attendance	Equivalent Schooling Missed	Level of educational risk
Average of 5 days a term	90%	1 year	Classified as regular attendance
1 day a week	80%	2 years	Indicated risk
1.5 days a week	70%	3 years	Moderate risk
2 days a week	60%	4 years	Moderate risk
3 days a week	40%	6 years	Severe risk
5 weeks a term	50%	5 years	Severe risk

In 2011 the Department of Education, assessed the numbers of students at educational risk in Western Australia in Government schools as follows:

Table F.3 Children and Young People in years 1 to 12 at Educational Risk from Non-Attendance, based on 2011 percentages³

Level of Educational Risk	Advised percentage of Students	In 2012 the percentage equalled the following Number of students
Regular attendance (90 – 100 per cent)	71.98	192,379
At indicated risk (80 – 89 per cent)	17.51	46,798
At moderate risk (60 – 79 per cent)	7.1	18,976
At severe risk (0 – 59 per cent)	3.41	9,113
	100%	267,266

From these tables it is apparent that:

- 46,798 children were absent from school 1 day a week which adds up to 1 year of missed schooling,

³ Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p 3–4.

- 18,976 children were absent from school 1.5 to 2 days a week which adds up to 2 to 3 years of missed schooling,
- 9,113 children were absent three or more days a week which adds up to 5 or six years of missed schooling.

The Committee found that the Department of Education's response to these significant numbers of 'at risk' students, is often fragmented and ill defined. For example, the Committee was concerned to learn that:

- the Department does not take steps to aggregate and analyse data centrally to more effectively address absenteeism;
- school principals appear to carry the overwhelming responsibility for securing improved attendance with little input from the Education Department's Central Office. Additionally, there are no formal protocols or processes for sharing strategies that work between schools across the state; and
- there is inadequate funding for other, non-government strategies, such as the Passport program and the breakfast program that are widely acknowledged for their efficacy in improving attendance.

Yet the Department accepts that attendance is core to the success of a student –since, as one American school superintendent put it, 'You can't teach them if they're not there.'⁴

Literacy

Underpinning all education outcomes is an individual's literacy and numeracy. Literacy is demonstrably important not only for positive educational outcomes, but for personal development, and social and economic outcomes in life. However, Western Australia is falling behind other countries in two respects:

1. The proportion of students at the high end of achievement is declining; and
2. Australia (and by extension Western Australia) has too long a 'tail' of underperformance, which is concentrated amongst students from low socio-economic families and Indigenous students.⁵

⁴ Meria Carstarphen, school superintendent in St. Paul, Available at <http://www.startribune.com/printarticle/?id=19410204> Accessed on 26 October 2012

⁵ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Importance of literacy and numeracy' Available

Taken as a whole, just over half (54%) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years are assessed as having the reading skills needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. A critical factor in achieving good literacy levels is widely seen to relate to the teaching methods adopted by the teacher and the school.

This Report documents the need to ensure high quality, systematic phonic (speech sounding) words are given priority in the teaching of literacy in schools. Children need to learn how to decode words and sentences (read) and encode (write/spell) using phonics, if the failings in literacy are to be addressed.

Despite some movement towards phonics as a pedagogy in Western Australian schools, the Committee was told that the pedagogical culture in many schools remains biased towards a 'whole language' approach, where students learn to recognise words. A number of teachers lack an understanding of language, and have little if any knowledge how to teach using phonics.

The Report recognises the critical importance of parental involvement in their child's education. In addition there is a recognised need for teacher's to hold high expectations for learning outcomes, if literacy standards are to improve.

Health

This Report lays out in chapters 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 the issues facing our children in relation to primary health care.

In particular, the Committee is shocked at the third world prevalence of Otitis Media in some communities. The World Health Organization advises that a prevalence rate of chronic Otitis Media greater than 4% indicates a massive public health problem which needs urgent attention in targeted populations.⁶ Yet, in Western Australia the prevalence of Otitis Media has been found to range from 40% to 70% in some Indigenous communities.⁷ Highlighting the low priority given to primary health care, by the government, is the significant, generally acknowledged and ongoing shortfall in funding for school health nurses.

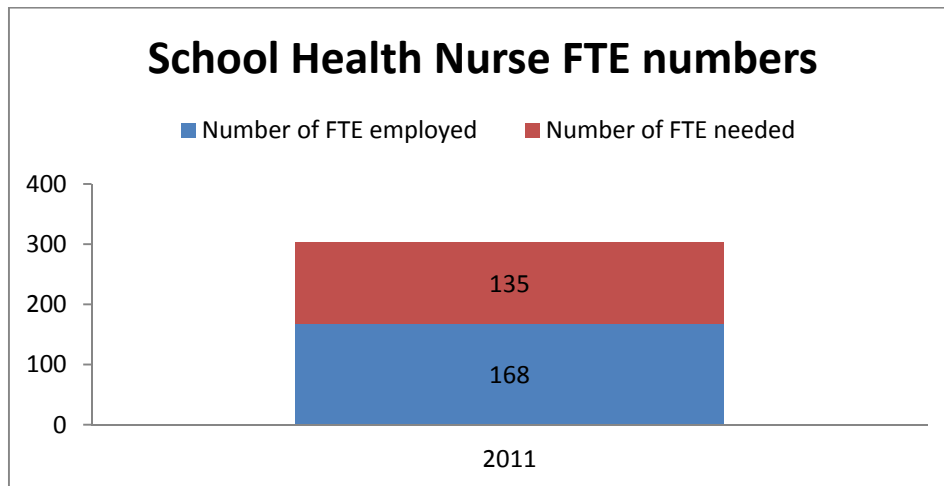
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/LiteracyandNumeracyPilotProjects/Pages/ImportanceLandN.aspx> Accessed 23 July 2012

⁶ 'Prevention of Hearing Impairment from Chronic Otitis Media, Report of a WHO/CIBA Foundation Workshop, London, 19-21 November 1996, World Health Organization, 14 April 2000, WHO/PDH/98.4, No. 2 in the series Strategies for Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Impairment, available at http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/en/chronic_otitis_media.pdf accessed 25 September 2012, p2.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4704.0 - The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2005*, Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/>. Accessed on 25 September 2012.

The shortfall in the numbers of school health nurses required, based on the Department of Health's own figures, is graphically illustrated in figure F.4:

Figure F 4: Number of FTE for school health nurses currently as against the number required.



The difference between the recommended ratio and the existing ratio is approximately 80%.

The Western Australian State Government's inadequate response to the funding needs of primary health care, not least in the regional areas of the state, is outlined across several dimensions of the health portfolio in this report.

The result of the current inadequacy of funding for critical and deficient primary health services will be reflected in the damaged educational and life outcomes for many children in our community far into the future.

A proposed initiative canvassed in this Report is that of a mobile surgical bus. This initiative recognises that in the Kimberley and the Pilbara the only hospitals that have operating suites and equipment that enable them to do anything more than minor surgery are in Broome, Derby and Kununurra. The mobile surgical bus initiative is being developed by a number of specialists and agencies. It would have a multi-functional purpose including the treatment of hearing adenoid surgery, cataract surgery and dental health problems.

I would like to thank my fellow committee members Peter Watson, MLA (Deputy Chair), Dr Graham Jacobs, MLA, Peter Abetz MLA and Lisa Baker MLA for their collective contributions to this Report.

I would also like to thank very much Dr Brian Gordon, our Principal Research Officer and Lucy Roberts who worked hard in the compilation of this Report and in the

sourcing and analysing of the research evidence. Your enthusiasm and demonstrated commitment to this Inquiry has been one of its hallmarks and is greatly appreciated.

Janet Woollard

DR JANET WOOLLARD MLA
CHAIR

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Executive Summary

This is the sixth and final report in the *Inquiry into Improving Educational Outcomes for Western Australians of All Ages*. The Committee has previously tabled five reports for this inquiry.

This Report documents three core areas to help improve educational outcomes for Western Australian children, namely:

- The development of improved strategies to address poor attendance;
- Focusing on and improving literacy levels from an early age; and
- Improving the health of preschool and school children.

The Committee found through the course of the Inquiry a strong correlation between the social determinants of health and educational outcomes.

Attendance

Attendance is crucial to students' academic and social achievements. In particular, regular non-attendance can disrupt a child's education and risk their academic and life-long achievements. Despite the compulsory nature of school education, school attendance in public schools was found in 2009 by the WA Auditor General to be 'steadily declining'. This Report identifies some of the underlying causes and some of the more effective responses to the problem of non-attendance.

Literacy

Literacy or lack of literacy has received significant media comment in recent months. This has been in response to concern expressed by educational academia and many sectors of Australian business. In reviewing literacy, this Report examines the prevailing pedagogy, teacher training, teacher expectations and parental engagement.

Health

Five of the six reports that have made up this inquiry have highlighted the domino effect of health and social problems leading to children in some regional communities suffering serious hearing loss, being malnourished and getting insufficient sleep. These factors, in turn, contribute to poor attendance and low levels of engagement in class, impeding effective learning outcomes.

One major treatable health issue that affects educational outcomes is that of Otitis Media. The World Health Organization advises that a prevalence rate of *chronic* Otitis Media greater than 4% indicates a massive public health problem which needs urgent attention in targeted populations.

In Western Australia, the prevalence of Otitis Media has been found to range from 40% to 70% in Indigenous communities. This percentage, according to research published in the Medical Journal of Australia, is one of the highest rates in the world. When inadequately treated, the educational impacts on the individual are life-long.

According to Access Economics, in 2008 the direct health costs of Otitis Media to the state of Western Australia were in excess of \$16 million for that year alone.⁸

The Committee is alarmed that after so many parliamentary and departmental reports highlighting the severity of this issue, there remains an inadequate and fragmented response by the WA Government to Otitis Media. The statistics for Otitis Media in WA are worse than those in some third world countries.

School Health Nurses

Chapter thirteen revisits the issue of the significant shortfall in school health nurses. By the Department of Health's estimates the shortfall was considered to be 135 positions in 2007. Child Health and School Health services are under stress.

The Department of Health advised that school health nurse numbers over the past 15 years were as follows:

Table ES.1: Number of students and School Health Nurses in Western Australia, 1996-2011⁹

Year	Number of students	Number of school health nurses employed	Ratio of nurses to students
1996	340,288	111	1:3066
2001	363,476	129	1:2818
2006	370,325	129	1:2871
2011	397,110	168	1:2364

However, the recommended ratio is:

- In Primary schools **1:1187**.
- In Secondary schools **1:1025**.¹⁰

8 Access Economics, *The cost burden of Otitis Media in Australia*, p110. Available at: <https://www.deloitteaccessconomics.com.au/uploads/File/The%20cost%20burden%20of%20otitis%20media%20in%20Australia.pdf>. Accessed on 8 October 2012.

9 Table derived from supplementary information provided to the Committee by Mr Kim Snowball, Director General, Department of Health, *Letter*, 5 September 2012.

Despite the further pressure on services likely to occur as the Department of Education implements its policy to place Year 7 students in secondary schools from 2015, there is no immediate prospect for increased numbers of school health nurses.

In summary, educational outcomes could be significantly enhanced by implementing proactive health and educational processes. A modest increase in the health and education budget would see long term economic benefits to the individual, the community and the state.

Ministerial Response

In accordance with Standing Order 277(1) of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly, the Education and Health Standing Committee directs that the Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Education, Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Child Protection, and Minister for Community Services report to the Assembly as to the action, if any, proposed to be taken by the Government with respect to the recommendations of the Committee.

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1

Page 19

It is not clear how the Department of Education can develop policies to target non-attendance issues when the data is up to 18 months old.

Finding 2

Page 20

The Department of Education does not centrally collect data on the reasons for school non-attendance. This means that the Department is unable to make the best use of information gathered by schools and to develop policies and strategies based on up-to-date information.

Recommendation 1

Page 20

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education direct the Education Department to collect and present to Parliament in its Annual Report, commencing 2013, the statistics for school non-attendance in WA with a uniform coding for causes of non-attendance. These statistics should additionally break the data down as follows:

Percentage and number of children with regular attendance:

90 – 100% attendance

Percentage and number of children at indicated risk:

80 – 89% attendance

Percentage and number of children at moderate risk:

60 – 79% attendance

Percentage and number of children at severe risk:

0 – 59% attendance

Finding 3

Page 31

There are a number of reasons why the Department of Education tends not to pursue the available legislative mechanisms to address student non-attendance:

- the complexity of the legal instruments;
- penalties available may exacerbate problems families face; and
- imposing a penalty on parents may not improve school attendance.

Finding 4**Page 36**

With the advent of the *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* strategy, the future use of Attendance Panels is uncertain.

Finding 5**Page 39**

The media campaign targeting attendance, 'It All Starts at School', did not lead to improved attendance and its efficacy is questionable.

Recommendation 2**Page 42**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education provide additional funding in the 2013-2014 budget so that whenever a child falls below 90% school attendance the school principal refers the child (and their family) to an attendance officer.

Finding 6**Page 48**

The Attendance Improvement Measure strategy has seen some solid improvements in attendance in some schools, although experience is mixed.

Recommendation 3**Page 48**

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education be funded to undertake an evaluation of the Attendance Improvement Measure in 2013/14.

Recommendation 4**Page 51**

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Education that a formalised policy of escalated levels of intervention be applied for children at educational risk as follows:

- **Level 1** The Committee believes school principals should have responsibility for children for whom the absentee data show the child is missing no more than half a day or less a week (90 -100% attendance).
- **Level 2** Where attendance levels are 80 – 90%, that is to say a child is at indicative educational risk and missing up to one full day a week, an attendance officer should be required to liaise with the school and case manage the child in close collaboration with the school principal. The attendance officer should report back on children at indicated risk to the regional office. As outlined in this Report, 80-90% attendance equates to 2 years of missed schooling.
- **Level 3** Where attendance levels are 60-79% that is to say the child is in the moderate educational risk category, a senior Regional attendance officer should be involved to support the child, the family and the school principal.
- **Level 4** Attendance support should be as outlined in Level 3. In addition where the attendance level falls below 60% and the child is therefore at severe educational risk, if the Department for Child Protection is not already involved, its engagement

should be required and the resources of the Department of Education's central office applied to remedy the situation.

Finding 7

Page 61

Parents taking children on holidays during school term is a significant cause of school non-attendance. Family holidays are taken:

- to suit fly-in, fly-out work rosters;
- to visit relatives overseas, often for extended periods; and
- to take advantage of cheaper fares during the term.

Finding 8

Page 63

There is a very strong link between parent and carer engagement with their children's education and school attendance.

Recommendation 5

Page 63

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education identifies and funds, in the 2013-14 budget, successful parent and carer engagement strategies that support their children's education and school attendance.

Finding 9

Page 69

The social determinants of children's health and wellbeing directly impact their ability to go to school and to learn. These include factors such as family structure, community cohesion, parenting skills, and parents' work schedules.

Finding 10

Page 71

Children from non-Western backgrounds can find it difficult to cope with school for a number of reasons, including but not limited to:

- language barriers
- racism, including from teachers
- trauma; and
- trying to balance two culturally different worlds

Finding 11

Page 74

Children moving from one school to another is a significant cause of school non-attendance both in the Perth metropolitan area and in the regions, because children generally do not leave one school and turn up immediately at another; there can be two months break in between.

Finding 12**Page 75**

The Department for Child Protection needs to be more involved in the issue of school non-attendance.

Recommendation 6**Page 76**

Where the attendance level falls below 60% which places the child at severe educational risk, the Department for Child Protection's engagement should be required. The Committee recommends to the Minister for Child Protection that the Department for Child Protection be funded adequately to allow it to manage any increased workload generated by increasing the Department's attention to school non-attendance

Finding 13**Page 79**

Curriculum and Re-Engagement in Education Schools (CARE schools) provide education for at-risk students who have been unable to access or have significant difficulty in accessing mainstream education. Most of the students come from government schools, not independent schools.

Finding 14**Page 81**

CARE Schools provide significant support and assistance for young people at risk who would otherwise fall completely outside the mainstream education system. The need for such support is considerably greater than in a mainstream school.

Finding 15**Page 81**

CARE Schools deliver specialised curricula focused on literacy and numeracy, provide individual education plans for each student and support students dealing with underlying problems and challenges.

Finding 16**Page 83**

Recognising the significant number of students at educational risk, estimated at over 11,000, there should be significant investment into the CARE school system to increase its capacity to provide services to the most vulnerable students in the community.

Recommendation 7**Page 83**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education makes funding available in the 2013 budget to allow CARE schools to expand to meet the needs of Western Australian students at risk, particularly in the regions.

Finding 17**Page 84**

CARE schools are required to renew their registration every year. According to the Charter of the CARE Schools, this requirement to re-register every year was initially imposed as a condition for additional funding in 2003.

Recommendation 8**Page 84**

The Committee recommends that the annual registration on CARE schools period be increased to two or more years.

Recommendation 9**Page 85**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education recognises the special circumstances and clientele of CARE schools and, therefore, the need for flexibility in the application of curriculum requirements, commencing in the 2013 school year.

Finding 18**Page 94**

The Committee finds that the Clontarf Foundation program is effective in engaging some indigenous boys in schooling. As such, it is an effective mechanism for improving the educational outcomes for indigenous boys.

Recommendation 10**Page 94**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education provides sufficient funding in the 2013 budget for the Clontarf Foundation to expand its program to every school in Western Australia that would benefit from it, particularly those within the metropolitan area.

Finding 19**Page 99**

The non-government attendance strategy known as the 'passport program' builds relationship between the parents and the school working together in a partnership. Its identified outcomes include:

- Increased parental involvement;
- Improved attendance; and
- Improved NAPLAN results.

Recommendation 11**Page 99**

The Committee recommends that, in the 2013-14 budget, the Minister for Education increases the funding of the 'Passport Program' to significantly extend the program to those schools which believe it would make a difference.

Finding 20**Page 103**

The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project, a project made up of a coalition of partners from the Aboriginal community, State and Federal governments, private enterprise, the

Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation and Karratha SHS has had a significant and positive impact on the educational outcomes of Indigenous students in the Karratha region.

Finding 21

Page 113

The complexity of the problem of school non-attendance means that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Finding 22

Page 113

Schools are in the best position to know what their needs are and to develop appropriate programs and strategies. However, it is important that information is shared throughout the education community so that teachers, principals, attendance officers and other staff can learn from each other.

Recommendation 12

Page 114

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education ensures that schools receive adequate funding to allow them to develop school attendance initiatives tailored specifically to each school's needs, in the 2013-14 budget.

Finding 23

Page 122

In the years 2000 – 2009 Australia's reading scores have deteriorated sharply when measured internationally both against the OECD average and more particularly against the educational outcomes of East Asia.

Finding 24

Page 125

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey found that only just over half (54%) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years were assessed as having the prose literacy skills needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. Results were similar for document literacy with 53% and numeracy with 47% achieving this level.

Finding 25

Page 133

Literacy is multi-dimensional, engaging both the spoken language and reading and writing. There is a growing consensus that high quality, systematic, synthetic phonic work taught discretely and consistently should be the prime approach to establishing word recognition. This should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum that takes into account speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Finding 26

Page 135

The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in the United Kingdom, with its focus on phonics, brought about a significant improvement in literacy standards. Building on the NLS the 'Independent review of the teaching of early reading', known as the 'Rose Report', highlighted the need for high quality, systematic phonic work to be taught discretely within a language rich curriculum. It recommended that phonic work be given

appropriate priority in the teaching of beginner readers and in decisions about training and professional development.

Finding 27

Page 139

The seven year longitudinal study in Clackmannshire, Scotland, demonstrated the value of synthetic phonics as a part of early reading education.

Recommendation 13

Page 139

The Committee strongly recommends to the Minister for Education that funding is made available in the 2013-2014 budget to ensure high quality, systematic phonic work is given priority in the teaching of literacy in schools with children learning how to decode (to read) and encode (to write/spell) print using phonics.

Finding 28

Page 144

Despite some movement towards phonics as a pedagogy, the Committee was told that the pedagogical culture in many schools remains biased towards 'whole language'. A number of teachers lack an understanding of language, and have little if any knowledge of phonics or how to teach it.

Finding 29

Page 145

Professional development aimed at changing or improving a teacher's pedagogic practice is best embedded when teachers can see for themselves the improved student educational outcomes that arise from the changes made.

Finding 30

Page 147

School leaders require knowledge about literacy to be able to achieve school-wide improvement. Initiatives such as 'Principals as Literacy Leaders' can play an important role in creating a sustainable strategy to address the literacy and leadership development challenge in lower SES environs.

Finding 31

Page 151

There is broad agreement at many levels that a teacher's expectations of a student are a critical factor in the student's success. Low expectations are variously described as: 'the most corrosive thing in education', 'soft bigotry' and 'collusion in failure'.

Finding 32

Page 152

Parental engagement in a child's education is a factor in literacy and broader educational outcomes regardless of socio-economic status. Similarly, parental disengagement is a strong negative factor.

Finding 33**Page 156**

All teachers (primary, middle and secondary) should be assisted to ensure that literacy is taught in all areas of the curriculum. For this reason, teachers need to be aware of the interface between a specific domain and its literacies.

Recommendation 14**Page 156**

In 2013 the Minister for Education develop and introduce a policy that supports a whole-school (primary, middle and secondary) approach to teaching literacy using a common language and core strategies across the curriculum.

Finding 34**Page 159**

Mentoring and constructive feedback, based on classroom observations, could be improved in many Western Australian schools, where teaching is generally seen as a private activity. Internationally, collaborative strategies are seen to be a key factor in the comparative success of the school.

Recommendation 15**Page 159**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education introduces a policy that mandates the creation of a strong culture of teacher collaboration, mentoring, and feedback for all teachers.

Finding 35**Page 163**

Children from a language poor background are at-risk for developing academic difficulties. Without effective intervention, the majority of these students will exit high school with academic skills well below grade level.

Finding 36**Page 166**

There is a relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and low academic performance. However, low academic performance does not have to be an inevitable consequence. International research on effective schools, together with case studies in Australia, demonstrate that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are capable of high levels of school performance, given the right educational conditions.

Finding 37**Page 175**

In some Aboriginal communities, because of poor social determinants, 40% of Aboriginal children are carrying bacteria such as atypical haemophilus influenzae, streptococcus pneumoniae, pneumococcus and Moraxella catarrhalis as compared to non-Aboriginal children.

Additionally, skin disease is a major problem including scabies leading to streptococcus infections resulting in rheumatic heart disease and potentially kidney failure.

Finding 38**Page 179**

There is an inadequacy of health resources in the regions which, when combined with a dispersed population, adversely affects primary health services in affected areas.

Finding 39**Page 181**

Currently, there is a complex, fragmented and often uncoordinated delivery system that operates across primary health care. This has implications for the services individuals and families receive. The current system would benefit from better integration and a stronger emphasis on team-based care arrangements.

Recommendation 16**Page 181**

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Health commissions an external review of the way resources are used for child health across all agencies and report on this to Parliament by June 2014. This review should consider formal collaboration between agencies, and disciplines within agencies.

Finding 40**Page 187**

Otitis Media, or middle ear infection, is endemic in many regional communities, with 96% of children affected in some schools. Aboriginal children in these communities have some of the highest internationally published prevalence rates for Otitis Media in the world.

Finding 41**Page 188**

Indigenous children under three are at the highest risk of ear disease. This is also the most critical development period for speech and language development, which underpins communication, learning, and social and emotional development. The impact of early hearing problems can have long term developmental consequences for children.

Finding 42**Page 189**

The weight of evidence is that the impact of Otitis Media on educational outcomes 'may be very great indeed, particularly for children from remote areas where English is a second language.' An additional issue is that when prevalent in a classroom, its impact is felt by all other students as the teacher's time is taken up providing individualised support and managing behaviour.

Finding 43**Page 193**

While sound amplification systems are not a sufficient solution to the impact of hearing issues on educational outcomes for Indigenous children, they are a palliative and useful tool.

Recommendation 17**Page 193**

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Education that funding be made available in the 2013-2014 budget to facilitate sound amplification systems to be installed in all classrooms across the state where 4% or more of the children have been reported as suffering from Otitis Media, and that it be departmental policy for teachers to use them where installed.

Finding 44**Page 195**

Earlier evaluation of the swimming pool project in the mid 2000s indicated that the regular use of the facility reduced the rate of Otitis Media as well as skin sores. Recently, community witnesses stated that the swimming pools 'haven't really worked' to improve Otitis Media. This may be because there are several structural barriers in many communities to the use of the swimming pool. These include:

- the pools aren't open for long enough hours;
- parents cannot always afford, or are disinclined to pay, the entry fee, and
- parents are unable or do not wish to supervise their children at the pool.

Recommendation 18**Page 195**

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Health commission an updated evaluation of the use and benefit of swimming pools in country communities. This evaluation would, inter alia, address the barriers to the use of swimming pools.

Finding 45**Page 197**

While responding to the social determinants of health that lead to Otitis Media is complex, Otitis Media is responsive to treatment by way of antibiotics or minimally invasive surgery.

Finding 46**Page 199**

Despite the fact that government and non-government organisations play a role in addressing ear health problems, there is no overarching coordination of services. Following up a child diagnosed with ear issues, in some parts of this state, relies on the Principal of the school having a suitable system in place.

Finding 47**Page 204**

There is support, within and outside government, for the concept of a mobile surgical bus with a theatre and pre-op rooms—the anaesthetic area – for regional areas of the state. The bus would have a multi-functional purpose including the treatment of hearing and dental health problems.

Recommendation 19**Page 204**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health funds a mobile surgical bus and its support team in the 2013-14 budget; with the value of the mobile surgical bus to be evaluated biannually.

Finding 48**Page 206**

The National body 'FirstVoice' survey found that:

- 'WA Health, when compared to the other states, is the poorest performer in several areas of Ear Health such as newborn hearing screening, deafness detection rates and waitlist times for hearing assessments and surgical hearing restoration such as cochlear implantation.
- WA has also the lowest numbers of bilateral cochlear implantation for deaf children, despite the internationally well recognized fact that treatment of deaf children consists of bilateral cochlear implantation.'

Recommendation 20**Page 206**

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Health that funding be made available in the 2013-14 budget for a State Ear Centre at Fiona Stanley Hospital. This data base would then be made accessible to relevant health sector specialists.

Finding 49**Page 207**

There is an identified need for an electronic ear health database to facilitate the clinical work of the many diverse government and non-government practitioners in the ear health sector. These specialists are often dealing with transient or mobile populations who do not have health records with them.

Recommendation 21**Page 207**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health direct the Department of Health in 2013-14 to develop a cross-organisational database to direct policy, planning and investment in treating ear health. The data base would then be accessible for use by appropriate health professionals.

Finding 50**Page 210**

Five per cent of our population is estimated to suffer from a lack of food security, with 40% of those at a severe level. Indigenous populations may be more vulnerable to food insecurity, with 30% of Indigenous adults reporting being worried about going without food.

Recommendation 22**Page 218**

The Committee recommends that the Treasurer make provision in the 2013-14 budget for 1 piece of fresh or dried fruit to be available to children attending schools in remote areas, where families and children are not able to purchase fruit on a daily basis.

Finding 51**Page 226**

The provision of breakfast and emergency meals programs in schools in many areas of the state has increased, as the consequential benefits of improved student behaviour, attendance and engagement have become recognised. These programs lead to improved nutrition and enhanced educational outcomes.

Recommendation 23**Page 226**

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Education that money is allocated in the 2013-14 budget to schools that choose to run breakfast and emergency meals programs in lower socio economic areas of the state. Such funding would cover a predetermined percentage of expenditure, based on need, incurred by a qualifying school.

Finding 52**Page 230**

Australian research has established that 14% of children and adolescents score in the clinical range for mental health problems; that is approximately one in seven children.

Finding 53**Page 233**

Mothers with significant depression interact with their infants in a different way. They have less positive emotions expressed and they experience the baby in a more negative way.

Finding 54**Page 235**

Children who have a disorganised attachment struggle in the classroom. They struggle with attention and concentration, and their ability to settle themselves emotionally to be available for learning. They have struggles with their peers and they have more conflictual relationships.

Finding 55**Page 236**

There is a wide body of evidence that demonstrates the linkage between trauma experienced as a child, brain development and subsequent mental health.

Finding 56**Page 238**

It is estimated that nearly a quarter of children living in Australian households have at least one parent with a mental illness. The number of children affected is thought to be within the vicinity of one million.

It is thought that 25–50% of children of a parent with a mental illness will experience a psychological disorder compared to 10-20% of children with a parent without a mental illness.

Recommendation 24

Page 238

The Committee supports Recommendation 22 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia, which states that:

To meet the mental health needs of children and young people of parents with a mental illness, the Mental Health Commission in partnership with relevant agencies identify and support a strategic and coordinated approach to services and programs.

Finding 57

Page 241

Best Beginnings, a program run in partnership between the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Health, effectively addresses issues of parenting with families with specific risk factors. It has been positively evaluated on three occasions and is considered best practice.

Finding 58

Page 244

The formal evaluation of Kidsmatter, a collaborative national initiative, found that it is associated with statistically and practically significant improvements in students' measured mental health, in terms of both reduced mental health difficulties and increased mental health strengths.

Recommendation 25

Page 244

Having regard to the significant numbers of children affected by mental health issues in the Western Australian school system, the Committee recommends that the Treasurer and the Minister for Health increase the funding in the 2013-14 budget to Best Beginnings and Kidsmatter to ensure that this most vulnerable section of the community is more widely assisted.

Finding 59

Page 246

There is a significant shortage of mental health services for children in Western Australia. These shortages fall into two categories. The first is a shortage of lower-level mental health services, designed to intervene prior to the child/family reaching a point of crisis and the second is the general absence of child and adolescent mental health specialists in Western Australia. Based on UK data, the ratio should be 21 FTE of community-based Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinicians, per 100 000 of population. Queensland has 14 FTE per 100 000 general population for community-based CAMHS clinicians and Western Australia has 7 FTE.

Recommendation 26**Page 246**

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Mental Health that the State government provides funding in its 2013/14 budget to increase the ratio of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinicians to 21 FTE per 100,000 over the next 2 years.

Finding 60**Page 249**

Despite the attention of the government being drawn to the significant shortage of school health nurses in the public education sector over the past five years, there remains a current shortfall of at least 135 school health nurses, and the system is stated as being under stress and likely to further deteriorate. The current difference between the recommended workload and the existing workload is of the order of 100%.

Recommendation 27**Page 249**

The Committee draws the attention of the Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Health to the shortage of school health nurses and recommends an increase in the Department of Health's 2013/14 budget to fund 135 additional FTE across the State.

Finding 61**Page 255**

Recognising the massive public health problem Otitis Media is in our Aboriginal communities where the prevalence of Otitis Media ranges from 40% to 70% of the population; together with research that suggests that 'Indigenous children living in remote communities have the highest internationally published prevalence rates for Otitis Media', the Minister for Health's response to the Committee's Report 14 is inadequate.

Recommendation 28**Page 255**

The Committee strongly recommends that the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education develop a Memorandum of Understanding by June 2013 with the purpose of preventing, identifying and ensuring prompt treatment for middle ear infections in children.

This Memorandum will facilitate the examination of all children in primary school by an appropriately qualified school or community nurse. Such examinations should be more frequent in the North West during the wet season.

A protocol should be developed to allow the school or community health nurse to examine a child at the beginning of the week and where a middle ear infection is present, to treat ear infections during school hours with antibiotics either kept at school or purchased from the local pharmacy.

The protocol could include:

- the school health nurses calling a medical practitioner to prescribe the antibiotic;
- amendments being made to the Poisons Act to allow school health nurses who are competent in ear assessments to prescribe and treat children with antibiotics;
- Telemetry linked to a medical specialist where there is any doubt as to the presence of an ear infection or as considered necessary.

When a child misses school who is being treated for an ear infection, the memorandum is to detail who the school health nurse is to notify to ensure another appropriately qualified person is able to visit the child at home to ensure the antibiotics are administered.

When the school health nurse has treated a child on two consecutive occasions for an ear infection the child is to be referred to the Ear Nose and Throat Specialist.

Finding 62

Page 261

Schools Plus funding to secure the provision of support required to access and participate in educational programs, is restricted to 'eligible' students in the public school system.

Finding 63

Page 264

Despite CARE schools taking on marginalised youth with high support needs, even when individual students have previously qualified for Schools Plus funding, that funding does not carry across to the CARE school when a student transfers to that school.

Recommendation 29

Page 264

The Committee strongly recommends that the Department of Education amend the portability criteria of Schools Plus funding by June 2013 to enable students to remain eligible for funding when they transfer from a public school to a Curriculum and Re-engagement in Education School.

Finding 64

Page 265

There is a demonstrable inequity of financial support for children with disabilities in the education system. The level of support available in the private sector is significantly less than that available in the public sector due to scarce resources.

Recommendation 30

Page 265

The Committee recommends the Minister for Education reassess the portability of Schools Plus funding for children with a disability by June 2013 to ensure equity of support for disabled children irrespective of whether they are in the public or independent school systems.

Recommendation 31**Page 270**

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education seek funding in the 2013-14 budget to conduct a 6 month review of the provision and accessibility of educational opportunities for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Western Australia, to consider increased support for home schooling and the value of a dedicated school for children with ASD.

Finding 65**Page 272**

Based on research, it is thought that 10% of students are gifted. This means that based on 2011 figures, there were in the order of 38,371 gifted students in Western Australian schools, of which 23,638 attended public schools.

Finding 66**Page 274**

Gifted students have different learning needs in the same way that students with other learning needs do. Underachievement is widespread amongst gifted students, but the reasons for it are not well understood.

Finding 67**Page 277**

Differentiation of the curriculum to suit the needs of gifted students is an added challenge for teachers, who may already be managing a number of students with different learning needs within the classroom.

Finding 68**Page 281**

The Committee finds that the education of gifted and talented students in Western Australia merits further inquiry and investment.

Recommendation 32**Page 281**

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Education investigates the adequacy of current educational opportunities for gifted students in the public education system in Western Australia, with a view to expanding programs that cater for gifted students over the next five years.

Finding 69**Page 299**

The provision of hostel and boarding accommodation for school students in regional and remote towns is a priority for many community members.

Recommendation 33**Page 299**

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Education investigate the need for increased student boarding facilities in regional and remote communities. Such an inquiry should consult with the affected communities to develop a plan to enable more children to have access to boarding facilities closer to their home communities.

Finding 70**Page 300**

Parental engagement and good parenting skills are vital to good educational outcomes. Through submissions and briefings, community members in Western Australia are calling on the government to provide parenting programs for families and communities in need. The Committee finds that an investment in parenting programs is likely to result in an improvement in educational outcomes.

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Recommendation 34**Page 301**

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Community Services that, in 2013, the number of parenting programs run in Western Australia be increased with improved accessibility.

Chapter 1

Preamble

This is the sixth and final report in the *Inquiry into Improving Educational Outcomes for Western Australians of All Ages*. The Committee has previously tabled five reports for this inquiry:

- Report 12: Inquiry into Improving Educational Outcomes for Western Australians of All Ages, (tabled 3 November 2011);
- Report 13: Child Health – Child Development: the first 3 years, (tabled 1 March 2012);
- Report 14: Report on key learnings from the Committee research trip 11-17 March 2012, (tabled 21 June 2012);
- Report 15: Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: the invisible disability, (tabled 20 September 2012); and
- Report 16: The role of ICT in Western Australian Education: Living and Working in a Digital World, (tabled 27 September 2012).

Due to the time constraints imposed on this Inquiry, this Report is largely confined to reviewing three key factors, namely: attendance, literacy and health issues, as they affect educational outcomes in Western Australia.

Challenges and Opportunities in Education

The benefits of education to individuals, families and the community are generally accepted. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states that 'equitable access to quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and supports the broad educational and social needs of families'.¹¹

The WA Department of Education recognises this on its website, stating 'a strong public education system is the cornerstone of every successful society'.¹²

11 OECD, 'Early childhood Education and Care', OECD Work on Education 2012–2013, OECD, p1.

12 Department of Education, *Discovering a World of Opportunities*, nd, np. Available at: <http://www.det.wa.gov.au>. Accessed on 24 July 2012.

Chapter 1

The Director General of the Department of Education (the Department) echoes this in the Department's Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2012–2015, calling for education to be valued 'as a powerful driver for future success and fulfilment'.¹³

On graduating from school, young people need to be 'confident about taking their places in the world, and to be active citizens who contribute to society in many different ways'.¹⁴

There are a number of significant challenges faced by the Department of Education in Western Australia. These include:

- The size of the state, with its sparsely spread population in regional and remote areas;
- The competing demands of and pressures from the rapidly expanding resource sector; and
- Changing demographics in the state, including a rapidly growing population.

This report is written in the context of both the significant demographic and geographical challenges and the opportunities that face Western Australia and its education system.

The report aims to identify why the government needs to focus on attendance, literacy and health to enable every Western Australian child to get the best possible education they can.

In addition, the report reviews a number of other issues that were raised by witnesses and members of the community during the course of the inquiry.

13 Department of Education, *Excellence and Equity. Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2012–2015*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2012, p1.

14 Department of Education, *Excellence and Equity. Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2012–2015*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2012, p1.

Chapter 2

The 2009 Auditor General Report on Student Attendance

In 2009, the Auditor General (AG) conducted a performance examination to provide Parliament with an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Education Department's attendance policy and strategies. The report 'Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools' was critical yet provided constructive recommendations to the Government to improve the management of non-attendance in public schools.¹⁵

A brief summary of the Report's Findings and Recommendations is included here as a context for this Report's chapters on attendance.

The Auditor General stated:

A good education gives a child key life skills, opens up career and economic opportunities and helps them participate in their community. Education can also be a powerful tool in overcoming social exclusion and disadvantage.

A large and growing number of children are at risk of missing out on those skills and opportunities because they do not go to school regularly.¹⁶

The problems associated with attendance are not new. In the overview to his report the Auditor General (AG) stated 'The Department of Education and Training needs to become more engaged in the development of good attendance policy and strategies and in monitoring results.'¹⁷

In the executive summary, the AG said:

- A child's academic achievement is at risk if they regularly miss more than half a day of school a week; [20 days/school year]

15 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009

16 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009 p4.

17 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009 p4.

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- Poor educational outcomes can affect student's work skills and their ability to participate in the workforce. It can also affect their level of participation in the community.
- In Western Australia, a child must attend school from the beginning of the year in which they turn six years and six months until the end of the year in which they turn 17.
- Of the more than 177,000 students in Years 1 to 10 in WA's public schools in 2008, almost 49 000 (28%) are at educational risk because they are not attending school regularly.¹⁸

Key findings of the Auditor General's report

The key findings of the Auditor General's report are reproduced in Figure 2.1 below:

Figure 2.1: Key Findings from the 2009 Auditor General's report:¹⁹

- *School attendance is steadily declining. Between 2000 and 2008 average attendance in primary schools fell from 94.5 per cent to 92.6 % and from 90.7 per cent to 88.0 per cent in secondary schools.*
- *Almost three quarters of public students attend school regularly (over 90 per cent of the time).*
- *The number of students at educational risk due to poor attendance rose six per cent in 2008 to nearly 49 000.*
- *Poor school attendance is a significant problem among Indigenous and non-Indigenous students:*
 - *The greatest number of students at educational risk due to poor attendance are non-Indigenous children in metropolitan school.*
 - *A high proportion of Indigenous students have low level of attendance, making them over twice as likely to be at educational risk. Achieving adequate levels of education is one of the key contributors to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.*
- *Attendance drops significantly as students progress through secondary school so that by Year 10 only 53 per cent of students attend regularly.*
- *DET has a strategy and policy to manage attendance and its approach works for students who are occasionally absent but not for those who are persistently absent.*
- *Few schools have improved attendance over the past three years.*
- *DET's attendance policy and strategies are not based on a good understanding of the major causes for why students do not go to school. Unless strategies address the causes school attendance will not improve.*
- *Schools and districts do not have clear guidance on how and when to respond to*

18 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009 p6.

19 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009 p6,7.

poor attendance so they may not provide the right response at the right time.

- *DET rarely uses its last resort options of attendance panels and prosecutions.*
- *Successful strategies developed by schools or districts are not captured and replicated, so DET does not know which interventions are effective and could be used more widely.*
- *Attendance is not consistently used to monitor schools' performance nor to inform DET, so a potential indicator of poor academic achievement is not utilised. On any given day in 2008, some 15,500 (8.7 per cent) students were absent from school.*
- *Poor attendance wastes educational services as students who are away from school miss out on the lessons delivered. Persistent non-attendees also need additional services to catch up. Schools met one third of the attendance targets that they set themselves*
- *A lack of guidance on the different levels of non-attendance which should trigger increased action leads to inconsistency in when and how schools and districts respond to non-attendance. As a result students may not get the support they need when they need it.*
- *DET has not given attendance the same priority as other indicator of educational risk. However, it is evident since the commencement of this examination that attendance has started to receive greater attention.*
- *DET's approach does not address common causes and risk factors so the potential to drive state-wide initiatives or to tackle specific groups of students is lost.*
- *Districts and schools are not coping well with the numbers of students at risk.*
- *District offices and schools do not have the information systems they need to do their job effectively. For instance, district offices have to contact schools to get timely information on individual and school attendance.*
- *DET has improved its processes to locate children who stop coming to school, but schools do not always follow these processes*
- *Addressing the causes of poor attendance sometimes needs the involvement of other agencies, but schools and districts lack clear guidance on when and how to engage these agencies.*
- *Information for DET's annual attendance audit is not timely or widely available and hence is not used as effectively as it might for managing performance and trends.*
- *DET does not consistently use attendance to monitor schools' performance or to inform management.²⁰*

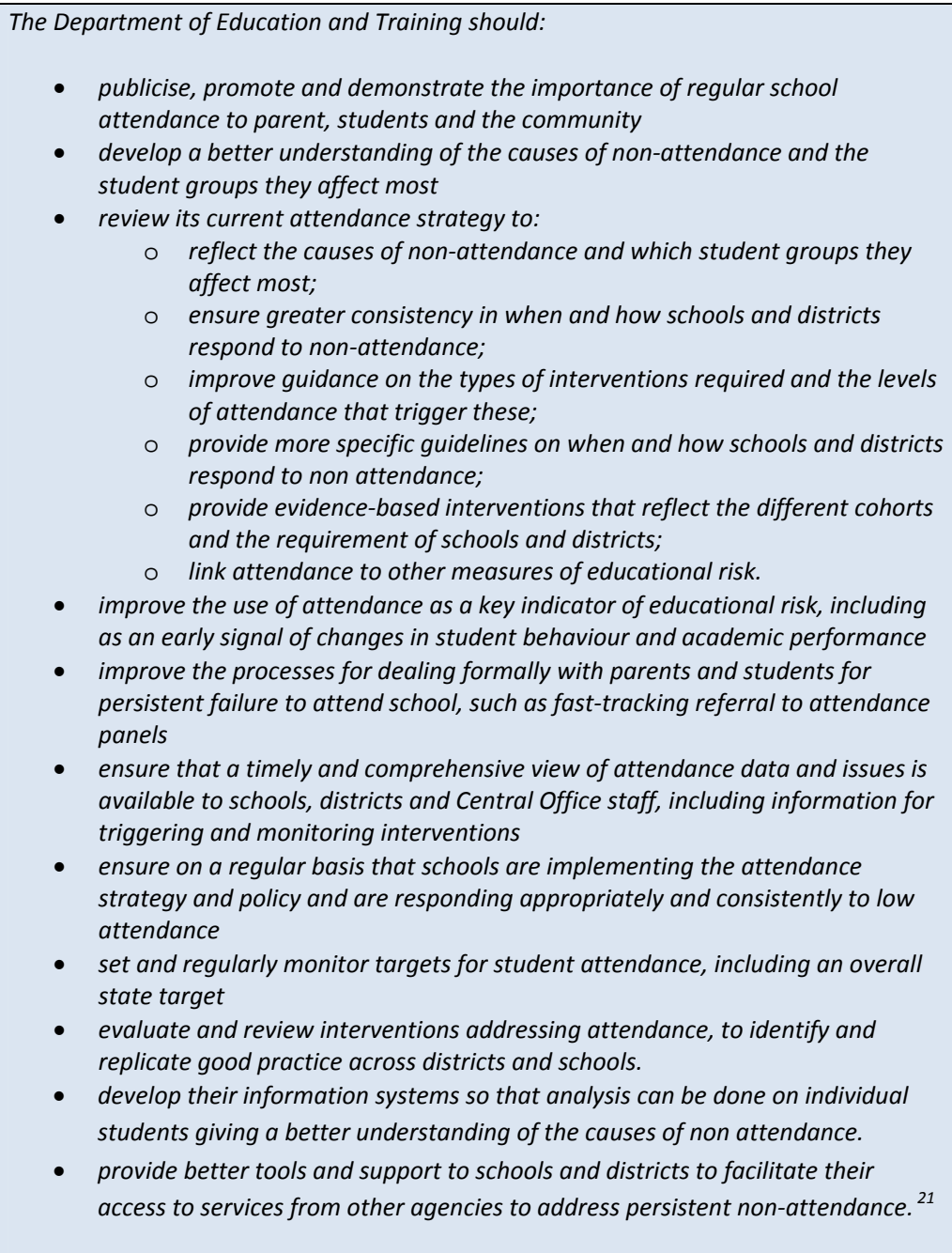
20 Auditor General Western Australia, Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009 p6,7.

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Key recommendations of the Auditor General's report

The key recommendations of the Auditor General's report are provided in Figure 2.2 below:

Figure 2.2 Key Recommendations from the 2009 Auditor General's Report



21 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009 p7,8.

Selected comments from the AG's report include:

- Students who are regularly absent are also less likely to fully participate socially or in the workforce and can face increased physical risks, long-term unemployment and involvement with the justice system.²²
- Non-Indigenous students comprised 81% of all students deemed at educational risk in 2008.²³
- Due to the low proportion of Indigenous students in the whole student population, a high proportion of Indigenous students are more than twice as likely to be at some level of educational risk.²⁴
- Sixty-three per cent of Indigenous students were considered to be at educational risk caused by non-attendance, with 20% considered to be at severe risk.²⁵
- A full day's attendance is at least four hours, with two of those in the morning and two in the afternoon. For example, if a school has an attendance rate of 91.3%, this means that on any given day 8.7% of students were absent.²⁶

In the 2009 report, the Auditor General noted that the Department's management information systems did not allow it to 'fully understand and monitor student attendance and its relationship to other indicators of educational risk'.²⁷

This meant, for example, that the Department of Education could not 'easily match a student's attendance rate with their academic performance or information on any behavioural issues'.²⁸ At that time, the Department of Education advised that

22 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p9.

23 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p.18.

24 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p18.

25 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p18.

26 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p15.

27 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p27.

28 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p27.

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scheduled upgrades to its database ‘should allow real time monitoring of attendance data’.²⁹

The audit also found that the Department of Education and Training’s (DET), as it was then known, ‘current approach to attendance works for the majority of students who are occasionally absent, but DET has not been successful in addressing persistent non-attendance’.³⁰

The Auditor General noted that the increase in the number of students with below 90% attendance was a sign that the Department’s attendance strategies and policies had not been successful.³¹

The report recommended that the Department of Education ‘develop a better understanding of the causes of non-attendance and the student groups they affect most’.³²

Figure 2.3, below, shows where the then current strategies and policies were not successfully addressing poor attendance.

Figure 2.3: Outcomes of Department of Education’s Incremental Non-attendance Strategy³³

	Attendance indicator	Current response	Outcomes for 2008
☑	Regular Attendance	School documents and monitors daily absences	Desired outcome achieved for 72per cent of students
↓	Attendance drops below 90per cent	School intervenes to restore attendance	Not working at most schools. More than 90per cent of schools have not managed to consistently improve attendance in the past two years.
↓	Attendance continues below 90per cent	School formally refers to district office	Not working. District office case loads are often so high they cannot contribute what is needed
↓	Poor attendance continues	Convene attendance panel	Not working. Seldom used and ineffective

29 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p27.

30 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p25. Note: DET is now the Department of Education. Training now falls under the portfolio of the Department of Training and Workforce Development.

31 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p25.

32 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p7.

33 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p25.

↓	Attendance not resolved	Prosecute parents	<i>Not used</i>
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The Committee would like to congratulate the Auditor General (AG) for the excellent report presented to Parliament in 2009 into student attendance.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Legislative Assembly has recently reviewed the Department of Education's responses to the Auditor General's Report. PAC will table a twelve page overview of its findings in the term of the current Parliament.

As the following chapters demonstrate, non-attendance is still prevalent in WA schools, meaning children are not getting an equitable start to life.

Chapter 3

Data on School Attendance

You can't teach them if they're not there.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People argues that 'regular school attendance is important for the achievement of numeracy and literacy standards, and for the development of a range of other skills'.³⁴

For children to benefit from formal education they need to attend school regularly. As the Director General of the Department of Education stated at a hearing, 'it is absolutely critical to students' progress and success that they are in school'.³⁵

Students' academic and social achievements are related to their school attendance and education. Regular non-attendance is highly likely to cause significant disruption to a child's education and thus risk their academic and life-long achievements. There is still a major problem with non-attendance in public schools in Western Australia (WA) and the government have been aware of this problem for several years.

The Director General, Department of Education told the Committee that while 'the attendance of children at school is centrally a responsibility of parents',³⁶ the Department of Education has a 'mutual obligation around attendance'.³⁷ Parents have an obligation to ensure their children attend school, and the Department's 'obligation is to ensure that children want to be there and that when they are, they are well schooled'.^{38 39}

Education is compulsory in Western Australia from the beginning of the year in which a child turns six and a half, through until the end of the year in which a student turns 17, or until they satisfy the minimum requirements for graduation from secondary school.

34 Submission No. 5 from Commissioner for Children and Young People, 7 December 2011, p5.

35 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

36 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p2.

37 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

38 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p. 2.

39 Department of Education, *Better attendance: Brighter futures*, Western Australia, 2011.

Chapter 3

The majority of school education in Western Australia is delivered in the public school system, although there are a significant number of enrolments in private schools.

In 2011, the education system in Western Australia enrolled 398,385 students. Of these, 65.5% were enrolled in the public education system, and 34.5% were in the private school system.⁴⁰

Table 3.1: Enrolments in Western Australian Schools 2010-2012⁴¹

Year	Public Schools	Private Schools	Community Kindergartens	Independent Pre-schools	Total
2010	256,912	134,069	1,203	266	392,450
2011	259,940	137,170	1,073	202	398,385
2012	267,266	139,780	863	226	408,135

Division 6 of the *School Education Act 1999* (WA), (the SE Act), provides for home education, and in mid-semester 2011 there were 1,806 students registered for home education.⁴²

As detailed in this Committee's report no 13: *Child Health – Child Development: the first 3 years*, Western Australia's population has been growing rapidly. In 2010, Western Australia had a 2.2 % population growth rate, the fastest of all States and Territories in Australia for the fourth consecutive year.⁴³

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

- At 30 June 2010, there were 538,963 children and young people 0 to 17 years of age in WA, representing nearly one quarter (23.5%) of the state's population.⁴⁴
- Within the next 45 years the number of children and young people 0 to 17 years in WA will increase by 64%, from 535,160 to 877,778.⁴⁵

40 Department of Education, *Annual Report 2010-11*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 20 September 2011, pi.

41 Sourced from Department of Education, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 2011, p. ii. Note: Figures are the first semester cohort, including half cohort. Also Department of Education, *Annual Report 2011-2012*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 2012, p122, available at <http://det.wa.edu.au/about/detcms/education/department-homepage/annual-report/department-of-education-annual-report-en?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-13313350> Accessed 8 October 2012.

42 Department of Education, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 2011, pi.

43 Submission No 5 from the Commissioner for Children and Young People, December 2011, p3.

44 Australian Bureau of Statistics, available from www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0, accessed 12 December 2011.

45 Australian Bureau of Statistics, available from www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0, accessed 12 December 2011.

The Department of Education's Annual Report 2011-12 identifies population growth and demographic changes as one of the Department's significant issues. In addition, 'a broadening student demographic requires a diverse range of programs and services to ensure all students are provided with education opportunities to be successful.'⁴⁶

Two of the demographic changes highlighted to the Committee in the course of this inquiry were:

- The rapidly growing Aboriginal population, some of whom live in remote communities with small schools. Aboriginal people currently make up 3.4% of the State's population. Almost 40% of Aboriginal people are below 15 years of age and the Aboriginal population of WA is expected to increase by 17% in the next 12 years.⁴⁷ For some of these children, English is not their first language.
- The growth in the number of children of migrants to the state, some of whom may be from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), and who may move to non-metropolitan schools. Karratha and other mining towns were cited as examples of schools with rising numbers of NESB students.⁴⁸

These factors mean that there are a variety of challenges to be overcome in the delivery of education, both for children within the compulsory education period, and for adults seeking further education and training.

The Extent of the Attendance Problem in Western Australia

A student's educational risk is determined by their level of school attendance.

As attendance rates change on a weekly or monthly basis, the Department of Education calculates attendance rates based on individual student attendance for all school days in semester one and semester two.⁴⁹

For a student to have minimal or no educational risk, he or she must have a school attendance of between 90 and 100%.⁵⁰

Regular or persistent absences from school, where attendance drops to below 90%, places a student at educational risk (see Table 3.3).

46 Department of Education, *Annual Report 2011-12*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 19 September 2012, p9.

47 DIA Closing the Gap in Indigenous Life Outcomes Western Australia 2010 Report. <http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/>

48 Pilbara Education Regional Office, Education Department of Western Australia, *Briefing*, Karratha, 12 March 2012.

49 Mr David Axworthy, for Hon. P. Collier, Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 June 2012, p3.

50 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19.

Chapter 3

Less than 90 % school attendance places a child at educational risk

The greater the number of absences, the more severe the educational risk.⁵¹

According to the Department of Education, a student who is absent 'for an average of five days a term between years 1 and 10' would miss approximately one year of school.⁵²

Five days a term between year 1 and year 10 = 1 year missed schooling

The Department of Education advised that, in 2011, 91.14% of students attended school regularly (meaning more than 90% of the time) and that this was 'a marginal increase' on the 91.08% attendance for 2009.⁵³

In February 2012, the Department of Education reported that attendance for 2011 was 90.93%, which was down on the previous year's figure.⁵⁴

In May 2012, the Director General advised the Committee that attendance levels are fairly stable over time, and the Public Accounts Committee received the same advice in August 2012.⁵⁵

In the Committee's view, attendance levels are fairly stable although on a low bench mark. This is evidenced by Ms O'Neill's acknowledgement that 'irregular student attendance is a real problem for us [the department]'.⁵⁶ As the then Minister stated, 'missing school adds up'.⁵⁷

The attendance data gathered in the semester audit includes all types of absences and allows the Department to identify students at educational risk from non-attendance.

Table 3.2 provides attendance data from 2007 to 2011.

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- 51 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19.
- 52 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19.
- 53 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19.
- 54 Hiatt, Bethany, 'School Days Lost to Cheap Trips', *The Western Australian online*, 3 February 2012. Available at: <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/12796461/school-days-lost-to-cheaped-trips/>. Accessed on 25 July 2012.
- 55 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p. 19; Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p2.
- 56 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19.
- 57 Dr E. Constable, (then Minister for Education), *Campaign to Boost School Attendance Focuses on the Positives, not Punishment*, Media Statement, Ministerial Media Statements, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 23 May 2011, p2.

Table 3.2: Statewide Attendance Rate for the Five Years 2007–2011⁵⁸

	2007 per cent	2008 per cent	2009 per cent	2010 per cent	2011 per cent
All students	91.37	90.88	91.08	91.14	90.93
Indigenous students	77.18	76.33	76.59	77.69	77.25
Non-Indigenous students	92.52	92.08	92.27	92.28	92.08

Table 3.3 details the risk associated with various levels of attendance and Table 3.4 shows the equivalent schooling missed for different periods of absence.

Table 3.3: Educational Risk from Non-Attendance⁵⁹

Level of Educational Risk	Percentage Attendance	Days per Week Missed
Regular attendance	90 – 100	half a day or less
At indicated risk	80 – 89	up to one full day
At moderate risk	60 – 79	between one and two days
At severe risk	0 - 59	more than two days

58 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter, 13 March 2012, p 8. Note: This letter was provided to the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislative Assembly

59 Sourced from: Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p16.

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Table 3.4: Absence and Equivalent Schooling Missed⁶⁰

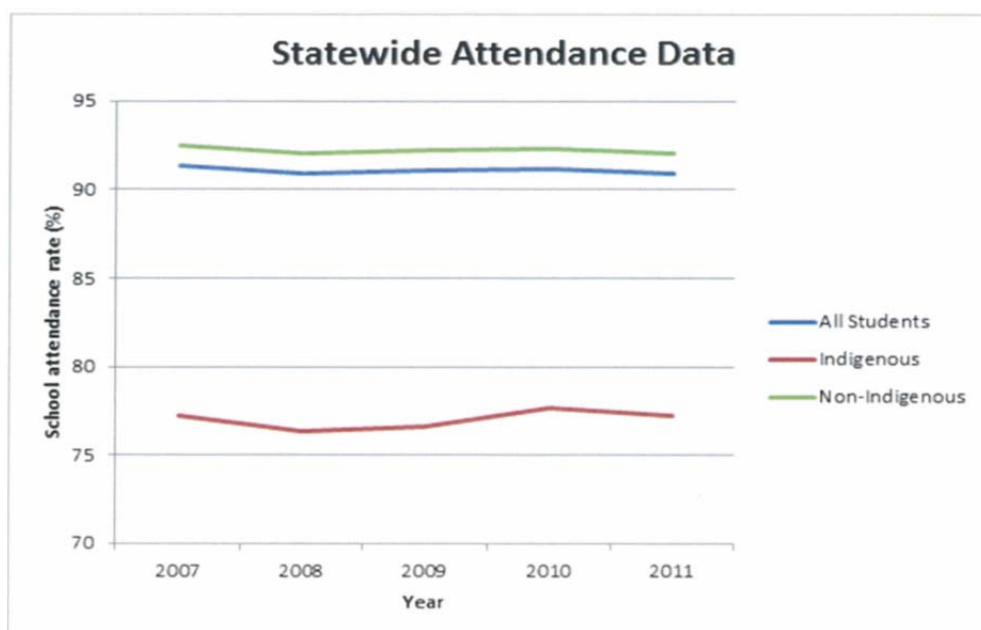
Period of Absence (years 1 to 10)	Equivalent Schooling Missed
Average of 5 days a term	1 year
1 day a week	2 years
1.5 days a week	3 years
2 days a week	4 years
3 days a week	6 years
5 weeks a term	5 years

In 2008, 20% of Indigenous students were considered at severe risk due to attending school less than 60%, compared with 1.5% of non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students in the Kimberley and Pilbara comprised 40% of Indigenous students at severe educational risk.⁶¹

Attendance data for the years 2007 to 2011 is represented graphically in Figure 3.1 below.

60 Dr E. Constable, (then Minister for Education), *Campaign to Boost School Attendance Focuses on the Positives, not Punishment*, Media Statement, Ministerial Media Statements, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 23 May 2011, p2.

61 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p18.

Figure 3.1: Statewide Attendance Rate⁶²Table 3.5: 2011 Children and Young People in years 1 to 12 at Educational Risk from Non-Attendance⁶³

Level of Educational Risk	Percentage of Students
Regular attendance (90 – 100 per cent)	71.12
At indicated risk (80 – 89 per cent)	17.51
At moderate risk (60 – 79 per cent)	7.1
At severe risk (0 – 59 per cent)	3.41

**It is important to note that comparison with data in the Auditor General's report is difficult as that report used figures from year 1 to year 10, whereas the above data is for all years up to year 12.⁶⁴

62 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter, 13 March 2012, p 8. Note: This letter was provided to the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislative Assembly

63 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p 3–4.

64 Mr Alan Dodson, Director, Education, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p3.

Chapter 3

The Department of Education's 2011 Semester one audit revealed that 3.4% of the students in years 1 to 12 had attendance in the severe risk category.

This equates to 7,125 children and young people.

Increase in the School Leaving Age

Another important factor that needs to be borne in mind, when comparing yearly statistics, is that there have been changes to the school leaving age in Western Australia. In 2006, the leaving age was raised to 16, and in 2008 it was increased to 17.

Rather than more young people taking up training, employment and apprenticeship options, 'more students have stayed at school than originally was modelled or considered or assumed to be the fact. Students who ordinarily in the old days would not stay at school are now staying at school'.⁶⁵

The Director General argues that 'we should be a little ... encouraged that we have stabilised what seemed to be, in five years previous, the beginning of a decline'.⁶⁶ However, Table 3.6 shows a mild fall in attendance for years 11 and 12 for 2008 and 2011 since the minimum school leaving age was increased.

Table 3.6: Attendance Rates for Year 11 and year 12⁶⁷

Year	2008	2011
Year 11	87.30	86.29
Year 12	88.95	88.53

Department of Education Data Collection

In preparing this report, the Committee has noted on several occasions references to the Department of Education's data collection.

On 12 October 2010, Hon Peter Collier, MLC, stated that 'the expansion of the Student Attendance Audit data analysis to allow real-time monitoring by schools is in the final planning stage'.⁶⁸

65 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p3.

66 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p3.

67 Developed from information provided by the Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p4.

68 Hon Peter Collier, Minister representing the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 12 October 2010, p7390.

In 2011, the Department of Education developed extra attendance codes for its student monitoring database to allow schools to generate more detailed information on non-attendance for each cohort, school and region.⁶⁹

These measures, though, would not fully address the Auditor General's concerns about matching attendance to other risk indicators.

- In discussing unexplained absences, the then Minister for Education, Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable, MLA, stated that while information on attendances was kept, data on unexplained absences was 'not kept centrally'.⁷⁰
- In responding to Public Accounts Committee questions on home visits by school staff, Mr David Axworthy of the Department of Education stated that this information was not collected centrally.⁷¹
- The Director General confirmed that the Department did not have 'an overall centralised figure of how many school visitations occurred' and that this was not collected by the Department.⁷²
- The Director General further advised that as at 8 August 2012, the Department of Education could only provide semester one 2011 attendance data 'because semester one 2012 is just being finalised'.⁷³

Finding 1

It is not clear how the Department of Education can develop policies to target non-attendance issues when the data is up to 18 months old.

The Committee is aware of the work done by individual schools in monitoring and recording attendance. Schools collect information on the reasons for non-attendance and the measures they take to improve attendance generally and for individual students. This information is used extensively in the chapter five. While this information is of enormous value to individual schools, it would be valuable information to the Department as a whole.

69 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter, 13 March 2012, p6. Note: This letter was provided to the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislative Assembly.

70 Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 16 August 2011, p. 22 of pp. 5862d–5890a.

71 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p6.

72 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p7.

73 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p4.

Chapter 3

The Education Department could learn more about attendance if they collected current information from school principals. Information on non-attendance and the reasons behind it needs to be collected centrally and analysed. Only then will the Department better understand the issues that are being faced in each school, district or region, and be able to develop appropriate intervention strategies.

Finding 2

The Department of Education does not centrally collect data on the reasons for school non-attendance. This means that the Department is unable to make the best use of information gathered by schools and to develop policies and strategies based on up-to-date information.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education direct the Education Department to collect and present to Parliament in its Annual Report, commencing 2013, the statistics for school non-attendance in WA with a uniform coding for causes of non-attendance. These statistics should additionally break the data down as follows:

Percentage and number of children with regular attendance:

90 – 100% attendance

Percentage and number of children at indicated risk:

80 – 89% attendance

Percentage and number of children at moderate risk:

60 – 79% attendance

Percentage and number of children at severe risk:

0 – 59% attendance

Post School Education

At the macro level, the importance of education, and therefore attendance, for all areas of society is emphasised by the planning document 'Skilling WA – A Workforce Development Plan for Western Australia,' which has two of its strategic goals as being to:

Increase participation in the workforce particularly among the under-employed and disengaged, mature-aged workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other under-represented groups;

And

*Provide flexible, responsive and innovative education and training which enables people to develop and utilise the skills necessary for them to realise their potential and contribute to Western Australia's prosperity.*⁷⁴

Increasing the participation of 'the under-employed and disengaged, mature-aged workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other under-represented groups,' is seen as vitally important.⁷⁵

As detailed in the plan, there have been a range of estimates and models done of the expected growth in employment opportunities in WA over the next few years.

Estimates range from:

- 220,000 new jobs over the next 5 years, to
- 488,500 new positions by 2020.⁷⁶

The modelling suggests that these positions will be spread across a broad range of industries, not just concentrated in the mining and resource industry. Crucially, many of the positions will require skilled workers.

One forecast suggests that over half of all jobs created during the period will be in the higher skilled categories including professionals (51,700 jobs), technicians and trade workers (39,700 jobs), and managers (39,300 jobs).⁷⁷ Over 87% of forecasted new jobs will require certificate III level qualifications or higher.⁷⁸

This means that training opportunities that are relevant to the anticipated vacancies need to be created.

74 Department of Training and Workforce Development, *Skilling WA – A Workforce Development Plan for Western Australia; Progress Report for the period January – June 2011*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, <http://www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/dtwd/detcms/navigation/workforce-development-plan/skilling-wa-update/?oid=Article-id-11982261>, accessed 15 May 2012, p1-2.

75 Department of Training and Workforce Development, *Skilling WA – A Workforce Development Plan for Western Australia: Executive Summary*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/dtwd/detcms/navigation/category.jsp?categoryID=8805112, accessed 15 May 2012, p29.

76 Department of Training and Workforce Development, *Skilling WA – A Workforce Development Plan for Western Australia: Executive Summary*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/dtwd/detcms/navigation/category.jsp?categoryID=8805112, accessed 15 May 2012, p24.

77 Department of Training and Workforce Development, *Skilling WA – A Workforce Development Plan for Western Australia: Executive Summary*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/dtwd/detcms/navigation/category.jsp?categoryID=8805112, accessed 15 May 2012, p28.

78 Department of Training and Workforce Development, *Skilling WA – A Workforce Development Plan for Western Australia: Executive Summary*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/dtwd/detcms/navigation/category.jsp?categoryID=8805112, accessed 15 May 2012, p29.

Chapter 3

The Western Australian school system provides a foundation education for all children in Western Australia. In some schools Vocational Education and Training (VET) is offered in the final school years.

When children leave school they are able to continue their education at the tertiary level through State Training Providers (STPs) (formerly known as TAFE Colleges), in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) field, or in the university field.

Chapter 4

Government legislation and policy; and parental responsibility

Education is Compulsory in Western Australia

School Education Act 1999 WA

Compulsory Education

The School Education Act 1999 WA (The SE Act) provides in Section 6 (c) that the compulsory education period for a child is:

- (i) from the beginning of the year in which the child reaches the age of 6 years and 6 months; and
- (ii) until —
 - (I) the end of the year in which the child reaches the age of 17; or
 - (II) the child satisfies the minimum requirements for graduation from secondary school established under the *School Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997*.

Parental Responsibility for enrolment

It is clear from s 9(2) of the SE Act that it is the responsibility of parents to enrol their children in an educational program throughout the compulsory education period. The penalty for a parent not ensuring enrolment is a fine of \$2,500.

Division 3 of the SE Act deals with school attendance.

Section 23 provides that on all days that a school is open for instruction, a student must:

- (a) *either*
 - attend the school at which he or she is enrolled; or*
 - (i) *otherwise participate in an educational programme of the school whether at the school or elsewhere, as required by the principal; or*
- (b) *comply with an arrangement under section 24 [Arrangements alternative to attendance].*

Parents must ensure that their children attend school as required under s 23 of the SE Act (s 38). Parents who do not comply with this section face a penalty of \$1,000.

Chapter 4

Furthermore, the SE Act provides for a child to be fined \$10 for not attending as required.

The SE Act places the primary responsibility on the parent in ensuring enrolment and attendance at school:

Non-Attendance

Section 25 (2) of the Act states

- (2) A student is excused from attending at school, or from participating in an educational programme of the school, on any day —
- (a) if the student is prevented from attending at school, or from participating in the educational programme by —
 - (i) temporary physical or mental incapacity; or
 - (ii) any other reasonable cause;
 - (b) if a responsible person has notified the principal of the cause of the student's non-attendance or non-participation —
 - (i) as soon as is practicable; and
 - (ii) in any case within 3 school days of the day on which the non-attendance started;
- and
- (c) where under paragraph (b) the incapacity of the student is given as the cause, if the responsible person provides the principal with a certificate in support from a registered medical practitioner if requested to do so by the principal.

In addition to permitted absences, providing that the principal has received prior notification, students can be excused from attending school for days recognised as having religious or cultural significance.

30. Non-attendance for religious or cultural observance

- (1) A student is excused from —
- (a) attendance at a government school at which he or she is enrolled; or
 - (b) participation in an educational programme of the school,
- on a day, or during a period, that under section 31 is recognized as having religious or cultural significance for the student or the student's parents.⁷⁹

The SE Act, at s 40, provides for the referral of a child's case to an Attendance Panel to inquire into the child's persistent absences which will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁷⁹ Section 30 *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

Home schooling

Section 25 (4) of the SE Act also recognises that some students may be home schooled

(4)A student is excused from attending at school, or from participating in an educational programme of the school, on any day if —

- (a)a parent of the student has applied, or intends to apply, to be registered under section 48 as the student’s home educator; and
- (b)the parent has notified the principal in writing of the application or intended application

Alternative Arrangements

Parents are able to enter into an arrangement with the principal to allow a student to attend alternative venues to participate in the school’s educational programs.⁸⁰

The *School Education Act 1999* (WA), (the SE Act), provides for training and employment alternatives for students in years 11 and 12.⁸¹ Young people may participate in alternative education programs such as university, a higher education course or in a vocational education and training (VET) course

Year 11 and 12 students who are enrolled in VET or other approved courses or who are undertaking apprenticeships, for example, may attend on a part-time basis.⁸²

Under the Act parents must seek approval from the Minister for children of school age to commence employment and must notify the Minister if that employment ceases. In addition it is the parent’s responsibility to notify the principal if a child is either not able to attend school or wishes to be absent from particular classes. A parent must notify the Minister of their child’s employment and any cessation of that employment (ss 11(G) and 11(H));

- alternatives to attendance are arranged between the principal and the parent (s 24);
- a parent must notify the principal of their child’s non-attendance (s 25);
- a parent can request non-attendance for religious or cultural observance (s 30); and
- a parent can request exemption for their child from particular classes on grounds such as conscientious objection (s 72).

80 Section 24 *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

81 Section 11B *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

82 Section 10(2) *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

Chapter 4

Attendance Panels appointed under the Schools Education Act 1999

The *School Education Act 1999* (SE Act), at s 39, provides for the appointment by the Minister of an Attendance Panel of three or more persons. Attendance panel membership is comprised of departmental and community representatives, with at least one panel member being a parent or community representative.⁸³

Cases where the principal believes the reasons for a child's absence from school are either not genuine or not sufficient, allow referral of the case to an Attendance Panel.⁸⁴

The *School Education Act 1999*, s 26(2)(b), this panel may:

- (i) *inquire into the child's attendance record including the social, cultural, lingual, economic or geographic factors, or learning difficulties, that might be affecting the child's attendance record; [and]*
- (ii) *give such advice and assistance to the child and to his or her parents as it thinks fit.*

The application of Attendance Panels is discussed later in this chapter.

Parental Support and Responsibility Act

The responsibilities of parents to exercise appropriate control over the behaviour of their children are further detailed in the *Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008* (WA) (the PSR Act).⁸⁵

Both the SE Act and the PSR Act provide for certain actions when persistent breaches of attendance rules occur.

- The SE Act, at s 40, provides for the referral of a child's case to an Attendance Panel to inquire into the child's persistent absences.
- The PSR Act allows the Court to make a responsible parenting order to ensure a child attends school.⁸⁶

Both the SE Act and the PSR Act provide the Department of Education with legal mechanisms to force parents to comply and ensure their children attend school.

83 Department of Education, *Behaviour and Wellbeing. Behaviour. Student Attendance. Attendance Panels*, nd, np. Available at: <http://det.wa.edu.au/studentsupport/behaviourandwellbeing/detcms/navigation/behaviour/student-attendance/?page=8&tab=Main#toc8>. Accessed on 25 July 2012; Section 39 (3) *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

84 Section 26 (1) *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

85 Section 5 *Parental Responsibility Act 2008* (WA).

86 Sections 14, 15 and 18 *Parental Responsibility Act 2008* (WA).

Responsible Parenting Agreements and Orders

Responsible Parenting Agreements

Under s 11 of the *Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008* (PSR Act), an authorised officer may enter into a responsible parenting agreement (RPA) with a child's parent. A RPA 'clearly sets out actions to be taken by parents and indicates the support services to be provided in order to help parents improve their parenting skills'.⁸⁷

A RPA can relate to one or more of the following:

- (a) the parent attending parenting guidance counselling, a parenting support group or any other relevant personal development course or group;*
- (b) the parent ensuring or taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the child attends school;*
- (c) the parent ensuring or taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the child avoids contact with a particular person or particular persons;*
- (d) the parent ensuring or taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the child avoids a particular place or particular places;*
- (e) other matters relating to the effective parenting of the child;*
- (f) the assistance to be given to the parent or child by a government agency to help the parent to comply with the agreement.*

Section 11 (5) prescribes that obligations agreed to under the RPA are not enforceable.

The Department of Education's *Guidelines for Responsible Parenting Agreements* advise that RPAs can be useful when other attempts to engage parents about their child's school attendance and/or behaviour have not met with success. While developing an RPA is a reasonably formal process, entering into an agreement is voluntary and may help (re)engage parents.⁸⁸ In considering the appropriateness of entering into an RPA, schools must judge whether:

- *parenting is a significant factor in the student's persistent non-attendance or anti-social school behaviour;*
- *a parenting program could remedy this;*
- *other requirements might be useful in an Agreement to address the behaviour;*

87 Department of Education, *Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements*, Government of Western Australia, May 2011, p2.

88 Department of Education, *Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements*, Government of Western Australia, May 2011, p3.

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- *the parent can be engaged on a voluntary basis.*⁸⁹

The Department of Education entered into six RPAs in 2010, seven in 2011 and four to June 2012.⁹⁰

Responsible Parenting Orders

In certain circumstances, including parents' refusal to enter into a RPA, application may be made to the Court for a responsible parenting order (RPO).

Section 13 (1) of the *Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008* (PSR Act) provides that only the CEOs of the Departments for Child Protection, for Education and for Corrective Services may make an application to the Court for such an order. The Court, under s 14 (2) may make a RPO that requires a parent to do one or more of the following:

- (a) *attend parenting guidance counselling, a parenting support group, or any other relevant personal development course or group;*
- (b) *take all reasonable steps to ensure that the child attends school;*
- (c) *take all reasonable steps to ensure that the child avoids contact with a specified person or specified persons;*
- (d) *take all reasonable steps to ensure that the child avoids a specified place or specified places;*
- (e) *comply with any other requirements set out in the order relating to the effective parenting of the child.*

There is also provision for the Court to make interim RPOs.

In deciding whether to make a RPO, the Court must be sure it would be in the best interest of the child, and must consider the family circumstances and the Order's impact on those circumstances.⁹¹

Under s 21 (1), a parent who does not make reasonable efforts to comply with the RPO commits an offence that incurs a penalty of \$200.

Prosecution of Parents

When parents do not enrol their school-aged children in school or home education, do not engage with the Department of Education or refuse the assistance offered to them and/or their children, the SE Act provides for the prosecution of a parent.

89 Adapted from: Department of Education, *Guidelines for the use of education-related Responsible Parenting Agreements*, Government of Western Australia, May 2011, p3.

90 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Hon. P. Collier, Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 June 2012, p. 16 and p18.

91 Section 19 *Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008* (WA). This is a raft of factors that the Court must consider and take into account under the PSR Act.

The first time the Department of Education took action to prosecute parents under the 1999 SE Act was in 2010, with two sustained convictions.⁹²

As at June 2012 there were three prosecutions pending.⁹³

PSR Act described as ‘cumbersome and unwieldy’ and only used as a ‘last resort’

The federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA) advised that state governments are responsible for enforcing school attendance, but that, for a variety of reasons, States tend not to use the powers that are available to them to do so.⁹⁴ This certainly is the case in Western Australia where the Department of Education sees legal recourse to responsible parenting orders and parental prosecutions as actions of last resort.

The Regional Executive Director, Pilbara Education Region, stated that the Department of Education has the legal power to take parents to court over attendance and that the court may impose a fine. However, it was acknowledged that the schools and the Department do not use those powers to their full extent.⁹⁵

Similarly, the Kimberley Education Region was aware of the PSR Act and its provisions for RPOs to be applied for by the CEO of DCP, Education and DCS. The Kimberley Education Region advised, though, that the PSR Act was cumbersome and unwieldy and, in practice, it was not used.⁹⁶

The Department of Education’s guidelines on using prosecution and responsible parenting orders as mechanisms to improve attendance clearly state that these are ‘action[s] of last resort where all other efforts to engage a parent voluntarily have been unsuccessful’.⁹⁷

These ‘other efforts’ are outlined in the Department’s strategies and policies relating to improving school attendance, and are discussed in detail below.

92 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, for Mr P. Collier, Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 June 2011, p. 16; and Ms Sharyn O’Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p30.

93 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, for Mr P. Collier, Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 June 2011, p18.

94 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Committee Briefing*, 12 October 2011.

95 Ms Sue Cunio, Regional Executive Director, Pilbara Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012, p9.

96 Kimberley Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

97 Department of Education, *Guidelines for the Use of Prosecution*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2011, p2; and Department of Education, *Guidelines for the Use of Education-related Responsible Parenting Orders*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2011, p3.

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The Director General of the Department of Education confirmed the position outlined in departmental guidelines, stating that:

*The rate of conviction in this area has always been historically low. It is one tool that is available to us. It is a tool that draws various commentary about how well it works or not, particularly in Indigenous communities. [...] Prosecution is there for us. It is lawful; if we need to use it we can, but it is a process of last resort.*⁹⁸

The Director General advised that legal instruments available to the Department of Education were 'not straightforward'.⁹⁹ There are a number of complexities that lead the Department of Education to conclude that RPOs and/or prosecution of parents is not the best course of action to take.

One issue is that the penalty imposed for successful prosecutions is a fine which may exacerbate the problems that disengaged families experience. According to the Director General:

*We are always asked the question, 'Why aren't you prosecuting more?' Prosecution is the last resort, but also you are prosecuting the people who are most unlikely to pay and it will have no effect on the outcome.*¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, there is no guarantee the imposing a penalty on the parents will improve the school attendance of their children. The penalty 'is not a huge fine. It may assist in that student coming back to school; it may not, as well'.¹⁰¹ The Director General further stated that it was 'true to say that over some years we [the Department of Education] have not pursued, necessarily, a prosecution right until the end point, because it is punitive'.¹⁰²

98 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, Estimates and Financial Operations Committee, Legislative Council, 5 June 2012, p16.

99 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence, Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

100 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence, Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p. 20. See also: Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, pp. 30–31 of pp.523c–558a.

101 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence, Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p. 20. See also: Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, pp. 30–31 of pp.523c–558a.

102 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p30 of pp.523c–558a.

Finding 3

There are a number of reasons why the Department of Education tends not to pursue the available legislative mechanisms to address student non-attendance:

- the complexity of the legal instruments;
- penalties available may exacerbate problems families face; and
- imposing a penalty on parents may not improve school attendance.

Another issue is that it is not possible to prosecute for intermittent school absences which occur when families 'for a variety of reasons ... determine that it is better for their child to stay at home and have a bit of family time'.¹⁰³

Such intermittent absences include fly in, fly out parents wanting to spend family time with their children, and families who take their children on overseas holidays during term time.

A major reason that the Department of Education does not pursue more RPOs or parent prosecutions is the complexity of the processes, which, in turn, are linked to the work undertaken prior to reaching a point of prosecution. The then Minister for Education, Dr Elizabeth Constable stated that:

*We have to put in place a series of steps before we get to prosecution. [...] We are required to go through those steps; we cannot just leap in and prosecute. When non-attendance is drawn to the department's attention, we have to go through all those steps.*¹⁰⁴

The Director General advised that while prosecution was an option, when the Department of Education

*Prepare[s] the cases for prosecution we are required to outline the full range of strategies we have put in place to achieve better student attendance. A recent high-profile case has resulted in one of the children from the family being more engaged, and the other not so engaged, with one student considering leaving school altogether.*¹⁰⁵

Prior to deciding to prosecute, schools:

103 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence, Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

104 Dr. E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p29 of pp.523c–558a.

105 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p30 of pp.523c–558a.

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*Work tirelessly to keep at school the few students who are not attending regularly. They undertake a range of initiatives, including in some country areas—although not only country areas—picking the kids up themselves. Schools are very committed to ensuring that students are in schools. They work very closely with parents, as they are required to do.*¹⁰⁶

As discussed later in this report, non-attendance is often a result of a range of factors and circumstances in the children's lives. This adds further complexity to the Department of Education's work to get children to attend school. According to the Department of Education, non-attending children:

*Are very often involved with school psychologists, counsellors and other care agencies apart from our own and, very often, so are the parents. In some cases, of course, the parents are not involved at all, so schools work directly with parents. We have school attendance agreements with parents. With the Department of Health, we run the positive parenting program courses to supplement what we are doing in this space. We translate all of the material into languages for the full range of people who are impacted. An enormous amount of effort goes into getting students into school and making sure they are attending for the time required by the legislation.*¹⁰⁷

In some cases, undertaking such measures leads to an improvement in children's school attendance. Engaging with families and developing relationships with those families can be productive.¹⁰⁸ For example, the Principal of Tambrey Primary School advised that his school tends not to use the police or the formal legal mechanisms available. Rather, Tambrey has adopted a supportive approach, which in eight or nine cases out of 10 does make a difference. The question remains, though, as to how much of a difference and for how long.¹⁰⁹

In some of these cases the change is temporary, with improvements in a child's school attendance dropping off after a time.¹¹⁰ Prosecuting parents in this situation is not straightforward and the Department of Education must begin the formal and

106 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p 30 of pp.523c–558a.

107 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p30 of pp.523c–558a.

108 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, pp. 30–31 of pp.523c–558a.

109 Mr Niel Smith, Principal, Tambrey Primary School, Committee Briefing, 12 March 2012.

110 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p30 and p31 of pp.523c–558a.

documented process again.¹¹¹ As the then Minister stated, students whose attendance is being managed through the Department of Education's formal process may return to school for a while 'and then maybe they slip back, and we start the process again'.¹¹² Whether or not RPOs or parent prosecutions are desirable, and whether or not they are the only mechanism that some families will act upon, the complexity of the processes involved mean that only a small number of such actions would be taken.

Nevertheless, the Department of Education has:

*drawn a line in the sand ... over the past few years and we are ... pursuing the cases much more vigorously than ever before since 1999. Hence, there have been two prosecutions in the last year and none previously. ... where a prosecution is necessary and where we can demonstrate that we have exhausted every other avenue available to us—as we are required to do; otherwise it does not proceed—we are doing that now.*¹¹³

The Department's Policy Responses and Outcomes

The use of Attendance Panels by the Department of Education

The case of a child of compulsory school age whose non-attendance is seen as persistent or chronic may be referred to an Attendance Panel.¹¹⁴ Cases where the principal believes the reasons for a child's absence from school are either not genuine or not sufficient, allow referral of the case to an Attendance Panel.¹¹⁵

However, the May 2011 Attendance Policy guidelines advise that formal meetings called by the school, as described in the *Attendance Policy*, will provide quality advice and support for parents.¹¹⁶ This means that an Attendance Panel is often not required.

Better Attendance: Brighter Futures Strategy

The *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* strategy was developed in response to the Auditor General's 2009 report on managing student attendance in Western

111 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Hon. P. Collier, Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 June 2012, p16.

112 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p30 of pp.523c–558a.

113 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p30 and p31 of pp.523c–558a.

114 Section 40 (1) *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

115 Section 26 (1) *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

116 Department of Education, *Guidelines for the use of Attendance Panels*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2011, p2.

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Australia.¹¹⁷ This strategy, launched in May 2010, was designed to ‘take a multi-pronged approach to attendance’ by:

- *focusing on improving student attendance in the early years*
- *offering increased support to parents and schools*
- *prosecuting parents whose children continually fail to attend school regularly.*¹¹⁸

The key target groups for the strategy are:

- *Aboriginal students*
- *Truants*
- *Students from Kindergarten to Year 4*
- *Students moving from Year 7 to Year 8*
- *Year 10 students*
- *Year 11 and 12 students not engaged in education, training or employment.*¹¹⁹

Better Attendance: Brighter Futures has the following nine key strategies, each of which has a number of actions to be taken to achieve or implement the overall strategy:

- 1 *ensuring all children are enrolled in school*
- 2 *giving direct support to schools and communities with the greatest need*
- 3 *ensuring strong support and action in the early years and at transition points*
- 4 *recognising initiatives that encourage student attendance and parent participation*
- 5 *notifying schools early where non-attendance is a serious issue*
- 6 *supporting parents to take responsibility for their child’s attendance at school*
- 7 *establishing partnerships with local businesses and agencies to improve attendance*
- 8 *providing professional learning for school staff and community members on how to address poor attendance*

117 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 25 May 2011, p. 3957f.

118 Dr E. Constable, (then Minister for Education), *State Government Launches Strategy to Improve Attendance in Public Schools*, Media Statement, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 31 May 2010.

119 Department of Education, *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2010, p3.

9 *making regular attendance a priority across the Department [of Education].*¹²⁰

An annual budget of \$3.4 million over three years was allocated to *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures*.

The strategy is to be fully implemented by the end of 2012 and will be assessed against the following key performance indicators:

1. *measurable improvement in student attendance in schools and for key at risk groups;*
2. *improvement in the attitudes of parents of children who do not attend school regularly; and,*
3. *effectiveness of local community/business partnerships in addressing non-attendance.*¹²¹

The Department of Education needs to ensure that it develops appropriate measures for these indicators.

Prior to the *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* strategy, Attendance Panels were a policy requirement in cases where prosecution of a parent under the SE Act was being considered.

Better Attendance: Brighter Futures stated that the process for prosecuting parents who fail to meet their responsibilities 'will be simplified', with the process including 'fast-tracking prosecutions where there is a history of parent non-responsiveness'.¹²²

Part of the fast-tracking was the removal of the requirement to form Attendance Panels when considering prosecuting parents. The Attendance Panel Guidelines state the Department of Education's expectation that Attendance Panels 'will only be formed in situations where an application for a Responsible Parenting Order is being considered by the school and region'.¹²³ This is a requirement under the PSR Act where

120 Department of Education, *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2010, p3.

121 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter to Public Accounts Committee, Attachment p6, 13 March 2012.

122 Department of Education, *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2010, p7. See also: Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Media Statement, *State Government launches strategy to improve attendance in public*, 31 May 2010. Available at: <http://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/ByPortfolio.aspx?ItemId=133598&search=better+attendance&admin=&minister=&portfolio=Education®ion=>. Accessed on 1 August 2012.

123 Department of Education, *Guidelines for the use of Attendance Panels*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2011, p2.

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a Responsible Parenting Order is being considered solely on the grounds of persistent non-attendance as defined in the SE Act.¹²⁴

The number of Attendance Panels convened has decreased markedly in a relatively short space of time:

Table 4.1: Attendance Panels Convened¹²⁵

Year	Number of Panels Convened
2006	15
2007	16
2008	4
2009	?
2010	?
2011	?

Given that:

- (i) the PSR Act has a 'sunset clause', at s 14 (5), that means the Court cannot make an order after the fifth anniversary of the day the section is assented to;
- (ii) there is no requirement for an Attendance Panel to be convened to consider the prosecution of a parent; and
- (iii) the Department of Education's policy preference is for formal meetings rather than recourse to the courts,

.... the future use of Attendance Panels is uncertain.

Finding 4

With the advent of the *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* strategy, the future use of Attendance Panels is uncertain.

Since the Auditor General's 2009 audit report, the Department of Education has launched a new strategy entitled *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* and has amended its attendance policy and guidelines.

Promoting the Importance of Regular School Attendance

One of the recommendations in the Auditor General's 2009 report on managing student attendance in Western Australia was that the Department of Education should 'publicise, promote and demonstrate the importance of regular school attendance to

¹²⁴ Section 18 (d) Parental Support and Responsibility Act 2008 (WA); Section 40 School Education Act 1999 (WA).

¹²⁵ Mr M. McGowan, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 1 May 2008, p2265.

parents, students and the community'.¹²⁶ In response, the Department of Education allocated \$200,000 to a state-wide communication strategy.¹²⁷

In May 2011, the then Minister for Education, Dr Elizabeth Constable, announced a campaign to improve school attendance. This campaign, titled *'It All Starts at School'*, targeted teenagers and parents with positive messages about the connection between going to school and achieving life goals.¹²⁸ The campaign combined media advertising and grassroots activity, and ran from 22 May to 30 June 2011.¹²⁹

The media campaign included television, radio, cinemas, buses and online advertising using local media and sporting identities 'to inspire teenagers about the necessity of going to school every day to achieve their dreams'.¹³⁰

The grassroots recognition program consisted of:

*Talking to parents, involving communities around their school and looking at things so that we get the message out that it is important that children attend school every day that they do not take days off and that every day off is a day that they are not benefiting from schooling.*¹³¹

This recognition program unites local P&Cs, community groups and shopping centres 'to run campaigns that reinforce the message that children should be at school during school time'.¹³² There were 10 metropolitan secondary schools in the recognition program, and students who made significant improvements in attendance were rewarded by, for example, behind-the-scenes tours of the West Coast Eagles Football Club.

126 Auditor General Western Australia, *Every Day Counts: Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools*, Report 9, Office of the Auditor General, Perth, August 2009, p7.

127 Hon. Peter Collier, Minister for Energy representing the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 12 October 2010, p. 7390.

128 Dr E. Constable, (then Minister for Education), *Campaign to Boost School Attendance Focuses on the Positives, not Punishment*, Media Statement, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 23 May 2011; Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p28 of pp.523c–558a.

129 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter to Public Accounts Committee, Attachment p3, 13 March 2012.

130 Dr E. Constable, (then Minister for Education), *Campaign to Boost School Attendance Focuses on the Positives, not Punishment*, Media Statement, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 23 May 2011; Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p27 of pp.523c–558a.

131 Mr David Axworthy, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p28 of pp.523c–558a.

132 Mr David Axworthy, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p28 of pp.523c–558a.

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In November 2011, Dr Constable advised that approximately 3,000 students and 27 organisations were participating in the program and that:

in Terms 2 and 3 2011, 78 students have been rewarded with unique experiences where they spent a day behind the scenes at some of Perth's companies and organisations to see what it is like to work there. Another 68 students will be rewarded with these experiences during Term 4, 2011. The ten participating schools have also been provided with vouchers to reward students, including tickets to movie premieres and the Perth Royal Show, discount vouchers for clothing retailers and entertainment outlets, iPods, gift cards for various retailers and sporting merchandise.¹³³

Dr Constable advised that principals had seen significant improvements for many of their students and that the Department of Education would report the program results later in 2011 after it had been running for some time.¹³⁴

The Department of Education engaged a market research company to survey 92 parents about the advertising campaign. The survey resulted in 20 respondents, only 7 of whom (35%) claimed to have seen the advertisement. Of these, 65% (approximately 5) recognised one of the sports stars. It is not clear whether this was a state-wide campaign or targeted to the metropolitan area and/or other particular areas. Nevertheless, a survey resulting in only 20 respondents is far too small to allow generalisations to be made about any population group or the success of the campaign.

While the Department states that the survey results show respondents had interpreted the campaign message across three core themes, namely outcomes focus, attendance and importance, and that it had a 'potentially high cognitive impact',¹³⁵ there is no evidence of the impact that this campaign had on school attendance. A market research survey of appropriate scale, which this was not, may be able to determine general recall of the advertisements and their key messages. However, such a survey cannot measure whether the campaign was effective in increasing school attendance.

133 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 22 November 2011, p9544b-9545a.

134 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 27 September 2011, p7771c-7772a.

135 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter to Public Accounts Committee, Attachment p3, 13 March 2012.

In February 2012, it was reported that ‘school attendance rates failed to improve last year, despite a big push to stop students skipping classes’.¹³⁶ Given this, it seems that the campaign did not achieve its objectives.

Finding 5

The media campaign targeting attendance, ‘It All Starts at School’, did not lead to improved attendance and its efficacy is questionable.

A market research company was engaged to assess attitudinal shifts in students from seven of the schools involved. The Department of Education states that this research shows:

- changes in beliefs about truancy as a normal behaviour; and
- increased awareness of the costs of ‘wagging’ school and appreciation of the benefits of school attendance.¹³⁷

It is essential that the Department of Education develops a much better understanding of the issues of non-attendance and the ways in which they interact. It is imperative that the Department completes its research project, discussed in chapter five, on the reasons for non-attendance. Only then will it be able to develop better targeted campaigns.

The cost of the ‘*It All Starts at School*’ program is unclear. While the May 2011 campaign announcement stated that the campaign, including advertising and recognition program, would cost \$450,000, the budget figure provided to the 2011 Estimates Committee for the total package of programs was in excess of \$6 million.¹³⁸ In November 2011, Dr Constable advised that \$92,506.25, excluding GST, was allocated in 2010/11 for the program, with decisions relating to future funding yet to be made.¹³⁹

Attendance Staff

The Department of Education has a number of FTE positions that work directly on matters of school attendance. These range from:

- school teachers,

136 Hiatt, Bethany, ‘School Days Lost to Cheap Trips’, *The Western Australian online*, 3 February 2012. Available at: <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/breaking/12796461/school-days-lost-to-cheaped-trips/>. Accessed on 25 July 2012.

137 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter to Public Accounts Committee, Attachment p5, 13 March 2012.

138 Mr David Axworthy, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p28 of pp.523c–558a.

139 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 22 November 2011, p9544b-9545a.

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- principals,
- attendance officers,
- participation officers, and
- district attendance staff.

Section 33 of the SE Act allows certain departmental, ministerial and teaching staff to be designated as attendance officers.

Attendance officers have the power to stop and detain someone they reasonably believe to be an absentee student not complying with the SE Act.

An attendance officer has the power to refer to an Attendance Panel a person who is of compulsory school age, enrolled at a school and persistently absent without reasonable cause, as outlined in the SE Act.

However, it seems that the Department of Education's current policy conception of 'attendance officers' has a different meaning and responsibility. According to the resource package provided to schools, attendance officers are:

*Authorised persons usually district based (although some are in schools) who play a key role in supporting schools, students and families to meet the legislative requirements for school attendance.*¹⁴⁰

It is in this sense that the term is used in the following discussion.

Each school principal is responsible for managing school attendance, maintaining attendance records and developing and implementing strategies to improve school attendance.

The Director General argued that it is 'the role of every school and every school teacher to pursue attendance. That is exactly what each and every school does'.¹⁴¹

Similarly, Dr Constable stated 'every school has someone within that school who is responsible for tracking attendance in the school and following up when there is no legitimate reason presented by parents for absence from school'.¹⁴²

School staff are able to liaise with district-based attendance staff on an informal basis for advice and support while attempting to resolve attendance issues for a student.

¹⁴⁰ Department of Education, *Improving Attendance: A Resource Package for Schools*, Glossary. Available at: <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/web-references/improving-attendance-a-resource-package-for-schools.en?oid=SiteProxy-id-11577811>. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

¹⁴¹ Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 31 May 2012, p25 of pp.530c-564a.

¹⁴² Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 22 November 2011, p1 of pp.9487b-9488a.

Once all reasonable efforts have been made and attendance issues remain, the school may formally refer the matter to the district attendance staff.¹⁴³

While district-level attendance staff investigate the matter further, case management responsibility remains with the school.

For students who are 16 and 17 years old, again, the school is responsible for managing attendance. For students in this age group who experience attendance difficulties, once the school has pursued all avenues available to them, it may make a referral to the Manager Participation, responsible for participation coordinators.

On referral, a participation coordinator is appointed 'to facilitate the exploration of continued schooling or other options available in education, training or employment for the student'.¹⁴⁴

Once referred, the attendance officer assumes case management in liaison with the school and family until the child has reverted to a minimum of 90% school attendance over a 6 month period.

According to a 2011 DEEWR report, 'Participation Coordinators employed by the Western Australian Department of Education are located in the eight newly established education regions'.¹⁴⁵

The roles of attendance officers and participation coordinators are clearly linked. As the Director General explained:

*Once there is an attendance issue that begins to be problematic and is outside the school's capacity to deal with, for example, if prosecution is necessary, then the school is supported centrally by the team we have that works through major attendance issues. Attendance is sometimes complicated in years 11 and 12 with the participation coordinators. Their role is not about attendance but to engage students in programs, but sometimes, of course, they are more aware of who is attending and who is not attending.*¹⁴⁶

143 Department of Education, *Improving Attendance: A Resource Package for Schools*, pp. 171–172. Available at: <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/web-references/improving-attendance-a-resource-package-for-schools.en?oid=SiteProxy-id-11577811>. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

144 Department of Education, *Improving Attendance: A Resource Package for Schools*, p171. Available at: <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/web-references/improving-attendance-a-resource-package-for-schools.en?oid=SiteProxy-id-11577811>. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

145 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Youth Attainment and Transitions. Western Australia Annual Report*, May 2011, p12. Available at: http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Documents/WA_AnnualReport.pdf. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

146 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 31 May 2012, p25 of pp.530c-564a.

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Table 4.1: Attendance and Participation Staff per Region in May 2012¹⁴⁷

Region	Attendance Officer		District or *Regional Attendance Coordinator		Participation Coordinator		Retention and Participation Officer		Participation Manager	
	FTE	No.	FTE	No.	FTE	No.	FTE	No.	FTE	No.
Goldfields	0.6	1			3.0	4	1.0	1	1.0	1
Kimberley			1.0	1	2.0	1				
Midwest	1.0	1			3.0	3				
North Metropolitan	*1.0	1	*1.0	1	10.5 2.0^	12 2				
Pilbara					2.5	1	1.0	1		
South Metro			3.0	3						
South West					6.0	7	2.0	3		
Wheatbelt					3.0	3				

* Regional ^ Senior Participation Coordinator

Table 4.2 shows the variation in the number of attendance and participation staff per region.

The number of referrals made from schools to attendance officers and participation officers, and the outcomes of these referrals, is not known.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education provide additional funding in the 2013-2014 budget so that whenever a child falls below 90% school attendance the school principal refers the child (and their family) to an attendance officer.

School-Based Attendance Officers and Other Attendance Staff

In addition to attendance officers, a trial program of School Based Attendance Officers (SBAO) was introduced in 2005. This trial, a joint initiative of the Aboriginal Education and Student Services teams, and the Kimberley District Aboriginal Education Advisory Council, 'aimed to improve the attendance of Aboriginal students—to close the gap which saw a 21% difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attendance in schools'.¹⁴⁸

The aim of the Kimberley District Education office is to reduce this 21% gap to 7.1% by 2014 by targeting students falling in the 60–80% attendance band and seeking to improve their attendance.

Students whose attendance falls below 60% are managed by the principal. Data show that Aboriginal school attendance in the region had increased from 68.9% in 2009 to

147 Data Sourced from Estimates Division 35: Education—Supplementary Information B43, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 31 May 2012, p1 of pp. 684b–697a.

148 Kimberley Success Zone, *The School-Based Attendance Officers Initiative. Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Participation*, p3. Available at: <http://www.ksz.edu.au>. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

71.7% in 2010 and 71.1% to October 2011.¹⁴⁹ The Department of Education's Kimberley Education Region's experience was that there is always a new cohort of children coming into the 60–80% band as fast as children leave it.

A March 2012 job description form for an SBAO for Pegs Creek Primary School outlines the role, as shown in figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: The Role of a School Based Attendance Officer¹⁵⁰

The School Based Attendance officer:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists school communities with processes that ensure non-attending and alienated students participate, and re engaged, in educational programs; • Collaborates with school staff, parents, regional office and the community identify student absenteeism and truancy; • Makes regular family contact, including phone calls and home visits and establishes community links to monitor and engage identified students and their families; • Assists with the development and implementation of a range of preventative strategies at the school level to engage and support non-attending and alienated students; • Assists principals with the development and implementation of individual student attendance improvement plans; • Participates in collaborative case conferences and other intervention processes to improve student attendance, participation and retention; • Assists teachers to explore alternative educational, vocational or employment options as appropriate; • Assists principals with the development and implementation of community activities and projects aimed at improving student attendance; and • Maintains student-specific case notes and briefing notes and relevant attendance information, reporting to the school administration and regional line manager on a regular basis.

SBAO positions are funded by the Aboriginal Education Attendance Grant. Such grants are directed to implementing local strategies to raise Aboriginal students' school attendance.¹⁵¹ The SBAO money and officers are managed by principals.

SBAOs also work with Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO) to improve school attendance. AEIOs help to ensure learning programs are educationally and culturally relevant. They do this mainly by:

- establishing and maintaining communication networks between students, parents, caregivers, school staff and the community;

149 Kimberley Success Zone, *The School-Based Attendance Officers Initiative. Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Participation*, p3. Available at: <http://www.ksz.edu.au>. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

150 Pilbara Education Region, Department of Education, *School Based Attendance Officer Advertised Vacancy SS/SS196.12*, August 2012. Note that while the vacancy advertisement is dated August, the JDF is effective from 27 March 2012.

151 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Youth Attainment and Transitions. Western Australia Annual Report*, May 2011, pp. 21–22. Available at: http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Documents/WA_AnnualReport.pdf. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

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- providing support to students in relation to academic progress, participation, attendance, discipline and retention; and
- informing teachers about community concerns and working with school staff to address the issues involved.¹⁵²

The Kimberley Education Region advised that in March 2012 there were 18 SBAOs for the whole of the Kimberley. The larger schools have a dedicated SBAO while the schools in more remote areas have 0.5FTE.¹⁵³ Broome has three SBAOs spread between three schools. Kununurra has more, in part because Kununurra had an attendance rate of 56% for its Aboriginal students.¹⁵⁴

The Principal of Halls Creek District High School, Mr Clifton Fong, argued that every school needs some form of attendance officer and that these officers need to be from the local community. However, as Mr Fong acknowledged, it is difficult to find people from the local communities to undertake this role.¹⁵⁵

The Kimberley Education Region stressed the importance of SBAOs being local aboriginal people from the same culture who know how to engage with the families.¹⁵⁶

Schools in the Perth metropolitan area also employ SBAOs, although not always on a full-time basis. For example, one school advised that it had hired a SBAO on a 0.6 FTE basis, and that this position was at risk due to lack of funding.

A Perth school has used National Partnership/School Support funding to employ a School Based Community Liaison Officer for three mornings a week. This person works closely with the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO).

AIEOs' work includes screening attendance on a daily basis, home visits and helping schools, students and their families deal with cultural matters. The Committee is aware of several schools in the metropolitan area that pooled District Office funding to employ an AIEO.

As well as SBAOs and AIEOs, schools employ a range of other staff to assist with improving attendance. These include chaplains, pastoral care staff, school psychologists, youth workers and social workers. A common strategy seems to be to

152 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Youth Attainment and Transitions. Western Australia Annual Report*, May 2011, p20. Available at: http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Documents/WA_AnnualReport.pdf. Accessed on 3 August 2012; Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 9 November 2010, p1 of pp.8394c–8395a.

153 Kimberley Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

154 Kimberley Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

155 Mr Clifton Fong, Principal, Halls Creek District High School, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

156 Kimberley Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

have a dedicated team, referred to as a Student Services Team or School Attendance Team, to manage student attendance. The membership of these teams varies, but generally consists of the staff mentioned above.

Attendance Improvement Measure (AIM) Schools

One of the key strategies of *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* is 'giving direct support to schools and communities with the greatest need'.¹⁵⁷ Part of this support involves identifying schools or clusters of schools with the most serious attendance problems and providing resources to allow them to participate in an attendance improvement measure (AIM) to develop and implement attendance improvement strategies.¹⁵⁸

There are five parts to the AIM process:

1. **Notifying:** Schools are notified of their classification as AIM schools and encouraged to establish an AIM committee of local stakeholders, including representatives from school councils and Parents and Citizens' Associations, to oversee the development and implementation of improvement plans.
2. **Profiling:** Schools develop for their AIM committees a detailed profile of student attendance and reasons for non-attendance.
3. **Planning:** School staff are supported to develop culturally appropriate attendance improvement plans. These plans may include the appointment SBAOs. Attendance plans must be tailored to suite the local context and meet local needs.
4. **Resourcing:** Funding is paid direct to AIM schools.
5. **Reviewing:** Each school and community will evaluate and report on attendance plan outcomes.¹⁵⁹

In 2010, 40 schools had been identified as having significant attendance issues and were provided with additional funding and support.¹⁶⁰ Support can take the form of profiling tools, strategic planning materials, training, funding and practical advice.¹⁶¹

Total funding for AIM schools in the 2010 school year was \$2,058,246; for the 2011 school year it was \$2,027,096.¹⁶² Schools are able to determine the best way to use the AIM funds received to improve attendance.¹⁶³

157 Department of Education, *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2010, p3.

158 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 25 May 2011, p1 of pp. 3957f–3958a.

159 Department of Education, *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2010, p5.

160 Ms Sharyn O'Neil, for Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 June 2012, p4.

161 Department of Education, *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, May 2010, p5.

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Table 4.3 shows the AIM funding made available to ten secondary schools in the metropolitan area in 2011.

Table 4.3: AIM Funding Provided to 10 Metropolitan Secondary Schools in 2011

School	AIM Funding	Aboriginal Education Funding
Armadale Senior High School	\$44,480	\$20,000
Yule Brook College		\$70,000
Belmont Community College		\$90,000
Cecil Andrews Senior High School	\$33,350	\$45,000
Coodanup Community College	\$26,550	\$20,000
Mandurah Senior High	\$17,830	\$20,000
Gilmore College	\$70,450	\$25,000
Swan View Senior High School	* \$75 000	
Balga Senior High School		
Clarkson Community High School		

* Swan View Senior High School, Balga Senior High School, Clarkson Community High School, Ashfield Primary School and Moorditj Noongar Community College have formed a cluster and share the 2011 AIM funds.

Table 4.4 below shows the change in attendance rate for AIM Schools from 2008 to 2011

However, the data in Table 4.4 needs to be read with caution. The results would also be impacted by the movement in school numbers, with smaller schools' results being more affected by small changes in student numbers. Therefore, comparison of individual school results would not be fair or reasonable.

Nevertheless, there have been some very good attendance improvements. Of particular note is East Kalgoorlie Primary School, which went from a 69.04% attendance rate in 2008 to 81.09% in 2011. Wiluna Remote Community School and the Ngaanyatjarra Land School also experienced significant improvements, with attendance improving by 7.73% and 5.02% respectively.

Of the 40 AIM schools, 20 show improvements in the attendance rates, while 20 experienced a drop in attendance rates. Some of these changes, though, were marginal, with minimal shifts either up or down.

The AIM project will finish at the end of 2012. The Department of Education needs to undertake a thorough post-project evaluation of the AIM schools and ensure it makes this information publicly available.

162 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p29 of pp. 523c–558a; Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 25 May 2011, pp. 3957f–3958a.

163 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 25 May 2011, pp. 3957f–3958a.

Table 4.4: Change in Attendance Rate for AIM Schools from 2008 to 2011¹⁶⁴

School	2008		2011		per cent Change	Number Change
	Attendance Rate	Enrolment	Attendance Rate	Enrolment		
Armadale SHS	82.95	657	80.93	560	-2.02	-97
Avonvale PS	83.24	91	87.10	120	3.86	29
Baler PS	88.51	385	85.70	435	-2.81	50
Balga SHS	78.34	310	76.16	359	-2.18	49
Belmont CC	84.81	552	85.51	494	0.70	-58
Carnarvon SHS	64.00	293	59.39	227	-4.61	-66
Cecil Andrews SHS	81.37	509	80.96	416	-0.41	-93
Central Midlands SHS	85.62	190	88.40	169	2.78	-21
Clarkson CHS	86.46	874	84.15	810	-2.31	-64
Coodanup CC	84.95	376	73.42	364	-11.53	-12
East Kalgoorlie PS	69.04	53	81.09	63	12.05	10
Eaton CC	85.81	260	86.00	325	0.19	65
Gilmore College	82.60	1024	84.16	875	1.56	-149
Hedland SHS	83.93	601	76.46	573	-7.47	-28
John Willcock College	86.18	580	82.65	445	-3.53	-135
Kalgoorlie-Boulder CHS	78.45	712	80.11	560	1.66	-152
Karratha SHS	80.54	601	80.24	535	-0.30	-66
Katanning SHS	87.71	390	88.12	350	0.41	-40
Kununurra DHS	76.54	704	80.84	703	4.30	-1
Lakeland SHS	84.90	543	87.57	393	2.67	-150
Laverton School	79.94	74	80.19	66	0.25	-8
Leonora DHS	73.87	132	66.11	126	-7.76	-6
Mandurah HS	80.90	324	84.05	217	3.15	-107
Medina PS	88.79	99	87.53	96	-1.26	-3
Moorditj Noongar CC	76.54	92	79.88	72	3.34	-20
Newman PS	82.93	211	85.67	222	2.74	11
Newman SHS	83.01	288	82.80	225	-0.21	-63
Newton Moore SHS	86.09	922	82.12	625	-3.97	-297
Norseman DHS	83.98	142	83.15	117	-0.83	-25
North Albany SHS	85.98	605	85.60	402	-0.38	-203
Northam SHS	85.70	590	86.11	551	0.41	-39
Pegs Creek PS	86.28	168	85.55	212	-0.73	44
Rangeway PS	84.10	378	85.31	380	1.21	2
Swan View SHS	83.51	659	81.00	428	-2.51	-231
The Ngaanyatjarra LS	51.69	278	56.71	261	5.02	-17
Tom Price SHS	81.23	214	82.39	246	1.16	32
Tranby PS	87.32	84	88.87	90	1.55	6
Wickham PS	87.11	248	84.56	244	-2.55	-4
Wiluna RCS	63.49	76	71.22	59	7.73	-17
Yule Brook College	79.46	186	79.14	154	-0.32	-32

164 Developed from information provided as Questions on Notice Supplementary Information, Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, Question No. 9, Legislation Council, Western Australia, 5 June 2012.

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PS = Primary School; SHS = Senior High School; CC = Community College; CHS = community High School; DHS = District High School; LS = Land School; RCS = Regional Community School; HS = High School

Finding 6

The Attendance Improvement Measure strategy has seen some solid improvements in attendance in some schools, although experience is mixed.

Recommendation 3

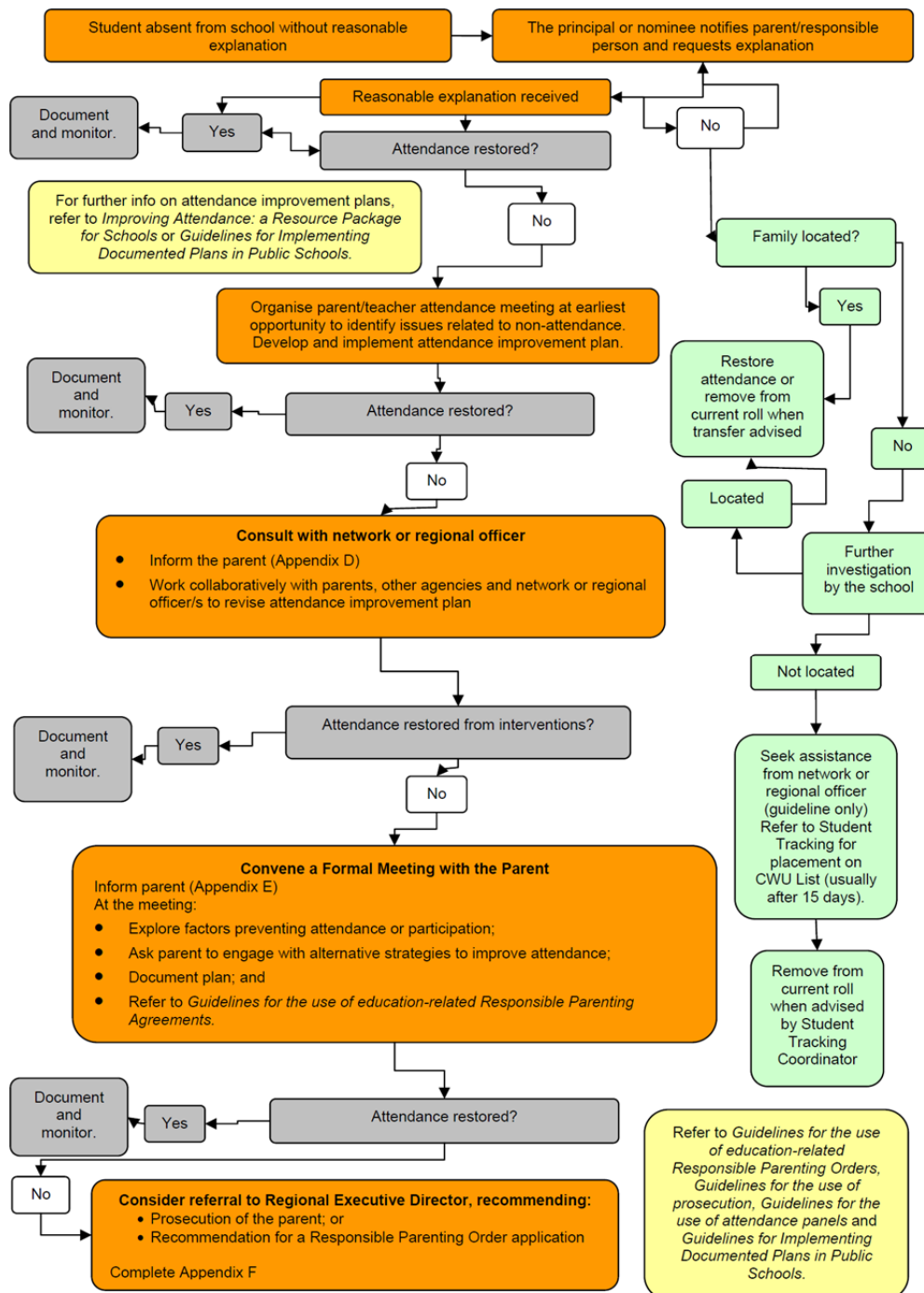
The Committee recommends that the Department of Education be funded to undertake an evaluation of the Attendance Improvement Measure in 2013/14.

The Department of Education issued a revised *Attendance Policy* in May 2011.

This policy contains an attendance intervention flowchart, as shown at Figure 4.5. This policy makes it clear that the school principal is responsible for keeping and retaining attendance records, and for managing school non-attendance.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Department of Education, *Student Attendance*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 12 May 2011, pp. 3–5.

Figure 4.5: Attendance intervention flowchart¹⁶⁶



166 Department of Education, Student Attendance Policy, *Appendix B: Attendance Intervention Flowchart*, Perth, May 2011, available at <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/policies/attendance.en?bbp.i=d0.a.1.5.1&bbp.8.policyID=11580868&g11n.enc=UTF-8&bbp.9.pane=6&selected=2> Accessed 8 October 2012.

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Where a student's attendance over a term drops below 90%, the **principal** must:

- *further investigate the reasons for the student's absence;*
- *organise a parent/teacher meeting and/or case conference at the earliest opportunity to identify the issues related to the non-attendance and plan for improvement; and*
- *document all attendance improvement plans.*¹⁶⁷

Policy guidelines state that any attendance improvement plans:

*should clearly indicate support to be provided by the school and/or network or regional officer, actions agreed to by the parent and timelines for achievement. Plans should be formally reviewed. Principals should offer support for parents from appropriate agencies at the earliest opportunity.*¹⁶⁸

Attendance below 90% means a child is at an indicated risk.

Currently under section 4.2.1 of the *Attendance Policy*, when repeated efforts to work with parents of a chronic or persistent non-attendeer have failed, a principal must:

- *consult with an appropriate network or regional officer (or officers);*
- *inform the parent ...; and*
- *revise any attendance improvement plan developed.*¹⁶⁹

While assistance from the network or regional office may be requested, the principal remains responsible for restoring school attendance.

The *Attendance Policy* states that matters will be referred to the Regional Executive Director when:

- *a formal meeting has been unable to secure parental engagement and improvement in school attendance (or engagement in another educational program); and*
- *it is determined that either prosecution of the parent or application to the Children's Court for a Responsible Parenting Order is appropriate.*¹⁷⁰

167 Department of Education, *Student Attendance*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 12 May 2011, Part 4.2, p5.

168 Department of Education, *Student Attendance*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 12 May 2011, Part 4.2, p5.

169 Department of Education, *Student Attendance*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 12 May 2011, Part 4.2.1, p5.

The *Attendance Policy* provides actions required 'if' a principal decides to refer a matter and 'if' the Regional Executive Director endorses the principal's recommendations.¹⁷¹

No guidance is provided as to when a matter is to be referred.

The Department of Education's Attendance Policy places a significant onus on the principal of the school for the attendance of children deemed to be at educational risk. The Committee is concerned that the Department's central office plays a marginal role in supporting strategies and there is a lack of up to date data being collated for the Department to effect a more rapid analysis and response to any broadly deteriorating situation.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Education that a formalised policy of escalated levels of intervention be applied for children at educational risk as follows:

- **Level 1** The Committee believes school principals should have responsibility for children for whom the absentee data show the child is missing no more than half a day or less a week (90 -100% attendance).
- **Level 2** Where attendance levels are 80 – 90%, that is to say a child is at indicative educational risk and missing up to one full day a week, an attendance officer should be required to liaise with the school and case manage the child in close collaboration with the school principal. The attendance officer should report back on children at indicated risk to the regional office. As outlined in this Report, 80-90% attendance equates to 2 years of missed schooling.
- **Level 3** Where attendance levels are 60-79% that is to say the child is in the moderate educational risk category, a senior Regional attendance officer should be involved to support the child, the family and the school principal.
- **Level 4** Attendance support should be as outlined in Level 3. In addition where the attendance level falls below 60% and the child is therefore at severe educational risk, if the Department for Child Protection is not already involved, its engagement should be required and the resources of the Department of Education's central office applied to remedy the situation.

170 Department of Education, *Student Attendance*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 12 May 2011, Part 4.2.3, p7.

171 Department of Education, *Student Attendance*, Government of Western Australia, Perth, 12 May 2011, Part 4.2.3, p7.

Chapter 5

Attendance is a Social and Family Issue

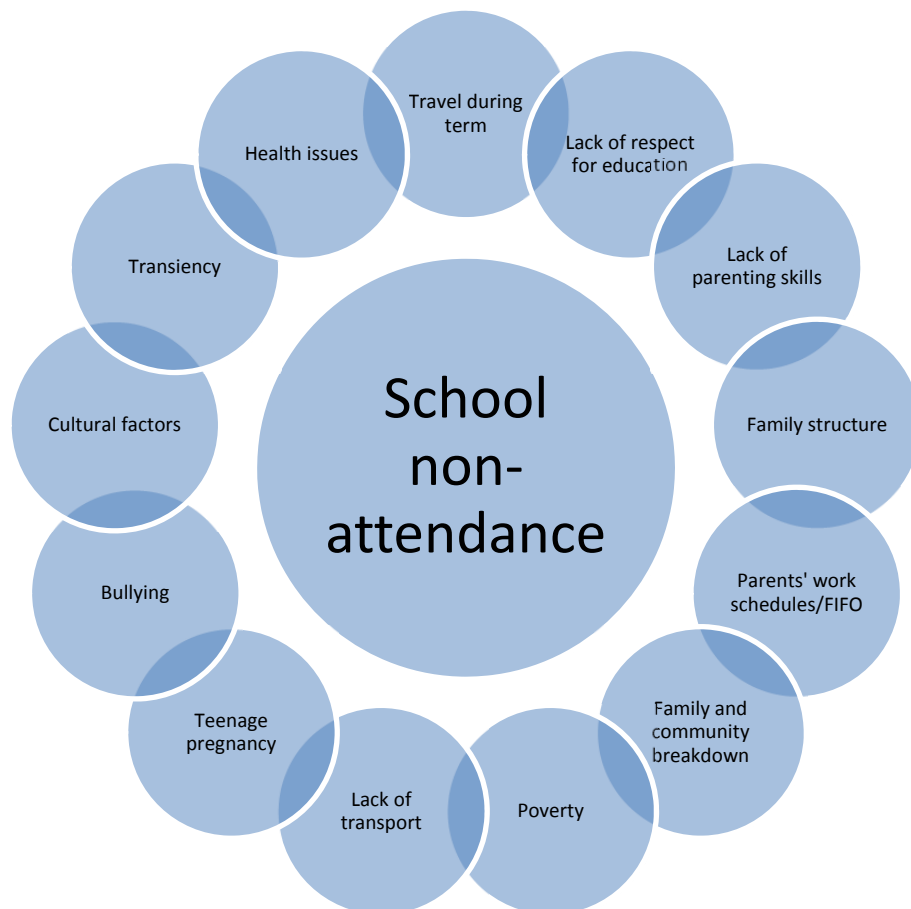
'How can you be work ready if you attend school 47 per cent of the time, you do not have a sleep pattern, and you do not see anyone go to work?'

Throughout this Inquiry, it has become very clear that the reasons for school non-attendance are complex and intimately connected to underlying social issues.

Reasons for Non-attendance

The barriers to regular school attendance are many and complex, as is illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 Barriers to regular school attendance



Chapter 5

The Committee was told that in 2011 the Department of Education commenced a draft research paper into the causes of non-attendance in the public schools in the state.¹⁷² No further information on what this project involved was provided. The research paper is yet to be completed.

However, considerable research into the factors that affect educational outcomes for young people has been done elsewhere. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research's (NCVER) Research Report 59 provides an extensive review of the literature dealing with the multidimensional nature of disadvantage and its impact on school completion.¹⁷³ While investigating the main predictors of Year 12 completion in Australia, NCVER's study outlines determinants of educational attainment generally.

School completion in Australia has been linked to:

- social and demographic factors, including gender, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and Indigenous status;
- curriculum and certification, including the breadth of offerings, VET in schools, senior school certificate requirements, alternative programs and university entry requirements;
- school organisation, including sector, selective entry schools, senior colleges, middle schools, TAFE-school relations and TAFE requirements;
- student performance, including early school achievement and academic progress;
- teachers and pedagogy, including teaching quality, teaching styles, assessment;
- personal factors, including finances, physical and mental health, disability, psychological issues, pregnancy, drug use, transport, family obligations, family breakdown and homelessness;
- economic and labour market factors, including employment, unemployment, apprenticeships, industry, recession and growth, teenage labour market opportunities.¹⁷⁴

Research would separate such factors into material and cultural. Material factors include student ability, parents' income, class sizes and the physical environment of the community. Cultural factors include a student's own aspirations, parental attitudes to

172 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter to Public Accounts Committee, Attachment p3, 13 March 2012.

173 Homel, J., Mavisakalyan, A., Nguyen, H.T. and Ryan, C., *School Completion: What we Learn from Different Measures of Family Background*, NCVER, Adelaide, 2012.

174 Homel, J., Mavisakalyan, A., Nguyen, H.T. and Ryan, C., *School Completion: What we Learn from Different Measures of Family Background*, NCVER, Adelaide, 2012, p15.

education, attitudes of teachers and social capital. Such research concluded that cultural factors such as parents' education had a stronger relationship to Year 12 participation than did material factors such as wealth.¹⁷⁵

Factors affecting student participation in school can also be categorised as family, individual or community characteristics. Various studies show that the common family characteristics impacting on school participation include structure, size, parents' education level, parents' occupation and residential mobility. While family income impacts on educational outcomes, the impact of earned income is positive while that of income received via welfare is generally negative.

Individual characteristics and behaviours also affect educational outcomes. Such characteristics and behaviours include alcohol consumption, drug use, health, religion and religiosity, psychological factors (including self-esteem, locus of control, persistence) and motivation for learning.¹⁷⁶ Individual student factors can also be impacted by neonatal factors including, but not limited to, whether or not the mother had consumed alcohol during pregnancy.¹⁷⁷

Neighbourhood or community factors also have an impact. Such factors include school quality, socioeconomic status, safety and ethnic diversity.

Some research concludes that the effects of early school experiences and student aspirations were significant. The probability of completing Year 12 for students who had to repeat a grade was reduced by between 22 and 30%. Those who smoked and drank alcohol had a reduced probability of Year 12 completion of 8 and 7% respectively. Students who aspired to continue to Year 12 had a 24% increased probability of completion, while those who aspired to continue to university had an 8% increased chance of completing Year 12.¹⁷⁸

While the above factors have been mentioned in relation to school participation, the link to school attendance is obvious. This has been demonstrated through the results of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) and through the Committee's own investigative travel and research.

Due to the apparent lack of research on non-Indigenous school attendance in Western Australia, the Committee asked a small number of Western Australian metropolitan

175 Homel, J, Mavisakalyan, A, Nguyen, HT and Ryan, C, *School Completion: What we Learn from Different Measures of Family Background*, NCVET, Adelaide, 2012, p16.

176 Homel, J, Mavisakalyan, A, Nguyen, HT and Ryan, C, *School Completion: What we Learn from Different Measures of Family Background*, NCVET, Adelaide, 2012, p16.

177 Zubrick, S.R. et al, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Volume 3, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2006, p125.

178 Homel, J., Mavisakalyan, A., Nguyen, H.T. and Ryan, C., *School Completion: What we Learn from Different Measures of Family Background*, NCVET, Adelaide, 2012, p40.

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schools to advise the key reasons parents and children gave for student non-attendance.

The number of schools involved—nine primary and eleven secondary—is too small to constitute a survey as such, and the schools selected cannot be said to be a representative sample. This means that data generated from the information provided must be used with caution. Nevertheless, the information provided by schools clearly indicates a wide range of issues that impact upon a child's willingness or ability to attend school on a regular basis.

Some of the reasons given for metropolitan, non-Indigenous student absences:

- Parents and/or children do not value education;
- Travel interstate and overseas, often for extended periods;
- Parents do not have the skills necessary to get their children to school;
- Parents' work commitments make it difficult for them to ensure school attendance;
- Children stay with extended step-families or an estranged parent;
- Attendance at significant cultural and religious events;
- Domestic violence;
- Parents' health problems, including mental health and substance abuse;
- Lack of transport, either private or public;
- Children have responsibility to care for siblings;
- Children's health, including mental health and substance abuse;
- Childhood trauma;
- Transiency; and
- Poverty, resulting in a lack of food, school uniforms, bags etc.

Indigenous Students and School Attendance

The 2006 Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) found that the 'median number of days absent was 26 days for Aboriginal students' and that 'only

18.1% of Aboriginal students had less than 8 days of absence from school'.¹⁷⁹ In relation to unexplained absences from school, nearly 50% of Aboriginal students had '10 or more unexplained days absent from school during the school year'.¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, 'two thirds of the absences of Aboriginal students [who were] away for at least 26 days were unexplained'.¹⁸¹

The WAACHS found that the factors associated with school attendance by Indigenous students included:

- *Students were one and a half times less likely to have been absent from school for more than 26 days if their carers had been educated beyond Year 10 to Years 11 or 12.*
- *Students assessed by their teachers to be at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties were almost twice as likely to have at least 26 days of absence from school.*
- *Students in families where 7 to 14 life stress events had occurred in a given year were almost twice as likely to be absent from school for 26 days or more than students from families where 2 or less life stress events had occurred.*
- *Students were more likely to miss more than 26 days of school if their main language spoken in the playground was Aboriginal English or an Aboriginal language.*
- *Students who had trouble getting enough sleep were over one and a half times more likely to be absent for at least 26 days.*
- *Students who had never attended day care were one and a half times more likely to be absent from school for 26 days or more during the school year.*
- *Students whose primary carer had needed to see the school principal about a problem students were having at school were almost twice as likely to be absent for 26 days or more.*

179 Zubrick, S.R. et al, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Volume 3, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2006, pp.113–14.

180 Zubrick, SR et al, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Volume 3, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2006, pp.113–14.

181 Zubrick, SR et al, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Volume 3, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2006, pp.113–14.

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- *Poorer attendance at school was found in schools with a high proportion of Aboriginal students, schools that had Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), and Government schools in the highest quartile of the socioeconomic index for schools (SEI).*¹⁸²

The impact of reduced health and wellbeing, levels of literacy and numeracy, and disengagement will be discussed in separate chapters in this report. At this point, it suffices to note that the Committee's research and evidence gathered throughout its investigative travel generally supports the survey findings.

While there are numerous reasons why children might be absent from school, the following discusses the particular issues brought to the attention of the Committee in hearings, during its investigative travel and through its small study of 20 metropolitan area schools.

The Department of Education does not keep non-attendance information centrally, and appears not to have a uniform coding for the cause of non-attendance. Thus, it has not been possible for the Committee to undertake an analysis of the reasons parents and students have provided to schools across the state for non-attendance. Without this information it is difficult to assess at a State level measures which can be implemented to improve attendance and educational outcomes for children.

The issues discussed below are based on evidence provided to the Committee from the north west of the state and from a small sample of metropolitan area schools. This means that they provide an indicative, rather than an exhaustive, list of all issues affecting school attendance. Nor do they necessarily apply only to those areas. It is reasonable to suggest that many of these issues apply to many areas of the state and other groups of students depending on factors including, but not limited to, socioeconomic status, culture and English language skills. Non-attendance is a complex issue.

Travel during school term

There are a number of reasons acknowledged in the SE Act for children to be absent from school. In acknowledging truancy as a small but important contributor to non-attendance, in June 2011, Hon. Dr Elizabeth Constable, then Minister for Education, noted that 'a couple of new causes' had been drawn to her attention and that these could be related to 'parents' way of life'.¹⁸³ Dr Constable stated that:

182 Zubrick, SR et al, *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People*, Volume 3, Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, 2006, pp.113–14.

183 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p28 of pp.523c–558a.

*It is not unusual for children of fly in, fly out workers to take time off when their parent who is a fly in, fly out worker is at home. The impact on the lives of those people is such that they want to be with their kids or they want to go fishing for a few days so they take their kids.*¹⁸⁴

The Member for Mandurah, Hon. David Templeman, confirmed that ‘fly in, fly out family relationship issues’ were a concern, stating that ‘more and more parents are taking their kids out of school for their one-week, two-week or three-week Bali holiday’.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, he stated that people in a fly in, fly out situation:

*Compensate[ed] for lost time with their kids by taking them on these trips—cheap trip to Bali in particular—and they think it is in some way rewarding the kids ... it is compensatory and, basically, the parent is saying, “I do not spend enough time with you week to week, month to month, because of work circumstances, so I will take you out of school for one or two weeks.” Most of the time they take them out in non-school holidays because the school holiday period is a very busy time in Indonesia.*¹⁸⁶

The Principal of Tambrey Primary School in Karratha advised the Committee that of the 13 or 14 students who had attended less than 50% of the school year to mid-March 2012, two or three had been away on holidays or something similar.¹⁸⁷ The Principal of Karratha Senior High School, described absenteeism in Karratha as ‘shocking’ and commented that there was a big problem with parents taking their children on holidays during term time.¹⁸⁸

While the Department of Education could not supply the data on non-attendance for family travel, the Deputy Director General, Schools, stated that ‘for a variety of reasons’ families ‘determine that it is better for their child to stay at home and have a bit of family time. Increasingly, we are seeing that linked to fly in, fly out arrangements’.¹⁸⁹

The Director General of Education confirmed that the impact of fly in, fly out work on school attendance was ‘one of the newer emerging concerns’, particularly in relation to

184 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p28 of pp.523c–558a. The Minister made a number of statements to the media on this issue, for example, in May 2011 and February 2012. In addition to these, the Minister wrote an Opinion Piece for *The Western Australian* newspaper on 3 February 2012.

185 Hon. D. Templeman, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 16 August 2011, p12 of pp5862d–5890a .

186 Hon. D. Templeman, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 16 August 2011, p12 of pp5862d–5890a.

187 Mr Niel Smith, Principal, Tambrey Primary School, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

188 Mr Greg Kelly, Principal, Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

189 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

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'how that relates to families being together and doing things together'.¹⁹⁰ However, the Director General (DG) advised that evidence of this is largely anecdotal with hard data on the extent of the problem being difficult to obtain. The Director General stated that:

*schools report that children of fly in, fly out workers take, during the school term, two weeks here, one week there, to be home with the family when the family is combined, to go away on holiday or to do regular things that they normally do not do with the parent who is usually away. We are seeing some of that Schools refer to lower overseas airfares, particularly to Indonesia and other places, and to the fact that the low seasons occur during school terms, so students go on holidays.*¹⁹¹

The considerable impact of the fly-in, fly-out work routine was noted by several schools in the metropolitan area. These schools confirmed that holidays for these families are often planned to suit the work roster and had become more frequent, again in line with the work roster. A further impact was that children stay at home to spend time with the returning fly-in, fly-out parent, with long-weekends turning into longer holidays.¹⁹²

The attraction of cheaper fares during school term was confirmed by Perth metropolitan area schools as a significant reason for non-attendance. However, schools advised that extended holiday absences were not only due to cheap flights to Bali. Families originally from overseas and/or with extended family living outside Australia are reported as taking overseas holidays to visit family or allowing children to stay home from school when relatives visit.¹⁹³

Schools reported that some of these overseas visits are for cultural reasons and some are to spend time in the family's country of origin following the granting of an Australian passport. One school reported a student absence of three months for this reason.¹⁹⁴

There is recognition, though, that parents have always taken children out of school for holidays. However, where previously this may have been only occasionally in circumstances such as long service leave, 'what we are seeing is an increase in the short

190 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p2.

191 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p2.

192 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

193 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

194 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

two weeks here, one week there for the purposes of holidaying which, of course, is not allowed for under the act'.¹⁹⁵

Ms Gould, the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, agreed that 'a lot of non-attendance is a result of family pressures on families to spend time with their children'.¹⁹⁶ However, Ms Gould stated that children could learn a lot by travelling in places with different cultures and that 'parents need to determine the educational value of the trip compared to the education they would miss being at school'.¹⁹⁷ It is questionable, though, what a child would learn 'play[ing] in a pool in Bali for a week'.¹⁹⁸

Finding 7

Parents taking children on holidays during school term is a significant cause of school non-attendance. Family holidays are taken:

- to suit fly-in, fly-out work rosters;
- to visit relatives overseas, often for extended periods; and
- to take advantage of cheaper fares during the term.

Lack of respect for education

There is concern that taking children out of school for holidays or family time suggests a lack of respect or a devaluing of education.

The schools which answered the Committee's questions strongly believe that the lack of value afforded education by some parents has a major and negative impact on school attendance. Apart from stating their general impression of this, the schools provided the following examples as indications that parents do not always value education, understand the impact of non-attendance or understand the need for consistency in attendance. Children were allowed to stay home:

195 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p3.

196 Ms Valerie Gould, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, as cited in Bannister, Brooke, 'WA School Attendance Drops because of Bali and FIFO', *ABC Perth*, 3 February 2011, p1. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/02/03/3422534.htm>. Accessed on 25 July 2012.

197 Ms Valerie Gould, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, as cited in Bannister, Brooke, 'WA School Attendance Drops because of Bali and FIFO', *ABC Perth*, 3 February 2011, p1. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/02/03/3422534.htm>. Accessed on 25 July 2012.

198 Ms Valerie Gould, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, as cited in Bannister, Brooke, 'WA School Attendance Drops because of Bali and FIFO', *ABC Perth*, 3 February 2011, p1. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/02/03/3422534.htm>. Accessed on 25 July 2012.

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- for trivial reasons such as the child is tired from being up late or simply does not wish to go to school;
- for birthdays;
- for visits by relatives;
- for the last week of term;
- to babysit or care for siblings;
- to clean the house; and
- because their sibling(s) was sick and it was easier for parents to keep all children at home.

The Principal of Karratha Senior High School advised the Committee of the need for advocacy to encourage the community to better respect and recognise the value of education for their children.¹⁹⁹

However, Ms Edie Wright of the Department of Education's Kimberley Education Region advised that Aboriginal parents do understand the value of education for their children. The problem is that in terms of priorities such as housing, health and finances, education slips down the list.²⁰⁰ These issues will be addressed further in this report.

Sometimes not valuing education manifests as an unwillingness to send children to school. Evidence presented to the Committee during its travel in the Pilbara suggests that a significant proportion of non-attendance arises for this reason.²⁰¹ According to the Director General, 'one of the worst groups is in year 1', which means that it is not the children themselves who are truanting; rather it is the parents who decide to not bring their children to school.²⁰²

An issue raised with the Committee in relation to the metropolitan area concerns the non-compulsory nature of early childhood education. Primary schools reported that because this is not compulsory some parents believe they do not need to send their children. In this phase of schooling attendance can be erratic.²⁰³

199 Mr Greg Kelly, Principal, Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

200 Ms Edie Wright, Kimberley Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

201 This was mentioned, for example, in Committee Briefings with schools such as Tambrey Primary School and in organisations such as Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation.

202 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

203 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

Similarly, the compulsory nature of Year 11 and Year 12 has not been accepted by some students, families and community members.

Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation (MHSAC) reported that many parents do not see the need for, or value of, an education. It seems that non-attendance at school is seen as normal behaviour.²⁰⁴ Yaandina Family Centre stated that they were 'dealing with a tribal group of people who have no tomorrow, who have no expectations of their children'.²⁰⁵ The Principal of Red Hill Catholic Primary School in Halls Creek advised that he drives a bus around in the morning to collect children for school. Sometimes he has to actually wake the child up and wait for them to get dressed and ready to go.²⁰⁶

However, as the Principal of Red Hill Catholic Primary School warns, it is important to remember that this is not a scenario that applies to all families in the regions. Some students come to school well prepared, ready to learn, and are supported by their families to do so.²⁰⁷

Nevertheless, it is apparent that there is an issue with parents who, for whatever reason, do not understand the importance of regular school attendance for their children.

Finding 8

There is a very strong link between parent and carer engagement with their children's education and school attendance.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education identifies and funds, in the 2013-14 budget, successful parent and carer engagement strategies that support their children's education and school attendance.

Non-attendance as a reflection of social and community issues

There is a connection between attendance and current social and community issues or activities. The Regional Executive Director, Pilbara Education Region, advised attendance is a symptom of a social issue.²⁰⁸ Anything that impacts on the community flows through into school attendance.²⁰⁹

204 Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

205 Yaandina Family Centre, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

206 Mr Dean Savoia, Principal, Red Hill Catholic Primary School, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

207 Mr Dean Savoia, Principal, Red Hill Catholic Primary School, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

208 Ms Sue Cunio, Regional Executive Director, Pilbara Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

209 Pilbara Education Regional Office, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

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These issues are generally interrelated and often compound one another. For example, substance abuse can result in poor parenting skills; a parent who starts work early cannot be there to ensure their child goes to school et cetera. However, they are separated here solely for ease of discussion.

Parenting skills

Schools reported reduced levels of general parenting skills as a reason for school non-attendance. In some cases there is a lack of school routines in place for children; so, for example, they may stay up too late and not be able to get up to go to school. Some parents do not have the skills to actually get a child out of bed, dressed and to school. Others are not able to support their children through encouraging attendance. It was suggested that parents may lack the will or not have strategies to put in place if a child truant. Interestingly, one school reported that a parent had kept a child home as punishment for misbehaving.²¹⁰

A parent's ability and/or willingness to get their child to school would also be impacted by their own experiences of education and their level of literacy and numeracy.²¹¹

In September 2012, the Committee visited Roseworth Primary School in Girrawheen to learn about how this school builds relationships and develop parent capacity to engage. Roseworth initially followed a program called FAST—Families and Schools Together—which was developed and used in the United States and Canada.

FAST caters for the whole family and is run at the school for one night a week over eight weeks. These multi-family sessions engage parents and children in fun, structured, research-based activities. The whole family attends the night which involves cooking and eating a meal together, followed by group, family and individual sessions. Trained counsellors run some of the sessions and teachers run others.

Using this relationship building process, FAST has a fifteen year track record in demonstrating the following outcomes and goals:

- Empowers parents;
- Builds supportive relationships;
- Strengthens family functioning;
- Reduces school failure by children at risk;
- Reduces substance abuse by the child and other family members; and
- Reduces stress from daily life situations for parents and children.

210 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

211 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

The FAST program was run by an organisation based in Tasmania and trainers had to be flown to Perth to run the courses. As this was quite expensive Roseworth developed and runs its 'Roseworth and Parents Together' program, which covers much the same territory. Roseworth uses its National Partnership funding for low SES schools to fund the program.²¹²

Roseworth Primary School has a range of other parental engagement programs, including adult learning sessions run during the school day. All of these initiatives aim to develop the parents' engagement with, and trust in, the school. The parenting sessions held in the evening cater for between eight to ten families at a time. The adult learning programs include activities such as:

- cooking classes;
- writing skills;
- IT skills; and
- how to make a phone call to a government body such as a hospital.

The courses are not accredited training courses and are funded through the school's National Partnership funding.²¹³

Family Structure

Being a child of separated or divorced parents can lead to high incidences of non-attendance. Schools reported that children missed school to travel either interstate or across the city to visit the non-resident parent and/or extended step-families. Children in these circumstances may be taken on two holidays per year, one with each parent. One school reported that a child can sometimes be kept home to avoid contact with the non-resident parent.²¹⁴

Children of single-parent families may be kept home from school to care for siblings or to let in tradespeople when their parent is at work. Children who have a parent in prison may be sensitive about this and stay home to avoid embarrassment or shame. A parent whose partner is in prison may keep a child home from school for company.²¹⁵

Parents' Work Schedule

A school psychologist in the Pilbara Education Regional Office referred to the emotional neglect which can occur for some children in families where both parents work 12-hour

212 Roseworth Primary School, Girrawheen, *Committee Briefing*, 5 September 2012.

213 Roseworth Primary School, Girrawheen, *Committee Briefing*, 5 September 2012.

214 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

215 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

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shifts at mine sites. Such families had material resources, but parents had little time to spend with their children.²¹⁶

When parents need to leave early for work they cannot ensure their children go to school. Parents in this situation do not know if their children have gone to school and, in such circumstances, it is easier for children to truant. Sometimes the older children are left to get the younger ones ready for school and to get them there. In such cases, the older children can be late for school, something which disrupts their own education.²¹⁷

Family and Community Break-down

According to the Department for Child Protection, East Kimberley, high levels of community dysfunction and a lack of community safety significantly impact upon school attendance.²¹⁸

The Catholic Education Office supported this at a hearing, stating that the average attendance rate in the Kimberley:

*Varies significantly depending on what is happening in the community or outside the community. If it is a period of sorry time, kids will come from everywhere. We are always mindful of, on census dates, where the kids are. Our schools try to ensure that the kids are particularly at school as much as possible, but it really depends on what is happening within the community.*²¹⁹

Children are sometimes exposed to family feuding and domestic violence, or traumatic events out of school hours. Not only is this traumatic for all involved, but children stay home to support and protect the abused partner. Perth metropolitan schools reported that conflict in the school and the community is a cause of school non-attendance. Trauma associated with neglect, abuse, poverty and, for Aboriginal children, the impact of the Stolen Generations on their parents, can also result in non-attendance.²²⁰

Experiencing anti-social behaviour at home is traumatic and leads to children not being able to concentrate while at school.²²¹

216 Ms F. Watt, School Psychologist, Pilbara Education Regional Office, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

217 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

218 Department for Child Protection, East Kimberley, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

219 Ms Debra Sayce, Catholic Education office, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p2.

220 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

221 Mr Clifton Fong, Principal, Halls Creek District High School, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

Children who have been refugees have often experienced trauma, and the effect of relatively small events in school can be significant for these children. This results in children either not wanting to come to school or not being able to school.

Many children are exposed to gambling, and drug and alcohol misuse.²²² One of the repercussions of this is that parents may often be absent, and children, therefore, have to self-parent without knowing how to care for themselves.²²³ Vulnerable children and young people are on the streets in the early hours of the morning, with little children 'running' with older ones.²²⁴

Perth metropolitan schools advised that parents with alcohol and drug addictions often are not able to look after their children well. Children can be neglected and not have their basic needs met. Some parents with a mental illness are sometimes not able to get their children to school. Schools reported occasions when children with a parent with a mental illness stayed at home to look after their parent. All of these factors necessarily impact on a child's capacity to attend school.²²⁵

Poverty

Poverty was a factor mentioned by several schools in the metropolitan area. This is manifest in a number of ways, including poor health, inability to buy uniforms, shoes, school bags and other supplies, no money for school lunches or school excursions et cetera. Children without uniforms and shoes, or whose uniform is torn or dirty, are kept away from school due to embarrassment.²²⁶

Poor living environments due to homelessness, overcrowding and sub-standard housing further impact on children's capacity to attend school regularly.²²⁷

Schools noted the impact of recent changes to family benefit payments. Mothers, in particular, have had to return to work, which may involve a lot of night work. One consequence of this is that parents do not get to spend as much time with their

222 Department for Child Protection, East Kimberley, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012; Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012; Yaandina Family Centre, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

223 Yaandina Family Centre, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012; Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

224 Yaandina Family Centre, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012; Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

225 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

226 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

227 Department for Child Protection, East Kimberley, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012; Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

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children and some students want or need to stay home with their parents during the day.²²⁸

Lack of transport

Schools reported that changes to bus services have resulted in increased non-attendance. A small change can mean that students need to take longer journeys, are often late and miss a considerable amount of school. The lack of regular transport services during school hours was noted as an issue.²²⁹

A lack of transport in the community is a problem in some regions. For example, the Principal of Halls Creek District High School advised that Halls Creek does not have a bus service, either within or around the town and out to the communities.²³⁰

Teenage pregnancy

Children, generally speaking, are commencing sexual activity at an early age. As Karratha Senior High School suggested, many non-Indigenous and Indigenous children are sexually active from Years 8 and 9.²³¹ As well as the general pressures that come with being a teenage mother, young girls miss considerable school, returning after a year's absence.²³² Teenage mothers in the metropolitan area are reported to miss considerable school time to care for their babies.²³³

Bullying

Bullying is another phenomenon that affects school attendance.²³⁴ This is clearly signified by the existence of:

- the National Safe Schools Framework, which was 'endorsed by all ministers for education through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in December 2010'.²³⁵

228 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

229 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

230 Mr Clifton Fong, Principal, Halls Creek District High School, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

231 Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012; Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

232 Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

233 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012

234 Ms Debra Sayce, Catholic Education office, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, pp 11–12.

235 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Safe Schools. National Safe Schools Framework*, nd, np. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/nationalsafeschoolsframework.aspx>. Accessed on 27 July 2012.

- an annual National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence, which is held in March each year ‘to raise community awareness about bullying and violence and to provide positive strategies and activities to all Australian schools’;²³⁶ and
- Anti-bullying policies in all Australian States and Territories.²³⁷

Schools in Perth advised that bullying in the school environment or via social media often meant that children being bullied did not want to come to school.²³⁸

Finding 9

The social determinants of children’s health and wellbeing directly impact their ability to go to school and to learn. These include factors such as family structure, community cohesion, parenting skills, and parents’ work schedules.

Cultural Factors

The Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS) advised the Committee that young people from different cultural backgrounds are conscious of ‘belonging to a minority group that does not fit the “classic” image of power and success in Australia’.²³⁹ A further challenge to life in Australia is:

*adapting to a new culture—learning what is acceptable, boundaries, freedoms and limitations, rights and responsibilities. (Building knowledge of cultural values and frameworks underpinning these ideals, rules and laws etc.)*²⁴⁰

Language barriers to learning mean that children can be left behind.²⁴¹ A further impact of the language barrier is that children can be kept home from school to interpret for a parent.²⁴²

Children from Indigenous and from different cultural backgrounds also report experiencing racism from teachers in particular. Many children ‘had experiences of bad

236 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Safe Schools. National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence*, nd, np. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/NatDayActionBullying.aspx>. Accessed on 27 July 2012.

237 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Safe Schools. States' and Territories' Anti-Bullying Policies*, nd, np. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/NationalSafeSchools/Pages/antibullyingpolicies.aspx>. Accessed on 27 July 2012.

238 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

239 Submission No. 3 from ASeTTS, 18 November 2011, p3.

240 Submission No. 3 from ASeTTS, 18 November 2011, p3.

241 Submission No. 3 from ASeTTS, 18 November 2011, p4.

242 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

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teaching skills and styles, many had even experienced racism from their teachers'.²⁴³ ASeTTS submitted that 'behavioural issues can often trigger racist comments and attitudes and act to mask the intent of teachers' reactions'.²⁴⁴ Interestingly, children 'from different backgrounds (including Anglo Australians) did not treat them [children from different cultural backgrounds] any differently'.²⁴⁵

For non-Western children, trying to fit into a Western education system can be very difficult. While the SE Act provides for absences from school for days recognised as having religious or cultural significance,²⁴⁶ there are other factors related to cultural difference that are not accommodated in legislation.

One of these is the different parenting styles in non-Western families. For example, Aboriginal children are taught to be much more independent much earlier in life than Western children. This makes going to school, particularly high school, difficult as all children are expected to submit to school authority.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, as the Clontarf Foundation advised, when they ask 'parents, the mums in particular, and go, "How come you're not sending your kids to school?"', they most often do try and send them but these boys just wander'.²⁴⁸

Indigenous students often struggle to balance both worlds. There are concerns around loss of culture, and the clash between the value placed on culture versus the value placed on education. There are considerable challenges in balancing culture and education.²⁴⁹

One of the difficulties for some communities is that the social structures have disintegrated over the last two generations, with traditional roles disappearing. The Committee heard, for example, that many Indigenous people in the north west of the state, and men in particular, have lost their roles in society. Children do not have Western reference points when they enter the school system, so much of it is entirely foreign.²⁵⁰

243 Submission No. 3 from ASeTTS, 18 November 2011, p4.

244 Submission No. 3 from ASeTTS, 18 November 2011, p4.

245 Submission No. 3 from ASeTTS, 18 November 2011, p4.

246 Section 30 *School Education Act 1999* (WA).

247 Ms Sarah Mist, Fitzroy Crossing Resident, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2012.

248 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p6.

249 Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

250 Ms Sarah Mist, Fitzroy Crossing Resident, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 March 2012.

The difficulty of making the cultural crossover is further increased for Indigenous boys. It is hard for boys who have completed 'law' at 12 or 13 to go to school and be treated as a boy, rather than as a man.²⁵¹

As noted earlier, the SE Act provides for absences for significant cultural or religious events. Several schools in the metropolitan area reported that students often were absent for cultural events and religious celebrations. Schools reported that Indigenous students can be absent for extended periods of time to attend funerals in other parts of the state. This was cited by the Catholic Education Office as a factor in non-attendance.²⁵²

Finding 10

Children from non-Western backgrounds can find it difficult to cope with school for a number of reasons, including but not limited to:

- language barriers
- racism, including from teachers
- trauma; and
- trying to balance two culturally different worlds

Transiency

The Committee was advised that transiency of families is a particular problem in the north west of the state. In towns such as Karratha, this may be due to a large itinerant workforce. Karratha Senior High School advised that Karratha is a town that people come to in order to make money, and then leave. The population is relatively young and focussed on 'getting rich and getting out'. The school population of Karratha Senior High School may change by 12% over the course of a single year.²⁵³

In other areas of the North West, family mobility is linked to cultural factors. As the Pilbara Education Regional Office advised, families in this region move between Karratha, Roebourne and Onslow.²⁵⁴ The Department for Child Protection noted the high level of transience in the Halls Creek region.²⁵⁵ While the Catholic Education Office confirmed that student attendance was the responsibility of each school, 'in the

251 Ms Sarah Mist, Fitzroy Crossing Resident, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012; University of Notre Dame, Broome Campus, 15 March 2012.

252 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012; Ms Debra Sayce, Catholic Education office, Transcript of Evidence, 9 May 2012, p2.

253 Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

254 Deputy Principal, Peg's Creek Primary School, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

255 Department for Child Protection, East Kimberley, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

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Kimberley it is a bit trickier because children typically move from one community to another community'.²⁵⁶ Sometimes, these communities may be in adjoining jurisdictions, namely South Australia and the Northern Territory. The Systems Interoperability Framework (SIF) Association reports that 'some students cross state borders several times a year'.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, as each jurisdiction has its own system of student record management, when a student moves 'it can be hard to tell who is who'.²⁵⁸

Transiency is affected by social and policy matters. For example, in 2010, circumstances generated by the stimulus package and alcohol bans in some communities caused increases in transience and student non-attendance.²⁵⁹

The Committee's study of schools in Perth revealed that transiency is a significant issue in the metropolitan area. Some schools experienced very high levels of transiency, with one advising that up to 50% of families in their school travelled north in the winter months.

Parents move when they get into debt they cannot repay. It can mean that children do not come to school because they do not have uniforms or school bags, or that the school is simply too far to get to without transport.²⁶⁰

Families living in Perth on a visa often live in rental accommodation. This means that these families, too, tend to move quite regularly.²⁶¹

Such transiency makes it difficult for schools to track students or to know of children who are not enrolled in any school. This problem is exacerbated when families do not always re-enrol their children when they move, so that these children are listed by the school as 'whereabouts unknown'.²⁶²

The difficulty of keeping track of children has been acknowledged by both the Western Australian Department of Education and the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Then Minister Constable stated that

256 Ms Debra Sayce, Catholic Education office, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p2.

257 SIF Association AU, 'Tri-borders. Supporting Students across SA, NT and WA', p. 1. Available at: http://www.sifinfo.org/upload/story/8E3BFF_SIF%20Association%20AU%20Pilot%202.1%20Tri-Borders.pdf. Accessed on 30 July 2012.

258 SIF Association AU, 'Tri-borders. Supporting Students across SA, NT and WA', p. 1. Available at: http://www.sifinfo.org/upload/story/8E3BFF_SIF%20Association%20AU%20Pilot%202.1%20Tri-Borders.pdf. Accessed on 30 July 2012.

259 Kimberley Success Zone, *The School-Based Attendance Officers Initiative. Strategies for Improving Student Attendance and Participation*, p. 8. Available at: <http://www.ksz.edu.au>. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

260 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

261 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

262 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

‘mobility of families and children in remote areas has been a major challenge for schools for a very long time’,²⁶³ and ‘many students did not appear on the data bases of state and territory systems’.²⁶⁴

DEEWR agreed that there was currently no mechanism to detect children of compulsory school age who have never been enrolled in an education program. A DEEWR national analysis of non-enrolment and non-attendance data found that, of the estimated 18,000 students between the ages of six and 14 years not enrolled nationally, approximately 900 were from Western Australia.²⁶⁵

Clearly, government education departments can only track the non-attendance of children who are enrolled in a school or other education program.

The Department of Education recently gathered data that showed that over the two-year period from February 2009 to December 2011:

*One student attended nine different schools in that region; one attended eight; two attended seven different schools; and 21 students attended six different schools. That is a lot of movement. ... 552 students—there are not that many kids out there—attended four different schools.*²⁶⁶

In addition to this, 140 students attended more than five schools, 2,270 attended three schools, and 641 attended schools in three different jurisdictions.²⁶⁷

The problem of keeping track of children who are part of highly mobile families is exacerbated by the fact that children can sometimes go under different names, ‘particularly if someone dies in the local community’.²⁶⁸

Furthermore, children ‘generally do not leave one [school] and turn up at another; there can be two months’ break in between’.²⁶⁹ One of the repercussions of this is that

263 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 21 February 2012, p11c–12a.

264 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 22 May 2012, p2915c–2916a.

265 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, *Committee Briefing*, 12 October 2011.

266 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p21.

267 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 21 February 2012, p11c–12a.

268 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p21.

269 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p21.

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schools cannot provide continuity in the provision of a student's learning program or learning outcome.²⁷⁰

Finding 11

Children moving from one school to another is a significant cause of school non-attendance both in the Perth metropolitan area and in the regions, because children generally do not leave one school and turn up immediately at another; there can be two months break in between.

Child Health

It is reasonable to suggest that all of the issues discussed above would have at least some impact on children's physical and mental health and wellbeing. Of course, child health is connected to many other social and financial issues such as housing, poverty and level of parents' education. This was made very clear in the information provided to the Committee by metropolitan schools. Among the health issues they identified were:

- Child hygiene is not always as good as it could be;
- Parents are not always able to take their child to a doctor soon enough, which results in longer absences;
- Parents cannot always afford prescribed medicines;
- Long waiting lists in public hospitals leads to longer absences;
- Neglected children are more susceptible to illness;
- Younger children are more susceptible to colds and other infectious conditions;
- Poor physical health; and
- Severe emotional health and wellbeing issues, including depression and mental illness.²⁷¹

As discussed elsewhere in this report, if a child is not well he or she is not able to attend school and/or learn effectively.

Response by Department for Child Protection to the social issues of non-attendance

As noted earlier, the CEO of the Department for Child Protection is one of the agencies that, under s 13 (1) of the PSR Act, may make an application to the Court for a

270 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 22 May 2012, p2915c–2916a.

271 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

responsible parenting order to require a parent to undertake certain actions including, but not limited to, ensuring that their child attends school.

It was evident from the Committee's travel to the Pilbara region, for example, that a general feeling exists that DCP is reluctant to get involved with the issue of school attendance and does not consider non-attendance a reason for the department to be involved with a family. The Committee heard that school attendance is not on DCP's radar, that it does not view school attendance as an issue for them, only violence, neglect and abuse, and that attendance is not seen as DCP's concern.²⁷²

DCP stated that lack of attendance at school is not enough for the department to remove children from their families. If school non-attendance were to become a sufficient reason for a child to be removed from its family, DCP advised that it could not begin to cope with the caseload. If such a measure became policy there would be nowhere to house all the children. It also suggested that the education system would not be able to cope with the numbers if all school-aged children suddenly showed up in class. Classroom management would be impossible.²⁷³

However, DCP advised that it is concerned about school attendance, and particularly about the number of children who have never been enrolled in school. The Department advised the Committee that it was trying to build parental capacity around getting kids off to school. To do this, DCP has a system of parent helpers who do home visits and work on developing routines, promoting pro-school attitudes, school uniforms et cetera. This clearly shows the overlap between the roles of the Departments of Education and Child Protection.

The Committee accepts that non-attendance is not sufficient reason to remove a child from his or her family. Removal of children is a serious matter and must not be undertaken lightly.

However, given that non-attendance can be symptomatic of underlying disadvantage and other social problems, the Committee cannot accept that concerns over increased caseloads or classroom numbers is sufficient reason for DCP not to be further involved with school attendance as an issue. It is the Committee's view that school attendance should be on DCP's radar and DCP should receive adequate funding to allow it to manage any increased workload this would generate.

Finding 12

The Department for Child Protection needs to be more involved in the issue of school non-attendance.

272 Pilbara Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012;
Kimberley Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

273 Department for Child Protection, East Kimberley, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012.

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Recommendation 6

Where the attendance level falls below 60% which places the child at severe educational risk, the Department for Child Protection's engagement should be required. The Committee recommends to the Minister for Child Protection that the Department for Child Protection be funded adequately to allow it to manage any increased workload generated by increasing the Department's attention to school non-attendance

Chapter 6

Programs and Initiatives to address school non-attendance

There are many programs that have been developed to address the issue of school non-attendance. Some of them are highlighted in this chapter to indicate some of the more successful approaches. This chapter does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list, and the Committee is aware that there are many innovative programs developed by schools across the state.

Curriculum and Re-Engagement in Education Schools (CARE)

The Curriculum and Re-engagement in Education schools (CARE schools) are included in this section of the report as they are frequently seen as a last resort for students whose attendance at school has become extremely problematic.

CARE schools are independent schools that come under the umbrella of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA). The prime purpose of CARE schools is the education of secondary aged students who have been unable or unwilling to access or have significant difficulty in accessing mainstream education. These young people fall into the category of ‘young people at risk’. They are considered to be at risk if their behaviour or life circumstances seriously jeopardises their wellbeing and alienates them from their families, education and training, and the community.²⁷⁴

The CARE school system currently has 11 schools—two Catholic schools and nine independent schools—with a total capacity of around 800 students.²⁷⁵ As described by the AISWA representative, most of the students come from the public school system before they go to a CARE school. CARE schools cater for different numbers of students. For example:

- Sowilo caters for about 50 to 60 children;
- Corridors in Midland caters for up to 100 children;
- St Clair’s caters for 30 children;

274 *The Western Australian Curriculum and Re-Engagement (CARE) Schools Charter*, available through Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, p4.

275 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p3; Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p3.

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- Alta-1 caters for 160 children in seven classes across the metropolitan area and Albany.²⁷⁶

Alta-1 has a 'multi-sited' model and is able to start another class when existing classes become filled.²⁷⁷

The CARE schools are 'liked by the local schools because often they will take the kids that they cannot cope with'. Most of the kids will come from government schools, not independent ones. Government schools are very keen to have a CARE school in their area to which they can refer students.²⁷⁸

There are a number of ways that students and parents can be made aware of a CARE school as an option. Generally, though, it is a Department of Education participation officer or a youth advocacy organisation such as Youth Futures WA Inc. that advises parents that mainstream schooling is not working for their child and that a CARE school may provide a better option.²⁷⁹ Medical Practitioners and mental health workers are also aware of CARE schools, as are the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Corrective Services. Parents also learn of the CARE school option through word-of-mouth.

The majority of students at CARE schools study a modified curriculum that is designed to address their identified needs. Low or non-existent literacy and numeracy are an issue for a significant number of students, and programs are designed to specifically address this. Most of the students face significant social issues that need to be addressed before they are able to engage with the curriculum.

The Committee was advised that the CARE schools provide services for those students who would otherwise fall completely outside the mainstream education system.

The common factor is the students who have difficulty fitting into a 'normal school'...these schools look after kids who do not fit in a normal school for a range of reasons; some from simple bad behaviour, and that can be for a number of reasons, to those who have some sort of disability from phobias to a whole range of mental issues

276 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p3.

277 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p3.

278 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p2.

279 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p5; Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p5.

*and also social issues that keep them from fitting into a regular school.*²⁸⁰

Finding 13

Curriculum and Re-Engagement in Education Schools (CARE schools) provide education for at-risk students who have been unable to access or have significant difficulty in accessing mainstream education. Most of the students come from government schools, not independent schools.

As the Principal of the largest CARE school, Mr Dave Stevens of Alta-1 made clear, sometimes the problems faced by students are something that is intrinsic to them, and sometimes they are the results of factors around them. CARE schools work with children dealing with a broad spectrum of issues, 'from your atypical angry young man, bully type scenario right through to the young person who has been bullied and is the victim of that and has no self-worth and no self-esteem'.²⁸¹

*With a large percentage of our children their issue is their parents, so it could be related to alcohol, drugs, abuse, neglect, total breakdown in family structure or no standards whatsoever. Then you have a percentage of children who have these mental health issues, which are compounding what is going on in their world and has been caused by – they have had great parenting but something has caused a depression or an anxiety of something that is going on in their world. Then we go right through to your naughty young person who just wants to do drugs, do what they want to do and carry on. I cannot say that there is one factor.*²⁸²

Curriculum is a core issue for CARE Schools. Mainstream school curriculum materials are generally not suitable for students in CARE Schools and it is difficult to find material that is appropriate for the at-risk teenagers. This means that each CARE school must write their own specific curriculum.²⁸³

To work with their students, CARE Schools need to focus on literacy and numeracy, rather than the broader mainstream curriculum.²⁸⁴ Mr Stevens advised that while there are some appropriate written texts:

280 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p2.

281 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p4.

282 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p4.

283 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p8.

284 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p11.

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There is a lack of digital literacy resources—very engaging multimedia stories for students that are age appropriate. I have 15 to 19-year-olds who are reading, as you say, at a year 3 or 4 level and all the year 3 and 4 work is for fire trucks and puppy dogs and whatever and they say, “I’m not reading that crap”, or other words!”²⁸⁵

Sourcing media and other material that is both age and academically appropriate is a big issue for CARE Schools.

CARE schools provide individual education plans (IEP) for each student, based on assessments carried out when the student joins the school. For example, Alta-1 involves teachers, chaplains, children and parents in developing their IEP. Of the five goals Alta-1 includes in a student’s IEP, four are generally social goals and one is an academic goal. For example:

*Getting them up in the morning and getting them to school by nine o’clock will be goal number one, having eaten before they get to school is goal number two and not swearing at the teacher every time they are asked to do something is goal number three. We start them off on the book *Raw*, which is the first English novel that we go through with the kids. We try to get them to read one page a day, or something along those lines, depending on where the child is at. They are very simple, specific and quantifiable goals so that the kids can see they are achieving.²⁸⁶*

Alta-1 then assesses students and revisits the IEP every five weeks or so and draws up a progression chart so that students can see their achievements.²⁸⁷

In addition to the educational program, CARE schools provide significant support and assistance to students in dealing with their underlying problems and challenges. This support may be provided through a chaplain, a psychologist, a social worker, or possibly through a mental health worker or a nurse. Students may also face challenges in relation to drugs and alcohol, and homelessness. ‘The mental health issue is probably the biggest factor we are dealing with, with underlying factors such as growing depression and a self-harming culture.’²⁸⁸

One of the other issues that fits this is when a child comes in with us, they may be hungry; so we will feed them. They may not have shoes; so we will put shoes on their feet...So you have a range of other services that the school provides and is funded through education

285 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p13.

286 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p12.

287 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p12.

288 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p6.

dollars. The concept of whether that can be spread or how that can be solicited – but you cannot do the education unless these young people are feeling safe. To make them feel safe you have to get them fed and clothed and go through a hierarchy of needs to get them to the point where they can settle enough to engage their academic processes.²⁸⁹

The need for support amongst the student body at a CARE school is evidently considerably greater than in a mainstream school.

Finding 14

CARE Schools provide significant support and assistance for young people at risk who would otherwise fall completely outside the mainstream education system. The need for such support is considerably greater than in a mainstream school.

Finding 15

CARE Schools deliver specialised curricula focused on literacy and numeracy, provide individual education plans for each student and support students dealing with underlying problems and challenges.

It was suggested to the Committee that there are three areas where reforms could be made that would significantly improve the operating environment for the CARE schools. These are:

- Improved funding;
- Changes to the registration processes for CARE schools; and
- Flexibility in curriculum requirements for CARE schools.

Funding

The funding history of the CARE schools, as described by the CARE Schools' Charter, has been a difficult and unstable one, and it appears that it remains a vexed issue. Given the importance of the work carried out by the CARE schools, and the vulnerability of their specific client group, it would seem that extra investment from the government would be warranted. This is particularly the case given that schools from within the government system refer their most difficult students out to the CARE schools. The CARE schools are therefore carrying one of the heaviest parts of the load in the education system; that would otherwise be the responsibility of the Education Department.

289 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p6.

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The importance of the work done by the CARE schools should not be underestimated. The students who are the target clientele for CARE schools are those who pose the greatest challenges to mainstream schools.

At the moment, the go-to place for Ed department schools when they get to the end of the wall is CARE schools. There are not enough of us and we as schools working in the area need to expand.²⁹⁰

A further issue is the range of services that the CARE schools provide for their students that are not required, or not required to such an extent, in other schools.

These guys are spending a lot of their dollars that technically should be spent on education and getting kids in a situation where they can actually do some education. One of the biggest challenges to that is funding. If the funding could follow the kids or get supported from all of these agencies that they are almost doing the work for but do not get the funding from, if we could have some multiagency support, that would be great.²⁹¹

There are so many other services we would want to offer, including having timely access to...psychological services and social workers. I would love to have a social worker on staff who could come in and work with the students. Our psych works flat out just trying to evaluate the kids. She actually does very little of the counselling. To have full-time counsellors available or multiple part-time counsellors and that sort of thing so that the teachers or the chaplain are not having to carry the whole load...²⁹²

The final issue in relation to funding for CARE schools is one of capacity. The 11 CARE schools currently have capacity to cater for 800 of the most disengaged high school students. Yet the numbers from the Department of Education would suggest that there are vastly more students in need of this form of intervention. A recent newspaper article reported that 'at least 11,000 children across WA are considered to be at "severe risk" because of poor school attendance', and that 'of WA's 262,000 public students, 4.27% failed to attend more than half of school days last year'.²⁹³ As discussed earlier in this report, a child's educational outcomes are at risk with

290 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p16.

291 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p15.

292 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p16.

293 Emerson, D., '11,000 truant pupils 'at risk'', *The West Australian*, 6 June 2012, <http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/newshome/13877309/11-000-truant-pupils-at-risk/> accessed 6 June 2012.

attendance anywhere below 90% - hence the group of students at educational risk must be considerably higher than 11,000.

The Committee was informed that the CARE schools have been approached to establish schools in Port Hedland and in Derby, and there are no doubt other regional centres that would benefit from similar facilities.²⁹⁴ The Committee therefore finds that there should be significant investment into the CARE school system to increase their capacity to provide services to the most vulnerable students in our community.

Finding 16

Recognising the significant number of students at educational risk, estimated at over 11,000, there should be significant investment into the CARE school system to increase its capacity to provide services to the most vulnerable students in the community.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education makes funding available in the 2013 budget to allow CARE schools to expand to meet the needs of Western Australian students at risk, particularly in the regions.

Registration

Under the current requirements for registration with the Department of Education Services, the CARE schools are required to renew their registration every year. According to the Charter of the CARE Schools, this requirement to re-register every year was initially imposed as a condition for additional funding in 2003, and has been in place ever since.²⁹⁵

*Their existence is always tenuous, and that is one of the reasons when they were first set up they were going to be registered annually. These schools have to go through their renewal of registration every 12 months partly because there was a fear they might go under. We have shown that is not going to be the case. These schools have hung on and are managing very well, but even though they have been going for quite a few years now, they are still subject to renewal every year. That is an added stress on what they have to do.*²⁹⁶

294 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2001, p16.

295 *The Western Australian Curriculum and Re-Engagement (CARE) Schools Charter*, available through Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, p2.

296 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, pp6–7.

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Finding 17

CARE schools are required to renew their registration every year. According to the Charter of the CARE Schools, this requirement to re-register every year was initially imposed as a condition for additional funding in 2003.

The Committee feels that this requirement to re-register every year is an unnecessary and onerous condition for these schools, and that it should be possible to meet the funding requirements without needing to complete the full registration process every year. This could reasonably be reduced to every second year, or every third year, without any great increase in the likelihood of problems. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department of Education Services re-examine the requirement for CARE schools to re-register every year, with the intention of reducing the burden this requirement places on CARE schools.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the annual registration on CARE schools period be increased to two or more years.

Flexibility of curriculum

The issue of the need for greater flexibility of curriculum for schools which teach students with special needs was raised with the Committee in several circumstances. The most obvious of these was in the case of the CARE schools. Students who have disengaged with schooling and who may face significant challenges in the realm of basic literacy and numeracy are evidently not going to benefit from being required to complete the full range of subjects.

All schools have to be registered through the Department of Education Services. One of the things that schools had to do as part of the registration process under the curriculum framework, which has now gone, was that in many cases people had to deliver nine learning areas. As Dave said, teaching a second languages or geography is probably not a priority with these kids. It is about basic literacy and numeracy...Now that the curriculum framework is not there and it is the Australian framework, there is still an expectation that they are a full-blown school. One thing we would like to see is some consideration for the CARE schools that are not outside the system. They have different priorities and that needs to be recognised in the registration of schools process, particularly with regard to the curriculum...it very much needs to be recognised that they need that flexibility.²⁹⁷

297 Mr Gary Robinson, Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor, Association of Independent Schools of WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p11.

This concern in relation to the national curriculum and the requirements being placed on schools was also raised with the Committee in relation to some of the regional and remote schools, particularly those with high indigenous enrolments.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education recognises the special circumstances and clientele of CARE schools and, therefore, the need for flexibility in the application of curriculum requirements, commencing in the 2013 school year.

Tri Borders

The problems associated with transiency and family mobility were discussed earlier in the previous chapter. In regions of the state such as the Kimberley, children move from community to community, which sometimes involves crossing state borders several times a year. Given this transiency, it was necessary to find a way to ensure that children in these circumstances received the best education possible.²⁹⁸

Tri-borders is a strategy that tracks students across the borders of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The strategy is funded by the federal government and managed by Western Australia's Department of Education.²⁹⁹ The aim of the strategy is to improve 'the attendance, enrolment and engagement of highly transient indigenous Australian students in Central and Northern Australia'.³⁰⁰

The strategy is based on a Systems Interoperability Framework (SIF) that facilitates the sharing of information from sources that use different student management systems.³⁰¹ The program collects information on children's attendance and learning programs, and makes this available on a real-time basis. This means that when students move from one school to another, teachers have access to each student's attendance and 'can very quickly pick up on what that child's learning program is and adapt their work to assist that child'.³⁰²

In May 2012, then Minister Constable advised that '333 public, Catholic and independent schools across Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern

298 Dr E. Constable, the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 21 February 2012, p12.

299 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra, *Committee Briefing*, 12 October 2011; Ms Debra Sace, Catholic Education Office, Transcript of Evidence, 9 May 2012, p2.

300 SIF Association, *SIF Association AU Tri-Borders Project Wins Silber at the IMS Learning Impact Awards*, 29 May 2012, p1. Available at: <http://www.sifassociation.org/us/press-List.asp?type=P&title=Press>. Accessed on 28 June 2012.

301 SIF Association AU, *Tri-Borders -> Supporting Students Across SA, NT and WA*, nd, p1. Available at: www.sifinfo.org. Accessed on 28 June 2012.

302 Dr E. Constable, the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 21 February 2012, p12.

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Territory now have access to standardised data to support continuity of teaching and learning as students move between schools'.³⁰³

The tri-border attendance strategy has received national and international awards. In the Australian Instructional Management Systems Learning Impact Awards, the strategy received the Australian Regional Winner award and the People's Choice award. The strategy was awarded a silver medal at the global Learning Impact Awards in Toronto, Canada.³⁰⁴

At the time of this Inquiry it was too early to determine the outcomes and effectiveness of this strategy.

Sporting Chance Program

The Sporting Chance Program is a federal government initiative:

*That uses sport and recreation as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their schooling to encourage positive educational outcomes. The program has been implemented with providers working together with schools, education authorities, sporting bodies, businesses and community groups.*³⁰⁵

The program consists of two elements: Education Engagement Strategies, which are for primary and secondary students; and school-based Sports Academies, which are for secondary students.³⁰⁶

There are five Education Engagement Strategies operating in Australia and delivering sport and recreation-based activities—such as 'healthy and positive lifestyles, mentoring and leadership, and exposure to community and sports role models'—all designed to help engage students in education.³⁰⁷ Role Models and Leaders Australia

303 Dr E. Constable, the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 22 May 2012, p1 of pp. 2915c–2916a.

304 Dr E. Constable, the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 21 February 2012, p12; Dr E. Constable, the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 22 May 2012, p1 of pp. 2915c–2916a.

305 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program Factsheet*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Documents/SCPFact sheet.pdf>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

306 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program Factsheet*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Documents/SCPFact sheet.pdf>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

307 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program Factsheet*, nd, p1. Available at:

delivers the one Education Engagement Strategy in Western Australia. This is the Up4it? Leadership Development Program.³⁰⁸

According to DEEWR, the sport and recreation-focus of Sports Academies provides opportunities to 'develop leadership, enhance education and career opportunities, improve the health and well-being of learners including self-esteem and confidence, and promote and support positive learning experiences that foster success'.³⁰⁹

Key indicators that these Academies have improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include:

- *an increase in school attendance,*
- *students' strengthened engagement with school and improved attitudes to schooling,*
- *improved achievement in student learning,*
- *increased retention to Year 12 or its vocational equivalent, and*
- *greater parental and community involvement with the schools and students' schooling.*³¹⁰

Currently there are 59 Sports Academies in Australia, with five providers of school-based Sports Academies in Western Australia listed by DEEWR.

Table 6.1 shows the Sports Academies operating in Western Australia, and their location.

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Documents/SCPFact sheet.pdf>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

308 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program Factsheet*, nd, p1. Available at:

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Documents/SCPFact sheet.pdf>. Accessed on 7 August 2012. See also:

<http://www.rolemodelsaustralia.com/programs.php?id=21>.

309 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program Factsheet*, nd, p1. Available at:

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Documents/SCPFact sheet.pdf>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

310 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Pages/SportsAcademies.aspx>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

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Table 6.1: School-Based Sports Academies in Western Australia³¹¹

Sports Academy	Location
Clontarf Foundation Football Academies	Kununurra, Halls Creek, Karratha, Bunbury, Geraldton, Broome, Albany, Kalgoorlie, Esperance, Derby, Kwinana, Waterford (Perth), Yule Brook (Perth), Carnarvon, Northam, Katanning and Fitzroy Crossing
Role Models and Leaders Australia Academies	Waterford (Perth), Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Broome and Fitzroy Crossing
Kicking Goals Academies	Swan Districts Football Club: Newman and Port Hedland
Mid West Netball Academy	Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation, Geraldton
Great Southern Girls Basketball Academy	North Albany High School

The federal government funds Sports Academies at approximately one third of their operating costs. The balance must be sourced from sponsor organisations such as state governments, territory governments, schools, education authorities, sporting bodies, and business and community organisations.³¹²

As the Clontarf Foundation has the largest number of sports academies in Western Australia, it makes for an interesting case study. The CEO of the Clontarf Foundation, Mr Gerard Neesham, explained that the Foundation is concerned with 'educational outcomes, attendance at school, retention, behaviour, healthy lifestyles and employment et cetera'.³¹³ Attendance is the first step.

In 2010 there were nine Clontarf Foundation academies in Western Australia, covering 14 schools.³¹⁴ With assistance from Royalties for Regions funding, the Clontarf Foundation has achieved a '45 per cent penetration in the regional areas'.³¹⁵ While the Foundation has been operating in the Perth metropolitan region for 13 years, its penetration is relatively low at 13%, with schools not picking up the program.³¹⁶

311 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program Factsheet*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Documents/SCPFactsheet.pdf>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

312 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Sporting Chance Program*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Indigenous/Schooling/Programs/SportingChance/Pages/SportsAcademies.aspx>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

313 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p2.

314 Dr E. Constable, then Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 3 June 2010, p30 of pp. 518c–549a.

315 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p4.

316 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p4.

Figure 6.2: Comments from Mr Gerard Neesham in relation to two Football Academies³¹⁷

<p>Yule Brook Football Academy</p> <p>Yule Brook had very few boys attending and we have more than tripled the number of boys attending. Yule Brook was a violent and angry school. The 45 Aboriginal boys there now are quiet, calm, confident leaders. They entertained the Governor the other day. One of our boys is a top student.</p> <p>Broome Football Academy</p> <p>In Broome, 47 boys attended the high school the year before our program started, with an attendance rate of 55 %. Now that is not 55 % on the same day, which means you cannot teach because they turn up on different days. It is impossible. That 55 % of 47 boys equates to just over 5 000 attendance days. In 2010, we had 113 boys with a 77 % attendance, which equates to 16 000 days, or thereabouts, attendance, for teaching purposes.</p> <p>[Broome] is one town, and every town looks the same. Halls Creek is the same. Derby is the same. Fitzroy is the same. Maddington is the same. Gosnells is the same.</p>
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The Clontarf Foundation funds its Academies through one-third contributions from the federal government (through the Sporting Chance initiative), the state governments and private organisations. The Clontarf Foundation's *Annual Report 2011* provides the following information of funding sources.³¹⁸

Table 6.3: Clontarf Foundation funding sources³¹⁹

Funding Source	\$ million
Federal government	6.194
Western Australian Government	2.794
Northern Territory Government	1.930
Victorian Government	0.540
Corporate entities	5.310
Interest and miscellaneous revenue	0.435
Total	\$17.203

In relation to corporate sponsors, Mr Neesham explained that Clontarf Foundation was:

Endeavouring to convince the private sector that it is better for them to invest in the capacity at the bottom, than to try to retrain somebody who is untrainable at 18, which is where a lot of the money is going.

317 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011.

318 Clontarf Foundation, *Annual Report 2011*, Clontarf Foundation, Perth, April 2012, p9.

319 Clontarf Foundation, *Annual Report 2011*, Clontarf Foundation, Perth, April 2012, p9.

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*We are endeavouring to change a very big private sector, which could easily fund this program fully if it put its effort to it.*³²⁰

Furthermore, Mr Neesham stated that if the Western Australian government:

*was really fully committed, we could quickly get to 60 per cent penetration in our state and make a serious difference to the future of a lot of people. That is not in our corner; that is in the corner of the state government.*³²¹

To operate its Football Academies, the Clontarf Foundation needs particular resources such as 'specific classrooms, facilities that go with it, academy rooms and teachers who have to be able to teach this style of kid. There are houses, because of course we cannot go and stick 10 staff in the Pilbara'.³²²

Providing such facilities requires significant finances. As Mr Neesham explained, the Clontarf Foundation needs support to:

*Be able to access housing at a reasonable rate; we need to be able to get long-term budgetary support. It is those sorts of things. This program was started in Western Australia. It is nearly a national program now. It is seen as best practice in the area, which we are very proud of. As Western Australians we are very proud of this, but as Western Australians we are frustrated that we have not finished Western Australia before we finished Victoria ... I would like to think that we could get to the spaces, particularly our own metropolitan area, sooner rather than later.*³²³

Mr Neesham advised that the estimated cost for the Football Academies per boy, per year is \$6,900, which is significantly less costly for the State than the \$250,000 to \$400,000 needed to keep a boy in a correctional facility.³²⁴ For the 2011 year, the actual cost was below target at \$6,300 per boy, per year. However, the average cost per boy is expected to increase as the Clontarf Foundation expands its initiative into smaller and more remote communities.³²⁵

320 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, pp. 10–11 .

321 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p11.

322 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p11.

323 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p11.

324 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p4.

325 Clontarf Foundation, *Annual Report 2011*, Clontarf Foundation, Perth, April 2012, p5.

The Clontarf Foundation's results across Australia for 2011 include:

- Average school attendance – 76% (against a target of 80%);
- 189 students completed Year 12 in Clontarf Academies;
- 58% of Clontarf students attended school more than 80% of the time;
- 69% of Year 12 students achieved a fully recognised graduation;
- 69% of 2010 Year 12 Leavers in full time employment, training or further education;
- 78% of 2011 Year 12 Leavers in full time employment, training or further education (against a target of 80%); and
- Retention of 89% (against a target of 90%).³²⁶

In 2001 DEEWR commissioned the Australian Council of Educational Research to conduct an independent review of the Sporting Chance initiative. Clontarf Foundation Football Academies at five schools were included in this review, two in the Northern Territory, one in Victoria and two in Western Australia—John Willcock College and Geraldton Senior College. The report on the independent review provides an extensive case study on the Clontarf Academies and its findings are generally positive.³²⁷ The overall assessment of the Clontarf Academies follows:

While central to the Clontarf Academies, football is not the primary focus. The project is primarily about improving educational outcomes, school completion, lifestyle, health and fitness, employment, positive and informed decision making and life skills. A major strength of this project is that it is run by staff who have the respect of the students, the families and the school. They are role models for these boys, and are important figures in their lives. Another strength is that participation in the project is linked to appropriate behaviour and respect. Further, the project operates alongside the school programs, without disrupting school procedures or timetables, and there is ongoing contact with school staff. One principal commented that 'we don't see Clontarf as a separate identity – it's got to fit in.' In some schools there has been considerable training and professional learning before the project started. Above all, it is the calibre of the staff that is

³²⁶ Clontarf Foundation, *Annual Report 2011*, Clontarf Foundation, Perth, April 2012, p5 and p15.

³²⁷ Clontarf Foundation, *Annual Report 2011*, Clontarf Foundation, Perth, April 2012, p8.

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*making this Academy model so successful across so many different communities.*³²⁸

The DEEWR evaluation report listed the critical success factors most commonly cited by the Clontarf academies evaluated as:

- *Quality staff who can relate to the students are fundamental to the project. One school suggested: 'You need the right people for the job. Project coordinators build a relationship with the school and the teachers, and with the parents. You have to get the trust of the kids'. Another suggested: 'Enough well-trained, committed personnel who know never to lose sight of the fact that the prime purpose of the project is to make the boys' life prospects better.' As one staff member explained: 'It's all driven by what is best for the boys.'*
- *A supportive school principal and administration who share the vision and commitment of the Academy.*
- *Structure and routine in the project. One of the Clontarf staff commented: 'A few boys were really at risk. The program has turned them around, given them structure and routine. It has given them someone to talk to.'*
- *Autonomy within school guidelines – 'The school is supportive of whatever we want to do if it is within the guidelines. We pretty well have free rein.'*
- *The external funding is crucial – it's not just an extra source of support. A sufficient and consistent funding source is important.*
- *Every Academy has its own dedicated Academy Room within the school grounds. This is a vibrant, welcoming environment where students and parents/carers can feel comfortable.*³²⁹

Associate Dean Jenny Connell of the University of Notre Dame's Broome Campus advised that she had conducted an evaluation of the Clontarf Foundation program and

328 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program*, report prepared by Australian Council for Educational Research, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, October 2011, p60. Available at: http://www.deewr.gov.au/indigenous/schooling/programs/sportingchance/documents/sportingchanceprogram2011_evaluationreport.docx.

329 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Evaluation of the Sporting Chance Program*, report prepared by Australian Council for Educational Research, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, October 2011, p59. Available at: http://www.deewr.gov.au/indigenous/schooling/programs/sportingchance/documents/sportingchanceprogram2011_evaluationreport.docx.

had found that it had led to increased confidence and skills in the boys. She also found that the boys particularly liked being treated as men.³³⁰

The Pilbara Education Regional Office and Karratha Senior High School reported that a major benefit of the program was that the staff were there all the time, rather than being fly in, fly out. Staff were integrated into the community.³³¹ While Karratha Senior High School also found Clontarf to be very good at getting children to attend school, and they would take as many students as were interested, the constant turnover of staff was problematic.

In Roebourne, the experience with Clontarf was that it is not the one answer to the issue of attendance and participation, but that it is a useful tool.³³²

The Clontarf Foundation does not provide a program for girls. The Foundation's initial strategic plan indicated the intention to develop activities for girls, such as cricket and basketball. However, based on the advice of its indigenous women board members, the Foundation determined that 'the boys drive the cycle of disadvantage, the girls do not; they are the ones left there holding the can'.³³³ Furthermore, Mr Neesham explained that it was unclear what could be used as a vehicle to change the behaviour in girls in the way that football was used for boys.³³⁴

Nevertheless, there is recognition of the need for a program for girls. This matter was raised with the Committee by both Karratha Senior High School and the Pilbara Education Regional Office. Karratha Senior High School advised that the Pilbara Industry Community Collaborative is talking about a program for girls, but this is yet to come to fruition. At the moment, the school has more problems with the girls than with the boys. The Pilbara Education Regional Office advised that while Clontarf had money to spend on the boys' program, schools did not have the money to match that sort of program for the girls.³³⁵

At this point in time, reliance is placed on the positive flow-on effects of improved attendance of boys. As Ms Syme stated, there is anecdotal evidence that:

330 Jenny Connell, Associate Dean, Notre Dame University Broome Campus, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

331 Pilbara Education Regional Office, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012; Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

332 Pilbara Education Regional Office, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

333 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p7.

334 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p7.

335 Pilbara Education Regional Office, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012; Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

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*By having positive impacts on the behaviours and attitudes and decision-making abilities of our boys, it has flow-on effects to their broader families, and also there seems to be a trend that where there are more boys that come to school, there are also more girls that come to school.*³³⁶

Given the significant success of the Clontarf Foundation program, the Committee has formed the view that the government should support the expansion of the program. This is particularly important for schools in the metropolitan area, given the high numbers of Indigenous students in the metropolitan area, and that Clontarf has only a 13% penetration rate in the metropolitan area.

Finding 18

The Committee finds that the Clontarf Foundation program is effective in engaging some indigenous boys in schooling. As such, it is an effective mechanism for improving the educational outcomes for indigenous boys.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education provides sufficient funding in the 2013 budget for the Clontarf Foundation to expand its program to every school in Western Australia that would benefit from it, particularly those within the metropolitan area.

The School Passport Program

The School Passport Program was developed in Western Australia by a not-for-profit organisation, the Community Development Foundation (CDF). This unique strategy creates a friendly interactive platform for parental engagement. It is an incentive-based program with two primary objectives: to increase parent/carer involvement in the school; and to increase regular student attendance.

Parents and carers earn points through their involvement in school activities on an hourly basis. One hour earns 10 points which equates to one school dollar and other 'rewards' are scaled according to responsibility or difficulty. Activities are decided by the school principal and the school's Parent and Citizen's Association. Activities for the parents will therefore vary from school to school. For instance:

336 Ms Stephanie Syme, Chief Financial Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p8.

Table 6.4: The Passport program: Activities undertaken by different schools³³⁷

Meekatharra District High School	Neerigen Brook Primary School	Bramfield Park Primary School
Student based activities	Student based activities	Student based activities
Classroom helper/mentor	Classroom helper/mentor	Classroom helper/mentor
Reading assistance One: One	Reading assistance One: One	Reading assistance One: One
Assistance in the before school reading program	Excursion Carnival Helper	Excursion Carnival Helper
All student absences explained	Attending the Cultural Educational Experience Program	Library Assistance
Students attending regularly	Staying with your child to do puzzles, read stories etc.	Attending school performances / assemblies.
Assisting with special days e.g. NAIDOC, sports, art etc.	Classroom helper/mentor	
Non student based activities	Non student based activities	Non student based activities
Pick up kids from school	Join the P&C	Join the P&C
Assembly attendance	Attend a P&C meeting	Attend a P&C meeting
Gardening/working on the farm	P&C Treasurer	P&C Treasurer
Washing as needed by the school	P&C Secretary	P&C Secretary
Attending a parent workshop	Other P & C positions outside of meeting time	Other P & C positions outside of meeting time
Cooking sewing	Canteen Treasurer	Book club coordinator
Organise a sporting activity at lunch time	PACMAN volunteers – leadership role	Parent/teacher meeting
Supply lunch from home or the school canteen	Parent teacher meeting	Making classroom resources
	Making classroom resources	Joining the school council and attending meetings
	Joining the school council and attending meetings	Accessing parent services and workshops
	Canteen helper	Early years playgroup 0-5 year olds Mondays 9a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
	Uniform shop coordinator	Working in the school garden
	Uniform shop helpers	100per cent school attendance

337 Briefing by Jenny Day and Marika Mulder at Ardross 2 August 2012

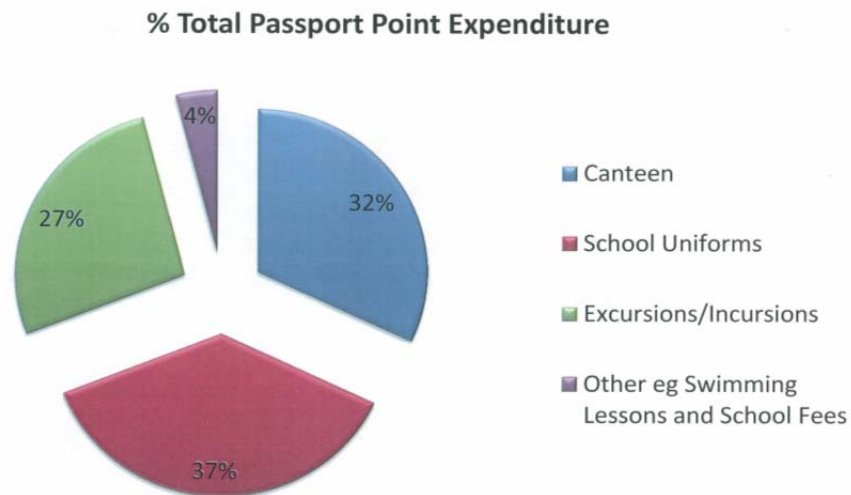
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	Assembly attendance	
	Accessing parent services and workshops	
	Accessing internet cafe	

These school dollars can then be redeemed on the school site for items such as school uniforms; food and drink at the canteen; stationary; to help pay for excursions/incursions; and other items such as school photos or swimming lessons. The amount of points needed for any one item will vary from school to school and be determined by the sponsoring school which on average will contribute \$18,000 p.a. to the program.³³⁸

Figure 6.5: Passport Program Expenditure of Points, Term 3 2011³³⁹

Breakdown of Passport Point Expenditure of Schools Term 3, 2011



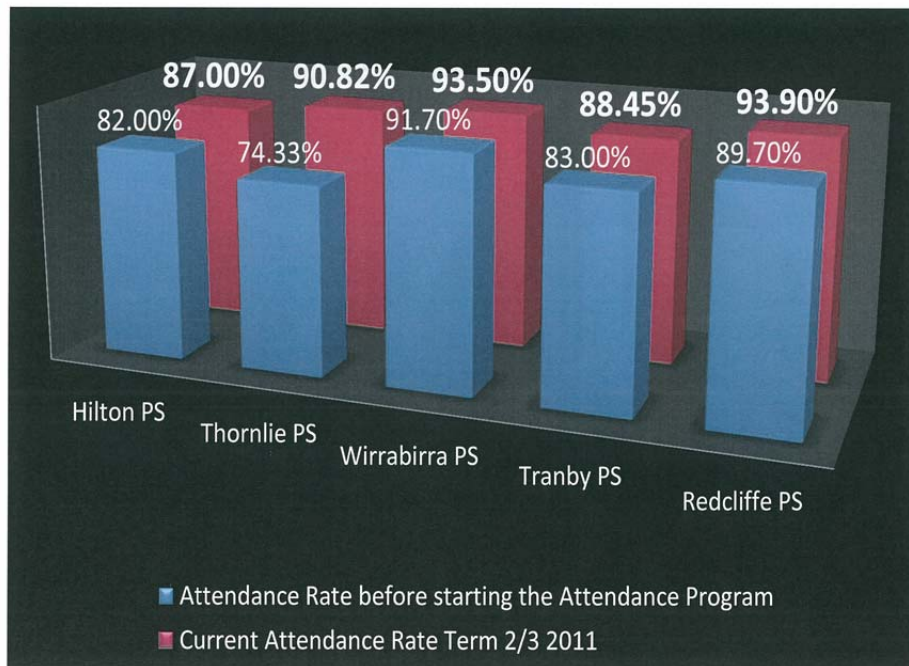
The program builds relationships between the parents and the school working together in a partnership.

338 Briefing by Jenny Day and Marika Mulder at Ardross 2 August 2012

339 Briefing by Jenny Day and Marika Mulder at Ardross 2 August 2012

Figure 6.6: Passport Program school attendance outcomes³⁴⁰

Improvements in Overall School Attendance Rates after commencing the Attendance Program



From Integris Data

The program extends across 67 schools. Forty four schools are actively participating and twenty three are in the process of designing passports. The Committee was told that there would be many more but the funding is limited and only those schools that receive Aboriginal attendance grants are able to readily resource it. The Education Department has provided CDF with \$150,000 over three years to run the program. This is supplemented by philanthropic grants.

A Guide to the Passport Program has been developed for the English as a Second Language/Dialect (ESL/ESD) community and has been translated into 12 of the most common languages.

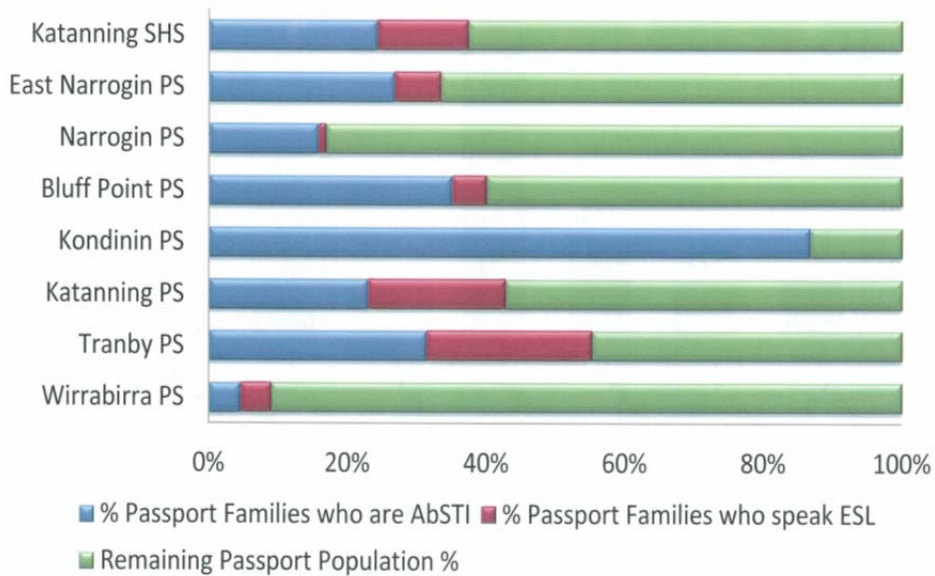
The outcomes are:

- Increased parental involvement;
- Improved attendance; and
- Improved NAPLAN results.

³⁴⁰ Briefing by Jenny Day and Marika Mulder at Ardross 2 August 2012

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Figure 6.7: Passport Program: Profile of families at selected schools.³⁴¹



Hilton Primary School currently has 20 students on their attendance program, with nine of these students having an attendance level of less than 80%. Prior to the program commencing, the average attendance at Hilton Primary School was 82%. Attendance as at the end of Term 2, 2011 rose to 87.7%. Wirrabirra Primary School in Gosnells reported increased regular attendance, from 64% in 2008 to 72% in 2009, to 78% in 2010.³⁴²

Other schools involved in the School Passport Program, such as West Northam Primary School, Medina Primary School and Tranby Primary School, have received Department of Education recognition for improvements made in school attendance.³⁴³

Roseworth Primary School is another school that runs the passport program to enable parents to earn points that can be spent in the canteen, on school photos, swimming lessons, uniforms et cetera. The program encourages parent engagement and Roseworth advised the Committee that it had been hugely successful. The Committee understands that Neerigen Brook Primary School runs a passport program linked with the local prison. Parents who are incarcerated can earn points for their children at the school by behaving appropriately in the prison. This is reported to have had a dramatic

341 Briefing by Jenny Day and Marika Mulder at Ardross 2 August 2012

342 Community Development Foundation, *School Passport Program*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://thecdf.com.au/programs/current-programs/the-cdf-passport-system/>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

343 Community Development Foundation, *School Passport Program*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://thecdf.com.au/programs/current-programs/the-cdf-passport-system/>. Accessed on 7 August 2012.

effect on prisoner behaviour in addition to helping children feel that their parent cares and, even while imprisoned, is doing something of benefit for them.³⁴⁴

Finding 19

The non-government attendance strategy known as the ‘passport program’ builds relationship between the parents and the school working together in a partnership. Its identified outcomes include:

- Increased parental involvement;
- Improved attendance; and
- Improved NAPLAN results.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that, in the 2013-14 budget, the Minister for Education increases the funding of the ‘Passport Program’ to significantly extend the program to those schools which believe it would make a difference.

Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project

The Principal of Karratha Senior High School discussed the Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project that operates at the school and at an annex in Roebourne.³⁴⁵

Karratha Senior High School draws students from the region, including Point Samson, Wickham, Roebourne, Karratha and Dampier. These towns support mining and fishing industries. There is also a large population of Indigenous people in the region, many of whom have strong ties to their lands.³⁴⁶

The inception and development of the program is particularly interesting. Hamersley Iron has been operating in the Pilbara for over 40 years and believed that its ‘desire to employ Indigenous people in skilled categories of employment had been frustrated by the fact that Aboriginal students were not completing high school’.³⁴⁷ Hamersley Iron believed that skilled-work opportunities would exist for Indigenous people only if they were able to attain improved educational outcomes. In light of this, in 1995, the company contacted the Polly Farmer Foundation to research how this might be done.

344 Roseworth Primary School, Girrawheen, *Committee Briefing*, 5 September 2012.

345 Mr Greg Kelly, Principal, Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

346 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

347 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

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In 1997, following a feasibility study, a Memorandum of Understanding for the Gumala Mirnuwarni project was instituted between Hamersley Iron, Woodside Energy Limited, Dampier Salt, the Western Australian Department of Education and the Polly Farmer Foundation. A pilot group of 20 high school students—10 from Roebourne/Wickham and 10 from Karratha—were chosen to participate in the project.³⁴⁸

The key principles of the project are:

- family involvement and support;
- valuing and supporting traditional knowledge and culture; and
- low profile and no publicity.³⁴⁹

The pilot concluded in 2000 and since then the project accepts 40 students each year. The Principal of Karratha Senior High School described the project as a homework and tuition program that gives Indigenous students the opportunity to focus on things they care about. The program provides science, maths, English tutoring. The project runs after-school, and a bus is provided to take children home afterwards.³⁵⁰

It is for aspirational students who want to achieve something, whether it is academic, vocational et cetera. Unlike the Clontarf Foundation's approach, Gumala Mirnuwarni does not have a sports focus. Children are recommended by the primary schools and are invited to participate in year 8. Selection is based on the achievement data from the primary school.³⁵¹ As well as the ability to succeed in school, other selection criteria are:

- family commitment and support;
- student attitude and commitment;
- potential for sibling involvement; and
- links to the local area.³⁵²

348 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, pp. 1–2. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

349 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p2. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

350 Mr Greg Kelly, Principal, Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

351 Mr Greg Kelly, Principal, Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

352 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p1. Available at:

To achieve its objectives, the Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project established two 'enrichment' or homework centres, provided tutors and school-based mentors, and organised camps and visits to tertiary education and industry sites.³⁵³

The Principal of Karratha Senior High School advised that the Department of Education funds one FTE to coordinate the program, while other partner organisations such as Rio Tinto, Woodside and the Polly Farmer Foundation provide support in the form of transport, funding some FTE et cetera.³⁵⁴ The then federal Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs also provided bulk funding arrangements through the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme.³⁵⁵

At the end of four years, that is, in 1999, the project reported the following results:

Seventeen of the 20 original students were still at school, which is an 85% retention rate. This represents a significant improvement on the 50% drop out rate for students in years 8, 9 and 10 in Roebourne, for example, in 1995.

Average absentee rate for original project students was around 18 days per year; for all project students it was 24 days. For Karratha Senior High School in 1999, the average absentee rate for non-Indigenous students was 12 days and for Indigenous students it was 42 days. Prior to the project commencing in Wickham and Karratha, the absentee rate for Indigenous students was around four times that for non-Indigenous students. Clearly, this gap has been dramatically reduced.

In 1999, 11 project students entered Year 12. Nine of these were expected to complete their WA Certificate of Education by the end of that year and three were expected to graduate with TEE scores suitable for university entry. It is noteworthy that these three students comprised 40% of the total number of Indigenous students who gained over 259 in their TEE results.

Following their 1999 results, four project students went on to university, studying law, nursing, computer science and teaching. Prior to the project, no Indigenous student from this area had entered university through TEE.

<http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

353 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p1. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

354 Mr Greg Kelly, Principal, Karratha Senior High School, *Committee Briefing*, 13 March 2012.

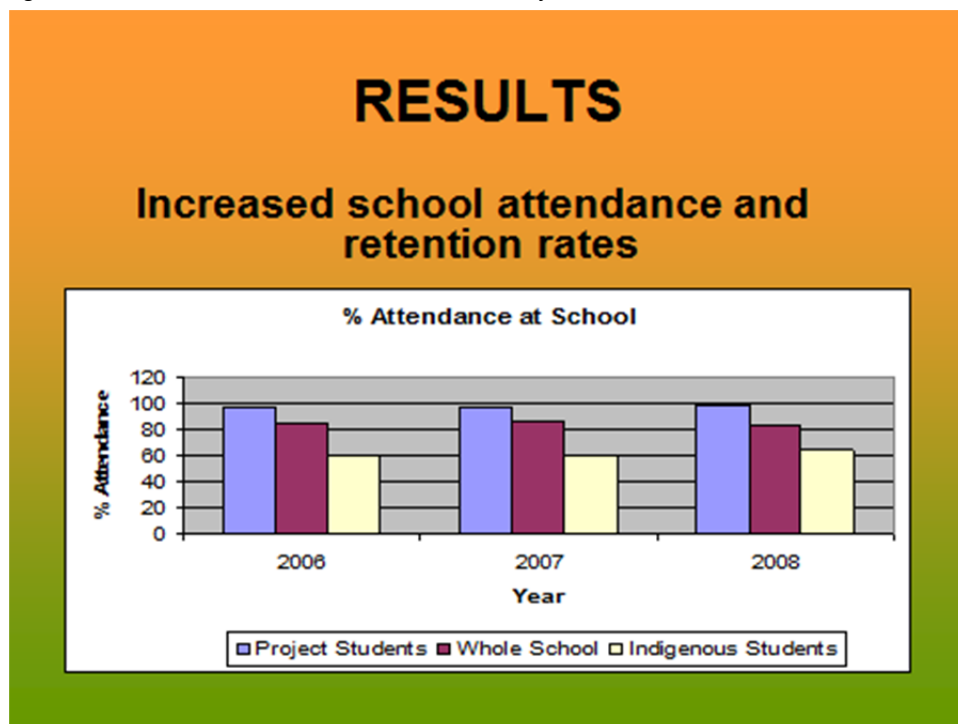
355 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p2. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

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By the end of 1999, six project students had been employed in traineeships and/or apprenticeships with Hamersley Iron and Woodside. One was studying business at TAFE.

While more up to date information on outcomes was not available, it is clear that this project had an enormous, positive impact on the educational outcomes of Indigenous students in the Karratha region. DEEWR reported that one key to the project's success was the students and their families. Having students see the purpose of education and want to succeed at school is vital.³⁵⁶ Commenting on the fact that of the 30 indigenous students at Karratha Senior High School in 1999, only 11 were project students, the school Principal at the time, stated, 'to my mind, the only thing different in this place has been the advent of the project. The project is having a real impact, even on kids who are not in it, because they see their friends going somewhere and doing something'.³⁵⁷

Figure 6.8: Results of the Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project³⁵⁸



356 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p2. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

357 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *What Works. The Work Program. The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, nd, p2. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

358 *The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project*, Available at: yooyahcloud.com/DTL/1uNNn/Karratha_presentation.ppt. Accessed on 25 September 2012.

Figure 6.9: A community view of the Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project.

A community view: Mr Marshall Smith (community Elder, project participant parent and project co-leader since January 1999)

For the past five months I have seen a number of significant factors which indicate that there are some long-term benefits that the students are receiving. This project has been a very worthwhile one for Aboriginal students, giving a support structure that has not only brought them together but has given them a better understanding of the importance of education.

A very good balance in the staffing has made a lot of things happen for the students as well as for the wider community. Due to the environment of the enrichment centres, the students not only attend more frequently in comparison to outside of a project like this, but they encourage others to come as well.

The standard of each student has improved so that they attend Year 11 and 12 now, whereas before very few students studied beyond Year 8/9. The project has assisted students who have been very shy to overcome their shyness.

Most students are very positive about their education and want to go as far as they can.

As far as I am aware, not one of the 30 or so students have been in police trouble since the project began. This is, of course, of great interest to me and to the Ministry of Justice Department. If there are more projects such as GMEP developed in other areas, the rate of juvenile offending in this state should decline, not escalate. This being the case, then there should also be a significant reduction in adult offending over a longer term as these young persons become responsible adults and parents.

It seems that another important factor in the success of this project is its drawing people together from the local community and using existing resources. Project personnel, however, sound a note of caution, stating that:

While successful and producing results that are very positive, it is important to remember that Gumala Mirnuwarni was geared to the specific circumstances of the Roebourne and Karratha area, and any duplication of the project in other areas would need to be adapted to local circumstances.³⁵⁹

Finding 20

The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project, a project made up of a coalition of partners from the Aboriginal community, State and Federal governments, private enterprise, the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation and Karratha SHS has had a significant and positive impact on the educational outcomes of Indigenous students in the Karratha region.

Other Programs and Initiatives

While the above discusses the main initiatives brought to the attention of the Committee, it does not discuss every initiative in Western Australia aiming to improve the school attendance of children and young people.

The following provides a brief description of some of the other programs and practices that were raised with the Committee during this Inquiry. It is important to acknowledge

359 Gumala Mirnuwarni Project personnel. Available at: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=169>. Accessed on 8 August 2012.

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the great diversity of measures that schools take to improve school attendance and to work with students and parents to achieve this.

Breakfast and Uniform Programs

One of the most commonly mentioned initiatives used by schools to improve attendance was to have programs that provide breakfast, uniforms and/or bus services to collect children for school.³⁶⁰ Such programs were mentioned by the Pilbara and the Kimberley Education Regional Offices, and by the Catholic Education Office when meeting with the Committee in March 2012.

In speaking of the extent to which schools go to get children to attend school, the Director General gave the example of what occurs in Meekatharra:

*The bus had gone out twice already to pick up children around town. They had gone into some of the children's homes to talk to parents to try to encourage them to get their kids out of bed. Many times in my career I have seen, as have my colleagues, schools that feed the children breakfast and lunch and, very often, feed them after school. The other day students in Meekatharra were being clothed, they were cleaning their teeth and having breakfast. A whole range of services was provided.*³⁶¹

The Principal of the Red Hill Catholic Primary School advised that some students came to school well prepared, ready to learn, and are supported by their families to do so. However, there were students who were not so well supported and the Principal goes to the children's homes to wake them up and waits for them to get dressed and ready for school. He also explained that the school has an early lunch break in order to feed the children who do not have breakfast before they come.³⁶²

Ms Edie Wright of the Department of Education's Kimberley Education Region believes it is incumbent on the school to address school culture. Some schools provide hooks for children to hang some part of a uniform, a shirt, for example, so that they can transition from home and dress for school. Other schools provide breakfasts or lunches. Each school has different needs and will cater differently to address those needs.³⁶³

360 Pilbara Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

361 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p2.

362 Mr Dean Savoia, Principal, Red Hill Catholic Primary School, *Committee Briefing*, 15 March 2012; Ms Debra Sayce, Catholic Education office, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p2.

363 Ms Edie Wright, Kimberley Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 14 March 2012.

Yaandina Family Centre clearly sees the value in breakfast and homework programs. It suggested that school hours be changed to make the school day longer. This would allow schools to begin with a breakfast program, provide lunch and have children stay after school for homework, activities and dinner.³⁶⁴

These initiatives are not limited to regional areas as schools in the metropolitan area have programs to provide food for children. Some schools have a breakfast club each day; others provide breakfast on some days. A number of schools also provided lunches for children who do not have any and/or morning and afternoon tea. Schools emphasised that this was provided in a way that did not induce shame in children.

Some metropolitan schools have a variety of means of ensuring students have access to uniforms. For example, one school has a system that allows students to borrow uniforms; others have second hand uniform shops or school uniform pools. This helps students to avoid the shame of not having a uniform and not being able to obtain one.

In other situations, schools provide items such as stationary, school bags and learning materials for children at risk. One school advised that the local Shire had donated funds to the school to purchase these items.³⁶⁵

Communications with Parents

Schools have a variety of means of communicating with parents to provide information on the importance of attendance, to engage parents and to advise parents of school attendance issues relating to their children. These include, but are not limited to:

- Sending school attendance information home to all families and providing it to new families;
- Including articles on the importance of school attendance in school newsletters, with some including information about how much school is lost through irregular attendance;
- Including attendance data in the newsletter once per term;
- Including an article in the school newsletter about the importance of keeping a sick child at home;
- Subscribing to a good parenting newsletter and providing articles to parents via the school newsletter;

364 Yaandina Family Centre, Committee Briefing, 13 March 2012.

365 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

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- Including the importance of attendance as an item in more public forums such as school assemblies, school boards, and Parents and Citizens associations;
- Publicising departmental campaigns such as 'It's not OK to Be Away' at parent briefings, in newsletters and comments on reports;
- Including information in school handbooks and student diaries;
- Telephone calls to parents and carers;
- Using SMS to advise parents of non-attendance;
- Letters to parents and carers advising of the problem and asking for parents' support in addressing the issue;
- Principals' comments on student reports;
- Letters to parents and carers offering assistance with parenting or home life issues;
- Helping parents communicate with other agencies; and
- Home visits for at risk students, often with the assistance of chaplains and pastoral care staff.³⁶⁶

Pegs Creek Primary School reported that at the start of the year it had about 70% attendance. Warning letters were sent to parents regarding fines for their children's non-attendance. The letters seem to have had the desired effect. For example, one student who last year was on 17% attendance now has a 78% attendance level. According to Pegs Creek, the strategy was to start with the 'big stick' approach at the start of the year and then move towards a more positive approach. They are also focussing on the middle range of attendance.³⁶⁷

Such communication with parents aims to engage, encourage and assist them in getting their children to school, and to build positive relationships between families and schools. It also helps to increase the profile of attendance in the general school community.

Rewards, Awards and Incentives

The School Passport Program is one incentive-based initiative outlined above. There are many other ways in which schools use awards and incentives to encourage and reward school attendance. Some of the most commonly mentioned ones include:

366 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

367 Deputy Principal, Pegs Creek Primary School, Committee Briefing, 12 March 2012.

- Certificates for whole of semester attendance;
- Class attendance shield each week for the top three classes in the school;
- Certificates for 100% attendance, with the students' names appearing in the newsletter;
- Student of the Week program, with a focus on attendance;
- Winning Faction or House awards;
- Attendance Heroes community notice board; and
- Weekly good behaviour awards.³⁶⁸

Interestingly, the above were mainly implemented by primary schools, with secondary schools offering more than certificates as an incentive. Only one of the primary schools contacted by the Committee used prizes such as canteen vouchers as an incentive. Many of the secondary schools, though, rewarded students for improved attendance and for attendance at set levels, such as over 90% or 100%. Some of the incentives and rewards include:

- Reward lunches for students who achieve and maintain 100% attendance for a term;
- Students entered into a draw for a prize such as an iPod or movie tickets for a set level of attendance;
- School excursions, camps and cultural activities for good attendance and behaviour;
- Vouchers for individuals or classes maintaining high attendance for set periods;
- Attendance Champions—those who achieve very high attendance levels of 99 and 100%, for example—receive a small prize;
- Rewards for moderate and indicated risk categories of students who improve attendance by a specified amount;
- Rewards as negotiated on individual students' Attendance and Behaviour Plans; and

³⁶⁸ Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

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- Class rewards, such as sausage sizzles or picnics, for general good attendance and behaviour.³⁶⁹

One metropolitan high school provided an example of the way one of its attendance reward programs works:

- Students who attend 90% or more per term go into the draw for an iPod Touch—one for Years 8/9/10 and one for Years 11/12; and
- Students who attend over 90% for the entire year go into a draw for a sound system to the value of \$400.

Schools noted that non-government agencies and local business communities help to fund these rewards and incentives. Such funding was also obtained to provide scholarships for students with good attendance.

Schools further noted that an individualised approach and personalised pastoral care was important. For example, one school advised that it sends birthday acknowledgements to each child and personalised get well cards when children are absent due to illness. It also sends letters home congratulating students on good attendance levels.

A reverse-incentive approach is also used in some schools. For example, students can lose privileges, such as permission to take a lap top home, if their attendance drops below a certain level.

Sporting, Cultural and Other Engagement Programs

Schools run a number of sporting, cultural and other programs and activities designed to engage both students and parents in education and thereby improve attendance. There is a wide variety of such measures taken in schools as they are designed to suit a particular cohort and group of circumstances. These act as an incentive to attend and arrive on time, and as a reward for good attendance.

The following mentions just some of those the Committee is aware of:

- Game Factory Program, a cooperative physical games program;
- Leadership programs with various football clubs and players;
- Drumbeat Program, combining experiential learning with cognitive behavioural therapy to engage young people and adults who may be anxious or resistant to 'talk based' therapies;

³⁶⁹ Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

- Growth groups before and after school, targeting at risk students and including activities such as skipping, robotics, drama, visual arts and choir;
- Noongar Club;
- Wirra Club;
- Mentoring systems, including mentors from businesses;
- Specialist programs, excursions and after school activities;
- Alternative programs such as Hillside Farm, STRIDE and EdVentures;
- Follow the Dream;
- Respect Each Other Program;
- Sports Foundation Fund;
- Flexibility in program and curriculum content and delivery;
- Partnerships with industry to expose students to the world of work;
- Flexi Connect Course for Years 11 and 12, focussing on engagement and connection;
- Transition courses for migrant and Indigenous students with limited education experiences;
- Driver Training Assistance;
- Tourism Enterprise Plan;
- Girls' Academy;
- Alternative Year 10 program to focus on parent/school communications;
- Home Rooms, with small groups of students from other years placed in a Home Room to help foster community and connection.

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Figure 6.10: An example of an innovative approach to attendance³⁷⁰

Our approach is no more evident than is our work last year with Student A—Year 9; mid-year attendance 30%; and impervious to all our attempts to re-engage him, including extensive work with his mother.

However, by the end of the year Student A's attendance improved to 62%.

We discovered he was truanting to meet mates in the city to dance Hip Hop on the streets. It is his passion; little did we know that before he came to us he had represented his home country in Hip Hop internationally. The Manager Student Services saw an opportunity to reconnect Student A with school.

First he was introduced to the Dance teacher. On condition of meeting improved attendance targets, Student A and a group of friends were given access at lunch time to the Performing Arts Centre. Then we worked with the boys to identify performance opportunities.

By meeting attendance improvement targets the boys were included to perform for incoming year 7s on our transition day. They choreographed and performed in the schools' end of year Dance concert. Next they performed at the local community Carols by Candlelight. The follow day unsolicited community feedback about their professionalism was emphatic. To end the year they led a "flash mob" dance at our final assembly—an uplifting way to complete the year.

Now Student A and three mates have free access, courtesy of our Dance teacher, to a private dance studio provided they maintain satisfactory attendance targets at school—so far so good.

Other Measures

There are a number of other measures that schools take to help improve school attendance. These include developing individual education plans and individual behaviour plans for students, particularly those at risk. Some schools advised that they then enter into agreements or 'contracts' with students to achieve attendance targets.

Schools also undertake home visits, sometimes with the school chaplain or other members of a Student Services Team. In March 2012, Roebourne had a range of initiatives in place to encourage attendance. These included all teachers doing home visits with aboriginal officers.³⁷¹

Roebourne school has a bus service to transport children, a local attendance officer, reward activities and family incentives.³⁷² The Committee is aware of at least two schools in the metropolitan area that collect students from home.

Other measures taken include:

- Developing an alternative or differentiated curriculum;

370 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

371 Pilbara Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

372 Pilbara Education Region, Department of Education, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

- Small group work for fast-tracking catch-up;
- Health and hygiene programs;
- Targeted approaches to health, wellbeing and mental health;
- Case management of students at risk;
- Parent evenings with student services and psychologists meeting parents to discuss issues such as teenagers, resilience and effective parenting;
- Home classrooms to foster a safe and secure environment;
- Providing a games room as a safe environment at lunch and recess times;
- One-on-one conversations with students to discuss attendance;
- Establish relationships with local community and businesses;
- Hold parent and student activity nights;
- Encourage parents to see the school as a community hub;
- Provide a welcoming school environment;
- Hold parent and student family dinners and events;
- Celebrate achievements in public forums such as assemblies to which parents and community members are invited; and
- Information evenings for migrant parents, with translators and government agency officers present to provide information.

Resourcing Improved School Attendance

If the general premise that school attendance is important to children's academic and life-long achievements is accepted, it must also be accepted that reducing the amount of non-attendance in the state's schools will lead to improved academic and social outcomes for Western Australian children.

However, there are consequences of improved school attendance that may ultimately reduce the potential benefits. A number of these were raised with the Committee.

As noted above, DCP suggested that schools could not cope with increased attendance and that classroom management would be impossible if all students currently absent were to attend school. This argument was supported by attendees at the Pilbara Regional Development Authority Forum in March 2012. For example, while schools

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such as the Roebourne District High School have significantly improved attendance rates, it is now dealing with new problems arising from increased attendance, including managing increased numbers and managing behaviour in the classroom.³⁷³

It is also clear that if more children attend school, more classrooms and staff will be needed. Given the issues that relate to non-attendance, it is also likely that a significant number of children with attendance issues will need increased support. As the Clontarf Foundation advised:

*There are other things that are needed along the lines of which we are working with the government at the moment anyway; for example, we have to have specific classrooms, facilities that go with it, academy rooms and teachers who have to be able to teach this style of kid. There are houses, because of course we cannot go and stick 10 staff in the Pilbara; that is going to cost us an enormous amount of money.*³⁷⁴

While the Director General DCP is mindful of the dilemmas faced by the Department of Education, he argues that:

*schools really do need capacity to accommodate people who require additional remediation. They have very good support programs for kids. As always, it is a supply and demand issue and we have more demand than for which there is supply for additional support to keep kids at school.*³⁷⁵

Diversity of Problems Requires Diversity of Responses

The above discussion of reasons why children and young people do not go to school, and the initiatives that schools have introduced to improve attendance clearly demonstrate that to be effective any such measures must be developed to suit the specific circumstances of the school, its student cohort and its community. It is obvious that the diversity of problems encountered by students, families, communities and schools means that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

This has been recognised by the Department of Education's Director General, who stated that 'essentially, attendance is a partnership—it has to be. Any solution has to be a partnership between the school, the parents and the broader community'.³⁷⁶ According to the Director General, 'the best strategies [for managing non-attendance]

373 Pilbara Regional Development Authority Forum, *Committee Briefing*, 12 March 2012.

374 Mr Gerard Neesham, Chief Executive Officer, Clontarf Foundation, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 November 2011, p11.

375 Mr Terry Murphy, Director General, Department for Child Protection, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2011, p10–11.

376 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p2.

are the ones that the schools come up with because they are individualised and the schools have very good relationships, by and large, with parents'.³⁷⁷

The Director General further stated that 'due to the complex nature of student attendance ... there is no simple answer or a 'one size fits all' approach'.³⁷⁸ Given this, through the *Better Attendance: Brighter Futures* policy, schools were empowered 'to work with parents and the community to address poor attendance and create solutions specific to community and individual student needs'.³⁷⁹

Schools have developed an impressive range of strategies and it is abundantly clear that schools are working very hard to address school non-attendance. Schools reported an improvement in relationships between the school and the community, and increased levels of engagement and confidence.³⁸⁰ Not all schools, though, could report an improvement in overall attendance, with many experiencing mixed results, despite their best efforts.

It seems to the Committee that there have been successful programs tailored to suit local circumstances that have had a very positive impact on school attendance and educational outcomes for children. It is important that information is shared throughout the education community so that teachers, principals, attendance officers and other staff can learn from each other. It is equally important that programs that have been successful in trials be funded to allow them to continue. In such circumstances there is no need to reinvent the wheel and call for more pilot programs. Through continued funding, the benefits from successful trial programs will be multiplied.

Finding 21

The complexity of the problem of school non-attendance means that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Finding 22

Schools are in the best position to know what their needs are and to develop appropriate programs and strategies. However, it is important that information is shared throughout the education community so that teachers, principals, attendance officers and other staff can learn from each other.

377 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

378 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p20.

379 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, Letter to Public Accounts Committee, Attachment p3, 13 March 2012.

380 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area, August 2012.

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Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education ensures that schools receive adequate funding to allow them to develop school attendance initiatives tailored specifically to each school's needs, in the 2013-14 budget.

Funding

Not only does the success or failure of programs and initiatives depend on parent, student and school engagement, it also depends on adequate resourcing. This was raised as a significant concern for schools, particularly for those who felt that the future of some successful programs was in doubt due to funding shortages.

School Support Program Resource Allocation

School Support Program Resource Allocation (SSPRA) funding is additional monies allocated to schools over and above their school grant. SSPRA funding was first delivered in 2009, with 'funding for senior school engagement' into SSPRA in 2011.³⁸¹ It was intended 'to enable principals and schools to have greater autonomy and flexibility in making decisions about how they use funding to bring about improvement in specific areas of need'.³⁸²

SSPRA funding of \$50 million annually is provided to give schools additional support 'for things like literacy, numeracy, behaviour and attendance ...which schools can use for whatever the priority in their school is, so schools have the capacity to use that flexibly. If attendance is the issue in their school, they can use it for that purpose'.³⁸³

The Director General advised that:

we have schools using funds flexibly from a range of areas to bring it together around participation. For example, most of the kids who have difficulty around participation also have difficulty around literacy and numeracy. Previously, they had to use each bucket separately. Now, schools can put together much more robust programs. [...] schools are doing a very good job to direct their resources to their priorities. [...]

381 Mr Martin Clery, Acting Executive Director, Statewide Services, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p17; Hon Peter Collier, MLC, Minister representing the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 April 2011, Question without Notice No. 226.

382 Hon Peter Collier, MLC, Minister representing the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 April 2011, p2166.

383 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p7.

*We are seeing much more sophisticated programs on the basis that they can use their money more flexibly.*³⁸⁴

The mechanisms used to allocate SSPRA funding to individual schools 'take into account student numbers, socioeconomic index, National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy results and geographic location'.³⁸⁵ This results in annual funding variations for individual schools.

It is not surprising that schools would express great concern about funding. Many of the initiatives that schools introduce to improve attendance and work with children at risk are resource intensive. Schools surveyed by the Committee raised the possibility of their having to cut programs due to funding not being renewed. As one school advised, the success or failure of intervention strategies is largely dependent on the amount of resources the school has available in order to actively pursue the attendance issues with individual students. Another advised that the resources they had were stretched to capacity. A third stated that they needed additional resources to tackle the complex issues related to attendance. This school found recent reductions in funding to be disconcerting and believed it would have a detrimental if not calamitous effect in years to come.³⁸⁶

It is understandable that schools have such concerns, particularly as their funding varies from year to year, according to the census. The following provides an example of the way that the census negatively impacts school funding.

A metropolitan school advised that the 2012 Semester 2 student census showed their school had 26 Aboriginal students. However, this school has 32 Aboriginal students on their roll. The six students not counted in the census had not attended school in the two week period prior to the census and had not provided an explanation for their absence. This means that they will not be counted in the Department of Education's resourcing allocation in 2013, despite the fact that the six students will stay on the school's roll and be the school's responsibility for attendance. This has the additional repercussion of a drop of 0.1 FTE in the allocation for an AIEO in 2013.³⁸⁷

In 2011 the Hon Peter Collier was asked what support there was for schools that had experienced significant SSPRA funding cuts. Mr Collier responded that 'schools that have had a reduction in SSPRA can access a range of support', and listed the following:

384 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p17.

385 Hon Peter Collier, MLC, Minister representing the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 April 2011, p2166.

386 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

387 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, *Study of 20 Schools in the Perth Metropolitan Area*, August 2012.

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- ‘access to learning and teaching resources to assist teachers to plan effective programs for kindergarten to year 12 across all learning areas. This includes K–10 syllabuses’;
- ‘explicit literacy and numeracy teaching resources that focus on the teaching of essential literacy and numeracy skills including phonological and phonemic awareness, grammar, punctuation, spelling and number skills’;
- ‘resources to support the teaching of students for whom English is a second language or dialect’;
- ‘participation in effective whole-school literacy planning workshops and learning area-specific workshops for secondary school leaders and teachers’;
- ‘delivery of specialist literacy and numeracy training to support expert teachers to provide modelling, mentoring and coaching support to colleagues’;
- ‘delivery of professional learning to upskill mainstream teachers to support effective teaching for English as a second language or dialect students’;
- ‘delivery of Primary Connections professional learning by trained, school-based facilitators’;
- ‘participation in Classroom Management Strategies professional, learning to build the capacity and skills of teachers to manage and engage students positively’;
- ‘access to the department’s statewide services branch to support teachers to cater for the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and students with identified disabilities—that is visiting teachers’; and
- ‘access to Schools Plus funding to support the implementation of individual education plans for students with identified needs’.³⁸⁸

Anecdotally, schools seem not to have been reassured by these statements.

388 Hon Peter Collier, MLC, Minister representing the Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Council, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 5 April 2011, p2166.

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Literacy pedagogy

Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. (Kofi Anan)

Background

*Engaging young children in interesting and worthwhile pre-reading activities paves the way for the great majority to make a good start on systematic phonic work by the age of five.*³⁸⁹

Underpinning all education outcomes is the individual's literacy and numeracy. Additionally, literacy is demonstrably important not only for positive educational outcomes, but for personal development, social and economic outcomes in life.

Individuals who fail to acquire basic competencies early on are more likely to require additional (and potentially expensive) intervention in later years, and are at higher risk of not attaining a Year 12 or equivalent qualification. Individuals with lower education levels typically have higher unemployment risks and less stable jobs.³⁹⁰

What it means to be literate has evolved with the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Literacy used to be about prose. People now need, for instance, document literacy for every day, but vital, tasks such as reading and understanding occupational health and safety instructions in the workplace, or being able to fill out forms. Increasingly, they need to be proficient in the use of information technology for communicating with others.

At its core, literacy is about the ability to use words, make meaning and access information in the written form. From a personal and societal perspective, it has come to mean the ability to function well in our increasingly complex lives. Nationally, a literate population is essential if Australia is to prosper in the global knowledge economy. Literacy also provides the gift of reading for pleasure – an engaging, rewarding, mind expanding and emotionally enriching activity. Those

389 Jim Rose, 'Independent review of the teaching of early reading', Available <https://www.education.gov.au/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006> Accessed 23 July 2012

390 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 23 July 2012

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*who are struggling with basic literacy will find that reading is a chore, a task, a complex system of symbols to be decoded. The black marks on the page will barely have meaning, so reading will not be a pastime of choice for these Australians – let alone a vehicle for success in life.*³⁹¹

Numerous studies have found that there is a strong link between low literacy levels, the unemployment history of individuals, and the incidence of criminal offending. Offenders disproportionately come from disadvantaged situations and backgrounds with many offenders being unemployed prior to incarceration. One study made the following observation: 'The overall picture emerges of an undereducated class with lower literacy skills to handle everyday tasks compared to the rest of the community.'³⁹²

Literacy in Australia today

Functional literacy provides a means for economic well-being and allows an individual to advance in areas of their life outside the purely economic arena. Yet in Australia today, one in five adults do not have the literacy skills to effectively participate in everyday life.³⁹³ Where once an individual would have been called literate if they could sign their name rather than marking it with a cross, the requirements of the twenty-first century mean that such a level of literacy would not now render that individual functionally literate.³⁹⁴

There has been significant media comment in recent months, giving voice to the concern felt by many sectors of Australian business, academia and government at the significant failings in the teaching of literacy. These concerns are illustrated below:

391 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Year Book 2012', Available at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1301.0~2012~Main%20Features~The%20National%20Year%20of%20Reading:%20libraries%20helping%20to%20make%20Australia%20a%20nation%20of%20readers~206> Accessed on 23 July 2012

392 Gaes, Gerald G, The Impact of Prison Education Programs on Post-Release Outcomes, Reentry Roundtable on Education, March 31 and April 1 2008, p3

393 Australian Council of Adult Literacy, A literate Australia, 2001, Available http://www.acal.edu.au/publications/papers/acal_view/ALitAustOct01.pdf Accessed 20 July 2012

394 Professor William Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p7.

Figure 7.1: A collage of recent headlines

Direct Instruction may not be rocket science but it is effective
 Teachers should be teachers, not facilitators, when it comes to educating schoolchildren

NOEL PEARSON'S ABORIGINAL COLLEGE GETS TOP RESULTS



NOEL Pearson may not be an educationalist by training but when it comes to his advocacy of Direct Instruction and knowledge about what best works in the classroom, he outshines most academics in teacher training institutes and universities.

Schools need to get basics of education right from the start

Literacy program a \$322m failure

Fast decline in literacy

Results
 Rachel Lebihan

A rigid American system of instruction is proving its worth for indigenous children

Despite what seems like an endless debate over literacy and numeracy standards in our State and nation, it seems that we still have problems equipping students with the most elementary skills.
 The latest evidence of concern comes from some of the State's most influential business leaders, who say our primary school system is failing to teach children basic reading and maths, leading to an alarming jump in illiterate and innumerate workers.

JULIA Gillard's signature education policy aimed at lifting national literacy and numeracy standards has failed to produce any improvements after three years and \$322 million in public spending.

The findings are contained in an Australian National Audit Office report that also identifies the commonwealth's failure to create a mechanism to monitor whether states were delivering on undertakings made to qualify for a share of extra federal money.

WA will miss out on millions of dollars in reward payments from Canberra after falling short of targets for lifting education standards.

WA's primary school system is failing to teach basic reading and maths, leading to an alarming jump in illiterate and innumerate workers, according to some of the State's most influential business leaders.

EDUCATION ATTACK

Missed education targets cost WA \$6m

WHY OUR KIDS STILL CANNOT READ

Despite studies showing phonics works, children are not being taught the basics of literacy

JENNIFER BUCKINGHAM

THE damning findings of the NSW Auditor-General's report on indigenous literacy released this week should come as no surprise. The Centre for Independent Studies' Helen Hughes and Mark Hughes have been dissecting the enduring problem of poor English literacy among indigenous children for a number of years. They conclude that the problem is largely due to poor literacy teaching

Kids 'not learning the basics'

Some senior maths equals primary level

A university academic says Year 12s who do maths at stage-one level are learning the same content that children cover in primary school in Singapore.

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The international studies outlined in this chapter reflect the need to achieve the minimum standards set for functional literacy in today's world.

Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)

As the NAPLAN results reveal, many Australian and Western Australian students are achieving good results in literacy and numeracy. Nonetheless, many students are also failing to achieve the minimum standards set. As a whole, Australia is falling behind other countries in two respects:

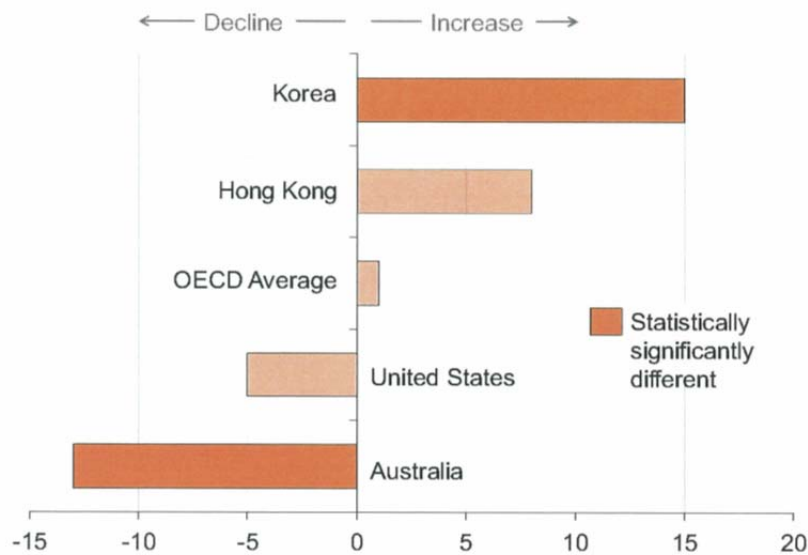
1. The proportion of students at the high end of achievement is declining; and
2. Australia has too long a 'tail' of underperformance, which is concentrated amongst students from low socio-economic families and Indigenous students.³⁹⁵

This relative decline is graphically illustrated in a recent report from the Grattan Institute which reviewed the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) PISA tests assess the knowledge and skills of 15 year olds. There has been a sharp improvement in the high performing education systems of East Asia but an equally sharp deterioration in Australia.³⁹⁶

395 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Importance of literacy and numeracy' Available <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/LiteracyandNumeracyPilotProjects/Pages/ImportanceLandN.aspx> Accessed 23 July 2012

396 Grattan Institute, 'Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia' Available <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/> accessed 23 July 2012

Figure 7.2: Changes in PISA mean reading scores between 2000 and 2009³⁹⁷

Source: (OECD, 2010a)

Up to half of the students who do not reach this baseline proficiency level come from the bottom quartile of PISA's index of economic, social and cultural status. However, there are at least as many underperformers in higher quartiles of the index. This implies that extra financial resources on their own are not sufficient to meet the education needs of all students.³⁹⁸

Very significant gaps in achievement remain between Australian students by gender, Indigenous status, location and wealth. In some cases these are equivalent to several years of schooling.

The average reading performance of Indigenous students was significantly lower, by more than two years of schooling, than that of non-Indigenous students. A similar gap in achievement was found for mathematics and science literacy.

In addition, there is a large gender gap in mathematics, with boys outperforming girls that was present in PISA 2006, but before then had not

397 Grattan Institute, 'Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia' Available <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/> accessed 23 July 2012, p9.

398 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 23 July 2012

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been seen for many years. In reading literacy boys trail girls by the equivalent of around one year of schooling.

Of greatest concern, students from the highest socioeconomic group outperformed students from the lowest socioeconomic group in reading by the equivalent of almost three full years of schooling.

*'These achievement gaps place an unacceptable proportion of 15-year-old students at serious risk of not achieving literacy levels sufficient for them to effectively participate in the workforce,' Professor Masters said. 'Some Australian teenagers may be trying to enter the workforce and forge a future for themselves with reading, mathematics and science literacy skills equivalent to a Year 7 or 8 education or worse.'*³⁹⁹

Finding 23

In the years 2000 – 2009 Australia's reading scores have deteriorated sharply when measured internationally both against the OECD average and more particularly against the educational outcomes of East Asia.

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS)

Another study is the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS). In 2006, ALLS was conducted in Australia as part of an international study coordinated by Statistics Canada and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).⁴⁰⁰

The ALLS provides information on knowledge and skills in the following four domains;

- Prose literacy: the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of narrative texts, including texts from newspapers, magazines and brochures.
- Document literacy: the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts.
- Numeracy: the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage and respond to the mathematical demands of diverse situations. And
- Problem solving: goal-directed thinking and action in situations for which no routine solution is available.

399 ACER, 'PISA identifies challenges for Australian education', 2010 Available at <http://www.acer.edu.au/media/pisa-identifies-challenges-for-australian-education> Accessed on 24 July 2012

400 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4228.0 - Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, Australia, 2006 (Reissue, Available <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228>. Accessed 20 July 2012

For each literacy domain, proficiency is measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 500 points. To facilitate analysis, these continuous scores have been grouped into 5 skill levels with Level 1 being the lowest measured level of literacy. Each level is defined as follows:

- *Level 1 –people with very poor skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information printed on the package.*
- *Level 2 – respondents can deal only with material that is simple, clearly laid out, and in which the tasks involved are not too complex. It denotes a weak level of skill, but more hidden than Level 1. They may have developed coping skills to manage everyday literacy demands, but their low level of proficiency makes it difficult for them to face novel demands, such as learning new job skills.*
- *Level 3 – is considered a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society. It denotes roughly the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry. Like higher levels, it requires the ability to integrate several sources of information and solve more complex problems.*
- *Levels 4 and 5 – describe respondents who demonstrate command of higher-order information processing skills.*

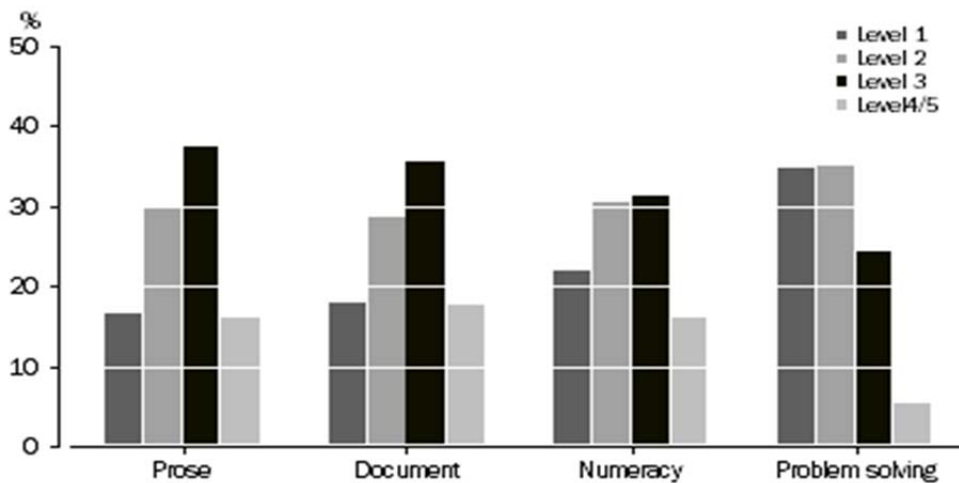
On the five-point scale, Level 3 was deemed to be the level at which people could ‘cope with many printed materials found in daily life and work though not always with a high level of proficiency’.

Measuring the adult population between the ages of 15 and 74, the distribution of skill levels from the survey found that:

- Approximately 7 million Australians had skills at Level 1 and 2, that is, they were likely to experience difficulty using every day printed materials;
- 5.6 million Australians are at Level 3 and deemed to have sufficient skills to cope; and
- 2.5 million are at Level 4 and 5 and are considered capable of managing the literacy demands of everyday life.

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Figure 7.3: Results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey⁴⁰¹.



Proportion at each skill level

Other findings from the survey include:

- Just over half (54%) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years were assessed as having the prose literacy skills needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. Results were similar for document literacy with 53% and numeracy with 47% achieving this level.

One witness to the Inquiry commented on the fact that these are literacy rates averaged out across the community and that:

*There are a lot of secondary schools that I go into where this 52 % would be something they would be pleased with—if they could get half their students actually writing well, reading well, strong vocabularies, actually able to engage with the curriculum. It is just simply not the case in a lot of schools.*⁴⁰²

- Women had higher scores for prose and health literacy, while men had higher scores for document literacy and numeracy.
- Across all the different types of literacy, people with jobs were more likely to be assessed as having the skill levels needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work than were the unemployed or those not in the labour force.

401 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4228.0 - Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, Australia, 2006 (Reissue), Available <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228>. Accessed 20 July 2012

402 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services,, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012 p2

- The median weekly income for people assessed with the highest level of prose literacy was \$890 compared to \$298 for those assessed at the lowest level.
- People who had completed a qualification generally had higher scores.
- Half (50%) of recent migrants whose first language was not English had the document literacy skills to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work compared to 32% a decade ago.
- Internationally, Australia was ranked in the middle across the different types of literacy with results closely aligned with those from Canada.⁴⁰³

Finding 24

The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey found that only just over half (54%) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years were assessed as having the prose literacy skills needed to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work. Results were similar for document literacy with 53% and numeracy with 47% achieving this level.

Improving literacy

People who whinge about resources are looking for a scapegoat - what is broken is the delivery⁴⁰⁴

It is acknowledged that a substantial proportion of school effectiveness can be attributed to teachers and school leadership. However, a critical factor in achieving good literacy levels is widely seen to relate to the pedagogy adopted by the teacher/school.

Pedagogy⁴⁰⁵

There are two primary approaches to teaching literacy, namely:

1. Whole language, and
2. Phonics.

The two approaches, described in more detail below, are quite different in their philosophical framework which can lead to strong debate between the proponents of each.

403 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4228.0 - Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results, Australia, 2006 (Reissue), Available

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228>. Accessed 20 July 2012

404 Briefing John Fleming, Melbourne 14 October 2012

405 The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept

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Differing world views or paradigms about the nature of literacy have resulted in conflicting views about how to teach reading. One of the most contentious debates in literacy pedagogy is the 'skills' (phonics) versus 'whole-language' debate.⁴⁰⁶

However, it is generally acknowledged that both phonics and whole language approaches have contributions to make to the effective teaching of reading. 'The main difference is that whole language strategies are more suitable for readers once they have mastered the decoding [phonics] aspect of reading.'⁴⁰⁷

I feel that the evidence firmly is that young children who are ready to learn to read should be taught, should be allowed to learn as soon as they are able rather than being held back, and that children who are least likely to prosper in schooling are those for whom it is most important that explicit teaching happens early.⁴⁰⁸

Whole language

Whole language is a method of teaching reading and writing that emphasises learning whole words and phrases by encountering them in meaningful contexts (say a picture) rather than by phonics exercises.

The first known use of 'whole language' as a pedagogy was in 1984.⁴⁰⁹ 'Whole language learning may come at the expense of accuracy and correctness. A child might be awarded high marks for "overall language use," even if he or she has misspelled many words.'⁴¹⁰

An examination of the pedagogy found that whole language exists in an environment where *motivated* students use literature and writing in a supportive, cooperative manner. Moreover, 'It can therefore be inferred that, because whole language is defined by educators in a variety of ways, the classroom activities chosen to support this concept may vary as well.'⁴¹¹

406 Office for Education Policy and Innovation, 'Evidence-based research for expert literacy teaching' 2007, Available at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/publ/literacy-summary-paper.pdf> Accessed 24 July 2012

407 Konza, D., *Teaching children with reading difficulties*, CENGAG Learning, Australia, 2003, p10.

408 Professor William Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p4.

409 Merriam Webster Dictionary, Available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/whole%20language> Accessed 24 July 2012.

410 Adapted from Maddux, C. D., Johnson, D. L., & Willis, J. W. (1997). *Educational computing: Learning with tomorrow's technologies*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. Available at <http://viking.coe.uh.edu/~ichen/ebook/et-it/whole.htm> Accessed 24 July 2012.

411 Begeron, B.S. What Does the Term Whole Language Mean? Constructing a Definition from the Literature *Journal of Literacy Research*, 1990 22: 315.

Phonics

'Phonics' emphasises the alphabetic principle. Letters represent the sounds of speech. There are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words, which are specific to the alphabetic writing system.

Children learn letter sounds (b = the first sound in "bat" and "ball") first and then blend them (bl = the first two sounds in "blue") to form words.

Children learn how to segment and chunk letter sounds together in order to blend them to form words.⁴¹²

"Phonics" actually literally means the relationship between the sounds that we use when we speak and the letters that we use to write those sounds down. Ultimately there is a predictable relationship in any alphabetic system of writing, which we have.

By definition, it is a coding system that takes the individual speech sounds—the phonemes—that we produce when we speak. In English, we have approximately 44 phonemes in our spoken language. In Italian, there are 20 phonemes. We have quite a lot more phonemes.

We only have 26 letters of the alphabet, so in order to code 44 sounds, immediately we have to create some unique combinations like an "s" and an "h" together to make a "sh" and a "c" and an "h" to make a "ch" and so on. We have our 44 sounds when we speak.

Phonics simply refers to the relationships between the sounds and the letters that we use to code those sounds on paper. In teaching phonics, it is not a method of teaching; it is teaching children that simple body of knowledge.⁴¹³

Which pedagogy?

Factors, such as disadvantage cannot readily be controlled without significant additional government resourcing of services. What goes on in the classroom is most important to influencing student success.

412 Wikipedia, 'Teaching reading: whole language and phonics' Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching_reading:_whole_language_and_phonics Accessed 24 July 2012.

413 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services,, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012 p5.

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But it is reported that ‘There has been a lot of discussion in Australia about curriculum and what should be taught in schools, but less debate about how it is taught.’⁴¹⁴ It has only been in the past two or three years that how literacy is taught in Western Australia has been more closely examined. Nonetheless, the Committee was advised that, in terms of the teaching of literacy in 2012:

There is the tendency to work from a top-down position rather than a bottom-up position; in other words, we work from the big picture—reading lots of fabulous stories, setting up wonderful teaching and learning environments in the hope that children, simply by being part of that, will develop the skills almost magically.

*Again, that works quite well for our top end of the spectrum kids. They do lap it up and they do get a lot from it. But it does not work so well for our bottom end of the spectrum kids—those kids who are the most disadvantaged.*⁴¹⁵

There is a growing body of evidence that ‘whole language’ has real limitations. In a brief meta-analysis of recent research, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood summarised findings from several national and international studies. These included the Department of Education, Science and Training 2005a; Education and Science Committee 2001; National Reading Panel 2000; and Rose 2006. It advised that these studies concluded:

Systematic phonics instruction is highly effective in preventing reading difficulties (National Reading Panel 2000).

Phonetic, word-level decoding skills are an important element in a balanced reading program (Education and Science Committee 2001).

Systematic phonics instruction is critical if children are to be taught well although teachers must draw on an integrated approach to reading that includes phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge and comprehension (Department of Education, Science and Training 2005a).

High quality, systematic, synthetic phonic work taught discretely and consistently should be the prime approach to establishing word recognition but it should be set within a broad and rich language

414 Nour Group, Schooling challenges and opportunities: A report for the review of funding for schooling panel, 1 August 2011.

415 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012 p7.

*curriculum that takes into account speaking, listening, reading and writing (Rose 2006).*⁴¹⁶

When this happens there are consistent reports from around the country of children overcoming the impact of social disadvantage. Referring to the ‘*Catch them before they fall*’ project which looked at what was happening in different schools, one Western Australian witness commented that:

*Some of the schools from the lowest socioeconomic areas were doing significantly better than schools from higher SES areas, and when we looked at what was the underlying factor, the difference was that they were using a much more structured approach in the early years. It does not have to be tedious and dull; it is very interactive and a lot of fun. But, simply, what is happening is the children are being taught in a systematic way the relationships between the letters and sounds.*⁴¹⁷

Bellfield Primary School, in the northern suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne, demonstrated the impact of explicit teaching, phonics, as the pedagogy of choice when combined with teacher accountability and parental engagement. In 2005 Bellfield was described as being an incredibly disadvantaged school—one of the most disadvantaged schools in metropolitan Australia. The profile of the school population was:

- *87% of children at the school were eligible for the Educational Maintenance Allowance. That means 87% of the parents were unemployed.*
- *Sixty-one % of the students were from single-parent families, predominantly living with their mother.*
- *Just over 25% of the students were non-English speaking students. Most of those students were from Somalia, had lived in refugee camps and arrived here on boats—and had never spoken English.*
- *Just over 10% of the students were Indigenous.*⁴¹⁸

Despite the marked social disadvantages that students faced there was a remarkable turnaround in educational outcomes in the period 1992 – 2005.

416 Office for Education Policy and Innovation, ‘Evidence-based research for expert literacy teaching’ 2007, p4, Available at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/publ/literacy-summary-paper.pdf> Accessed 24 July 2012.

417 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, ‘*Transcript of Evidence*’, 9 July 2012 p6.

418 Buckingham, J. et al, ‘Educating the Disadvantaged’, Issue Analysis, no. 116, 1 October 2009, p12.

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In 1992 80% of Bellfield students were not only failing in literacy and numeracy but failing dismally—not even close to the benchmarks. By 2005, tests indicated that the Bellfield students, as a cohort and as a group, were at the top of state-wide benchmarks. So in that 10-year period, something had significantly transformed the educational opportunities of those students.^{419 420}

The principal of that school during those years advised the Committee that:

*Phonics can be taught in the early years and research shows that systematic phonics teaching in these years is more effective than non-systematic instruction.*⁴²¹

As a collateral outcome he advised that behaviour improved as learning improved as did the general tone in the school. This was evidenced in the disadvantaged schools of Lincoln Gardens at Port Lincoln and Fisk St primary school Whyalla.

In another example related to the Committee, a witness stated that:

One of the schools we have been working with is in a very remote Aboriginal community. The teacher who was there was really struggling—a fantastic teacher; a very, very competent, very professional teacher who had done lots of wonderful things before. She was doing lots of great things with these kids, but she still felt that she had this whole class of K–4 kids none of whom were reading.

*So she started using a structured phonics approach, and within a year every single child in that class is reading and many of them are reading really well. Not only are they reading really well, but they are spelling really well and they are building little sentences. They are doing fantastically well. They are also doing lots of other art projects, writing projects and storytelling projects and are making little movies; they have got their own little sound recording studio happening there. But they are doing the literacy in a very structured way and they are getting fantastic results.*⁴²²

In Cape York, the Committee met with the CEO and staff of the Cape York Institute and the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA) led by Mr Noel Pearson. As the

419 Buckingham, J. et al, 'Educating the Disadvantaged', Issue Analysis, no. 116, 1 October 2009, p12.

420 Briefing John Fleming, Melbourne, 14 October 2011.

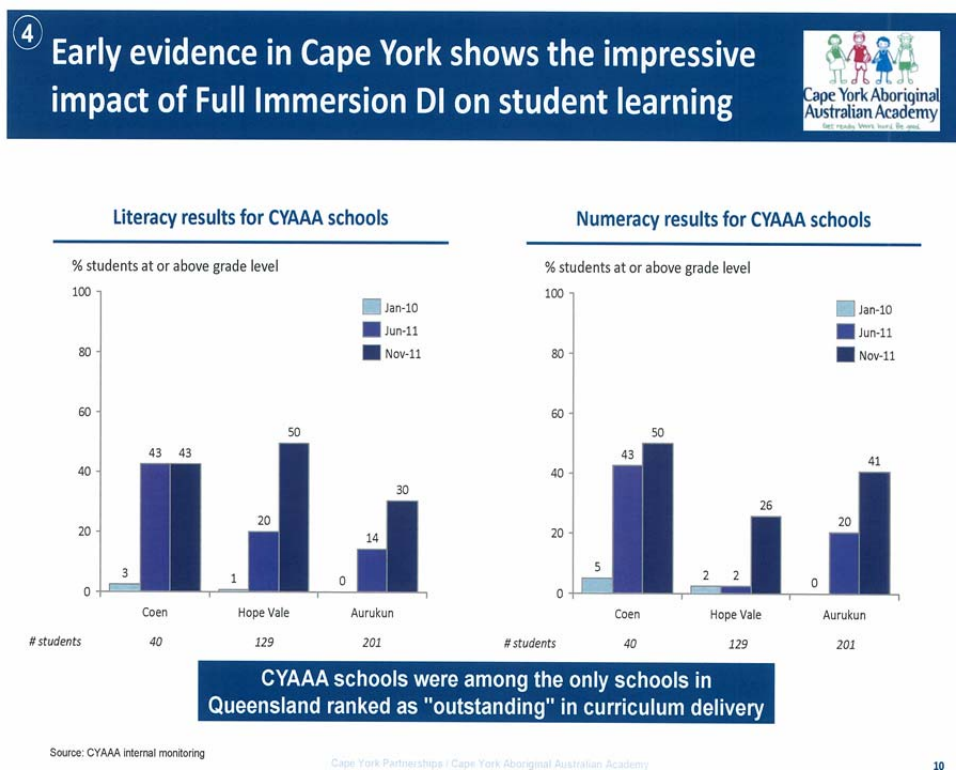
421 Briefing John Fleming, Melbourne, 14 October 2011.

422 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012 p6.

following table indicates there have been significant gains in students' literacy and numeracy results in the schools under their control. They attribute their success to the:

- *dedication to teaching mainstream curriculum in English literacy and numeracy, using a form of phonics known as Direct Instruction [which is discussed later in this chapter];*
- *provision of enriching extracurricular artistic, musical and sport programs; and*
- *provision of comprehensive Indigenous culture and language programs.*⁴²³

Figure 7.4: The impact of Full Immersion Direct Instruction in Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy⁴²⁴



Case story

One witness to the Committee recounted a student's personal journey with explicit phonics, from the student's perspective:

423 Briefing by Noel Pearson, Cairns 4 July 2012

424 Briefing by Noel Pearson, Cairns 4 July 2012

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There is a retell from a student's perspective about how he found being involved in a program of this kind. This is a very explicit structured synthetic phonics program, essentially. He says —

You make it to Secondary School, and for whatever reasons, you've only just begun reading easy words. You don't like reading aloud, and your confidence is low in most areas of literacy.

At the beginning of Year 8, you do a series of tests in spelling, reading and writing and you just know that you didn't do too well.

After this bad start to the year, a different teacher comes up and gets you to sound out some letters and words and read aloud to them. Not too long after, they ask if you would like to learn to read better, really quickly. It's easy to agree to this because you've seen the work and the books they expect you to be able to read in class.

So you start going to the Library four times a week for an individual lesson with your own reading tutor. You learn all about the sounds that letters make and how they can blend together. The practice you get with sounds and words makes it easier to tackle longer, more difficult words. Your tutor also times you reading word lists you've already learned. As you get faster at it you realise that you don't have to sound the words out any more, you actually know it off by heart. Every session you do some reading as well and, although you find it difficult and tiring at first, you start to get better at it. You understand it!

In a couple of months, you are able to read more easily and you understand the meaning of words. You start using the vocabulary that you are acquiring and you and your tutor talk about your fluency and decoding words and you know what these terms indicate about your knowledge of language.

In less than 9 months of continuously doing this program you are reading words like 'inconsequential' and 'advantageous'. You can decode them, define them, spell them and use the words at home with your Mum! You feel confident of your skills and suddenly, going into Year 9 doesn't seem so daunting after all.

That is just one student talking about his experience. My frustration with that, quite frankly, is that it should have happened when he was in year 3 or year 4. One of the things that we know about kids in terms of literacy and access and knowledge and the ability to be part of the secondary school curriculum is one of the biggest drivers is their vocabularies. The difference between a student who reads throughout primary school and a student who does not is in the magnitude of 30 000 to 50 000 words. Even this boy's capacity now to engage well with the curriculum has been really significantly

*compromised by the lack of good, strong education in the primary school. I get very frustrated when I hear people saying, “But you’ve got to engage the kids and you’ve got to provide them with all these wonderful experiences”—of course we have to do that—but ultimately, if we are not teaching kids how to read and spell accurately and give them that opportunity to read and therefore grow their vocabularies, which they will do through reading primarily, more so than any other activity; you can talk to children until you are blue in the face but if we want them to build a strong vocabulary, they need to be reading.*⁴²⁵

Finding 25

Literacy is multi-dimensional, engaging both the spoken language and reading and writing. There is a growing consensus that high quality, systematic, synthetic phonic work taught discretely and consistently should be the prime approach to establishing word recognition. This should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum that takes into account speaking, listening, reading and writing.⁴²⁶

Direct Instruction

Direct Instruction is a subset of phonics. It focuses on training teachers in effective classroom methods rather than providing ‘pull-out services’ for at-risk students. It is widely used in the Charter school movement in the United States and is the preferred method of teaching literacy in the schools run by the Cape York Australian Aboriginal Academy. It provides teachers with a script that they use in their teaching, allowing less experienced or able teachers to attain good literacy outcomes for their students. In the process it is seen as providing a form of professional development to the teachers involved. In its context, the results are seen as being very positive both in Australia and in the United States.

One witness with a strong history in literacy and research summarised it as follows:

Capital D, capital I “Direct Instruction” or, as it is known by some, the “devil incarnate”, is scripted, and people think that is absolutely awful. For people who do not know what they are doing it certainly has its place and the results in that school that Noel Pearson is involved in are evidence for what can happen.

If that kind of option is available. If teachers do not know how to teach explicitly—there is a place for the script. I honestly believe that. If they

425 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012 p3,4.

426 Office for Education Policy and Innovation, ‘Evidence-based research for expert literacy teaching’ 2007, p4, Available at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/publ/literacy-summary-paper.pdf> Accessed 24 July 2012.

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have the knowledge and they see enough good models of it, they can develop that and within a very rich program that incorporates a lot of oral language. But when you are talking about teacher knowledge, people can make flash cards of a night—you can be a very engaging teacher, although not every teacher can be—and we need to develop the acting skills of some teachers.

You can make all sorts of games out of what really is direct instruction, little “d” little “i”, as I call it because it is really about a clear target instruction, lots of opportunities for rehearsal, practising and blending in that practising. In the research projects that I am doing in South Australia that is exactly what we are doing.⁴²⁷

The National Literacy Strategy (UK)

In the United Kingdom, in an effort to address poor literacy standards, a national literacy strategy (NLS) was put in place in 1998. With a strong focus on the teaching of reading the strategy engaged schools with what phonic content should be taught and how to teach it. Despite the lack of any statutory remit, the NLS sought to match teaching methodology with curriculum content, thus appearing to ‘tell teachers how to teach’.⁴²⁸ Its implementation made a significant difference to literacy outcomes.

When it was introduced in 1998, only 65% of 11-year-olds reached the target level in English, i.e. level 4, at the end of Key Stage 2.

By 2005, after seven years of the NLS, nearly 80% of them reached that level. These Year 6 pupils were the first cohort to have been part of the NLS from the beginning, i.e. when they were in the Reception year.⁴²⁹

Despite its success, concern remained for some 15% of children who still failed to reach the national benchmarks for literacy.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), in its annual analysis of the national tests has drawn attention to where improvements might be made, and has emphasised the importance of phonic knowledge. In particular:

427 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, Transcript of Evidence, 9 July 2012, p13,14.

428 Jim Rose, ‘Independent review of the teaching of early reading’, Available <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006> Accessed 23 July 2012.

429 Jim Rose, ‘Independent review of the teaching of early reading’, Available <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006> Accessed 23 July 2012.

*Its analysis of the 2005 Key Stage 1 tests showed that teachers could raise attainment in children's reading and spelling further at Key Stage 1 if, among other things, they taught phonic knowledge and skills more thoroughly than at present*⁴³⁰

Findings such as these, along with the recommendation by England's House of Commons Education and Skills Committee led to a review of the teaching of early reading that was headed by the ex-inspector and education consultant, Jim Rose. The subsequent report made a number of recommendations including:

- *High quality, systematic phonic work should be taught discretely. The knowledge, skills and understanding that constitute high quality phonic work should be taught as the prime approach in learning to decode (to read) and encode (to write/spell) print.*
- *Phonic work should be set within a broad and rich language curriculum that takes full account of developing the four interdependent strands of language: speaking, listening, reading and writing and enlarging children's stock of words.*
- *Head teachers and managers of settings should make sure that phonic work is given appropriate priority in the teaching of beginner readers and this is reflected in decisions about training and professional development for their staff.*
- *Settings and schools should make sure that at least one member of staff is fully able to lead on literacy, especially phonic work.*⁴³¹

Finding 26

The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in the United Kingdom, with its focus on phonics, brought about a significant improvement in literacy standards. Building on the NLS the 'Independent review of the teaching of early reading', known as the 'Rose Report', highlighted the need for high quality, systematic phonic work to be taught discretely within a language rich curriculum. It recommended that phonic work be given appropriate priority in the teaching of beginner readers and in decisions about training and professional development.

430 Jim Rose, 'Independent review of the teaching of early reading', Available <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006> Accessed 23 July 2012

431 Jim Rose, 'Independent review of the teaching of early reading', Available <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006> Accessed 23 July 2012

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The Clackmannshire longitudinal study

In 2005 the results of a 'Seven Year Study of the Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment' was published. This Scottish longitudinal study pointed to synthetic⁴³² phonics as an important part of early education.

The results of the study were as follows:

Findings in Primary 1

Our study was carried out in Clackmannanshire schools in mostly disadvantaged areas, with a few schools from moderately advantaged areas. Three training programmes were conducted with around 300 children for 16 weeks, starting soon after entry to Primary 1. For 20 minutes a day, children were taught either :

- 1) by a synthetic phonics programme, or*
- 2) by an analytic phonics programme modelled on the methods commonly used in Scotland, or*
- 3) by an analytic phonics plus phonological- awareness training programme.*

At the end of these programmes, the synthetic-phonics-taught group were:

- reading words around 7 months ahead of the other two groups (7 months ahead for their chronological age)*
- spelling around 8 to 9 months ahead of the other groups (7 months ahead of chronological age)*
- The synthetic-phonics taught group read irregular words better than the other groups, and was the only group that could read unfamiliar words by analogy. (Watson and Johnston, 1998).*

At the end of the initial programme, all of the children who had been taught by the two analytic phonics programmes then carried out the synthetic phonics programme, which they completed by the end of Primary 1. The children's progress in reading and spelling has been studied every year since then.

Findings from Primary 2 to Primary 7

In order to make comparisons across the years, we are reporting the results for the children that were available for testing from Primary 2 to Primary 7, so the figures will differ slightly from previous reports.

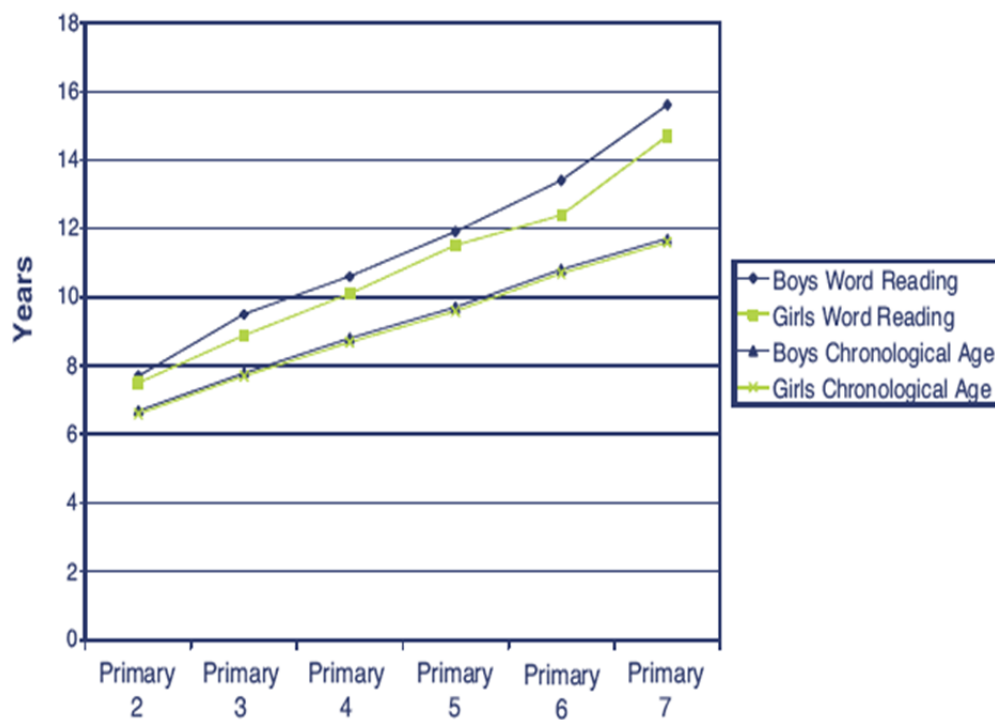
432 Synthetic phonics is an approach to teaching phonics in which individual letters or letter sounds are blended to form groups of letters or sounds, and those groups are then blended to form complete words. For example: the letters b, a, b, and y can be grouped into ba and by, then further blended to form the word baby.

At the end of Primary 7, word reading was 3 years 6 months ahead of chronological age, spelling was 1 year 9 months ahead, and reading comprehension was 3.5 months ahead.

The figures below show how the children progressed from year to year in word reading, spelling and reading comprehension, and whether the boys and girls differed in performance from each other.⁴³³

Word reading

Figure 7.5: Comparison of word reading from Primary 2 to Primary 7, boys versus girls⁴³⁴



There were 105 boys and 97 girls available for a word reading comparison across all 7 years of the study. It can be seen in Figure 4.6 that in Primary 3 the boys pulled significantly ahead of the girls in word reading, and stayed ahead right through to the end of Primary 7.

433 Scottish Executive Education Department, *A Seven Year Study of the Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment*, 2005, Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/933/0044071.pdf>. Accessed on 9 October 2012.

434 Scottish Executive Education Department, *A Seven Year Study of the Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment*, 2005, Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/933/0044071.pdf>. Accessed on 9 October 2012.

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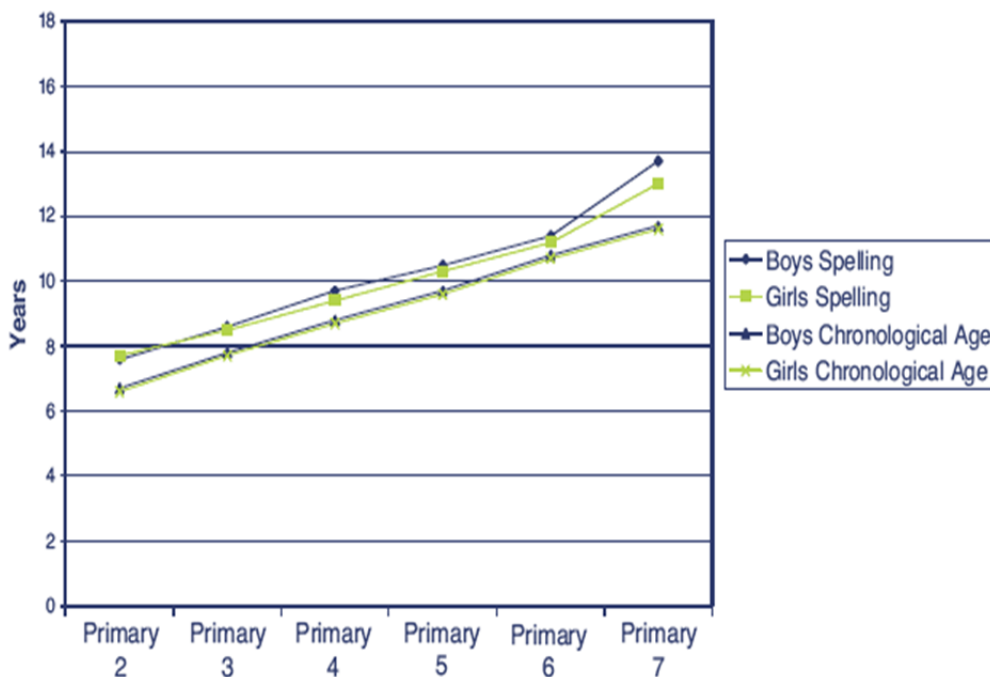
At the end of the study, the boys were reading around 9.5 months ahead of the girls. Word reading was significantly above chronological age throughout the study, but was further ahead of age in Primary 7 than in all previous years.

Thus the effects of the initial training programme in Primary 1 were not only maintained until Primary 7, but increased year after year.

A comparison was also made of the children's progress according to whether they had learnt by the synthetic phonics programme at the beginning of Primary 1, or starting around Easter of Primary 1. It was found that the girls read words better if taught by the synthetic phonics programme from the start of the school year.

Spelling

Figure 7.6: Comparison of spelling from Primary 2 to Primary 7, boys versus girls⁴³⁵



There were 95 boys and 84 girls available for comparison over the 7 years of the study.

It can be seen in Figure 4.7 that in Primary 4 the boys started to pull ahead of the girls. They were significantly ahead in Primaries 4, 6 and 7, being around 8.6 months ahead by the end of the study.

435 Scottish Executive Education Department, *A Seven Year Study of the Effects of Synthetic Phonics Teaching on Reading and Spelling Attainment*, 2005, Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/933/0044071.pdf>. Accessed on 9 October 2012.

Spelling was significantly above chronological age throughout, and was significantly further ahead of age in Primary 7 than in all previous years. As with word reading, spelling skills were still increasing at the end of Primary 7, 6 years after the initial programme was completed.

Finding 27

The seven year longitudinal study in Clackmannshire, Scotland, demonstrated the value of synthetic phonics as a part of early reading education.

Recommendation 13

The Committee strongly recommends to the Minister for Education that funding is made available in the 2013-2014 budget to ensure high quality, systematic phonic work is given priority in the teaching of literacy in schools with children learning how to decode (to read) and encode (to write/spell) print using phonics.

Phonics as a way of teaching and learning (a pedagogy)

The Committee acknowledges that the effective teaching of literacy is more than pedagogy. There is a need for parallel strategies targeting teachers, parents, school culture and community. These include:

- Engaging parents in their children’s early reading; ‘children’s attitudes to reading are greatly influenced by parents and carers. They can do much to stimulate children’s early interest in literacy.’⁴³⁶
- Having a focus on learning and on building teacher capacity to provide it. Teachers are educated to diagnose the style and progress of a child’s learning.⁴³⁷
- Mentoring, classroom observation and constructive feedback create more professional, collaborative teachers.⁴³⁸
- Performance based accountability for students and teachers; and changing the school culture to reflect traditional values and discipline.⁴³⁹

436 Jim Rose, ‘Independent review of the teaching of early reading’, Available <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006> Accessed 23 July 2012

437 Grattan Institute, ‘Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia’ Available <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/> accessed 23 July 2012

438 Grattan Institute, ‘Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia’ Available <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/> accessed 23 July 2012

439 Briefing John Fleming, Melbourne, 14 October 2011

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- Developing a positive sense of identity in schools. 'It is important to understand the dynamics around negative stereotypes and whether students and their teachers are colluding or challenging it.'⁴⁴⁰
- 'High expectations' leadership to ensure 'high expectations' classrooms, with 'high expectations' teacher/student relationships;⁴⁴¹
- Parent and community engagement, teacher accountability, and professional development.⁴⁴²
- teacher quality to build in children:
 - Personal and social competencies (relationships);
 - Literacy and numeracy (content knowledge and pedagogical expertise); and
 - Other general capabilities captured in the national goals of schooling.⁴⁴³
- Clarity about learning outcomes sought.⁴⁴⁴

Many of these factors are discussed further in the next chapter.

440 Briefing with Dr Chris Sarra, CEO, Stronger Smarter Institute, Brisbane, 5 July 2012.

441 Briefing with Dr Chris Sarra, CEO, Stronger Smarter Institute, Brisbane, 5 July 2012.

442 Briefing with Ms Danielle Toon, CEO of Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy, Cairns, 4 July 2012.

443 Submission No. 15 from Department of Education, 2011, p8.

444 Submission No. 15 from Department of Education, 2011, p8.

Chapter 8

Literacy and teachers

The quality of teaching is the largest predictor of successful student learning outcomes across all years of schooling.⁴⁴⁵

Teaching teachers - the issues

Teacher training programs

There is reportedly a large disparity in the quality of teacher training programs, in preparing graduate teachers for teaching in the classroom. The problem has been acknowledged by the Federal government and steps are being taken to improve the quality of teacher candidates. Professor Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, told the Committee:

*In the best programs they are extremely well prepared; while [in the rest] they are not very well prepared. There is quite a lot of variation, but a great deal of effort nationally has gone into ensuring that they will be properly prepared. For example, there is an organisation that I am the deputy chair of called the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, which is a commonwealth government statutory authority responsible for accreditation of teacher education, among other things. I was in Melbourne the day before working on the fine details of what universities will have to be able to show to the regulator about how they manage the literacy of teacher candidates in order to be accredited to offer teacher education programs. There is a lot of activity going on in this area.*⁴⁴⁶

Prevailing pedagogical culture

The Committee was told that the pedagogical culture in schools remains biased towards 'whole language' with a number of teachers lacking an understanding of language, and many more having little if any knowledge of phonics or how to teach it. This is despite large scale and significant studies in both the United States and the United Kingdom, together with a proliferation of 'on the ground' examples in Australia, that clearly show the superior effectiveness of phonics as a pedagogy. There are several

445 Submission No. 15 from Department of Education, January 2012, p12.

446 Professor William Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August, p14.

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reasons for this, the key one being the prevailing ‘whole language’ culture that exists in most schools.

The Committee was given conflicting evidence on the compulsory nature of the teaching of phonics but understands that it forms a compulsory topic in most teacher training courses.⁴⁴⁷ Despite this being the case, it has been suggested that those that are exposed to phonics as student teachers will often become acculturated by ‘whole language’ in the schools in which they begin their working life. A witness from Edith Cowan University suggested some of reasons why that is the case.

What we do not have is enough time. We know what is required. We do not have enough time. Essentially, we have four subjects across the four years, and that is all because of the very crowded curriculum; schools have crowded curriculums but we have a crowded curriculum as well. We have students [and] we have teachers and principals who do not understand either the process of teaching reading or what is required.

What happens with our neophyte teachers is they graduate and go out to school and they will pick up the culture of the school. We have schools full of teachers who were lucky enough to learn how to read, most of them, although some of them had trouble. At the same time the curriculum was “let us not teach letters and knowledge explicitly”, it was also “let us not teach either grammar or spelling”, so they do not understand the structure of language, and there is so much of it.

You need a deep understanding of this and it takes a while to get your head around; it really does. If they go out, they will pick up whatever is out there but we have to work with the practising teachers as well as our pre-service teachers because we have basically four 12-week units of a few hours a week. At Edith Cowan we are funded for two assessment points. They [the student teachers] get very canny about what they do and do not need to access in order to do that. They do not have to come to the lectures because they can access them online. ‘What will I need for this?’ It is incredibly difficult.

At our ‘pracs’ they do not have the opportunity. They are besieged with the need to manage the class and all that kind of thing. They do not have the time to assess, plan, implement, monitor, evaluate and reassess. They do not have time to do that [phonics] unless they do a

447 Professor William Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p11.

*particular elective. Many of them will choose not to do that because it does not fit in with their timetable or whatever.*⁴⁴⁸

The witness went on to note that in both ECU and another unnamed university, there are still lecturers who are ‘wedded’ to whole language.⁴⁴⁹

As a consequence, teachers who are exposed to professional development courses that teach them how to teach explicit and structured phonics, often find it revelatory.

*We run courses for teachers that are two days long, which are teaching how to teach explicit and structured phonics. Teachers will say that in those two days they learn far more about decoding, phonics, how our writing system actually works, than they have in their four years of university. Clearly there is still not enough of that happening.*⁴⁵⁰

One witness gave the Committee an example from her experience of what may happen when phonics is not the method used to teach literacy to disadvantaged students:

So, we can have the most engaging programs that go on for months and months on end. I have been in to Aboriginal community schools, for example, where I have been trying to get to the bottom with a teacher of what precisely her literacy program is. She will talk it through with me about taking the kids out; taking photos of the bush tucker; coming back in; making a fabulous big book. She kind of talks about this is what the pictures are about and they put them all up and so it goes on. This takes a whole term where they build their big books; they all read them together; they act out hunting for things and gathering the bush tucker and so on. But I am saying, “But at what point are you teaching the children to read?” It is not happening. So, by the end of term, yes, they have been doing these things, but my experience with kids—I guess over the years, having been involved with kids in juvenile detention centres and from all walks of life, generally from the more disadvantaged end of the spectrum—the most engaging thing that you can do with a child is to brighten with some success. Children who really learn a new skill are so pleased that they have achieved this and the results are so positive. So, for me, the

448 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p6.

449 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p6.

450 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012 p6.

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*explicit instruction is absolutely necessary for kids from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop skills.*⁴⁵¹

One approach to building confidence in graduating teachers to teach phonics is an approach adopted by Durham University.

*They have now developed a process where all of their graduating teachers must have a certificate in reading education or instruction as part of their final diploma or degree. They actually engage and work at the nitty-gritty of teaching reading very specifically—what steps and strategies need to happen. They actually go out and they teach in a classroom and they are working with children, teaching some phonics and so on and teaching other aspects of literacy. It is all done via two-way Skype-type sessions. They are assessed on what they are doing. Children are asked questions via Skype.*⁴⁵²

Finding 28

Despite some movement towards phonics as a pedagogy, the Committee was told that the pedagogical culture in many schools remains biased towards ‘whole language’. A number of teachers lack an understanding of language, and have little if any knowledge of phonics or how to teach it.

Reinforcing change in teachers’ attitudes

There is an old adage that nothing succeeds like success. The recent ‘*Making the Links: Integrating Spelling, Vocabulary Development and Comprehension Project*’ (the Project) was designed around a year-long collaborative learning initiative aimed at helping learning area teachers (Years 7 to 9) incorporate the teaching of literacy into their disciplines. Teachers from a range of learning areas were encouraged to participate. The project looked at, amongst other things, how professional development is best embedded.

The Project noted that, traditionally, the view was that a change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs would result in changes in their classroom behaviours and practices. This would in turn result in improved student outcomes. While not discounting the value of the traditional model it supported an alternative model of the change process, one that saw significant shifts in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs occur as a direct result of improvements in the learning outcomes of their students.

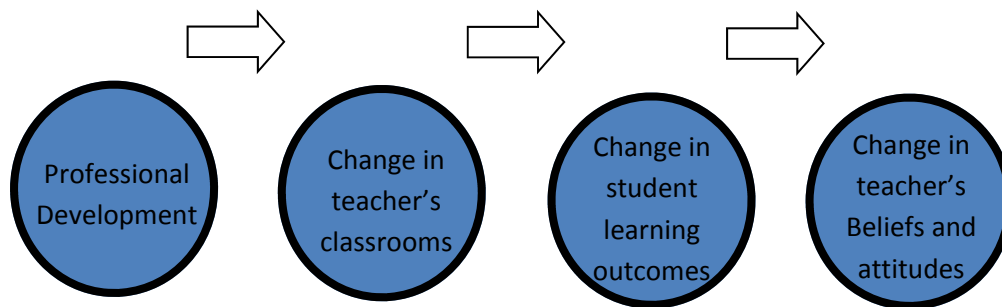
451 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p3.

452 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p8.

In this model, the demonstrated gain in student learning is the ‘key to the endurance of any change in instructional practice.’ Teachers are seen as pragmatists who want to develop skills in the use of strategies that will directly relate to their day-to-day work in the classroom.

This model of teacher change is illustrated below:

Figure 8.1: Model of teacher change⁴⁵³



This means that in practice, there is a mechanism that occurs when teachers undertake explicit teaching or when they teach literacy in secondary schools in the disciplines in which literacy is not seen as their responsibility. The improvements in student literacy reinforce the pedagogic approach adopted by an individual teacher.

This is well exemplified in the success of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) discussed in the previous chapter where the success of the NLS is in part ‘attributed to the fact that so many teachers have come to embed within their own practice the guidance offered by the NLS’, because it worked.⁴⁵⁴

Finding 29

Professional development aimed at changing or improving a teacher’s pedagogic practice is best embedded when teachers can see for themselves the improved student educational outcomes that arise from the changes made.

Principals as Literacy Leaders

A recent Commonwealth funded initiative targeting lower SES schools, was the ‘Principals as Literacy Leaders (PALL) Pilot Project’. The Committee met with the principal of Roseworth Primary School who was one of sixty participants nationally and

453 Faulkner, V. et al, *Making the links*, March 2011, p17. Available at: http://www.uwa.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1572913/Making-the-Links_-Report-20111.pdf. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

454 Jim Rose, ‘Independent review of the teaching of early reading’, Available <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFES-0201-2006> Accessed 23 July 2012.

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who spoke highly of its impact on him and through him on the school and the teacher's educational practices and outcomes.⁴⁵⁵

The project was initiated in 2008 by the Australian Primary Principals Association. It was based on research that showed that the role of the principal is a key factor in the effectiveness of students learning to read at school.⁴⁵⁶ The project set out to identify specific capabilities needed for principals to be effective leaders in the teaching of reading in their schools. It is premised on the fact that there is no turnaround in the achievement trajectory of students without the action of dedicated and talented principals.

The course gave principals the confidence to intervene in the teaching of literacy in their school because, as one principal put it: 'Really, this is the first time I have been involved in everything the teachers have done. I know 200% more about literacy and can now supervise with authority.'⁴⁵⁷

In the view of the principal at Roseworth Primary School, the project was a very successful model. It taught principals about literacy, and the most successful teaching methods for literacy. The reason given for why it works is that despite being responsible for what is taught and how it is taught in a school, the many pressures on a principal in the twenty-first century can pull the principal away from the curricula – 'this program takes you back to the basics.'⁴⁵⁸

In the case of Roseworth Primary School the principal has embedded the following practices into the school's operation and culture:

455 Briefing Mr Geoff Metcalf, Principal Roseworth Primary School, Girrawheen, 6 September 2012.

456 The Australian Primary Principals Association, *Principals as Literacy Leaders: Confident, Credible and Connected*, 2012, Available at: http://www.appa.asn.au/images/news2012/PALL%20Research%20Book_FINAL%208Feb2012.pdf. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

457 The Australian Primary Principals Association, *Principals as Literacy Leaders: Confident, Credible and Connected*, 2012, Available at: http://www.appa.asn.au/images/news2012/PALL%20Research%20Book_FINAL%208Feb2012.pdf. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

458 Briefing Mr Geoff Metcalf, Principal Roseworth Primary School, Girrawheen, 6 September 2012.

Figure 8.2: Learning framework for improving literacy⁴⁵⁹

The moral purpose of the school is the enhancement of students' lives through improvement in learning and achievement in literacy.
The school vision and directions have been developed collaboratively.
High expectations are set, understood and communicated.
Goals are embedded in classroom routines.
*Learning and achievement goals are clear and are articulated in school programs.
*The belief that 'all students can learn' is evident in school practices.
The gathering and analysis of sound qualitative and quantitative data about student's literacy learning and achievement forms the basis for 'disciplined dialogue.'
An assessment schedule covering all aspects of literacy has been developed collaboratively.
A range of data that informs learning as well as achievement is gathered, including school and system data.
Qualitative as well as quantitative data are collected and analysed
The monitoring of learning is regular, comprehensive and generates useful data.
Accountability for classroom, school and system data collection and analysis is shared with teachers.
Planning for learning is based on data.

The evaluated outcomes of the project were described as follows:

*The project outcomes leave no doubt that principals' leadership for learning or instructional leadership capabilities for literacy were enhanced. Moreover, school-based intervention evaluations show the direct effects of changed strategies on improving children's learning and achievement in reading.*⁴⁶⁰

Finding 30

School leaders require knowledge about literacy to be able to achieve school-wide improvement. Initiatives such as 'Principals as Literacy Leaders' can play an important role in creating a sustainable strategy to address the literacy and leadership development challenge in lower SES environs.

459 The Australian Primary Principals Association, *Principals as Literacy Leaders: Confident, Credible and Connected*, 2012, Available at: http://www.appa.asn.au/images/news2012/PALL%20Research%20Book_FINAL%208Feb2012.pdf. Accessed on 7 September 2012, p2.

460 The Australian Primary Principals Association, *Principals as Literacy Leaders: Confident, Credible and Connected*, 2012, Available at: http://www.appa.asn.au/images/news2012/PALL%20Research%20Book_FINAL%208Feb2012.pdf. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

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Low expectations result in low outcomes

*The greatest resource of all is a knowledgeable and skilful teacher who cares about that group of kids, who believes they can learn.*⁴⁶¹

In the previous chapter the factors of disadvantage were considered as they affected an individual child's literacy outcomes. The question that arises is whether educational disadvantage can be overcome in schools without first overcoming the child's broader economic disadvantage or whether educational progress can be antecedent to changing economic circumstances.⁴⁶²

The answer appears to lie both in the experience of the United Kingdom and in the schools exemplified in the previous chapter. These highlight the fact that the literacy achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students can be narrowed, if not closed, without first addressing the child's broader disadvantage.

One barrier to success is that of teacher/student expectations.

Unfortunately, the correlation between disadvantage and historical educational outcomes can lead to bureaucrats, teachers and students having low expectations in terms of academic performance⁴⁶³

Such an attitude is not supported by many educators. Mr Noel Pearson, CEO of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy (CYAAA), and Dr Chris Sarra of the Stronger Smarter Institute both commented on this issue. Mr Pearson wrote '*Beware the soft bigotry of low expectations*'⁴⁶⁴, and Dr Chris Sarra stated that '*Compassion all the time is collusion*'.⁴⁶⁵

In another place, writing about the need to challenge mindsets, Dr Sarra stated:

Education systems have demonstrated a tendency to readily accept Indigenous underachievement in schools as somehow 'normal' or

461 Professor Bill Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p4.

462 Peter Shergold as a response to the essay by Noel Pearson, *Radical Hope*, Black Inc, Victoria, 2011, p23.

463 Briefing by Cape York Aboriginal Academy, Cairns, 4 July 2012 and briefing Dr Chris Sarra, Brisbane 5 July 2012.

464 Noel Pearson, *Closing the gap in Indigenous education*, 2010, p1. Available at: <http://menziesfoundation.org.au/education/IndEd%20Workshop%20presentations/Closing%20the%20gap%20in%20Indigenous%20education%20-%20Workshop%20Report.pdf>. Accessed on 2 August 2012.

465 Briefing by Dr Chris Sarra, Brisbane 5 July 2012

*'given'. Disturbingly there has been little outrage from within the system about dramatic and continuing levels of underachievement.*⁴⁶⁶

It is in this context that the idea of 'socially relevant' education is seen as an approach that limits possibilities.⁴⁶⁷

*As the late, great Professor Ken Rowe made abundantly clear, family background may establish where children start in life, but it doesn't necessarily determine where they end up. Yet, there are too many schools where educational failure is expected and accepted as a product of social disadvantage*⁴⁶⁸

In exemplifying what he meant by collusion with low expectations, Mr Noel Pearson mentioned a community consultation undertaken in respect to acceptable levels of attendance which affirmed that families wanted 100% attendance but the state lowered the bar and targeted 80%.

Both Mr Noel Pearson and Dr Chris Sarra affirmed that such bureaucratic expectations resulted in lower literacy outcomes.⁴⁶⁹ The CYAAA, drawing on the mantra of the Charter School movement in the United States, teaches its children:

*'High expectations and no excuses. Raise the bar on learning and aim for mastery.'*⁴⁷⁰

The Academy aims to develop a culture that maintains a high-quality, high expectation school culture that engenders pride.

The Committee was told that this contrasts with a number of schools across Northern Australia, including some community schools in Western Australia, where:

*In quite a few schools expectations are so low that teachers are not even taking roll call let alone taking them twice a day. The reality is that teachers have little training in behaviour management. And so are relieved to see a smaller class.*⁴⁷¹

In the view of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, 'giving up on your belief that these kids can progress is the most corrosive thing of all in

466 Dr Chris Sarra, *Strong and Smart – towards a pedagogy of emancipation*, Routledge, London, 2011, p161.

467 Peter Shergold as a response to the essay by Noel Pearson, *Radical Hope*, Black Inc, Victoria, 2011, p170.

468 Buckingham, J. et al, 'Educating the Disadvantaged', *Issue Analysis*, no. 116, 1 October 2009, p1.

469 Briefing by Cape York Aboriginal Academy, Cairns, 4 July 2012 and briefing Dr Chris Sarra, Brisbane 5 July 2012.

470 Briefing by Cape York Aboriginal Academy, Cairns, 4 July 2012.

471 Briefing by Cape York Aboriginal Academy, Cairns, 4 July 2012.

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education'.⁴⁷² In his view, such low expectations can occur where children are not receiving a lot of support at home and do not attend from time to time. As a consequence, teachers 'can begin to believe that these kids cannot learn, or that we should not expect too much of these kids.'⁴⁷³

In Western Australia, the Committee heard that the Department of Education has a partnership with Dr Chris Sarra to undertake professional development for teachers in the Kimberley, using the staff from the Stronger Smarter Institute. The program works to bring about transformational change in schools, and to stop the 'collusion of low expectations around aboriginal children.'⁴⁷⁴

Dr Chris Sarra was the Principal at Cherbourg State School in South East Queensland. His "Strong and Smart" philosophy of indigenous education, developed at that school, led to improved school attendance and increased community involvement. He believed that he could turn the school around as he understood 'the toxicity of low expectations'. In his view, too often staff and the community lower the bar by making excuses for the children's learning outcomes because 'they come from a deprived SES'. By lowering the bar they lower expectations.⁴⁷⁵ Dr Sarra's strategies were summarised as:

- Addressing low expectations in the students, the teaching community as well as in the broader community both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal;
- Setting high standards; and
- Engaging the community.

One such strategy that is seen to support a student's positive identity is the requirement of school uniforms.

In the view of Dr Sarra, this process begins with the Principal having a high expectations relationship with the teacher through the provision of support, development, monitoring, intervention and being fair but firm. The relationship with parents also needs to be fair but firm. This includes objectively looking at why the children are not turning up – Dr Sarra suggested asking 'is school boring? Is there bullying? Is it racist?'⁴⁷⁶

472 Professor Bill Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p5.

473 Professor Bill Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p5.

474 Witness, Briefing Halls Creek 15 March 2012.

475 Briefing by Dr Chris Sarra, Brisbane 5 July 2012.

476 Briefing by Dr Chris Sarra, Brisbane 5 July 2012.

Finding 31

There is broad agreement at many levels that a teacher's expectations of a student are a critical factor in the student's success. Low expectations are variously described as: 'the most corrosive thing in education', 'soft bigotry' and 'collusion in failure'.

Another area identified where school principals and teachers can have low expectations is that of parental engagement.

Parental engagement

The Family-School Partnerships Framework developed in 2008 as the result of a collaborative national project established by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), the Australian Parents Council (APC) and DEEWR argued that effective schools have high levels of parental and community involvement. Such involvement is correlated to improved student learning, attendance and behaviour, regardless of the social or cultural background of the family. The framework concluded that family engagement is therefore seen as part of the core business of schools.⁴⁷⁷

International studies support the importance of parental engagement:

*Parent engagement matters. Study after study has shown us that student achievement improves when parents play an active role in their children's education, and that good schools become even better schools when parents are involved. It is recognized that parent engagement is a key factor in the enhancement of student achievement and well-being.*⁴⁷⁸

Parental engagement in their child's education is demonstrably a factor in literacy and broader educational outcomes regardless of socio-economic status (SES). Similarly, parental disengagement is a strong negative factor. Because this is so important, The Smith Family, which works with disadvantaged families, will only work with 'engaged' families. A lack of commitment from parents will see them 'exited' from the program. The Smith Family views disengaged families as the government's responsibility.⁴⁷⁹

477 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Parent engagement in children's education*, report prepared by Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau. 2011, ACT, 2011, p4.

478 Ontario Ministry for Education, *Encouraging Parent Involvement in Schools*, 2012, Available at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/>. Accessed on 3 August 2012.

479 Briefing by Mr Graham Jaeschke, General Manager, Smith Family South Australia, 10 October 2011.

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Finding 32

Parental engagement in a child's education is a factor in literacy and broader educational outcomes regardless of socio-economic status. Similarly, parental disengagement is a strong negative factor.

Improved attendance is seen as a critical facet in securing a good education (as discussed earlier in this report) and is linked to parental engagement.

One Principal told the Committee that if there were a platform for parents to comfortably access schools then they would more readily be involved. He noted that along with the pedagogy, parental involvement was also a critical factor in the success he enjoyed as a Principal and as an educator. He reported that in a school in Ballajura, 90% of parents agreed to support those children falling behind. The approach adopted was to build a relationship with each parent: 'teachers did not write notes to parents, instead they contacted them personally by phone'.⁴⁸⁰

Mr Noel Pearson of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy spoke of the two pillars for successful education which he described as the:

- supply side (quality of teachers, teacher training, leadership and school governance); and
- demand side which is driven by students, parents and the community. In particular 'the demand comes from demanding parents without which you won't have a very good school.' Undemanding parents are disengaged parents. Yet when disengaged parents see a change in their children's attitudes and can see them begin to read, they tend to lend their support to the child's schoolwork.⁴⁸¹

One highly effective strategy that works to achieve parental involvement is the school passport program. This was discussed earlier.

The situation in the Education Department

Three identified issues that support effective teaching of literacy include:

- the acknowledgment of its importance;
- securing support to teach literacy; and
- the integration of literacy into all school subjects.

Despite the general acknowledgement of the importance of literacy in early education it has to compete with other issues.

480 Briefing by John Fleming Melbourne 17 October 2011.

481 Briefing by Noel Pearson, Cairns 4 July 2012.

*Teaching children to read is the most important academic outcome of primary education, yet now with all the other problems teachers have to cope with as well, they are trying to feed children and address all the social problems. More and more, our curriculum is becoming crowded, which is another issue for us as well.*⁴⁸²

Strong support is required to focus on explicit (phonics) teaching.

One of the key recommendations was that we need to be teaching phonics and we need to be taking an evidence-based approach. It is still not really happening. It is almost to me as though there is still a passive resistance to this approach. Certainly in early childhood education, there is a sense that it is believed to be negative. It is believed to be drilling, rote learning, all of this kind of mythology that is around what is simply a body of knowledge which is a necessary component of strong literacy development.

My view is that we should still be working hard to improve an understanding amongst graduating teachers and current teachers. There are some teachers, as I say, who do a fantastic job already, but I still believe they are in the minority in terms of those who actually understand what a successful phonics program looks like.

*I think that there is also a mantra that exists at the moment around we need to be moving towards more evidence-based education. I agree with that 100%, but, again, I do not think we are necessarily seeing that happening. When people talk about engagement and creative opportunities as though they are separate from teaching students skills, I do not think that is what the evidence tells us. I think the evidence is very much that these things be taught in tandem and we can get great benefits from having both in our systems of education.*⁴⁸³

A third factor arises when students make the transition to secondary school where teachers need the skills and knowledge to integrate literacy into their subject areas.

Secondary school years

The Western Australian 2011 report 'Making the Links' highlighted the need for literacy to be taught in the middle and upper school years across the various subject disciplines

482 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, Transcript of Evidence, 9 July 2012, p13.

483 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, Transcript of Evidence, 9 July 2012 p8.

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such as science, mathematics and history, as each discipline has its own language and literacy demands.

In short, more and more students begin to struggle in literacy throughout the middle and upper secondary years. There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, the texts that students are required to read and write become more complex and demanding as they move through the school years and also students need to increase their proficiency in understanding how texts work in particular subject areas; the various disciplines have their own literacy practices and these differences become more pronounced as students move through middle and upper secondary school. It has also been suggested that there are 'new' literacy demands in the 21st century that schooling has not kept pace with. One of these is the capacity to engage effectively with digital literacies and multimedia.

A compounding issue is that, in many middle years classrooms, literacy is not integrated into subject areas as is usually the case in primary schools; it is often the case that students are not effectively taught and supported in how to access and use texts in the learning areas. Not only do texts differ at the word level, sentence level and text level from one subject area to the next, but also, in order to comprehend texts, different kinds of prior knowledge are needed from one discipline to the next. Unfortunately, middle and secondary school teachers (even most English teachers) are seldom trained in teaching literacy within their subject areas.⁴⁸⁴

The Report highlights the 'pressing need' to help 'middle years teachers' acquire the skills and knowledge to integrate literacy into their subject areas.

Comprehension of maths problems is very sophisticated. We know from all of the NAPLAN results and all the tests in the world that a great many kids these days struggle very much in understanding maths problems because of literacy problems. We are putting all these textbooks in front of kids in a high school when they do not have the fluency that we are talking about.⁴⁸⁵

Additionally, some secondary school teachers are yet to be persuaded that their role is important in teaching literacy. This role is often perceived to belong to the primary

484 Faulkner et al, 'Making the Links' Available at http://www.uwa.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1572913/Making-the-Links-Report-2011.pdf Accessed on 27 July 2012.

485 Dr Robert Faulkner, Course Coordinator Masters of Teaching, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p12,13.

schools. Rather than believing that they have any responsibility for literacy, high school teachers may view themselves as ‘content’ specialists.⁴⁸⁶

We hear that from secondary school teachers as well, all the time; secondary teachers do not think it is their responsibility at all. With the push now for year 7s up into secondary, it is going to become even more acute. We are going to be pushing up to secondary schools students who are obviously in even greater need for good English teaching and, generally speaking, secondary schoolteachers do not think it is their responsibility to be doing these things, so there is a grave danger.⁴⁸⁷

But to me, it is about educating secondary school teachers to take their responsibilities seriously. That cannot happen under the present graduate diploma arrangements, because there is just not the space in a one-year course to educate secondary school teachers to understand what language is about and to know where language is coming from.

We have enough of a problem; we have a unit called “Teaching and Learning: Development Theory and Practice”, which tries to trace developmental psychology. We start with Trevor Parry’s lectures on developmental paediatrics, right up to early adulthood. We have enough problems trying to get secondary school teachers to appreciate that that is important for their understanding of what they do.

So until we get to a model that gives us more space—that is, a two-year graduate diploma of education or a two-year master of teaching—we will not be able to equip secondary teachers to fulfil the responsibility they have, and that applies to every maths teacher, every science teacher and to every teacher in secondary education; they all have that responsibility.⁴⁸⁸

The Committee was told that the ‘Australian Curriculum has been designed to draw attention to the opportunities in subjects other than English and mathematics to improve kids’ literacy and numeracy.’⁴⁸⁹

486 Faulkner et al, ‘Making the Links’ Available at http://www.uwa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1572913/Making-the-Links_-Report-20111.pdf Accessed on 27 July 2012.

487 Dr Robert Faulkner, Course Coordinator Masters of Teaching, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p11.

488 Dr Robert Faulkner, Course Coordinator Masters of Teaching, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p12.

489 Professor William Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p13.

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The Committee considers that all teachers should be teachers of literacy and need to teach explicitly the literacy demands of curriculum learning in all stages of schooling.

In the opinion of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, literacy teaching should continue through schooling in all areas of the curriculum, and it is therefore seen as the responsibility of all teachers (primary, middle and secondary). For this reason, teachers need to be aware of the interface between a specific domain and its literacies. As teachers plan and design curricular tasks they need to identify and take into account the specific literacy demands of the particular curriculum area.⁴⁹⁰

The problem of persuading some high school teachers to see their role in terms of literacy is made more difficult by the structure of secondary schools where students move from classroom to classroom for different subjects.⁴⁹¹

Finding 33

All teachers (primary, middle and secondary) should be assisted to ensure that literacy is taught in all areas of the curriculum. For this reason, teachers need to be aware of the interface between a specific domain and its literacies.

Recommendation 14

In 2013 the Minister for Education develop and introduce a policy that supports a whole-school (primary, middle and secondary) approach to teaching literacy using a common language and core strategies across the curriculum.

Mentoring

The Grattan Report notes that in many countries, including Australia, there is a 'disconnect' between policy and practice in the classrooms when compared to successful East Asian education models.⁴⁹² One important disconnect is in the area of mentoring and feedback to teachers.

Mentoring and induction programs are poor. Most countries, including Australia, have such programs. Yet new teachers say they often fail to

490 Office for Education Policy and Innovation, 'Evidence-based research for expert literacy teaching' 2007, p4, Available at <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/publ/literacy-summary-paper.pdf> Accessed 24 July 2012.

491 Faulkner et al, 'Making the Links' Available at http://www.uwa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1572913/Making-the-Links-Report-20111.pdf Accessed on 27 July 2012.

492 Grattan Institute, 'Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia' Available <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/> accessed 23 July 2012, p2

*provide constructive feedback based on classroom observations. They are disconnected from student learning.*⁴⁹³

This perspective was supported by witnesses to the Inquiry:

*I think, by and large, teachers welcome parents into the classroom but I think the comment that teachers are not having their colleagues into their classroom is a really big issue. We are not sharing.*⁴⁹⁴

And:

*I was at a conference a little while ago in Melbourne where I asked a six years and out teacher, "How many visits have you had in your classroom?" She said, "Well, I had some in my first year, and since then nobody's been into my classroom. This is a travesty [and] this is not uncommon".*⁴⁹⁵

And:

*It is part of the culture too; you just shut the door and nobody comes in.*⁴⁹⁶

By comparison:

*every teacher in Shanghai has a mentor—every teacher. Someone who has been teaching 40 years still has a mentor; that is the culture [in Shanghai]. Everything depends on the knowledge.*⁴⁹⁷

In East Asia, teacher relationships link to teacher learning and to student learning as follows:

493 Grattan Institute, 'Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia' Available <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/> accessed 23 July 2012, p13.

494 Ms Suzanne Dawkins, PhD Student, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, 9 July 2012, p17.

495 Dr Robert Faulkner, Course Coordinator Masters of Teaching, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p17.

496 Ms Suzanne Dawkins, PhD Student, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, 9 July 2012, p17.

497 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p 16.

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Figure 8.3: The link between teacher learning and student learning in East Asia⁴⁹⁸

Programs	Teachers	Teaching	Learning
Induction and mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarisation with school administrative processes and emotional support • Sharing experience of teaching • Passing probationary phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum preparation and lesson plans • Advice on appropriate teaching techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive feedback based on frequent classroom observation • Multiple specialist mentors • Mentees observe mentor's classes • Developing new teachers as researchers
Research and lesson groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers meet in groups and networks in and between schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers exchange materials and coordinate timetabling and homework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active professional collaboration, team teaching, classroom observation and feedback • Constant monitoring and feedback on each students' progress • Teachers are researchers who lead reform and implement new pedagogy
Classroom observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation to fulfil requirements for teacher evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback focuses on how teachers interact with the class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback focuses on students' learning, progress, and individual needs

Such collaboration, observation and feedback as a teacher's educational norm are evidenced in the best schools in Western Australia.

In the best schools, or the best parts of good schools, one of the things you find is that teachers know a bit about what other teachers are doing, because they have been in their classroom, that people are willing to have other adults watch them teach, people are interested in

498 Grattan Institute, 'Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia' Available <http://grattan.edu.au/publications/reports/post/catching-up-learning-from-the-best-school-systems-in-east-asia/> accessed 23 July 2012, p19.

*what other people are finding successful. So that learning from each other, getting feedback about your teaching, lesson observation that happens in the best parts of schools or the best schools.*⁴⁹⁹

To do otherwise results in a situation where teaching is a private activity of what an adult does with children and only the adult and the children know what is going on. In contrast lesson observation and feedback require giving up the sense that teaching is a private activity.⁵⁰⁰

Finding 34

Mentoring and constructive feedback, based on classroom observations, could be improved in many Western Australian schools, where teaching is generally seen as a private activity. Internationally, collaborative strategies are seen to be a key factor in the comparative success of the school.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education introduces a policy that mandates the creation of a strong culture of teacher collaboration, mentoring, and feedback for all teachers.

499 Professor William Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p6.

500 Professor William Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p6.

Chapter 9

Education and the Social Determinants of Health

Health is dependent on conditions that enable people to live lives they would choose to live.⁵⁰¹

What are the social determinants of health?

Five of the six reports that have made up this inquiry have highlighted the domino effect of health and social problems. People's opportunities for health are strongly influenced by the social and economic conditions in which they live. These opportunities are encapsulated in a social determinants approach to health.⁵⁰²

Health determinants include the place where people are born, grow, live, work and age. Additionally, the World Health Organization has determined that early childhood development is in itself a social determinant of health, based on the evidence that a child's brain and biological development *in utero* and over the first three years of life is directly influenced by the quality of experiences in the child's environment at a family, community and societal level.⁵⁰³ Children living in families without adequate income or access to resources are at a greater risk of poor health and poor educational outcomes, both in the short and long term.

Health problems in turn contribute to poor school attendance, low levels of engagement in class, and impede effective student learning outcomes. These include:

- The achievement gap in the early years; and
- Disadvantage and literacy numeracy outcomes.

501 Medical Journal of Australia, *Social determinants and the health of Indigenous Australians*, 2011 Available at: https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2011/194/10/social-determinants-and-health-indigenous-australians?0=ip_login_no_cache%3Dda98d9890dbf2e82b1c1be65185ad087. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

502 Institute of Public Health in Ireland, *Health Impacts of Education: a review*, 2008,. Available at: <http://www.publichealth.ie/files/file/Health%20Impacts%20of%20Education.pdf>. Accessed on 17 September 2012.

503 Submission No. 12 from Department of Health, treatment of Otitis Media in Australian Aboriginal infants. Menzies School of Health Research and Australian Doctors Fund. Darwin, NT 16-18 February, 1992. Page 18-27.

Chapter 9

The achievement gap in the early years

Future literacy is supported and enhanced by being exposed to a language rich environment in the home. As one witness noted, 'It all begins with oral language and exposure to print and all those early literacy experiences.'⁵⁰⁴

*If the child is having 10 minutes' conversation with one parent during the week, the chances of them coming to literacy ready to read are pretty much zero. They are your 10 %; they are already there. We need to look at early childhood, and by "early" I mean early.*⁵⁰⁵

There is a widely acknowledged relationship between a child's language difficulties, and subsequent reading and school failure.⁵⁰⁶

*Underpinning everything is oral language and early literacy experiences. We do not have a lot of control over that but we now know that we have to work on oral language, which all of us would agree on.*⁵⁰⁷

Language difficulties lead to an achievement gap between children from a language-rich and those from a language-poor background.

The achievement gap begins for many students before they enter the Kindergarten classroom. Children aren't born with a vocabulary, yet educators and reading researchers have long identified the differences in word knowledge and vocabulary as key indicators of student readiness. Here are a couple of key findings:

A gap of 30 million words in language experience exists for some children prior to entering school. In 1995, Hart and Risley published findings from a study showing vast differences in the quantity and quality of language experience in the homes of children during the first 4 years of life.

Infants and young children with inadequate language development are at-risk for developing academic difficulties. Without effective

504 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, Transcript of Evidence, 9 July 2012, p4.

505 Dr Robert Faulkner, Course Coordinator Masters of Teaching, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia, Transcript of Evidence, 9 July 2012, p15.

506 Konza, D., *Teaching children with reading difficulties*, CENGAGE Learning, Australia, 2003, p35.

507 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, Transcript of Evidence, 9 July 2012, p5.

*intervention, the majority of these students will exit high school with academic skills well below grade level.*⁵⁰⁸

Finding 35

Children from a language poor background are at-risk for developing academic difficulties. Without effective intervention, the majority of these students will exit high school with academic skills well below grade level.

Disadvantage and literacy numeracy outcomes

*'Demography must not equal destiny'*⁵⁰⁹

Related to the factors resulting in the early year's achievement gap are factors of disadvantage faced by children. The 'Review of Funding for Schooling' also known as the 'Gonski Report', detailed five factors of disadvantage that have been proven to have a significant impact on educational outcomes in Australia. These include:

- Low Socio-Economic Status (SES);
- Indigenous background;
- Living in a regional remote area;
- Disability; and
- English as a second language (ESL).

Children who are failing to reach the benchmarks are not found in equal proportions in every school. Disadvantage is concentrated in particular schools and in particular areas.⁵¹⁰ These factors of disadvantage are seen to directly correlate with levels of literacy in the experience of educators in Western Australia.

We have students right across the board, but the Gonski report was fairly accurate in picking up the five areas with regard to those students most at risk—those students that we would consider the most

508 Scientific learning, 'The 30 Million Word Gap in Language Experience Puts Kids At Risk' Available at <http://www.scilearn.com/blog/the-30-million-word-gap-in-language-experience-puts-kids-at-risk.php> Accessed 23 July 2012

509 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 31 July 2012

510 Buckingham, J. et al, 'Educating the Disadvantaged', *Issue Analysis*, no. 116, 1 October 2009, p1.

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*vulnerable and disadvantaged. That is exactly the case in literacy in terms of what we are looking at.*⁵¹¹

Many studies and reviews make it clear that children from low SES families are more likely to have lower levels of literacy, numeracy and comprehension.⁵¹² However, this does not have to be the case and the 'Gonski report' noted that, internationally, the most successful schooling systems are those where students achieve to the best of their ability, without their background or the school they attend impacting on their outcomes.⁵¹³

In Australia, for many children there are individual factors of disadvantage interacting with each other and affecting educational outcomes.

*Above and beyond the impact of individual factors of disadvantage on educational outcomes, evidence confirms there are also complex interactions between these factors. Many Australian students experience multiple factors of disadvantage and it is these students whom data confirm are at the highest risk of poor performance.*⁵¹⁴

And:

In their assessment of funding approaches for disadvantaged students, the Australian Council for Educational Research noted that 'in addition to specific groups (of disadvantaged students) an ongoing challenge for schooling is to put in place mechanisms that can deliver adequate resources for students with multiple disadvantages' (ACER 2011, p. 71). The interaction between Indigeneity, low socioeconomic status and attending school in a remote or very remote location is particularly strong in Australia. While compound disadvantage is not something that is experienced exclusively by Indigenous students, research

511 Ms Mandy Nayton, Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO, DSF Literacy and Clinical Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012 p2

512 Considine, G, & Zappala, G. 'Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Students from Disadvantaged Background', Available at http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/NSPC01_Considine_Zappala.pdf Accessed 31 July 2012.

513 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 31 July 2012.

514 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 23 July 2012

*confirms that Indigenous students are over-represented in all categories of disadvantage.*⁵¹⁵

Nonetheless, as one witness pointed out, although there is an undeniable relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and low academic performance, *it is not inevitable*. International research on effective schools and case studies in Australia demonstrate that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are capable of high levels of school performance, given the right educational conditions.⁵¹⁶

This view is supported by the 'Gonski report' which expressed the belief:

*That the underlying talents and abilities of students that enable them to succeed in schooling are not distributed differently among children from different socioeconomic status, ethnic or language backgrounds, or according to where they live or go to school.*⁵¹⁷

While acknowledging that it is not realistic to expect to remove the totality of the effects of disadvantage, the report points out that other countries are 'doing a better job than Australia at minimising the impact.' As such there is scope for Australia to reduce the influence of such disadvantage on student's educational outcomes. The figure below shows the relationship between PISA reading literacy scores and social background for Australia and these other high-performing countries.

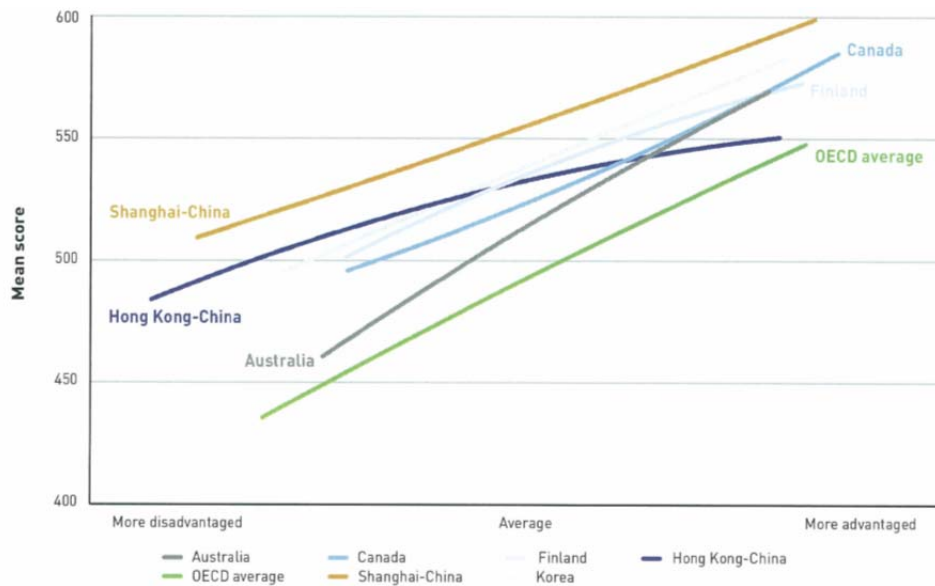
515 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 23 July 2012

516 Briefing John Fleming, Melbourne 14 October 2012

517 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 23 July 2012

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Figure 9.1: Social gradients in PISA reading literacy by country, 2009⁵¹⁸



Source: Reproduced from COAG Reform Council 2011 (Figure 3.4, p. 35), using OECD, PISA 2009 data.

In the view of the 'Gonski report' panel, there is a moral imperative to not only provide access to education but to address the facets of disadvantage. This will ensure that all children are given access to an acceptable international standard of education necessary to lead successful and productive lives.⁵¹⁹

Finding 36

There is a relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and low academic performance. However, low academic performance does not have to be an inevitable consequence. International research on effective schools, together with case studies in Australia, demonstrate that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are capable of high levels of school performance, given the right educational conditions.

Health Issues

Many child health issues are underpinned by cultural, economic, political and historical factors which influence societies, communities and neighbourhoods, families and

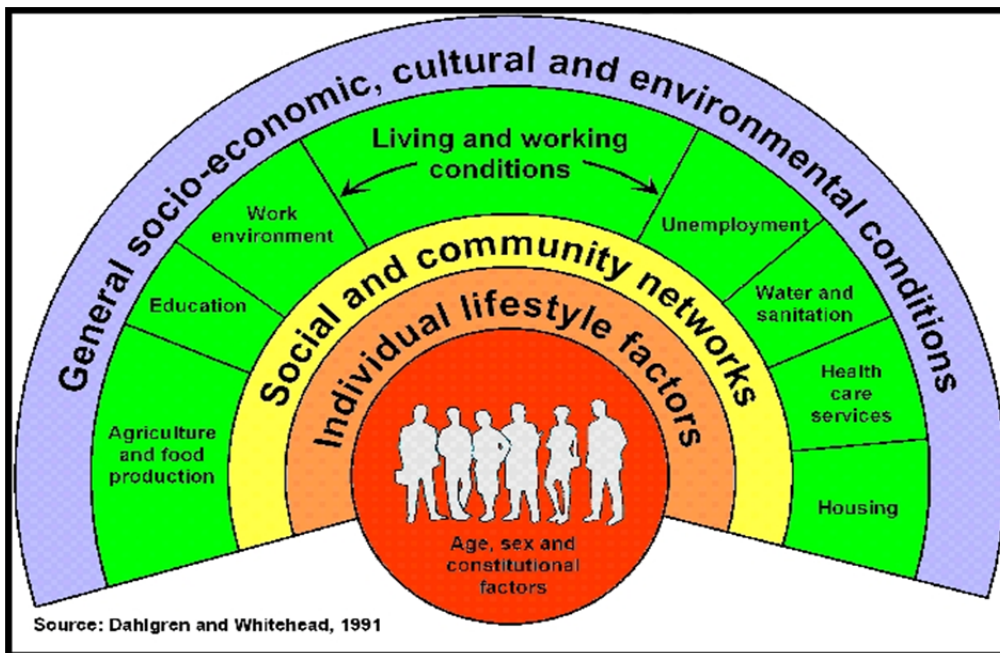
518 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 23 July 2012, p107.

519 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'Review of funding for schooling', December 2011, Available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf> Accessed 23 July 2012

individuals.⁵²⁰ For example, the main prevention strategies required for the control of Otitis Media in Aboriginal children are environmental, and include the alleviation of housing and overcrowding problems and access to good nutrition.⁵²¹

Some of the determinants that underpin those poor health outcomes that negatively impact on education are illustrated below. These are largely found in individual lifestyle factors and social and community networks.

Figure 9.2: The determinants of health⁵²²



There is a growing consensus on the importance of systematic differences in exposure to health hazards and risk conditions in the population. This means some groups in society have a much poorer chance of achieving their full health potential as a result of their life circumstances. The most disadvantaged groups have the poorest health and the highest exposure to health-damaging risk factors.

520 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Young Australians: their health and wellbeing*, 2011. Available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=6442459937>. Accessed on 14 September 2012.

521 Tait P. Otitis Media- the Central Australian experience. In: Proceedings- Medical options for Prevention and Treatment of Otitis Media in Australian Aboriginal Infants

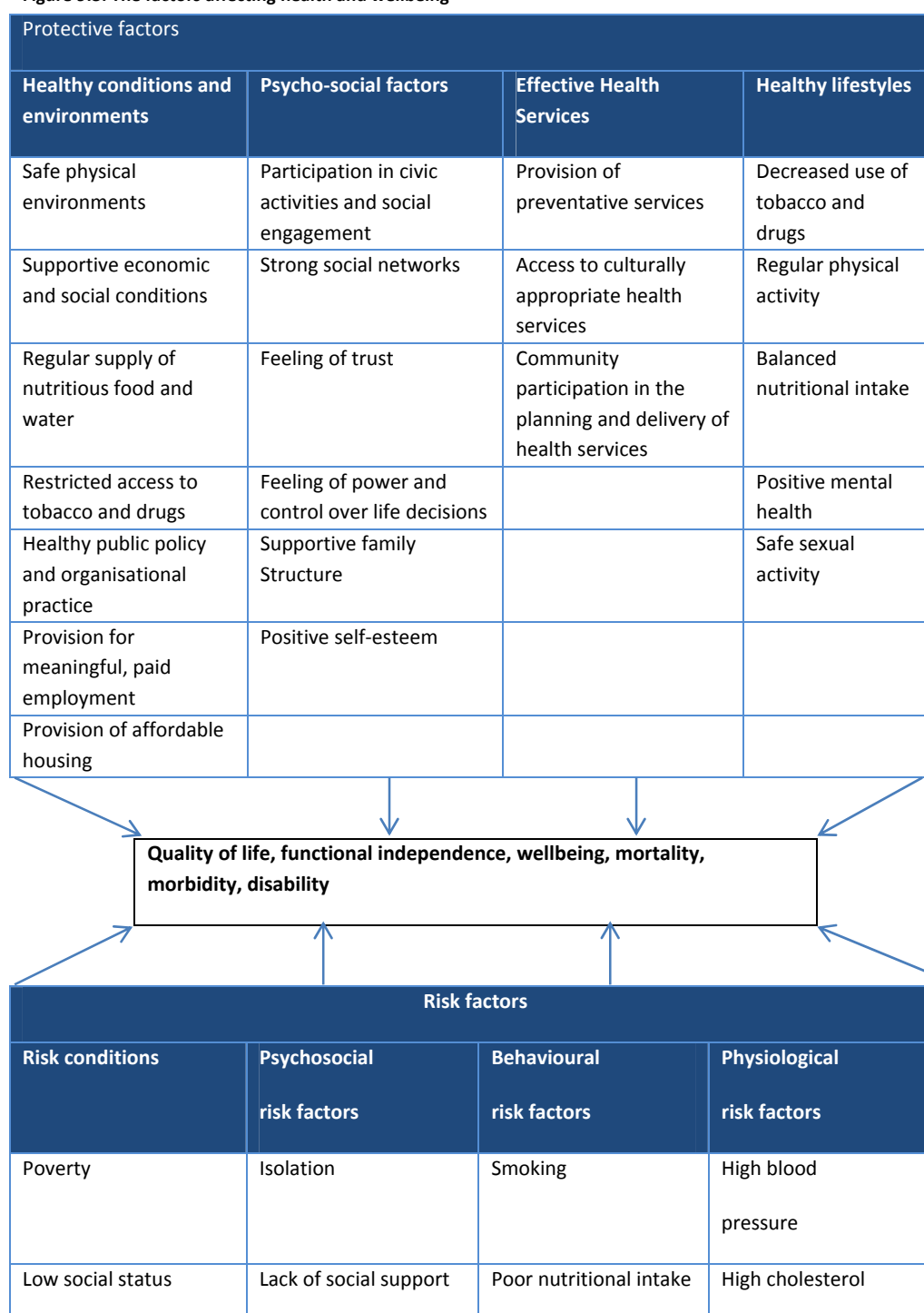
522 Dahlgren and Whitehead, *The determinants of health*, 1991, Available at: <http://www.google.com.au/search?q=dahlgren+and+whitehead+determinants+of+health&hl=en&prmd=imvnsb&tbo=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=O-FSUPe9CeeViAezp4CoAg&ved=0CDYQsAQ&biw=1440&bih=746>. Accessed on 14 September 2012.

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There is evidence that poorer socioeconomic groups tend to have poorer nutrition, less physical activity in leisure time, greater prevalence of smoking and more damaging patterns of alcohol use. However, each factor should not be considered separately. The life circumstances or determinants of health of people experiencing disadvantage highlight the greater restrictions on 'making healthy choices the easy choices'.⁵²³

This is illustrated in figure 9.3.

523 Department of Health, Victoria, *The determinants of health*, Available at http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/what_is/determinants.htm, Accessed on 20 September 2012.

Figure 9.3: The factors affecting health and wellbeing⁵²⁴

524 Department of Health, Victoria, *The determinants of health*, Available at http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/what_is/determinants.htm, Accessed on 20 September 2012.

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Dangerous work	Poor social networks	Physical inactivity	Release of stress hormone
Polluted environment	Low self-esteem	Substance abuse	Altered levels of biochemical markers
Natural resource depletion	High self-blame	Poor hygiene	Genetic factors
Discrimination (age, sex, race, disability)	Low perceived power	Being overweight	
Steep power hierarchy (wealth, status, authority) within a community and workplace	Loss of meaning or Purpose Abuse	Unsafe sexual activity	

The social determinants of health pose the major challenge in primary prevention; a challenge that is not solely the responsibility of the Department of Health which recognises that collaborative work across a number of agencies and whole of government approaches are often required.⁵²⁵

The circular interplay of health and education

It is generally acknowledged that school aged children with poor health are more likely to suffer from school-related behaviour problems. These might include negative learning attitudes and learning disabilities, antisocial behaviour and risk behaviour, and social maladjustment. 'Health risk factors include inappropriate parental education methods, fewer classmates, and less social support.'⁵²⁶

525 Mr Kim Snowball, Department of health, Letter, 30 September 2012.

526 US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, *Associations between poor health and school-related behavior problems at the child and family levels*, 2010. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20573142>. Accessed on 18 September 2012.

In Aboriginal communities, there is a documented relationship between health and education outcomes for children. Improvements in health outcomes result in improved education outcomes and the converse also applies.⁵²⁷

Unfortunately, when untreated, initial disadvantage may be compounded as the child goes through school suffering impaired hearing, malnutrition, poor general health, including poor eyesight, anaemia, skin diseases, and sleep deprivation. Poor health affects school attendance and punctuality as well as ability to concentrate and to learn.⁵²⁸

Poor health can damage a student's education. However, research shows that there is a mechanism where improved education can positively lead to improvements in health as well as providing other social benefits.⁵²⁹

For example:

*An additional four years of education lowers five-year mortality by 1.8 percentage points; it also reduces the risk of heart disease by 2.16 percentage points, and the risk of diabetes by 1.3 percentage points.*⁵³⁰

Education and health are widely recognised as being highly correlated. Professor Collette Tayler, co-author of Starting Strong II, the 2006 OECD report on Early Childhood Education and Care, advised the Committee:

*A focus on health alone is insufficient. Education is not just the schooling period. Research has shown that it is a life-long learning process that starts at birth. A connected approach that links child health with the education departments is better than the traditional education versus a health split.*⁵³¹

527 New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) in partnership with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated, *Review of Aboriginal Education*, 2003, p14. Available at: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reviews/aboriginaledu/report/aer2003_04.pdf. Accessed on 18 September 2012.

528 Collins, Bob et al, *Learning Lessons An independent review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* Northern Territory Department of Education. Darwin. 1999

529 New South Wales Department of Education and Training (DET) in partnership with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated, *Review of Aboriginal Education*, 2003, p14. Available at: https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reviews/aboriginaledu/report/aer2003_04.pdf. Accessed on 18 September 2012.

530 The National Bureau of Economic Research, *The Effects of Education on Health*, 2012. Available at: <http://www.nber.org/digest/mar07/w12352.html>. Accessed on 18 September 2012.

531 Professor Collette Tayler, Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care, Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

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Despite the acknowledged relationship between education and health, and a strong focus on comparative rankings of education performance, using national and international benchmarks, little public attention is paid to the impact of a child's health on their educational outcomes.⁵³²

Conversely, education is a strong predictor of long-term health and quality of life. It is even argued in some quarters that 'education causes health, but the pathways through which it leads to better health and longer life expectancy are not yet clearly understood.'⁵³³ What is clear is that health, human development and well-being are dynamic processes that are closely related to socioeconomic status (SES) and educational attainment. An individual's health is highly correlated with his or her social position. Success in school and the number of years of schooling are major factors in determining social and occupational status in adulthood.

In a 2010 paper, the Australian Bureau of Statistics highlighted the correlation of education and health, noting that:

Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with improved health outcomes:

In 2008, 59% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–34 years who had completed Year 12 reported excellent/very good health compared with 49% of those who had left school early (Year 9 or below). For people aged 35 years and over, the rates were 43% and 25% respectively.

The likelihood of smoking also decreased with higher levels of schooling, 34% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–34 years who had completed Year 12 were current daily smokers compared with 68% of those who had left school early. For people aged 35 years and over, the rates were 36% and 48% respectively.⁵³⁴

532 World Health Organisation, *The impact of health and health behaviours on educational outcomes in high-income countries: a review of the evidence*, report prepared by Marc Suhrcke, School of Medicine, Health Policy and Practice, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom and Carmen de Paz Nieves, Fundación Ideas, Madrid, Spain, 2012, pvi.

533 Low, B & Low, D, 'Education and Education Policy as Social Determinants of Health', *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*, Volume 8, Number 11: 756-761. November 2006.

534 Australian Bureau of statistics, *4704.0 - The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 2011, Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter365Oct+2010>. Accessed on 17 September 2012.

The role of primary health care

The importance of social determinants of health and their role in education are well documented. However, success in improving health depends on making health systems responsive to population needs.

Both the social determinants of health and primary health care prioritise health equity. Additionally, they promote a broad view of health, and perform optimally through cross sector collaboration and the participation of empowered communities. This collaborative, empowered, approach is exemplified in the Lililwan project which is outlined in the Committee's recently tabled Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder report.⁵³⁵ This section looks at several areas of identified shortfall in the way primary health care is delivered in some areas.

The importance of primary health care

*Increased primary health care resources are also shown to be able to offset some of the harmful health effects of socioeconomic disadvantage and inequality.*⁵³⁶

Around the world, primary health care is regarded as a major contributor to better population health, not least that of children.⁵³⁷ However, primary health care is now widely acknowledged to include more than health systems; although, the selective focus on the need to address a narrow range of biomedical interventions is often seen to offer the most benefit.

The most effective delivery of primary health care and improved social determinants of health requires a strong focus on collaborative action. This is because, in many instances, health inequities are influenced by other sectors such as housing, occupation, education or income.⁵³⁸

535 Education and Health Standing Committee, *Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: the invisible disability*, Report 15, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, tabled 20 September 2012.

536 Robert Griew Consulting, *The link between primary health care and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2008, Available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/>. Accessed on 17 September 2012.

537 WA Primary Care Health Network, *WA Primary Health Care Strategy – consultation document*, 2011. Available at: http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/resources/newsfiles/wa_primary_healthcare_strategy_consultation.pdf. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

538 Rasanathan K, Montesinos EV, Matheson D, Etienne C, Evans T., 'Primary health care and the social determinants of health: essential and complementary approaches for reducing inequities in health', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 2011 Aug;65(8):656-60. Epub 2009 Nov 22.

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Primary health care in its biomedical frame is the frontline of Australia's health care system. Primary health care is that part of the health system that most people interact with most of the time. Its providers include GPs, nurses including general practice nurses, school and community nurses and nurse practitioners, midwives, allied health professionals, pharmacists and dentists.

Reforming primary health care is seen as 'the single greatest opportunity for improvement in population health and health system performance'.⁵³⁹ Research shows that those health systems with strong primary health care are more efficient, have lower rates of hospitalisation, fewer health inequalities and better health outcomes.⁵⁴⁰ For this reason, the way in which primary health care might be reformed is in the interest of every Western Australian.

Health care needs differ in the community context

In general terms the Australian health system is said to compare well with overseas health systems. However, community needs vary and for some communities there are barriers to accessing health care resulting in uneven outcomes.⁵⁴¹

The gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is the most telling example, but not the only case:

*[In the regions] There may be basic nutritional needs and really basic public or primary health needs as opposed to other communities in the metro, ... there are those issues where we are probably talking about a different set of needs, and it may be more about sexual health discussions or healthy lifestyle, exercise, obesity, things like that. Whereas a community in the Kimberley may in fact be right back and need a lot of support around basic things.*⁵⁴²

There is a correlation between the under-met health care needs of a community and the educational outcomes of that community.

539 WA Primary Care Health Network, *WA Primary Health Care Strategy – consultation document*, 2011. Available at: http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/resources/newsfiles/wa_primary_healthcare_strategy_consultation.pdf. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

540 Department of Health and Aging, *Primary Health Care Reform in Australia - Report to Support Australia's First National Primary Health Care Strategy*, 2009 Available at: <http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/nphc-draftreportsupp-toc~nphc-draftreportsupp-ch2>. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

541 The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *Towards a National Primary Health Care Strategy*, report prepared by Commonwealth of Australia 2008, p10.

542 Mr Philip Aylward, Chief Executive Officer, Child and Adolescent Health Service, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 August 2012, p17.

In many Aboriginal communities in the North West of Western Australia, basic health care needs are immediately apparent:

Crowding issues and issues of hygiene. [There is a] very, very high rate of transmission of bugs, in particular, bacteria. These children get the bacteria in the first days of life. By the time they reach two months of age, 40 % are carrying the bacteria, in contrast to 10 % of non-Aboriginal children.

The three main bacteria are called nontypeable haemophilus influenzae, streptococcus pneumoniae pneumococcus and Moraxella catarrhalis. Those are the main bugs. I think the nontypeable haemophilus is probably considered more and more important. For the streptococcus pneumoniae, this is before they are even going to get their first vaccine.⁵⁴³

And:

Skin disease is a huge problem in remote communities. The actual disease is generally often caused by scabies initially. The scabies mite sort of burrows in, breaks the skin and then we all have got bugs like staph aureus or streptococcus crawling all over our skin. Aboriginal kids happen to have heaps more crawling over their skin because they live in confined environments, do not often have the access or the routine of showering each day and certainly do not have the kind of up tightness about being spick-and-span that a lot of people in more advantaged communities have. So, there are a lot of bugs on the skin, a lot of breaks in the skin, through scabies or scratches or whatever, and then that causes a skin sore, which you would not think is that big a problem. But the problem with it is that the bug that causes the skin sore, particularly one called streptococcus, it releases a toxin that damages the heart and that causes rheumatic heart disease. It also damages the kidney, so it causes post-infectious kidney inflammation, which can then later in life lead to kidney failure.⁵⁴⁴

Finding 37

In some Aboriginal communities, because of poor social determinants, 40% of Aboriginal children are carrying bacteria such as atypical haemophilus influenzae,

543 Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann, Researcher/Epidemiologist, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 August 2012, p2.

544 Dr James Fitzpatrick, Paediatric Doctor, The George Institute for Global Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p13.

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streptococcus pneumoniae, pneumococcus and Moraxella catarrhalis as compared to non-Aboriginal children.

Additionally, skin disease is a major problem including scabies leading to streptococcus infections resulting in rheumatic heart disease and potentially kidney failure.

Barriers to the effective provision of services to children with chronic disease

Resourcing

The people who most need support are the ones who don't go to GPs.⁵⁴⁵

In an era of budgetary constraints, it is unsurprising that the issue of limited resources was highlighted to the Committee as being a significant contributor to the gap between the Department of Health's policy and its practice.

One area of particular concern raised with the Committee by numerous witnesses was the shortage of school health nurses. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 13.

The Committee was told that money has been poured into clinical intervention and not prevention, health promotion or environmental health.

If you have a health condition in the Kimberley or the Pilbara, you are more likely to go to a government hospital for that GP-type service than to anywhere else. That is part of what needs to change. We need to make sure we are getting a contribution from both federal and state governments and that we have models of primary health care that work.⁵⁴⁶

Additionally, agencies should look at each other's services rather than each other's weaknesses and work towards models of partnership.⁵⁴⁷

Historical acute versus family centred primary care

The 'medical model' with a focus on the acute care of the individual became the dominant paradigm of primary health care over the last century.

One witness to the Committee felt that this approach can prevent effective primary health care. The Committee was told the traditional approach in the Kimberley has

545 Professor Collette Tayler, Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care, Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

546 Mr Kim Snowball, Director General, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 6 September, p19.

547 Briefing WA Country Health Services 14 March 2012.

resulted from medical services being based on the need for a robust acute response to serious illness by medical staff.⁵⁴⁸

An alternative model that was put forward to the Committee is that of a matrix management model of care. This has, as its focus, the team providing the case management of the individual patient with chronic disease or disability within the context of the family group.

The need for a family centred approach to primary health care is acknowledged across the country:

Governments are traditionally nervous to step into family life, but that is in fact the best thing they can do to strengthen families.⁵⁴⁹ Mental health services also need to take a family approach. A child needs to be treated for the mother's depression. Just treating the mother is insufficient. Maternal depression has been shown to significantly impact on a child's brain development.⁵⁵⁰

Case identification and family management of the child and family were felt to be more effective than the medical model. An example of a newer primary care model was given as 'the situation in the Apunapima Aboriginal Medical Service for Cape York, which has a household focus with family nurse practitioners, delivering comprehensive health care to the family within each small community.'⁵⁵¹

Lack of primary medical, nursing and allied health professionals

Regional Australia, including Western Australia, is stated as having a fragile health infrastructure which can be a barrier to 'mainstream' and diverse communities accessing health services.

This lack of health resources combined with a dispersed population, low number of health professionals, high staff turnover and lack of specialised training adversely affects health services in rural areas.⁵⁵²

This was mentioned to the Committee in several regional areas:

In relation to GPs and nurses treating children with Otitis Media:

548 Submission No. 20 from Professor John Boulton, March 2012, p1.

549 Professor Collette Tayler, Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care, Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

550 Professor Collette Tayler, Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care, Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

551 Submission No. 20 from Professor John Boulton, March 2012, p1.

552 Diversity Health Institute, *Towards health for all in regional Australia: critical health infrastructure for refugee resettlement*, report prepared by Scott Sypek, Greg Clugston, Christine Phillips 2011, p1.

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All the kids I have seen in the last four years of working as a kids doctor up there, you see them and treat them once, but you do not get back to that place for eight weeks or nine weeks. The nurses are too flat out to be able to do it well and the GPs do not really do much kids health anyway, and the kid has gone for eight weeks, 12 weeks without having their ears treated.⁵⁵³

And:

The historical picture of GPs providing continuity of service does not happen here as they are based in hospitals and there is a high turnover.⁵⁵⁴

And:

I also noted the lack of family doctor (GP) continuity throughout the region, apart from in the Broome Aboriginal Medical Service (BRAMS) which provided an office-hours GP services.⁵⁵⁵

In relation to child health nurses:

There is one child health nurse in Fitzroy Crossing, and she doesn't have the qualifications for it. Mothers go to Derby to deliver. The community midwife has about 50 to 80 pregnancies on her books at a time, all of which will deliver in Derby, or in emergency, in Broome or Darwin. There are about 300 children aged 0 to 5 in the valley, and 500 aged 0 to 12. They need 5 or 6 child health nurses and 3 midwives, as pretty much all pregnancies are 'high risk'.⁵⁵⁶

In relation to Aboriginal health workers:

The town needs more health workers, particularly aboriginal health workers. They need to target the students in middle high school to go and do work placements in the health service. The hospital could take 4 at a time, 2 on each shift. They could train as an assistant nurse. Aboriginal health workers need to have a certificate III. If you targeted kids in middle high school, they could be mentored all the way through

553 Dr James Fitzpatrick, Paediatric Doctor, The George Institute for Global Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p13.

554 Briefing WA Country Health Services 14 March 2012.

555 Submission No. 20 from Professor John Boulton, March 2012, p1.

556 Briefing Fitzroy Valley Health Service, Fitzroy Crossing 15 March 2012.

*the process. The certificate III study could be done remotely. If a mother in the valley has 3 or 4 antenatal midwife visits, that's a win.*⁵⁵⁷

Mental Health Services

The issue of the provision of mental health services will be covered in greater detail in Chapter twelve. The Committee was told Mental Health Services as they relate to children and adolescents have

*been really grossly under-resourced and just completely ignored. It is interesting that when you are looking at mental health, I think child and adolescent mental health has been part of adult mental health.*⁵⁵⁸

Finding 38

There is an inadequacy of health resources in the regions which, when combined with a dispersed population, adversely affects primary health services in affected areas.

The need for coordination of service delivery

Primary health care in Australia is delivered through a mix of Commonwealth, State and Territory Government funding and private funding, with public and private services.

While many primary health care services are delivered through general practice, supported by patient access to Medicare rebates, there are a range of other programs that have developed to address service gaps as they have emerged. Many of these are delivered through non-government organisations.⁵⁵⁹

In a large meeting of agencies, organised by the Pilbara Regional Development Authority, the Committee was particularly struck by the many separate uncoordinated funding initiatives that existed throughout the North West.

The complex, fragmented and often uncoordinated delivery systems that operate across primary health care have implications for the services individuals receive, how they pay for them, and how care providers interact and provide care.⁵⁶⁰ As the Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre noted:

557 Briefing Fitzroy Crossing Fitzroy Valley Health Service 15 March 2012.

558 Dr Carolyn Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2012, p13.

559 Department of Health and Aging, *Primary Health Care Reform in Australia - Report to Support Australia's First National Primary Health Care Strategy*, 2009 Available at: <http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/nphc-draftreportsupp-toc~nphc-draftreportsupp-ch2>. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

560 Department of Health and Aging, *Primary Health Care Reform in Australia - Report to Support Australia's First National Primary Health Care Strategy*, 2009 Available at: <http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/nphc-draftreportsupp-toc~nphc-draftreportsupp-ch2>. Accessed on 7 September 2012.

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Beyond the policy jargon of mutual responsibility, welfare reform, and economic empowerment there lies an uncomplicated ingredient for success which governments have never been able to manage- it's about genuine partnership.⁵⁶¹

What we have now is chaos and dysfunction at every level- within government and within the community. Schools, training centres, the health system, child protection, the range of community services and the courts are basically operating as silos with different policies and funding systems. The left hand has no idea what the right hand is doing and government attempts to coordinate this madness in various guises over the past few years have failed miserably.⁵⁶²

Transiency of service workers leads to poorer service delivery and no succession planning. The health service needs greater integration with the community.⁵⁶³

Government responsibility - to provide good government in the form of skill development, employment, health services, education and child protection - does not at present interface or connect in a formal sense with the cultural and social reality of the Valley. In essence government approach to service delivery is fundamentally assimilationist and a recipe for continued disaster. "There's a real sense of frustration and despair - once the women despair, what chance has the community got? It will really fall apart then."⁵⁶⁴

For instance why should it be necessary for an independent Aboriginal cultural health organisation to operate independently of the State Government Hospital and community health system? They should be enmeshed as one seamless health service that is fully accountable to the Fitzroy Valley community. The present system allows for repeated 'buck passing' and needs fundamental structural changes.⁵⁶⁵

One of the largest non-government primary care providers in the state highlighted the importance of collaboration and coordination across the sectors as compared with the tokenistic approach adopted by the government, stating that

561 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, March 2012, p4.

562 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, March 2012, p4.

563 Briefing Fitzroy Valley Health Service, Fitzroy Crossing 15 March 2012.

564 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, March 2012, p4.

565 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, March 2012, p4.

*the primary health care strategy that has just come out is one example of where we were really excluded from that whole development.*⁵⁶⁶

In its view, the solution lies in collaboration and coordination being managed at a Ministerial level.⁵⁶⁷

Finding 39

Currently, there is a complex, fragmented and often uncoordinated delivery system that operates across primary health care. This has implications for the services individuals and families receive. The current system would benefit from better integration and a stronger emphasis on team-based care arrangements.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Health commissions an external review of the way resources are used for child health across all agencies and report on this to Parliament by June 2014. This review should consider formal collaboration between agencies, and disciplines within agencies.

566 Ms Elaine Bennett, Director, Services, Ngala, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2011, p13.

567 Ms Elaine Bennett, Director, Services, Ngala, *Transcript of Evidence*, 21 September 2011, p13.

Chapter 10

Health challenge to good educational outcomes – Hearing problems

'A gold-standard education is only possible with proper ear health.'⁵⁶⁸

The issue of ear health was raised with the Committee by numerous witnesses, particularly in relation to indigenous children in regional and remote areas. The importance of hearing to educational outcomes cannot be overstated. As Professor Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, told the Committee:

*...having strong hearing means having a strong start, because if a child cannot hear, it cannot learn, go to school or be educated. That is a fundamental principle...a gold-standard education is only possible with proper ear health.*⁵⁶⁹

This chapter considers the ear health challenges faced by communities in Western Australia, and in particular, regional communities.

Otitis Media – middle ear infection

While hearing issues in children can be caused by exposure to disease *in utero* such as German measles, or genetic disorders, the most common cause is Otitis Media (infection of the middle ear).

The World Health Organization advises that a prevalence rate of chronic Otitis Media greater than 4% indicates a massive public health problem which needs urgent attention in targeted populations.⁵⁷⁰

In Western Australia the prevalence of Otitis Media has been found to range from 40% to 70% in some Indigenous communities.⁵⁷¹

568 Professor Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, Fremantle Hospital, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p2.

569 Professor Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, Fremantle Hospital, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p2.

570 'Prevention of Hearing Impairment from Chronic Otitis Media, Report of a WHO/CIBA Foundation Workshop, London, 19-21 November 1996, World Health Organization, 14 April 2000, WHO/PDH/98.4, No. 2 in the series Strategies for Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Impairment, available at http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/en/chronic_otitis_media.pdf accessed 25 September 2012, p2.

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This issue has been the subject of many reports over the years. In one example, in 2010, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee reported on its inquiry into *Hearing Health in Australia*.⁵⁷² This inquiry found that ‘a higher proportion of Indigenous Australians experience hearing problems than non-Indigenous Australians across nearly all age groups, in remote, rural and metropolitan areas.’⁵⁷³

The Senate Committee further reported on the extent of hearing problems for Indigenous Australians:

*Indigenous Australians experience ear disease and associated hearing loss at up to ten times the rate of non-Indigenous Australia. In 2004-05, 10 % of Indigenous children aged zero to 14 years were reported as having ear or hearing problems, compared to three % of non-Indigenous children...The committee heard evidence that these figures may under represent the actual rates of hearing problems in Indigenous children. It has been estimated that some form of hearing loss may affect up to 70 % of Indigenous adult people.*⁵⁷⁴

The main cause of hearing issues for Indigenous children and adults are infections of the middle ear, commonly called ‘glue ear’ or ‘runny ear’. The infection involves an inflammation of the middle ear, and is a common childhood disease. It often occurs as a result of another illness such as a cold.

*Middle ear infections cause a fluid build-up in the middle ear. This build up creates pressure on the ear drum, sometimes to the point where it bursts. It is the presence of fluid, and in some cases the resulting perforation of the ear drum, which inhibits the conduct of sound through the middle ear.*⁵⁷⁵

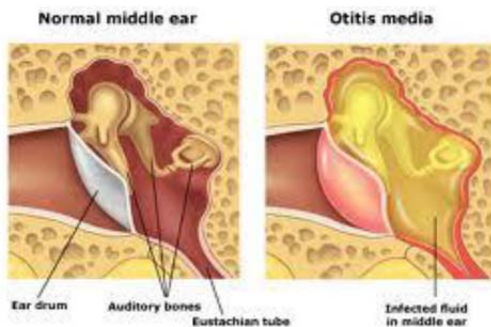
571 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4704.0 - The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 2005*, Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/>. Accessed on 25 September 2012.

572 Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry Into Hearing Health in Australia*, The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, May 2010. Available at www.aph.gov.au.

573 Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry Into Hearing Health in Australia*, The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, May 2010. Available at www.aph.gov.au, p121.

574 Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry Into Hearing Health in Australia*, The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, May 2010. Available at www.aph.gov.au, p121-122.

575 Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry Into Hearing Health in Australia*, The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, May 2010. Available at www.aph.gov.au, p122.

Figure 10.1: Normal ear 'v' one with middle ear infection⁵⁷⁶

There are several types of the infection:

Figure 10.2: Types of Otitis Media⁵⁷⁷

Acute Otitis Media (AOM) without perforation: acute inflammation of the middle ear and eardrum (tympanic membrane), usually with signs or symptoms of infection. AOM is characterised by the presence of fluid behind the eardrum, combined with one or more of the following: bulging eardrum, red eardrum, recent discharge of pus, fever, ear pain, and irritability.

Acute Otitis Media with perforation: discharge of pus through a perforation (hole) in the eardrum within the previous 6 weeks.

Recurrent acute Otitis Media (RAOM): more than three attacks of AOM within six months, or more than four in 12 months.

Chronic Otitis Media: a persistent inflammation of the middle ear – it can occur with or without perforation, either as chronic suppurative Otitis Media, or as Otitis Media with effusion (respectively).

Chronic suppurative Otitis Media (CSOM): recurrent or persistent bacterial infection of the middle ear, with discharge and perforation of the ear drum (CSOM is distinguished from acute perforation with discharge in that the discharge persists). Symptoms include hearing loss – pain is not a feature. CSOM has been identified on the basis of discharge persisting for 6 weeks or more, but an expert panel convened by the World Health Organization defined it recently as discharge for at least 2 weeks.

Otitis with effusion (OME): an inflammation of the middle ear characterised by fluid behind the eardrum, without signs or symptoms of acute Otitis Media; also sometimes referred to as serous Otitis Media, secretory Otitis Media, or (more colloquially) 'glue ear'.

Dry perforation: perforation of the eardrum, without any signs of discharge or fluid behind the eardrum.

576 Briefing by Telethon Speech and Hearing May 2012.

577 Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry Into Hearing Health in Australia*, The Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, May 2010. Available at www.aph.gov.au, p122.

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Otitis Media is a problem at both a state and a national level:

More than 80 % of Aboriginal children suffer from middle-ear infections before they are 12 months old, according to research published in the Medical Journal of Australia. It is one of the highest rates in the world.

Repeated infections, which cause fluid to build up behind the ear drum, have led to 20 % of Aboriginal children suffering ruptured ear drums.⁵⁷⁸

The 2011 report of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 'Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011' found that 'Indigenous children living in remote communities have the highest internationally published prevalence rates for Otitis Media.'⁵⁷⁹

Additionally,

Studies spanning 30 years have consistently found that, in Indigenous children, Otitis Media typically starts at a younger age, is much more common and is more likely to result in hearing loss than in non-Indigenous children. Hearing assessments for school-age children in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY) and Tjarutja Lands between 2002 and 2008 found that 74 % of children failed a standard hearing test and more than 30 % of children had eardrum perforations, about half of which had active disease (discharging ears). The worst affected children met the hearing impairment criteria for government disability support.⁵⁸⁰

These findings were confirmed in the course of this Inquiry by numerous witnesses. In one example, in Halls Creek, the Committee was told by the Red Hill Catholic Primary School that the problem is so pervasive that the school simply assumes that all the children will have some form of hearing problem when they arrive.⁵⁸¹

Notre Dame University in Broome advised that it is thought as many as 40% of the Aboriginal population in the region have scarred ears, with resultant hearing impairment. Staff of Notre Dame advised that when they visited the high school in

578 WA Today.com.au, Third World ear infections in WA children, 2012, p1. Available at: <http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/third-world-ear-infections-in-wa-children-20101115-17twg.html>. Accessed on 2 April 2012.

579 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011: Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2011, p5.52.

580 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011: Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2011, p5.53.

581 Witness briefing, Halls Creek, 15 March 2012.

Broome to provide briefings on their courses, the school was using Auslan interpreters for the children with hearing loss.⁵⁸²

In Roebourne, the Mawarnkarra Aboriginal Health Service reported that the Western Australian Country Health Service had carried out hearing screening with an audiologist in the town, and found that 96% of children in Roebourne in year 1 and 2 had some form of hearing loss, and the rate in year 3 was similar.⁵⁸³

The prevalence of ear disease within the Indigenous community is thought to account for an acceptance of hearing problems by many families who saw it as 'normal'.⁵⁸⁴

Finding 40

Otitis Media, or middle ear infection, is endemic in many regional communities, with 96% of children affected in some schools. Aboriginal children in these communities have some of the highest internationally published prevalence rates for Otitis Media in the world.

The direct health cost of Otitis Media

The data for the estimates of the costs of Otitis Media (OM) are based on the number of cases of OM, not the number of people with OM in 2008. The costs relate to the direct health system impost.

Figure 10.3: Bottom up⁵⁸⁵ costs of OM by State/territory in 2008 in \$'000s⁵⁸⁶

	0-14	15-24	25-64	65-74	75+	Total	0-14	15-24	25-64	65-74	75+	Total
	Low estimate based on Begg et al (2007) cases 2008						High estimate based on Butler et al (2004) Cases 2008					
ACT	941	136	253	20	15	1,386	1,746	274	529	38	26	2,645
NSW	19,579	2,386	4,876	532	456	27,917	36,350	4,799	10,198	978	772	53,275
NT	765	86	159	8	3	878	1,420	174	333	16	5	1,676
QLD	12,536	1,524	2,997	308	237	17,138	23,274	3,064	6,268	567	400	32,705
SA	4,224	551	1,112	131	121	6,418	7,842	1,107	2,327	241	205	12,247
TAS	1,417	164	341	43	34	1,992	2,631	331	713	78	58	3,801
VIC	14,492	1,856	3,725	397	342	21,189	26,906	3,733	7,791	730	578	40,436
WA	6,212	782	1,523	151	115	8,635	11,533	1,572	3,185	277	195	16,479
Total	60,165	7,486	14,986	1,590	1,324	85,552	111,703	15,053	31,344	2,925	2,240	163,264

The bottom up costs underestimate the health system costs of OM because capital costs are understated in these data (e.g. hospital costs

582 Witness briefing, Broome, 14 March 2012.

583 Witness briefing, Roebourne, 12 March 2012.

584 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, May 2010, p127.

585 Bottom up costs are based on BEACH data for health service utilisation rates for OM and unit cost data from Medicare, the National Hospital Cost Data Collection, Australian Statistics on Medicines and other data sets. This does not include capital costs.

586 Access Economics, *The cost burden of Otitis Media in Australia*, 2009, p110. Available at: <https://www.deloitteaccesseconomics.com.au/uploads/File/The%20cost%20burden%20of%20otitis%20media%20in%20Australia.pdf>. Accessed on 9 October 2012.

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include only depreciation and not user cost of capital) and other elements of cost included in the top down estimates are excluded from the bottom up estimates (eg. research and administration)⁵⁸⁷

Chronic Otitis Media and education outcomes

As the 'Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage' report makes clear, early hearing problems can have long term developmental impacts on children.

Indigenous children under three are at the highest risk of ear disease. Unfortunately, this is also the most critical development period for speech and language development, underpinning communication, learning, and social and emotional development.⁵⁸⁸

Hearing loss due to Otitis Media in children under three impairs their speech and language development, meaning that they are already behind once they reach school. Hearing difficulties often persist once at school, meaning that children are at an even greater disadvantage.

Finding 41

Indigenous children under three are at the highest risk of ear disease. This is also the most critical development period for speech and language development, which underpins communication, learning, and social and emotional development. The impact of early hearing problems can have long term developmental consequences for children.

The potential impact of Otitis Media on a child's education was outlined in the 2010 Senate Community Affairs References Committee's Report.

The committee is deeply concerned about the impact of hearing impairment on Indigenous education outcomes, and is persuaded by the weight of evidence that its impact may be very great indeed, particularly for children from remote areas where English is a second language.⁵⁸⁹

The reason for the significant impact on educational outcomes lies in both the number of episodes of Otitis Media and the lack of treatment.

587 Access Economics, *The cost burden of Otitis Media in Australia*, 2009, p110. Available at: <https://www.deloitteaccessconomics.com.au/uploads/File/The%20cost%20burden%20of%20otitis%20media%20in%20Australia.pdf>. Accessed on 9 October 2012.

588 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011: Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2011, p5.53.

589 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, May 2010, p146.

Research shows that more than 3 episodes of Otitis Media is correlated with deficiencies in verbal ability, and delays in school grade attainment.⁵⁹⁰

The fact that many infants have their first ear perforation before their first birthday means that their associated hearing loss starts before they commence speaking. 'This contributes to educational difficulties in childhood and training and employment problems in adults.'⁵⁹¹

In addition, the educational impact of hearing difficulties may not be limited to only the child with damaged hearing.

One researcher found that once the number of hearing impaired Indigenous children in a classroom went above a certain level, the non-hearing impaired children's education also suffered, as the teacher's time was taken up providing individualised support and managing behaviour.⁵⁹²

Finding 42

The weight of evidence is that the impact of Otitis Media on educational outcomes 'may be very great indeed, particularly for children from remote areas where English is a second language.' An additional issue is that when prevalent in a classroom, its impact is felt by all other students as the teacher's time is taken up providing individualised support and managing behaviour.

Prevention and Early Intervention

There are periods in a child's development when the impact of Otitis Media and hearing loss is more significant than at other times.

Aboriginal children experience earlier onset of the disease (peak prevalence 5-9 months). They have longer periods when the disease is active and suffer more significant hearing loss than non-indigenous children. Research on early years development clearly points to periods of critical and sensitive development, and current research indicates the period between birth and twelve months to be most critical for the

590 Report of a WHO/CIBA Foundation Workshop, *Strategies for Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Impairment*, 1996, p11. Available at: http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/en/chronic_otitis_media.pdf. Accessed on 25 September 2009.

591 Report of a WHO/CIBA Foundation Workshop, *Strategies for Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Impairment*, 1996, p2. Available at: http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/en/chronic_otitis_media.pdf. Accessed on 25 September 2009.

592 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, May 2010, p129

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*development of the sound (auditory) system. The impact of the disease is mediated by the degree of hearing loss, the length of time the child is exposed to a hearing loss, the stage of development at which the child sustains the hearing loss and the level of support available to the child. The degree of impact on development is also mediated by socio-economic status, with children who have existing risk factors suffering a larger impact.*⁵⁹³

As a consequence, early screening and intervention is of vital importance.

*What we also know is that the earlier the intervention, the better. If you can get a child with hearing loss within the first two years, it is good; if you can get a child within the first year after birth, that is even better; if you can get a child within the first six months, fantastic; and if you get it at newborn level, that is outstanding.*⁵⁹⁴

Professor Harvey Coates explained how important this is to the Committee:

*I must tell you, however, that when we keep talking about children at school age, we are missing the boat, because Aboriginal ear disease starts by three months. I mean, 90 to 100 % of Aboriginal children have middle ear disease at age three months – 12 weeks of age. They have excessive colonisation, with pneumococcal and other bacteria in their post-nasal space, or nasopharynx, and that then spreads and causes the discharging nose and the discharging ears. So this is something that starts early...It is no use waiting until they have had their 32 months of hearing loss and ear disease, which is the average length of time the Aboriginal child will have a hearing loss before the age of five, instead of three months in the non-indigenous child. We need to be addressing this earlier.*⁵⁹⁵

Chronic Otitis Media is a major cause of hearing loss in this state and is preventable.

Opportunities for prevention can be implemented through a program of primary ear care incorporated into primary health care. 'General health promotion measures should be targeted, including breastfeeding, immunisation, adequate nutrition,

593 Submission No. 11 to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia, from Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2009, p2.

594 Professor Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, Fremantle Hospital, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p2.

595 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 August 2012, p2.

personal hygiene, improved housing, reduced overcrowding, and adequate access to clean water.⁵⁹⁶

Dr Rajan noted the importance of prevention, saying:

*Prevention is better than cure. WHO gives out the guidelines that you have to supplement vitamin C and vitamin A into the nutrition. Nutrition is key. We know that nutrition is a key factor for prevention of any kind of infection, not only ear infection. Even vitamin A is crucial. Again, WHO guidelines are that every child needs to have this minimum amount of vitamin A. Just by doing that decreases mortality for infections.*⁵⁹⁷

The suggestion was made that the universal child health nurse visit schedule would provide an opportunity for ear checks. This may provide one mechanism for screening, but there are significant problems with the capacity of the universal child health visit system, as detailed in this Committee's earlier report *Child Health – Child Development: the first 3 years*.

One expert felt that the addition of extra hearing checks on top of the universal schedule would be of benefit.

*I have always recommended you take every opportunity to look in the ears when a child comes for their needles or when a child comes for an illness – obviously any fever I think – but if you want to do it routinely it would probably be what we suggested initially: zero, two, four, six, 12 and 18 [months]; so really a bit more intensive in the first year and annually.*⁵⁹⁸

Professor Coates commented in relation to this issue that the number of visits is not crucial, but attending some visits is. 'I would have a carrot rather than a stick for parents to attend those six [universal] visits, because we will be able to pick up problems at those six visits, particularly if there are six between [the age of] zero and three.'⁵⁹⁹

596 Report of a WHO/CIBA Foundation Workshop, *Strategies for Prevention of Deafness and Hearing Impairment*, 1996, p2. Available at: http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/en/chronic_otitis_media.pdf. Accessed on 25 September 2009.

597 Dr Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, Fremantle Hospital and Health Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p8.

598 Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann, Researcher/Epidemiologist, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, p3.

599 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 August 2012, p2.

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Sound amplification systems in school classrooms

During its visit to the Kimberley, the Committee received a demonstration of the sound amplification systems that are used across the Kimberley and in other parts of the state. In 2009, the then federal Minister for Education, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, announced a \$7 million funding package to help close the gap in literacy and numeracy in remote WA.⁶⁰⁰ As part of this package, \$1.3 million was dedicated to provide sound amplification systems to public, Catholic and Aboriginal Independent Community schools in Western Australia. This funding enabled the systems to be installed in 'all 458 classrooms in 43 Kimberley schools.'⁶⁰¹

The Senate Community Affairs References Committee found that the sound field systems are helpful because 'students are able to hear and follow instructions, they behave better, and they are less distracted by outside noises.'⁶⁰² In addition, the systems provide assistance for children who are either unable to access hearing aids or those who refuse to wear the aids they may have, due to embarrassment and shame.⁶⁰³

The Kimberley Education Regional Office briefed the Committee on these systems.⁶⁰⁴ The Committee was told they have been installed in all classrooms across the Kimberley. The teacher wears a microphone around their neck which relays the sound through speakers situated around the room. The sound is amplified to a regular level of decibels to provide uniform sound throughout the classroom without making speech too loud for children with normal hearing.

The Committee was advised that some schools in the Pilbara (including Roebourne), use the same systems. While the benefits of the systems are clear, the Committee was told there are occasional technical problems that need to be overcome. The biggest problem appears to be that the use of the system is not mandatory for teachers, even though it is considered best practice.

600 The Hon Julia Gillard MP, (Minister for Education), *\$7 million to help close the gap in literacy and numeracy in remote WA*, Media Statement, DEEWR, Canberra, 16 August 2009.

601 Answer to Question on Notice DEEWR Question No. EW0644_11 asked in the Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-2011, Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations by Senator Siewert, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), 21 October 2010, p41.

602 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, May 2010, p131.

603 Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Hear Us: Inquiry into Hearing Health in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, May 2010, p131.

604 Kimberley Education Regional Office, Education Department of Western Australia, *Briefing*, Broome, 14 March 2012.

Finding 43

While sound amplification systems are not a sufficient solution to the impact of hearing issues on educational outcomes for Indigenous children, they are a palliative and useful tool.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Education that funding be made available in the 2013-2014 budget to facilitate sound amplification systems to be installed in all classrooms across the state where 4% or more of the children have been reported as suffering from Otitis Media, and that it be departmental policy for teachers to use them where installed.

The Swimming Pool Program

In 2006, the Education and Health Standing Committee of the 37th Parliament undertook an inquiry into the 'Swimming Pool Program in Remote Communities'.⁶⁰⁵ The 'Swimming Pool Program' was developed in the late 1990s as part of a broader environmental health package developed to benefit remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

The environmental health package aimed to address a broad range of environmental health issues. Some of the needs identified included: access, housing, water, power, sewerage, recreational facilities, health services and land care. It was hoped that improvements to these areas would improve the overall health of the communities.

The environmental health package advocated the installation of swimming pools in remote indigenous communities, in the belief that they would assist with improving ear and skin health within the community, particularly for children.⁶⁰⁶

The 2006 Committee's inquiry reported on research by the Telethon Institute of Child Health Research into skin and ear infections in children in two communities. As the report set out

The surveys [were] conducted from pre-pool through to 2005. Each survey examination was conducted approximately six months apart and was undertaken by a paediatrician. Results announced in 2006 indicated that in Jigalong alone there have been reductions of 42 % in antibiotic prescriptions, a 44 % reduction in the number of cases of ear

605 Education and Health Standing Committee, *Swimming Pool Program in Remote Communities*, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 22 June 2006.

606 Education and Health Standing Committee, *Swimming Pool Program in Remote Communities*, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 22 June 2006, p7.

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*disease, a 51 % reduction in the incidence of skin disease and a 63 % reduction in the number of cases involving respiratory disease.*⁶⁰⁷

However, the report stated that Otitis Media ear infections are complex and take some time to heal. It was, therefore, not expected that there would be dramatic improvements in ear infections in the short term.

*...the ENT surgeons, will tell you that we will not see a sudden improvement in ear disease. It is much more complex than a skin sore. That is what we have found.*⁶⁰⁸

It was not the intention of this Committee to revisit the earlier review of the swimming pool program. However, several witnesses raised the issue of the swimming pools with the Committee during its visit to the North West. In both Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, members of the community commented that while the intention of the pools program had been to improve the ear infection situation, it 'hasn't really worked'. In both towns the factors that militated against the use of swimming pools included:

- they aren't open for long enough hours;
- parents cannot always afford, or are disinclined to pay, the entry fee; and
- parents 'can't be bothered with supervising the children at the pool'.⁶⁰⁹

One witness to the Committee who ran the evaluation of the swimming pool project advised that:

*We did see benefits—this was about 2000 to 2005— we saw benefits more in one community than another and then we would look at it. The most dramatic actually was skin sores, which is a very big deal, because skin sores are related to heart disease and kidney disease. And for ear disease there was a definite decline in discharge—it went from like 30 % to 15 %.*⁶¹⁰

Her testimony to the Committee was corroborated by Professor Harvey Coates who advised that:

607 Education and Health Standing Committee, *Swimming Pool Program in Remote Communities*, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 22 June 2006, pxxvi.

608 Mrs Mary Tennant, Research Assistant, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 22 June 2005, quoted in Education and Health Standing Committee, *Swimming Pool Program in Remote Communities*, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 22 June 2006, p18.

609 Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, Briefing, 15 March 2012.

610 Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann, Researcher/Epidemiologist, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 August 2012, p9.

Our group went to Burringurrah and the other group went to Jigalong. In Burringurrah there was a reduction in the number of children with discharging ears and perforations over the period of the study. There was not only that; there was a reduction in eye problems and scabies—their chests got better. People would come and get together. It was wonderful for the social fabric of the community. Also there was a no-pool, no-school rule, and so truancy went right down, particularly on those days when the weather was in the forties. So it did work.⁶¹¹

Finding 44

Earlier evaluation of the swimming pool project in the mid 2000s indicated that the regular use of the facility reduced the rate of Otitis Media as well as skin sores. Recently, community witnesses stated that the swimming pools ‘haven’t really worked’ to improve Otitis Media. This may be because there are several structural barriers in many communities to the use of the swimming pool. These include:

- the pools aren’t open for long enough hours;
- parents cannot always afford, or are disinclined to pay, the entry fee, and
- parents are unable or do not wish to supervise their children at the pool.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Health commission an updated evaluation of the use and benefit of swimming pools in country communities. This evaluation would, inter alia, address the barriers to the use of swimming pools.

Treatment

The causes of high rates of Otitis Media in indigenous children are rooted in the social determinants of health, (refer chapter 9) and are acknowledged to be complex. Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann briefed the Committee on research carried out into Otitis Media in Kalgoorlie and the Goldfields. She provided the Committee with a conceptual framework that informed the research, and pointed out that ‘this is a very complex issue. One thing is not going to fix all. Things start very, very early in life.’⁶¹²

The complexity of the problem and the broad range of issues that contribute to it are illustrated in the conceptual framework below.

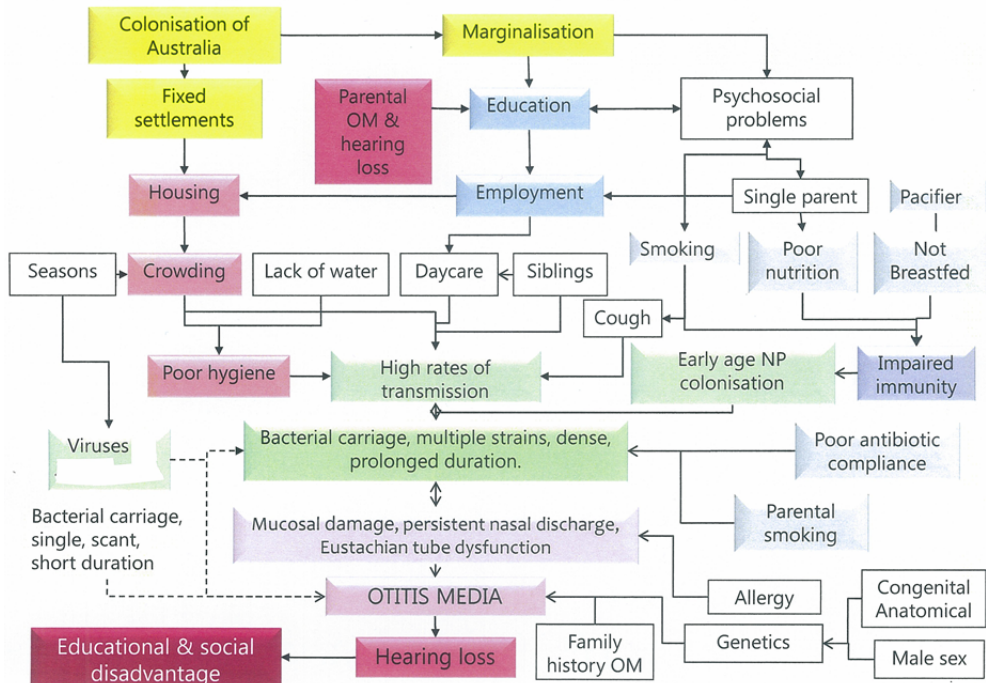
611 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 August 2012, p7.

612 Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann, Researcher/Epidemiologist, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 August 2012, p2.

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Figure 10.4: Conceptual framework to study causal pathways to Otitis Media⁶¹³

Conceptual framework to study causal pathways to Otitis Media (Lehmann et al.)



However, Otitis Media infections are readily treated if primary health care is available and accessible.

*To a large extent, Otitis Media is treatable either through surgery or a long-term course of antibiotics. A surgical procedure (myringotomy) can be performed to assist in restoring hearing. This is achieved by releasing the fluid that builds up in the middle ear. A randomised control trial of at risk Aboriginal infants found that infants receiving long-term antibiotics (antibiotics for 24 weeks) had more normal ears, fewer perforations and less bacterial colonisation.*⁶¹⁴

Other treatments include ear drops (such as Ciprofloxacin) and vaccinations.

The installation of grommets into the ear drum is often prescribed for repeated infections. The procedure is simple, quick and inexpensive. Dr Rajan briefed the Committee on the processes for installing grommets, and for repairing perforations in the ear drum.

⁶¹³ Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann et al, Researcher/Epidemiologist, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, August 2012.

⁶¹⁴ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011: Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2011, p5.53.

...our new technique for fixing ear drums – the smart ear fix. Hundreds of thousands of Australian kids and adults have ear holes which cause hearing loss. We developed a technique, together with overseas collaborators, where we can fix this. It is minimally invasive, within a few minutes...The idea is that you can do these low complexity things with surgical ear buses, which are mobile...an experienced, trained surgeon takes between two to five minutes to put in grommets. The new technique to fix the holes is probably a bit longer – maybe four to eight minutes...children need to be asleep [under general anaesthetic].⁶¹⁵

Finding 45

While responding to the social determinants of health that lead to Otitis Media is complex, Otitis Media is responsive to treatment by way of antibiotics or minimally invasive surgery.

One major issue in securing effective treatment is the inadequacy of supported pathways to treatment. The Committee was told repeatedly that part of the problem is that while some children are screened and found to have an ear problem, there is no monitored or supervised follow up. Follow up is required to ensure children receive treatment, or are referred and attend a specialist appointment, to receive the intervention they require. There is no coherent system in place to ensure that a child and its family successfully navigate the fragmented medical processes.

In the Committee's third report of this Inquiry, *Report on key learnings from the Committee research trip 11-17 March 2012*, the Committee noted that there is a lack of compliance by families in treating their children with antibiotics for middle ear infections. As a consequence, children may need supervision by a school health nurse or to have a hospital stay to ensure that there is compliance with the required five days of antibiotics.

However, School Health Nurses are currently restricted in what they are allowed to do. It was strongly recommended that the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department of Education and the Department of Health be modified to allow school health nurses to check, treat and refer children for ear health issues.

The proposed referral pathway is:

- When a child who is being treated for an ear infection misses school, the school health nurse is to notify child development services and the local community

⁶¹⁵ Professor Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, Fremantle Hospital, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p4.

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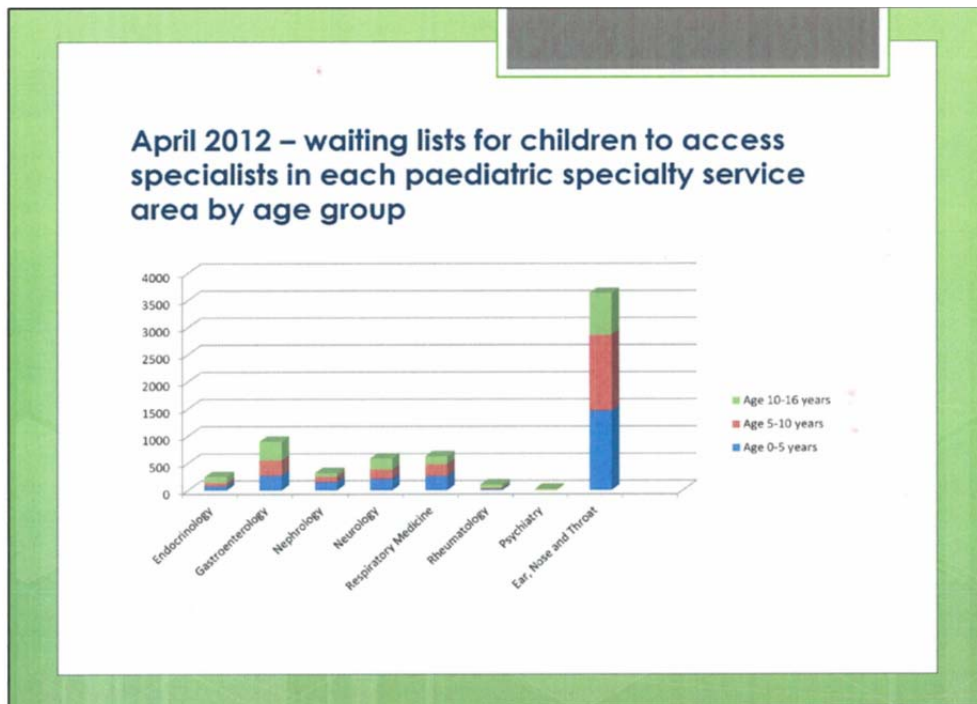
health services to ensure another appropriately qualified person is able to visit the child at home to administer the antibiotics.

- When the school nurse has treated a child on two consecutive occasions for an ear infection the child is to be referred to the Ear Nose and Throat Specialist.

The issues around School Health Nurses are fully discussed in chapter 13 of this Report.

Another obstacle to treatment is the significant waiting lists. Given that many of the children who are affected by this complaint are from disadvantaged and often rural/remote families and communities, the challenges of access to medical assistance are significant. The wait lists for Ear Nose and Throat specialists are far more significant than for other specialists, as illustrated in figure 10.5 below

Figure 10.5: Waiting lists for children to access specialists.⁶¹⁶



The Committee is aware that there are various groups seeking to rectify the problems of ear health for indigenous children throughout the state. However, the Committee was told consistently during its trip to the North West, and by other witnesses, that there is no overarching coordination on the matter of ear health, and that following up

616 Dr Janet Woollard Power Point Presentation September 2012

a child diagnosed with ear issues comes back to the Principal of the school having a suitable system in place.⁶¹⁷

Finding 46

Despite the fact that government and non-government organisations play a role in addressing ear health problems, there is no overarching coordination of services. Following up a child diagnosed with ear issues, in some parts of this state, relies on the Principal of the school having a suitable system in place.

One group working on ear health using a novel strategy is the Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre WA.

Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre of WA – Earbus

The Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre of WA is a not for profit organisation that works with children with communication disabilities to develop their ability to listen and speak. The Centre coordinates and runs the ‘Earbus’ program.

Figure 10.6: Pilbara Earbus⁶¹⁸



The Earbuses are four fully equipped mobile clinics which travel to primary schools, kindergartens, and child care centres in metropolitan and regional areas of WA, and

617 Kimberley Education Regional Office, Education Department of Western Australia, *Briefing*, Broome, 14 March 2012.

618 Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre, *Earbus Program - Mobile Ear Clinics*, 2012, Available at: <http://www.tsh.org.au/programs-services/audiology-ear-health/earbus-program-mobile-ear-clinics>. Accessed on 25 September 2012.

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provide a free screening service to children whose ear health problems may otherwise go undetected.⁶¹⁹

The Earbuses provide a screening and referral service. Each bus is staffed by a doctor, nurse, Aboriginal Outreach Worker and an Ear Nose and Throat specialist. Children are screened by the team, provided with primary care, and referred for further treatment if necessary. The buses cover the following areas of the state:

Pilbara: including Karratha, Onslow, Port Hedland, Roebourne;

Metro East: including Balga, Ellenbrook, Greenmount, Lockridge, Middle Swan, Midland, Mirrabooka, Redcliffe, Swan View.

Metro South: including Coolbellup, Fremantle, Kardinya, Kwinana, Melville, Mandurah, Myaree, Northam, Rockingham, Willagee.

South West: including August, Boyup Brook, Bunbury, Busselton, Collie, Harvey, Manjimup, Margaret River.

The Earbus program is supported by a range of sponsors, including Chevron, which sponsors the Pilbara region bus.⁶²⁰

This program is an excellent initiative, and the Committee is pleased to see the coverage that has already been achieved. However, it is clear that there are still large stretches of the state that are not covered. The Goldfields and the Kimberley, for example, could no doubt benefit from the program being extended to those areas.

The Smart Ear Fix trial

Professor Harvey Coates, Professor Rajan, Professor Lannigan and Dr Stephen Rodrigues have started a trial of a procedure which they have called 'The Smart Ear Fix'. The procedure is being undertaken at Fremantle hospital. A hole in the ear drum affects 100,000 Australians; this new technique reduces the operating time from 35 minutes to five minutes. Patients can be treated as out-patients. This procedure could be performed using the mobile Earbus and has the potential to restore hearing to thousands of children and adults in the regions. It is believed that 20 -40 children could be treated every day.

619 Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre, *Fact Sheet: Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre*, available from <http://www.tsh.org.au/> accessed 30 July 2012.

620 Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre, *The EarBus Program: Mobile Children's Ear Clinics*, available from <http://www.tsh.org.au/programs-services/audiology-ear-health/earbus-program-mobile-ear-clinics>, accessed 30 July 2012.

Figure 10.7 Perforated ear drum⁶²¹



The technique is based in the new tissue-engineered myringoplasty.

*[It] is a simple procedure. It can be done under local anaesthetic on adults. It takes on average, in Professor Ganesh Raj's hands, who is my collaborator on this project, seven minutes. In children, you can do it in six under a brief general anaesthetic. You can do both sides at the same time. The cost per child is probably going to be \$40 to \$50 for the tissue-engineered basic fibroblastic growth factor and the tisseel glue, which is a fibrin glue that seals the top of the gelatin foam.*⁶²²

Mobile surgical services

Professor Harvey Coates briefed the Committee on a proposal for the development of a mobile surgical service based on a similar New Zealand approach.

621 Illustrated talk to Rotary by Dr J.M. Woollard September 2012

622 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 August 2012, p4.

Figure 10.7: A mobile surgical service bus⁶²³

Mobile Surgical Services



This proposal recognises that the only hospitals in the Kimberley and the Pilbara that have operating suites and equipment that enable them to do anything more than minor surgery are Broome, Derby and Kununurra. Consequently, patients and their families have to travel to these hospitals, or on some occasions they have to travel to Perth for more specialised surgery. The mobile surgical service would provide an operating suite that was staffed by proceduralists and specialists, anaesthetists and nurses. It would be fitted out to perform day procedures, or occasionally short-stay, overnight procedures in regional non-equipped towns. As an example, the mobile surgical service could go to Wyndham, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Onslow, Tom Price or Newman in the Pilbara, and be sited next to the local hospital so that if post-operative recuperation were needed, that could occur in the hospital. The types of surgical procedures that could be performed on the bus include ear procedures, grommets, adenoid surgery, cataract surgery and hernia and laparoscopic procedures, and paediatricians could perform minor operations for undescended testicles, cystoscopies and prostate biopsies.⁶²⁴

Dr Harvey Coates described the way the 'ear buses' and the 'mobile surgical buses' would work as follows:

These buses will go out and identify children, do hearing assessments, initiate treatments and educate. You will have an ear nurse specialist, and she will be the linchpin to the ENT surgeon and also be

623 Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre, *Earbus Program - Mobile Ear Clinics*, 2012, Available at: <http://www.tsh.org.au/programs-services/audiology-ear-health/earbus-program-mobile-ear-clinics>. Accessed on 25 September 2012.

624 Dr Janet Woollard MLA, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 27 September 2012, p6715a.

coordinating with the GP's in the region, who are overwhelmed with work, as you can imagine. There are 13 nurse specialists in New Zealand. The Variety Club pays for the buses, as they have here, and Chevron in the Pilbara. These are making a difference.

We do not want to just identify the problem; we want to actually treat the problem and educate. The Aboriginal ear health workers will bring the patients in and then the children can have their hearing tested, diagnosis and treatment.

One dream I have is of a mobile surgical bus. Because there are hospitals in Derby, Broome and Kununurra, the only two places you could have it would be in Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing and because it is the wet season for half the year, it would only be able to work there at the time of the year in the dry season.⁶²⁵

The bus design is modelled on one built in Brisbane for use in the Solomon Islands.

There are two buses totally self-contained. One bus has a surgical theatre, pre-op rooms—the anaesthetic area. The second bus has the recovery room, and that can then be hot bedded so that the staff can sleep on board there, and there is a kitchen and all the rest. This could go to a place like Leonora or Laverton, where there is no hospital or there is a nursing post. The children could be arranged or prearranged by the Earbus going through. I think it needs to be done with two groups now; the dentists—I think dental health is a huge issue—and ENT. So we would consult in the morning, see all the children, and operate in the afternoon, and vice versa for the dentists. That would utilise the anaesthetists.⁶²⁶

A number of specialists and agencies have expressed support for the concept of a mobile surgical bus. The amount to be raised by non-government sources would be contingent on the level of the government's financial contribution. The concept of such a 'Public Private Partnership' similarly received support from the Director General of the Department of Public Health:

If it were to operate in that way, as we currently do, which is with private ENT surgeons in particular, it could be developed as a private

625 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, Transcript of Evidence, 15 August 2012, p3.

626 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, Transcript of Evidence, 15 August 2012, p4.

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*service, which we would contribute to or provide a grant to or fundraise for.*⁶²⁷

Finding 47

There is support, within and outside government, for the concept of a mobile surgical bus with a theatre and pre-op rooms—the anaesthetic area – for regional areas of the state. The bus would have a multi-functional purpose including the treatment of hearing and dental health problems.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health funds a mobile surgical bus and its support team in the 2013-14 budget; with the value of the mobile surgical bus to be evaluated biannually.

State Ear Centre Model of Care

Professor Rajan outlined to the Committee a proposal under consideration by the Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Western Australia together with the DoH and WACHS for the creation of a:

- (1) State Ear Hub. This would create a centre for rural and indigenous ENT Services (RESCWA) with the aim to administer and coordinate rural and indigenous ENT services in conjunction with a primary focus on Ear Health which require cat.1 or other complex workups and interventions, and
- (2) State Ear Health Centre (SEHC) to oversee service delivery and coordinate resources.⁶²⁸

Professor Rajan saw the facility along with that of the RESC WA being in one location (i.e. Fiona Stanley Hospital).

After much consideration and review of the various infrastructural plans I would strongly recommend that the new Fiona Stanley Hospital becomes the new State Ear Health and Hearing Implant Centre. It will have the latest set up with regard to diagnostics, imaging and treatment for hearing disorders. It is in close proximity to the new State Rehabilitation Centre which would also allow inclusion of the crucial child development services...The close proximity to Jandakot Airport would also make it very accessible for patients from rural and country areas to be directly transferred for treatment and management...The high end technology infrastructure at Fiona Stanley

627 Mr Kim Snowball, Director General, Department of Health, *Transcript of Evidence*, 6 September 2012, p9.

628 Professor Gunesh Rajan, University of Western Australia, Electronic Mail, 3 May 2012

*would also allow the set up of a Telethon ear centre and co-ordination unit in the same site.*⁶²⁹

When asked about a State Ear Health Centre Professor Harvey Coates suggested a suitable position might be the Telethon Speech and Hearing campus, stating:

*The park is wonderful. There is that new, large clinic with five or six audio booths being completed now—the Bendat centre at the Telethon Speech and Hearing. All the buildings are new. There is all the infrastructure there. You could put a building or initially the surgical Earbus and do grommet blitz procedures.*⁶³⁰

The rationale for a State Hearing Centre is that in Western Australia, there is a fragmentation of metropolitan, rural and indigenous Ear Health and ENT services. There is a significant disparity between regions with regard to infrastructure and setup to run ENT outpatient departments, the ability to perform basic audiology and surgical interventions. This leads to significant gaps and delay in care in the crucial area of ear health throughout the state with a significant impact on outcomes for rural and indigenous patients. There is no agreed model of care for ear health services in WA. Referral pathways are particularly unclear for regional practitioners and there is under-utilisation of telemedicine and e-health capabilities.⁶³¹

According to the proposal for a State Ear Centre submitted to the Committee, the situation for ear health intervention in WA is in need of serious attention.

*...the latest data of the FirstVoice⁶³² survey show that WA Health when compared to the other states, is the poorest performer in several areas of Ear Health such as newborn hearing screening, deafness detection rates and waitlist times for hearing assessments and surgical hearing restoration such as cochlear implantation. WA has also the lowest numbers of bilateral cochlear implantation for deaf children, despite the internationally well recognized fact that treatment of deaf children consists of bilateral cochlear implantation.*⁶³³

629 Professor Gunesh Rajan, Head of Unit Otolaryngology, UWA, Ear and Skull Base Surgeon/Head and Neck Surgeon, ENT Department, Fremantle Hospital, Letter, 24 July 2012.

630 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, Transcript of Evidence, 15 August 2012, p5

631 Professor Gunesh Rajan, University of Western Australia, Electronic Mail, 3 May 2012

632 First Voice is the national voice for member organisations whose primary focus is the provision of listening and spoken language therapy services in Australia and New Zealand.

633 *Rationale for the State Ear Centre Proposal (SEHC)*, provided by Dr Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, School of Surgery, Fremantle, 2012.

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Finding 48

The National body 'FirstVoice' survey found that:

- 'WA Health, when compared to the other states, is the poorest performer in several areas of Ear Health such as newborn hearing screening, deafness detection rates and waitlist times for hearing assessments and surgical hearing restoration such as cochlear implantation.
- WA has also the lowest numbers of bilateral cochlear implantation for deaf children, despite the internationally well recognized fact that treatment of deaf children consists of bilateral cochlear implantation.'

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Health that funding be made available in the 2013-14 budget for a State Ear Centre at Fiona Stanley Hospital. This data base would then be made accessible to relevant health sector specialists.

Data collection

Compounding the issues of poor coordination of screening, treatment and care, there is a notable absence of consistently collected and recorded data. It is impossible to deliver adequate and comprehensive care if the data is unavailable to ensure that an often highly mobile population, which requires treatment, receives it. Without adequate collated data it is impossible to measure how effective particular strategies have been in improving the ear health of the state.

Professor Lehmann raised the issue of data with the Committee.

What I have been thinking over the last week or two is: is there a way of having some kind of ear database? ...It would have to be something, because not only we do not have statistics, what is going on is people are going to one health worker and then another organisation. One of the concerns that Kalgoorlie is saying is that this is dangerous, and not just for ear health. They have been prescribed something one minute and then the next week someone else comes along with no idea what happened previously...as soon as there is a child with an ear health problem, put them on with their needs and their alternative needs...that would mean we could track these children.⁶³⁴

Given the large number of organisations working in the ear health area, such an electronic database would need to be accessible to all interested players to record

634 Associate Professor Deborah Lehmann, Researcher/Epidemiologist, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, *Transcript of Evidence*, p6.

information of screening, treatment and follow-up. The Committee acknowledges that informed consent for data sharing among health professionals would need to be routinely obtained to make the system work.

Finding 49

There is an identified need for an electronic ear health database to facilitate the clinical work of the many diverse government and non-government practitioners in the ear health sector. These specialists are often dealing with transient or mobile populations who do not have health records with them.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Health direct the Department of Health in 2013-14 to develop a cross-organisational database to direct policy, planning and investment in treating ear health. The data base would then be accessible for use by appropriate health professionals.

Chapter 11

Health challenges to good educational outcomes - Nutrition

Nutrition is a fundamental pillar of human life, health and development across the entire life span. From the earliest stages of foetal development, at birth, through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood and old age. Good nutrition is essential for survival, physical growth, mental development, performance, productivity, health and well-being. It is an essential foundation of human and national development.⁶³⁵

Nutrition

Adequate nutrition is one of the key factors that allows a child to benefit from the educational opportunities it is afforded. While generally thought to be a third world issue, 5% of Australia's population is estimated to suffer from a lack of food security, with 40% of those at a severe level. Indigenous populations may be vulnerable to food insecurity, with 30% of Indigenous adults reporting being worried about going without food.⁶³⁶

A short summary of the issue of food security is provided here to inform the discussion of the impact of nutrition on educational outcomes and the different food strategies undertaken by schools.

635 World Health Organization, *Nutrition for health and development*, Geneva, 2000, quoted in Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, p5.

636 Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Food insecurity in Australia: What is it, who experiences it and how can child and family services support families experiencing it?*, 2011, Available at: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/ps/ps9.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

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Figure 11.1: What is food security?⁶³⁷

Food security is defined as *'the ability of individuals, households and communities to acquire appropriate and nutritious food on a regular and reliable basis using socially acceptable means.'*

Food security is determined by people's local 'food supply' and their capacity and resources to 'access and use that food'.

Food supply refers to *'the availability, cost, quality, variety and promotion of foods for local population groups that will meet nutritional requirements.'*

Food access refers to *'the range of physical and financial resources, supports, and knowledge, skills and preferences that people have to access and consume nutritious foods.'*

Food security can be understood to be a continuum, from being food secure at one end of the continuum, to being food insecure without hunger, through to food insecure with severe hunger at the other end.

Figure 11.2: The food security continuum



There are three key components of food insecurity: inadequate access to food, inadequate supply and the inappropriate use of food (e.g., inappropriate preparation of food).⁶³⁸

Finding 50

Five per cent of our population is estimated to suffer from a lack of food security, with 40% of those at a severe level. Indigenous populations may be more vulnerable to food insecurity, with 30% of Indigenous adults reporting being worried about going without food.

There are two time frames that are factors in how good nutrition impacts on educational outcomes.

637 Extract from 'National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities,' Council of Australian Governments, December 2009, available at <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/92> accessed 26 September 2012.

638 Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Food insecurity in Australia: What is it, who experiences it and how can child and family services support families experiencing it?*, 2011, Available at: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/ps/ps9.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

The first of these is the long term provision of sufficient nutrition to ensure health and growth, and the second is having sufficient good quality food on a day to enable a child to pay attention and focus in class.

The long term view

As Dr Rajan made clear when discussing the issue of ear infections, a basic level of nutrition is vital to ensure good health and the ability to fight off infections.

*Prevention is better than cure. WHO gives out the guidelines that you have to supplement vitamin C and vitamin A into the nutrition. Nutrition is key. We know that nutrition is a key factor for prevention of any kind of infection, not only ear infection. Even vitamin A is crucial. Again, WHO guidelines are that every child needs to have this minimum amount of vitamin A. Just by doing that decreases mortality for infections.*⁶³⁹

Research conducted in the UK that looked at the extent of and the evidence for the relationship between nutrition and educational outcomes found a variety of important impacts. These included:

- *Nutritional deficiencies prior to school entry have the potential to impact upon cognitive outcomes in school-aged and adolescent children. For instance, clinical research has found an association between early life vitamin B12 deficiency and reduced scores on cognitive tests in adolescence.*
- *Children with nutritional deficiencies are particularly susceptible to the moment-to-moment metabolic changes that impact upon cognitive ability and performance of the brain.*⁶⁴⁰

As discussed by Dr Rajan, the UK research found that 'Poor nutrition may also result in decreased immunity and greater susceptibility to infectious disease. This in turn has the potential to lead to increased levels of absence from school through ill health.'⁶⁴¹

In addition, the research emphasised the extent to which nutrition impacts upon behaviour.

639 Dr Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, Fremantle Hospital and Health Services, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p8.

640 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, pi.

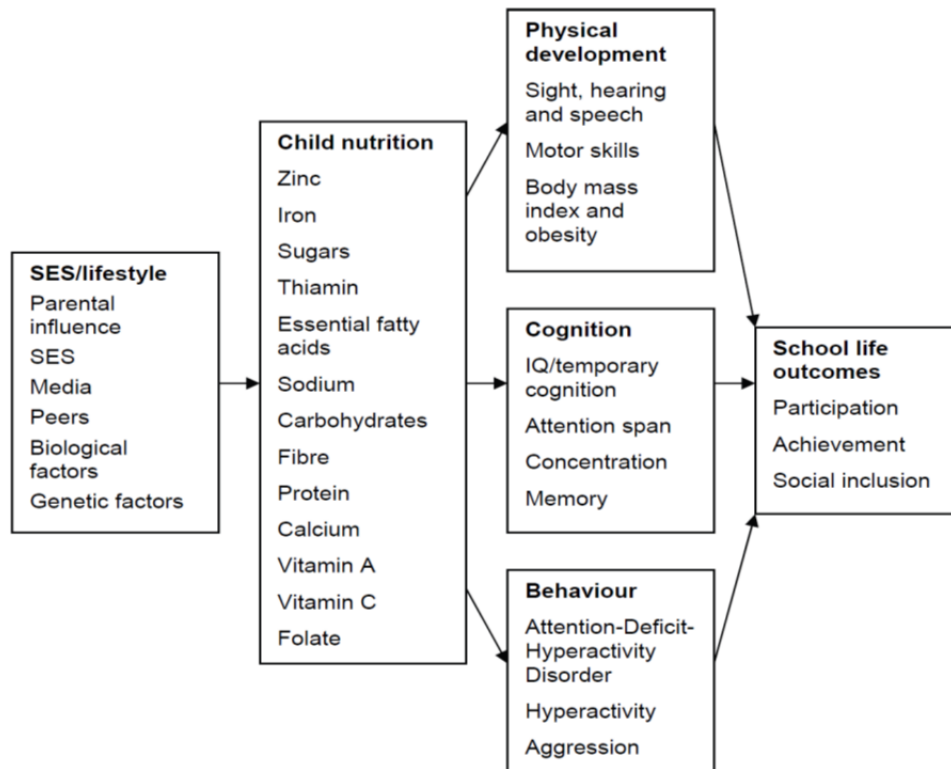
641 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, piv

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Nutrition, particularly in the short-term, is believed to impact upon individual behaviour. In its more extreme form this may manifest itself through the presence of developmental disorders, including attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia and autistic spectrum disorders.⁶⁴²

A conceptual model of the relationship between nutrition and school life outcomes shows both the range of important nutritional elements, and the various areas of impact.

Figure 11.3: Conceptual model of the relationship between nutrition and school life outcomes⁶⁴³



Diet has an impact on children's ability to think in the short- and long-term. A recent review of research on the effects of deficiencies in zinc, iodine, iron and folate on the cognitive development of school-aged children highlighted the significance of nutrition in the post-infancy period....deficiencies in iron and zinc have been associated with impairment of neuropsychologic function, retardation of growth and

642 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, piv

643 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, p6

*development, reduced immunity and increased vulnerability to infectious diseases.*⁶⁴⁴

In addition, different types of nutrient deficiencies have been found to influence behaviour. A lack of thiamine (Vitamin B) in the diet has been found to have a 'causal relationship to behavioural problems in adolescents, such as irritability, aggressive behaviour and personality changes.'⁶⁴⁵ Research has also found other nutritional factors that impact on behaviour.

*...research in the US using data from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) (1988-1994) found an association between a history of school suspension and low serum total cholesterol [the sum of all cholesterol in a person's blood]...this association remained after controlling for known confounders, such as cognitive and academic performance and nutritional status. As school suspensions are typically ordered in response to aggressive behaviours, these results support previous research with adults that demonstrated a link between low serum cholesterol and aggression.*⁶⁴⁶

There are a variety of factors at play that influence why children don't have sufficient or appropriate nutrition. UK research identifies some of these factors as being:

- Individual child food preferences. These may be due to biological and genetic predisposition, but are also influenced by social and family factors;
- Social and cultural factors, such as advertising, marketing; and practices related to food production and consumption, e.g. eating food in front of the television;
- Low income may create barriers to healthy eating; but 'additional socio-environmental factors, such as culture and lack of education reinforce the effects of deprivation.'⁶⁴⁷

644 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, p11.

645 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, p14.

646 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, p15.

647 Annik Sorhaindo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, piii.

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While all of these are important and relevant factors for children in Western Australia, those in remote communities of the state face the further challenge of the limited availability or the affordability of a range of fresh and healthy foods.

Food security in remote communities

The issue of food security in remote communities is one that has received considerable focus over the years. According to the 1995 Australian National Nutrition Survey and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework (data 2004–05) certain groups experience food insecurity at a higher rate than the general population. One significantly impacted group is that of the Aboriginal people with a rate of 24% of the population experiencing food insecurity.⁶⁴⁸

The availability of fresh and nutritious food in remote communities has been a problem for many years.

Identified barriers to good nutrition

A 2011 study identified the following factors leading to vulnerability to food insecurity.⁶⁴⁹

Remote communities:

- The food supply is limited to that available in a general store which may not always be open and is generally c. 26% more expensive than in cities such as Darwin;
- Low incomes with an average 35% of that limited income being spent on food;
- A tendency to use fast food outlets which are open despite lower nutritional value;
- Lack of a working stove – in one survey only 38% of indigenous households had facilities such as stoves, running water and adequate storage for food;
- Lack of transport to food outlets; and
- Mental ill health.

Urban communities:

- Low income;

648 Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Food insecurity in Australia: What is it, who experiences it and how can child and family services support families experiencing it?*, 2011, Available at: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/ps/ps9.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

649 Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Food insecurity in Australia: What is it, who experiences it and how can child and family services support families experiencing it?*, 2011, Available at: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/ps/ps9.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

- Overcrowding;
- Lack of storage and cooking facilities;
- Poorly organised public transport;
- Substance abuse leading to a misallocation of financial resources, including gambling; and
- Mental ill health.⁶⁵⁰

COAG response

In 2009, the Commonwealth Government and the governments of Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia agreed to a 'National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities'.⁶⁵¹ The Strategy was designed to contribute to the COAG 'Closing the Gap' initiative.

The Strategy acknowledged that

Food security in many remote Indigenous communities is currently poor – the supply of healthy food is often sporadic and of limited choice and low quality, and access, through adequate equipment and resources required for safe food storage and preparation, is limited. The cost of fresh and nutritious food in stores in remote Indigenous communities is consistently found to be significantly higher than that experienced in urban and regional Australia...In part, higher prices may be attributed to high store costs, particularly with regard to freight and storage, resulting from remoteness, small population size and geographic dispersion – factors common in many small remote locations. ...While high prices for fresh healthy food are not unusual outside major metropolitan centres in Australia, the impact on food security is greatly exacerbated in remote Indigenous communities, where household incomes are often very low and there are few or no alternatives to the local store.⁶⁵²

650 Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Food insecurity in Australia: What is it, who experiences it and how can child and family services support families experiencing it?*, 2011, Available at: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/pubs/sheets/ps/ps9.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

651 'National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities,' Council of Australian Governments, December 2009, available at <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/92> accessed 26 September 2012.

652 'National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities,' Council of Australian Governments, December 2009, available at <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/92> accessed 26 September 2012, p3.

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The Strategy emphasised the extent to which access is an issue in remote communities. 'For instance, a 2004 survey of remote Western Australian communities found that respondents in 17% of communities did not have regular access to fruit and vegetables and that 84% of communities had to travel an average of 101 kilometres to access fruit and vegetables.'⁶⁵³

The Strategy identified five action areas to address food security in remote communities:

- National standards for stores and 'take-aways' in remote communities in the areas of retail management, financial management, governance, infrastructure, food and nutrition policy and promotion and food preparation and safety;
- A quality improvement scheme to support implementation of the standards;
- Improved governance and accountability of remote community stores through increased incorporation under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*;
- A National Healthy Eating Plan for remote Indigenous communities;
- A national workforce plan to improve food security in remote Indigenous communities.⁶⁵⁴

A variety of activities have been undertaken under the strategy, and the Committee considers that the development of the National Healthy Eating Plan is a step forward. The Committee understands that this is still in draft form and waiting to be considered by COAG.⁶⁵⁵

This area of need has seen a considerable non-government response, and the HealthinfoNet website maintained by the Edith Cowan University provides a listing of the many projects that are taking place.⁶⁵⁶

653 'National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities,' Council of Australian Governments, December 2009, available at <http://www.coag.gov.au/node/92> accessed 26 September 2012, p4.

654 Australian Government, Budget 2010-11, *The Building Blocks – Action to Close the Gap: Closing the Gap: Health*, 2010-11. Available at: www.budget.gov.au/2010-11/content/ministerial_statements/indigenous/html/ms_indigenous-04.htm, Accessed on 26 September 2012.

655 Whole of Government response to Report 4 of the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities, tabled 24 September 2010, available at http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=indig_ctt_e/index.htm, accessed 26 September 2012, p2.

656 Edith Cowan University, *Australian Indigenous HealthinfoNet*, at: <http://www.healthinfo.net.ecu.edu.au/>. Accessed on 26 September 2012.

One project of particular interest to the Committee is the EON Foundation Inc (EON) Thriving Communities Program, run by the EON Foundation. The EON Foundation is a charitable foundation that:

*Provides assistance to indigenous communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia...to help improve the opportunities for indigenous people, particularly children, by working with them to initiate and support grassroots health, education, training and employment programs.*⁶⁵⁷

The EON runs the EON Thriving Communities Program in partnership with eight communities in remote Western Australia: Djarindjin, Lombadina, Beagle Bay, One Arm Point, Looma, Noonkandbah, Kadjina, Wankatjungka, and Ngalapita. The Thriving Communities Program has four components:

- EON Edible Gardens. These are established in schools and grow vegetables, fruit and 'bushtucker'.
- EON Healthy Eating. This component involves regular visits from an EON project manager for cooking and nutrition classes with school children and workshops with adults.
- EON Training and Education. EON project managers and horticulturalist provide informal training to enable community members to establish and maintain their gardens and healthy homes, and enable further formal training in conjunction with TAFE.
- EON Healthy Homes. Healthy lifestyle and disease prevention learning for the whole community centred on home maintenance and health environments.⁶⁵⁸

The Committee was impressed by the practical approach of this project and by its emphasis on healthy self-sufficiency.

Professor Harvey Coates addressed the issue of food security with the Committee, in a manner that brought home the immediacy, the simplicity and the importance of this issue.

When oranges cost \$2 each in some of these remote communities, parents cannot afford it. They cannot afford fruit. There are a number of general practitioners from the Central Desert, ...who are passionate about the fact that nutrition, particularly vitamin C, can make a difference in healing the eardrums, and they say that they can treat

657 EON Foundation Inc, *2011 Annual Report*, Perth, 2011, p1.

658 EON Foundation Inc, *2011 Annual Report*, Perth, 2011, p2-3.

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*the children with vitamin-C containing fruit, and the children's ears will often get better.*⁶⁵⁹

Professor Coates spoke of using a 'carrot' rather than a 'stick' approach to encouraging parents to ensure their child attends the universal child health checks. He suggested that fresh fruit could be the 'carrot'.

*I think it would be wonderful if they can make the Ord River second division a large area of supplying fruit to the rest of the Kimberley and that area. The reward would be fresh fruit. ...We go down to Bigyadanga and Balgo and Mulan and Billiluna, and we take a whole pile of apples, which are not as popular as oranges. The oranges are cut up and the children gravitate towards these.*⁶⁶⁰

The importance of a balanced diet with the requisite nutrients cannot be overstated in relation to improving health (and ear health) for indigenous children in remote areas. The Committee agrees with Professor Coates that the provision of fresh fruit in remote communities would be an excellent initiative.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the Treasurer make provision in the 2013-14 budget for 1 piece of fresh or dried fruit to be available to children attending schools in remote areas, where families and children are not able to purchase fruit on a daily basis.

There are a range of initiatives not mentioned here that seek to address the issue of nutrition and food security in remote communities. However, the Committee was not able to devote further time to the issue given the broad nature of the inquiry terms of reference. Several witnesses raised the issue of nutrition in remote communities with the Committee, hence the brief summary provided in this chapter.

The short term response – providing breakfast

School Breakfast Programs

A more immediate question facing teachers on a daily basis is whether a child is hungry at school, and how this influences their ability to learn on that day. From the evidence received by the Committee, this is a pressing and relevant problem in many schools right across the state, including in the metropolitan area.

It is well accepted that children who have breakfast prior to school have a better chance of benefiting from the educational activities that occur that day.

659 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 August 2012, p1.

660 Professor Harvey Coates, Paediatric Otolaryngologist, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, *Transcript of Evidence*, 15 August 2012, p3.

Research on the effects of breakfast on cognition shows that, particularly for younger children, skipping breakfast can have adverse effects on both general energy-levels and cognition of school children...three experiments testing the effect on memory and mood found that consuming breakfast resulted in better scores on three different types of memory tests.⁶⁶¹

Many schools in Western Australia run breakfast and/or lunch programs in order to address the issue of nutrition for their students. These programs are run on a school by school basis, usually on the basis of an identified need amongst that school's student population.

Many of the breakfast programs run throughout the state are run in conjunction with the charity organisation 'Foodbank WA'. Some are run by volunteers, others by regular school staff such as the Principal and teachers, and some by auxiliary school staff. The aims of these programs are frequently varied, with the school breakfast programs often cited as important factors in a school's arsenal of tools to encourage attendance. The attendance related nature and impact of these programs has already been discussed earlier in this report. This section of the report will examine the benefits of these nutrition programs from the other perspectives.

Foodbank WA is 'a non-denominational, charitable organisation which sources donated and surplus food from the food and grocery industry to distribute to welfare and community agencies that provide food assistance to people in need.'⁶⁶² The School Breakfast Program (SBP) commenced in 2001 with 17 schools, and has since grown to over 385 schools across the state being involved. These include metropolitan schools, schools in Kalumburu, Kununurra, Esperance, Albany, and remote schools along the South Australia/Northern Territory border.⁶⁶³ 'The Program directly reaches over 14,000 children, serving over 43,000 breakfasts and 18,000 'emergency' meals per week.'⁶⁶⁴ 'Emergency' meals are often the provision of lunch for children who would not otherwise have access to a lunch.

Many of the schools in the program are in low socio-economic areas of Western Australia, and many are in remote and regional areas of the state. The map below

661 Annik Sorhaingo, Leon Feinstein, 'What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?', Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report No. 18, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, London, June 2006, p13.

662 Foodbank WA, *About Us*. Available at: <http://www.foodbank.com.au/default.asp?id=1,72,,62>. Accessed on 2 August 2012.

663 Foodbank WA, *About Us*. Available at: <http://www.healthyfoodforall.com.au/school-breakfast-program/>. Accessed on 2 August 2012.

664 Foodbank WA, *About Us*. Available at: <http://www.healthyfoodforall.com.au/school-breakfast-program/>. Accessed on 2 August 2012.

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shows some of the locations around the state that are involved with the School Breakfast Program.

Figure 11.4: School Breakfast Program Map⁶⁶⁵



An evaluation study on the Foodbank School Breakfast Program (SBP) conducted in 2010 reported that while there was no quantitative data on the number of students who would have attended school without breakfast in the absence of the Foodbank program, there was some data provided by a national study conducted by MBF in 2009. That study of 1,210 Australians indicated that:

*A disturbing number of children skip breakfast claiming there is no time, they are too tired, or can't be bothered having a meal before going to school...Queensland and Western Australia had the worst record for skipping breakfast.*⁶⁶⁶

665 Foodbank WA, *Healthy Food for All, School Breakfast Program is helping throughout the Western Australian Region*. Available at: <http://www.healthyfoodforall.com.au/school-breakfast-program/map/>. Accessed on 2 August 2012.

666 MBF Healthwatch survey, 2009 conducted by TNS Healthcare, quoted in *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p14.

The MBF research found that '42% of adults reported their child aged 6-18 skipped breakfast at least once a week and on average, breakfast is skipped an average of 1.5 times in a school week in Western Australia compared to the National average of 1.2.'⁶⁶⁷

It is worth noting that the above research does not include children who would like to have breakfast before attending school, but who are unable to due to a lack of food in the house.

Children targeted by school breakfast programs

Research for the Foodbank SBP suggests that the breakfast programs reach children with a range of nutritional needs:

- Those who are *frequently* food insecure (where breakfast is rarely provided),
- Those who are *infrequently* food insecure (where food is accessible 'most' of the time, but there is occasionally some financial hardship experienced in the home),
- Those with low food motivation or unwillingness to trial new foods,
- Those consuming unhealthy breakfasts (either provided at home, or consumed via the school's canteen),
- Children who would otherwise prepare breakfast independently (because of family members having separate morning schedules).⁶⁶⁸

Benefits of school breakfast programs

There are a variety of benefits that are found to arise from the breakfast programs. Simple access to food for breakfast is the most obvious, with 36.6% of the children surveyed for the SBP evaluation in 2010 citing food access as the reason why they like attending the breakfast program.⁶⁶⁹

In addition, breakfast programs are thought to contribute to the following positive outcomes:

1. Student engagement: Previous research on the SBP found that the provision of food to children was perceived to improve student engagement with school and the classroom. '93.4% report an improvement in student concentration levels, 91.7%

667 MBF Healthwatch survey, 2009 conducted by TNS Healthcare, quoted in *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p14.

668 *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p14.

669 *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p14.

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report an improvement in engagement in classroom activities.⁶⁷⁰ Feedback from teachers and Principals reflects a widespread perception that children who received a good breakfast are better able to focus in class. While it is difficult to measure the exact impact, there has been international research to support this perception:

There is a supportive body of evidence within international literature that reviews experimental designed evaluations of [school breakfast programs]. This literature suggests that cognitive performance of under-nourished children is consistently benefited by the consumption of breakfast...Taras (2005) summarises much of the literature and acknowledges that the results vary considerably, but concludes that the most notable significant impacts occur among populations who are severely undernourished. Overall, the conclusion research within this article is that there is an apparent short-term positive impact of breakfast on cognition skills.⁶⁷¹

2. Behaviour management: Previous research for the Foodbank SBP found that

Nine in ten (89.7%) Principals/Coordinators...reported a slight or substantial improvement in the behaviour of students as a result of SBP.⁶⁷²

A case study approach taken in the 2010 evaluation found that all 4 case study schools perceived an improvement in the behaviour of students as a result of the breakfast program. Significantly, at one school, data analysed by the Principal showed that:

Behaviour referrals are highest on Tuesdays and Thursdays – these are the only two days during the school week that the SBP is not delivered. The Principal did not feel there were any other significant factors that would affect the number of behaviour referrals with the exception of fewer children attending school on a Friday.⁶⁷³

This school (case study 4 from the evaluation study) was a regional district high school, catering for kindergarten to year 10. The breakfast program ran on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the time of the evaluation. However, there were plans in place to extend the program to Tuesdays and Thursdays, based on the Principal's analysis set out below.

670 Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p14.

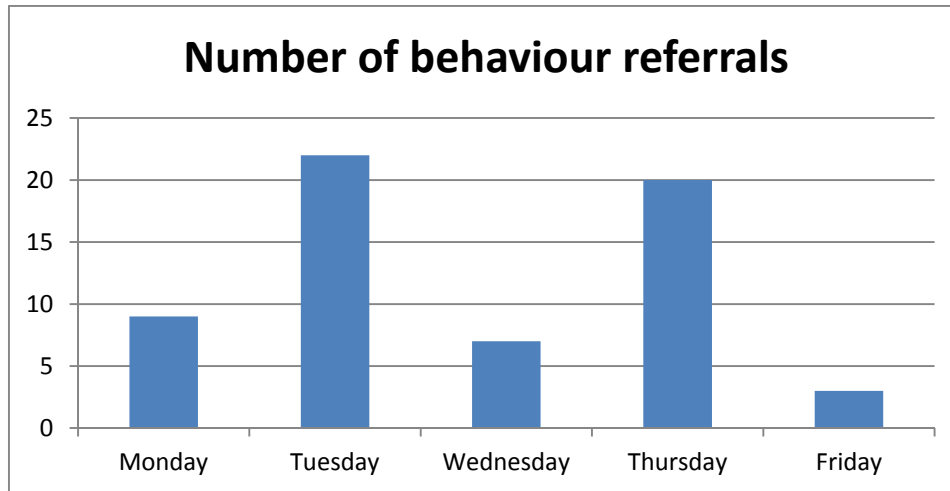
671 Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p15.

672 Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p16.

673 Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p17.

Figure 11.5: Behaviour Referrals by School Day (from Case Study 4)⁶⁷⁴

Source: School Daily Behaviour Referrals to the Deputy Principal, data Jan-Aug 2010



Note that the SBP is provided on Monday, Wednesday and Friday in this school. The only other factor that the Principal felt was relevant was that fewer students in total attended the school on a Friday, reflected in the smaller numbers on a Friday. The leadership team at this school (both the Principal and Deputy Principal) thought that:

*A key root cause of behavioural issues was often a lack of food. Children branded as 'troublemakers' had very often not eaten breakfast or lunch and it was felt that until these basic needs were met it was not possible to tackle the remaining behaviour issues.*⁶⁷⁵

It is a simple yet powerful point that children who are hungry are unlikely to be able to behave appropriately in the classroom, let alone engage with the educational material before them.

3. Academic outcomes: A related point to that made above is the extent to which inadequate nutrition impacts on a child's educational capabilities. While there are a variety of factors that impact on a child's educational outcomes, adequate nutrition is clearly a contributing factor. As one teacher put it, 'if you're hungry, you're not really interested in Captain Cook or your times tables.'⁶⁷⁶ Research 'which reports on academic indicators (such as conceptual thinking, numerical reasoning etc.) pre and post consumption of breakfast... [finds] that there is a plausible link, although not scientifically verified, that [school breakfast programs] *protect* children against the

⁶⁷⁴ Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p17.

⁶⁷⁵ Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p94.

⁶⁷⁶ Quoted in Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p21.

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cumulative impact that the consistent absence of breakfast consumption would have on learning.⁶⁷⁷

A variety of other benefits were found to eventuate from the school breakfast programs. However, these were associated with the social/education side of the program, rather than the actual nutrition provided. For this reason, they will not be discussed at length here, but the additional benefits included: emotional benefits for the children involved; child and community safety; forming of habitual consumption patterns and behaviours; health and hygiene education; learning responsibility and developing social and life skills. School breakfast programs also have benefits for parents, volunteers and teachers involved.⁶⁷⁸

Some concerns with the school breakfast programs

While the importance of children being adequately fed before they attend school cannot be denied, there are some who feel that the provision of food to children is outside the main focus of a school, and that to provide such services may be 'letting parents off the hook' of their responsibilities, or encouraging 'dependency'. In addition, schools are already pressed to manage all of the service delivery required of them in relation to education – to take on the provision of food to students is an additional burden some feel is outside the school's role and capabilities.

The issue of creating a mentality of dependence through the provision of food to children at school was one that was raised in the evaluation conducted for Foodbank of the school breakfast program. In theory, it could be argued that schools providing food to children are making it possible for parents to abrogate their responsibility by stepping into the breach, and are creating a mentality that 'someone else' will provide for the children. However, the evaluation found that even if this were a risk of the program, it is far outweighed by the benefits of the program, as outlined above.⁶⁷⁹

This is the rationale adopted by Mr Noel Pearson of the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy where such programs might be seen to run counter to the ethos of the organisation.

One suggested mechanism to counter this potential risk is to encourage families to contribute to the costs of breakfast, or to actively charge for the provision of breakfast. Several schools in the evaluation were reported to have a 'donation tin', into which children could contribute money if they were able. The Committee received a briefing

677 *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p21.

678 *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010.

679 *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p4.

at the Cape York Institute in the course of this Inquiry, which included a description of their breakfast programs. In accordance with the welfare reform project in Cape York, the breakfast programs run there, charge for the provision of breakfast.⁶⁸⁰

It is important to note that mechanisms to guard against the development of a mentality of dependence should be carefully calibrated by schools to ensure that children are not the losers, due to an ideological concern around welfare dependency.

The second identified concern with school breakfast programs is the extent to which they place an additional burden upon school staff without additional resourcing. As government policy moves closer to a model of a school being a one-stop shop for wrap-around family services, this issue rises to the fore. For some schools, the breakfast program is run entirely by volunteers, thereby avoiding any extra load for school staff. However, for others, such as Rosemount Primary School in Girrawheen, school staff take on roles ranging from coordination, advocacy, organisation, and the delivery of breakfast to the students.

The final challenge that faces school breakfast programs is the issue of stigma, or concerns by either the child or the family that they will be 'shamed' by being seen to attend. This issue was canvassed in an article for [The Australian](#), which reported on advances being made at Southwell Primary in Perth.

*...teachers looked at lateness and attendance. They noticed that few indigenous children were coming to the free morning breakfast because they were ashamed to let everyone know they had no food at home. So in late 2009, the school launched the "fitness and fuel" program where it became compulsory for all students to exercise and have sandwiches and fruit before school. It took away the shame factor. "Virtually overnight," [the Principal] said, attendance shot up. Overall attendance went from about 85% to the low 90s and indigenous attendance rose nearly 20 %, which meant a whole extra day of school a week for some children.*⁶⁸¹

The stigma or shame of attending the breakfast program was an issue for one of the case study schools in the Foodbank evaluation. The remote school that participated in the case study evaluation was found to have struggled with the issue of stigma.

When the breakfast programme was first introduced it was aimed solely at children who were not provided with breakfast at home. However, it was felt that this increased the level of social stigma and created a "shame factor" around eating the school breakfast. This

680 Briefing, Cape York Institute, Cairns, 4 July 2012.

681 Perpitch, N., 'Teachers take control to quell class violence', *The Australian*, 5 July 2012, p7.

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*stigma created the barrier that many children would not eat the breakfast, even if they were hungry or had not eaten breakfast. The solution to this was to make SBP accessible to the entire school rather than targeted selection of individual students.*⁶⁸²

The issue of social stigma around the breakfast programs is obviously one that needs to be carefully managed to ensure that the way the program is developed and implemented does not create an unintended barrier. The examples cited suggest that one way to manage this is to make the program available to all students across the school, thereby avoiding the perception of targeting particular students in need.

Finding 51

The provision of breakfast and emergency meals programs in schools in many areas of the state has increased, as the consequential benefits of improved student behaviour, attendance and engagement have become recognised. These programs lead to improved nutrition and enhanced educational outcomes.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Education that money is allocated in the 2013-14 budget to schools that choose to run breakfast and emergency meals programs in lower socio economic areas of the state. Such funding would cover a predetermined percentage of expenditure, based on need, incurred by a qualifying school.

682 *Foodbank WA – School Breakfast Program Research, Final Report*, prepared by TNS Social Research, November 2010, p79.

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Health challenge to good educational outcomes – Mental health

Mental health is an integral part of health; indeed, there is no health without mental health.⁶⁸³

The importance of the mental health of children

There is a growing body of evidence that associates a comprehensive and systematic approach to mental health and wellbeing in educational settings to improved behaviour, higher academic achievement and better health outcomes.⁶⁸⁴

It has long been suggested that children and adolescents experience a high rate of mental health problems. The term 'mental illness' is generally used when someone experiences significant changes in their thinking, feelings or behaviour. Such changes need to be bad enough to affect how the person functions or to cause distress to them or to other people.⁶⁸⁵

Mental health is the opposite – it means mental wellbeing, good mental functioning or having no particular problems in thinking, feelings or behaviour.

The challenge facing education and health professionals is:

*How to avoid medicalising normal behaviour; things that they are looking for are autism spectrum disorder which is a broad base multi area problem, behavioural sensory and communication issues, depression and anxiety.*⁶⁸⁶

Mental health is an essential part of children's overall health. It has a complex interactive relationship with their physical health and their ability to succeed in school,

683 World Health Organisation, *Mental health: strengthening our response*. Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>. Accessed on 26 September 2012.

684 'Response Ability' Department of Health and Ageing, *Why Promote Wellbeing?*, Available at: <http://www.responseability.org/site/index.cfm?>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

685 ISPS UK, *What is mental illness and what is mental health?*, Available at: <http://ispsuk.org/?p=312>. Accessed on 26 September 2012.

686 AMA federal president Steve Hambleton, 10 June 2012. Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-06-10/>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

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at work and in society; 'Both physical and mental health affect how we think, feel and act on the inside and outside.'⁶⁸⁷

Identifying mental disorders in children can be tricky for health care providers. Children differ from adults in that they experience many physical, mental, and emotional changes as they progress through their natural growth and development. They learn how to cope, adapt, and relate to others and the world around them.⁶⁸⁸

However, there are many different types of mental disorders that can affect children and adolescents, including:

*Anxiety disorders, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Disruptive behaviour disorders, Pervasive development disorders, Eating disorders, Elimination disorders such as bed-wetting, Learning and communication disorders, Affective (mood) disorders [including depression], Schizophrenia, Tic disorders.*⁶⁸⁹

The Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People conducted an *Inquiry into the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Western Australia*, which reported in April 2011.⁶⁹⁰ The inquiry carried out an in-depth examination of the mental health needs of children and young people in Western Australia and the services available to meet those needs. It is not the intention of this report to cover the same ground as the Commissioner, but it is worth examining some of the evidence that this Committee received in relation to the impact that early mental health issues can have on a child's ability to engage with education.

As Dr Goossens explained to the Committee

...there is a much better understanding now between the links between emotional and mental health, and educational outcomes...people thought that cognitive development was entirely separate from emotional development and mental health outcomes related to that...increasingly now there is an awareness...that a lot of the brain development that is occurring in the first few years of life, dating back to the point of conception, is very responsive to environment, and that the two are inextricably linked, and that anything that affects

687 American Psychological association, *Children's Mental Health*, Available at: <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/children-mental-health.aspx>. Accessed on 26 September 2012.

688 WebMed, *Mental Illness in Children*, Available at: <http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-illness-children>. Accessed on 26 September 2012.

689 WebMed, *Mental Illness in Children*, Available at: <http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-illness-children>. Accessed on 26 September 2012.

690 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011.

*emotional health is also going to affect cognitive development and the capacity to be available to be educated...*⁶⁹¹

The importance of addressing the issue of mental health problems during childhood was emphasised by a policy brief from the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. The brief outlined that mental health problems in early childhood include social, emotional and behavioural concerns. These result in two categories of problems: behavioural and emotional problems.

*Behavioural (externalising) problems include aggression, hyperactivity and oppositional defiance disorder, and affect around 14 % of Australian children and up to 20 % at sub-clinical levels. Emotional (internalising) problems affect up to 15 % of Australian children; these include anxiety, fears and phobias in younger children, and depression and anxiety in school-age children.*⁶⁹²

How big is the issue?

International surveys have reflected a high incidence of mental health issues in children and adolescents. Until 2000 no substantial research had been carried out in Australia that attempted to determine the size of the issue. The *Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being* is the first survey that investigated the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents at a national level in Australia.⁶⁹³

The number of children affected by these problems is high. The 'National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being' from 2000 found that one in every seven children aged from 4-17 years are affected by behavioural or emotional problems.⁶⁹⁴ Of further concern is research that has found that for approximately half of these children their mental health problems will persist.⁶⁹⁵

The numbers of children affected are illustrated in the table below:

691 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p1.

692 Centre for Community Child Health, *Policy Brief No 24: Children's mental health*, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Melbourne, April 2012, p1.

693 Mental Health and Special Programs Branch Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, *Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being*, report prepared by Sawyer et al, Canberra, 2000, p1.

694 Centre for Community Child Health, *Policy Brief No 24: Children's mental health*, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Melbourne, April 2012, p1.

695 Centre for Community Child Health, *Policy Brief No 24: Children's mental health*, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Melbourne, April 2012, p2.

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Figure 12.1: Prevalence (%) of total problems, externalising problems and internalising problems⁶⁹⁶

	Total Problems		Externalising problems		Internalising problems	
	%	Population estimate	%	Population estimate	%	Population estimate
All children	14.1	521,886	12.9	475,478	12.8	473,989
Males						
4-12 yo	15.0	181,749	13.6	164,992	15.0	182,032
13-17 yo	13.4	90,678	11.7	78,965	13.6	92,244
Females						
4-12 yo	14.4	166,817	12.2	141,121	11.3	130,309
13-17 yo	12.8	82,221	14.1	90,726	10.7	68,788

The definition of Internalising Problems includes:

- inhibited or over-controlled behaviour (e.g., anxiety or depression); and

The definition of Externalising Problems includes:

- antisocial or under-controlled behaviour, (e.g., delinquency or aggression).

While there is research that suggests the problem has increased in some overseas localities, the Committee has not been able to source any authoritative Australian study that has been undertaken since the landmark research of 2000 referred to above, that examines the prevalence of mental illness in children and adolescents in this country.

Mental illness is not uniform across population groups because of the social determinants of health. As an example, the issues underlying mental illness 'are magnified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (who represent 36% of the indigenous population) but suffer from increased socioeconomic, cultural and geographic disadvantage, with higher rates of mental illness.'⁶⁹⁷

Finding 52

Australian research has established that 14% of children and adolescents score in the clinical range for mental health problems; that is approximately one in seven children.

696 Mental Health and Special Programs Branch Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, *Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Well-Being*, report prepared by Sawyer et al, Canberra, 2000, p10.

697 The Children's Mental Health Coalition, *Our children, our future*, 2010. Available at: <http://www.aaimhi.org/inewsfiles/Our%20children%20our%20future%20final.pdf>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

Maternal mental health and that of the child

Experiences pre-natally and in the early childhood years will affect the long-term mental health, relationships and learning of a child.

Pre-natal mental health

The earliest point in a child's life where mental health becomes a concern is in the pre-natal period. Maternal mental health during the pregnancy has been shown to have an important impact on the child's later mental health.

Research has found 'that children whose mothers are stressed during pregnancy are at higher risk of developing behavioural and emotional problems.'⁶⁹⁸

*It is now known that some predictors of mental health for a child are present even before birth, with the mother's health and experiences during pregnancy recognised as critical factors in mental health outcomes for young children.*⁶⁹⁹

Post-natal depression

Once the child is born, post-natal depression in the mother becomes an issue for the child.

*We know, with mothers who have had significant depression in the peri-natal period, that their children go to have...a great deal more difficulties with attention and concentration, and they have different performances in their early education from children who do not.*⁷⁰⁰

Community child health nurses play a crucial role in screening new mothers for depression and other mental health issues as part of their regular contacts with the new baby and the wider family. Child health nurses utilise the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) in the first 6 months of contact with the family. As the CCYP's report found:

This is the only universal screening for maternal mental health issues and, with an estimated 16% of Australian mothers affected by

698 Submission No. 5 from Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 7 December 2011, p7.

699 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011, p30.

700 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p4.

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*postnatal depression, it is a critical tool for early intervention for both the mother and the child.*⁷⁰¹

Evidence submitted to the CCYP Inquiry emphasised the extent to which the mother's mental state impacts upon the child:

*Early identification of the risk for or presence of perinatal mental health issues in the mother (or father) provides opportunities to intervene in the progression of a decline in the parent's mental state thereby potentially preventing mental health and wellbeing concerns in the infant. ...Infants show very subtle but predictable signs of being affected by the mental health and wellbeing deficits in their caregivers...It could be said that infants are often the 'barometers' of how well a mother is doing psychologically.*⁷⁰²

Dr Caroline Goossens, a child psychiatrist, expanded on the impact of maternal depression on a child's development:

if a mother has severe depression, we are looking at a child who might have a number of different points of adversity. We have, perhaps a genetic loading for depression later, so we have to consider that; we have to have a look at if a mum has significant depression yet she remains the primary caregiver, we know that mothers with significant depression interact with their infants in a different way...they have less positive emotions expressed and they experience the baby in a more negative way, they do not have many gaze-to-gaze experiences, and they have a decreased capacity to regulate their infants. This is all very much an involuntary thing and reflects their difficulties at the time.

*If a baby is in an experience where they have a lot of other care-giving experiences, obviously the effect of that on their own emotional development will be reduced. But if this mum is their sole primary caregiver, it obviously has a far bigger effect and would compound their, perhaps, natural biological predisposition, maybe, later to depression because they have had those early care-giving experiences.*⁷⁰³

Maternal mental health has a significant impact upon the mental health of the child.

701 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011, p101.

702 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011, p101.

703 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p4.

Finding 53

Mothers with significant depression interact with their infants in a different way. They have less positive emotions expressed and they experience the baby in a more negative way.

The attachment relationship between care-giver and infant

One of the areas where maternal depression can have a significant impact is that of attachment, the biological instinct which drives infants to seek closeness with their primary caregiver.

Babies and young children thrive when they are cared for by adults that are 'crazy about them'.⁷⁰⁴

A child's relationship with their primary caregiver, and the attachment they have to that person, influences a child's long term future development.

The nature of the attachment relationship between a child and the primary caregiver can fall within one of four categories:

- secure;
- avoidant;
- ambivalent; and
- disorganised.⁷⁰⁵

Secure attachment is characterised as a bond with a caregiver who is affectionate, safe, responsive and predictable. Secure attachment positively influences a child's development and is associated with:

- development of healthy relationships with other people;
- ability to exhibit social and emotional regulation;
- better educational outcomes; and
- a greater degree of resiliency and optimism.⁷⁰⁶

Dr Goossens described secure attachment as:

704 Bronfenbrenner, U. (1976). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

705 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p8-9.

706 Perry, B., 'Childhood experience and the expression of genetic potential', *Brain and Mind*, vol 3, 2002, p95.

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*...where you have a fairly robust relationship with your parent; where the parent usually is enjoying parenting; they have a capacity to tolerate both positive and negative emotions in their child; they are physically affectionate; and they can think about what they do as a parent.*⁷⁰⁷

Dr Goossens described some of the misconceptions of what secure attachment is:

*I think unfortunately attachment in a way has been associated with this idea that you always have to be nurturing and warm with your child, without this sense that you have to take charge. All the modern attachment research supports that it is about the capacity take charge wherever necessary, and that obviously the warmth and support is very important, but it does not undermine you parental capacity to be the one in charge; and children need to know that it is you as a parent who is in charge, not them.*⁷⁰⁸

By contrast, disorganised attachment, where children have no 'coherent strategy and relationship to fall back on', can have long term impacts on that child's development, and their ability to engage with education:

*We know that children who have a disorganised attachment, for example, really struggle in the classroom. They have a whole lot of problems; they struggle with, really, attention and concentration, and their ability to settle themselves enough emotionally to be available for learning. They have struggles with their peers and they have far more conflictual relationships, often. They are far more internally preoccupied frequently by what is going on in their own minds...so that really impacts on their capacity.*⁷⁰⁹

Attachment is only one factor that influences an infant's overall development. However, starting life with attachment problems is a disadvantage and may result in lasting developmental problems, including social and emotional dysfunction.⁷¹⁰

707 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p4.

708 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p13.

709 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p4.

710 Perry, B., 'Childhood experience and the expression of genetic potential', *Brain and Mind*, vol 3, 2002, p95.

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Children who have a disorganised attachment struggle in the classroom. They struggle with attention and concentration, and their ability to settle themselves emotionally to be available for learning. They have struggles with their peers and they have more conflictual relationships.

Mental health and environmental factors**Exposure to trauma as a child**

Abuse and neglect can disrupt attachment and stem the development of important relational capacities. Nearly 35 % of children and youth who are reported for maltreatment demonstrate significant deficits in social skills.⁷¹¹

American studies have shown that among 12- to 17-year-old youth, 39% reported witnessing violence, 17% reported physical assault, and 8% reported a lifetime prevalence of sexual assault.⁷¹²

Such exposure to trauma as a child can have a significant impact on brain development, with subsequent impacts on that child's mental health. As Dr Goossens explained, the experience of trauma can alter the shape of the brain as it develops.

What we see in situations of deprivation and significant trauma is a lot of impact on brain development. It is not 100 %, but you get high rates of changes depending upon the level of deprivation and abuse. But what we see is that this part of the brain that is developing...this orbitofrontal cortex, is not nearly as well developed, and that in a situation of difficulty these children do not have the same cognitive control that we would see in other children over a situation of adversity, because of the deficits in their environment.⁷¹³

Of particular poignancy is the finding that the child does not have to be the subject of abuse themselves to be significantly damaged by it. Witnessing the abuse of their primary caregiver has a profound impact on children.

711 Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, *Social Media message*, May 2012, Available at: http://www.samhsa.gov/children/social_media_may2012.asp. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

712 Kilpatrick DG, Acierno R. (2003). Mental health needs of crime victims: Epidemiology and outcomes. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*.16(2),119–132. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1023/A:1022891005388/abstract> and Saunders BE. (2003). Understanding Children Exposed to Violence Toward an Integration of Overlapping Fields. National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center. *J Interpers Violence*. 18(4) 356-376. Retrieved from <http://jiv.sagepub.com/content/18/4/356.short> .

713 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p1.

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For children who are exposed to one-off traumas, there is still an impact. But what we really are concerned about is repeated exposure to trauma and to relational trauma. It has a huge impact on the developing brain. ...when you look at an infant and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder... The thing that is most likely to precipitate a post-traumatic stress disorder is not threat to themselves but threat to their primary caregiver. So that does really highlight the negative impact of domestic violence, because often it is about witnessing violence to the primary caregiver. We are so hard wired to link into that primary caregiver and to be terribly concerned about their wellbeing, and that is why it is so traumatising.⁷¹⁴

This highlights how damaging situations of domestic violence are, not only for the adult victim of the violence, but for the children in the family.

Finding 55

There is a wide body of evidence that demonstrates the linkage between trauma experienced as a child, brain development and subsequent mental health.

Children with parents with mental health problems

It is estimated that 'nearly a quarter of children living in Australian households have at least one parent with a mental illness.'⁷¹⁵ The number of children affected is thought to be within the vicinity of one million.⁷¹⁶ The impact of this is far reaching. 'It is predicted that 25 – 50% of children of a parent with a mental illness will experience a psychological disorder compared to 10-20% of children with a parent without a mental illness.'⁷¹⁷

The challenges that face these children are significant.

(i) There is considerable evidence that parents with mental health issues are over-represented among maltreating families.⁷¹⁸

(ii) Young children of mentally ill parents are at increased risk of medical problems, including:

714 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p12.

715 Western Australian Association for Mental Health, *Young Carer Project*, Department for Communities – Office for Youth, Perth, December 2010, p4.

716 Western Australian Association for Mental Health, *Young Carer Project*, Department for Communities – Office for Youth, Perth, December 2010, p6.

717 Western Australian Association for Mental Health, *Young Carer Project*, Department for Communities – Office for Youth, Perth, December 2010, p4.

718 Sheppard, M. (1997). Double jeopardy: the link between child abuse and maternal depression in child and family social work, *Child & Family Social Work*, 2, 2, 91-107.

- Injuries, convulsive disorders and increased frequency of hospitalisation.
- Behavioural, developmental and emotional problems.
- Greater risk of developing mental disorders later in life.

Research suggests that youth who had a mother with a mental illness were four times more likely to commit serious criminal behaviours.⁷¹⁹

Additionally the Young Carers Project reported that:

*Children and young people of parents with a mental illness can be more vulnerable to: poverty, isolation, fear of support services, separation anxiety, family disruption, marital conflict, disruption to education and school difficulties, lack of structure in the home, general developmental delay, negative unresolved emotions, increased child protection and illness-related issues.*⁷²⁰

Carer's Australia had similar findings that risks for young carers include:

*low levels of health and emotional well-being, impaired psychosocial development, limited friendships, low participation and attainment in school and employment, difficulties in making transition to independence and significant lack of opportunity and choices.*⁷²¹

The need for early intervention and support is obvious in these cases. Intervention for the child during childhood provides the opportunity to prevent later mental health problems, and to avoid significant damage to their schooling experience. As the Commissioner for Children and Young People found in her report, 'targeted mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention are crucial'. However, 'a significant barrier to the systematic provision of services and support is that children and young people of a parent with mental illness are not necessarily being identified.'⁷²²

719 NSW Department of Community Services, *Parental mental health and its impact on children*, 2008, Available at:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/researchnotes_parental_mentalhealth.pdf. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

720 Western Australian Association for Mental Health, *Young Carer Project*, Department for Communities – Office for Youth, Perth, December 2010, p7.

721 Western Australian Association for Mental Health, *Young Carer Project*, Department for Communities – Office for Youth, Perth, December 2010, p7.

722 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011, p86.

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Finding 56

It is estimated that nearly a quarter of children living in Australian households have at least one parent with a mental illness. The number of children affected is thought to be within the vicinity of one million.

It is thought that 25–50% of children of a parent with a mental illness will experience a psychological disorder compared to 10-20% of children with a parent without a mental illness.

In relation to this issue, the Commissioner for Children and Young People made the following recommendation:

*Recommendation 22: To meet the mental health needs of children and young people of parents with a mental illness, the Mental Health Commission in partnership with relevant agencies identify and support a strategic and coordinated approach to services and programs.*⁷²³

Recommendation 24

The Committee supports Recommendation 22 of the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia, which states that:

To meet the mental health needs of children and young people of parents with a mental illness, the Mental Health Commission in partnership with relevant agencies identify and support a strategic and coordinated approach to services and programs.

Successful programs for children’s mental health

Many mental health conditions that start in childhood continue into youth and adulthood if they are not treated, including:

- Autism and attachment disorders, onset 0-3 years;
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, typical onset 7-9 years;
- Conduct disorders, onset 7-14 years;
- Anxiety disorders, 7-14 years.⁷²⁴

723 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011, p87.

724 The Children’s Mental Health Coalition, *Our children, our future*, 2010. Available at: <http://www.aaimhi.org/inewsfiles/Our%20children%20our%20future%20final.pdf>. Accessed on 27 September 2012.

The Committee was briefed on two programs that have been found to have a significant positive impact on the mental health of children.

Some programs target the parents and as a result improve the child's mental health, while others such as Kidsmatter are directly targeted at the child.

The Committee does not suggest that the following summaries are in anyway an exhaustive or representative list of successful programs. There are, no doubt, many more programs that achieve significant improvements for children. The details of these two programs are included as examples of what is can be done when policy meets practice.

Best Beginnings

Best Beginnings is a program run in partnership between the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Health. It is a long standing program that has been positively evaluated by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in 2004, 2006 and 2008.⁷²⁵ The program provides a home visiting service by Department for Child Protection case officers and community health nurses. 'It is targeted at very young, very vulnerable mothers, those who without intervention would be at serious risk of coming into the child protection system and at risk of losing their children.'⁷²⁶

The program is a voluntary home visiting service run over two years with families with specific risk factors that make their child vulnerable to poor attachment, developmental delay and poor life outcomes.⁷²⁷ The service is designed to commence either prior to birth or within the first 3 months of a child's life, and works with families until the baby is up to two years of age. Some areas have variations to the program to augment the home visits with group activities such as play groups and other socialisation activities.

The program targets parents with specific risk factors that include:

- suffering depression/anxiety;
- being under 20 years of age;
- experiencing financial stress;

725 Mr Terry Murphy, Director General, Department for Child Protection, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2011, p3.

726 Mr Terry Murphy, Director General, Department for Child Protection, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2011, p3.

727 Department for Child Protection, *Family Support (Responsible Parenting) Framework*, Perth, February 2012, p7, available at <http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Pages/PoliciesandFrameworks.aspx>. Accessed 10 August 2012.

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- being a single parent;
- experiencing domestic violence;
- low education level; and
- being socially isolated.⁷²⁸

The Director for Child Protection said:

It is 22 home visits, and they would go for an hour, an hour and a half – longer if needs be. A worker tends to be a social worker, but really, all sorts of people....They focus on mother-child attachment – literally how mum relates to and loves and is not put off by the baby, because remember, these young women are carrying a lot of issues.

They focus on very basic child health and wellbeing – really the basics of keeping the child healthy: washed, bathed, fed, sleeping and so on, and wellbeing, which you would term enrichment really, because these mums are at risk of leaving their babies alone too much for whatever reason, so really it is about continuous contact and a rich, stimulated environment.

Also, it has got to be about the parent, the mum, looking after herself, remembering the issues I mentioned: domestic violence, drug use, mental health, depression. So it is an intervention for the mum to be healthy and well, and very importantly and easy to underestimate, the social connectedness of the mother; so making sure that mum knows other healthy people in the community.⁷²⁹

As the Centre for Community Child Health found, good parenting is of significant importance for improving children's mental health.

Parenting style has been found to be the most important modifiable influence on young children's behaviour. For this reason, most programs that aim to prevent the development of poor childhood

728 Department for Child Protection, *Family Support (Responsible Parenting) Framework*, Perth, February 2012, p7, available at <http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Pages/PoliciesandFrameworks.aspx>. Accessed 10 August 2012.

729 Mr Terry Murphy, Director General, Department for Child Protection, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2011, p4.

*mental health emphasise the importance of optimising parenting styles.*⁷³⁰

The Committee understands that historically the program was only available in the metropolitan area and very few country areas. However, it has recently been rolled out to all country areas as a result of Royalties for Regions funding.⁷³¹

*I will just finish by saying it is one of those programs whenever I go to a district, people tell me we need to double. ...We are just in the process of rolling out to all country areas, but if you did take a very rough rule of thumb, we could have an additional staff person, which would give us an additional 30 cases per year in each of our 17 regions. So it is quite a big number of people; it is getting up to 500 additional clients, and that would certainly, I think, be a realistic expansion. That would cost just under \$2 million.*⁷³²

This program has been included in the compendium of best practice put together by the CCYP early in 2012, *Building Blocks: Best Practice Programs that Improve the Wellbeing of Children and Young People*.⁷³³

Best Beginnings is listed as a 'best practice' program in the health and safety domain. The evaluation field states that 'An evaluation using strong qualitative research found that the program significantly improved participants' wellbeing, child health outcomes, and family functioning.'⁷³⁴

Finding 57

Best Beginnings, a program run in partnership between the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Health, effectively addresses issues of parenting with families with specific risk factors. It has been positively evaluated on three occasions and is considered best practice.

730 Centre for Community Child Health, *Policy Brief No 24: Children's mental health*, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Melbourne, April 2012, p2.

731 Mr Terry Murphy, Director General, Department for Child Protection, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2011, p3.

732 Mr Terry Murphy, Director General, Department for Child Protection, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2011, p4.

733 Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Building Blocks: Best Practice Programs that Improve the Wellbeing of Children and Young People – Edition One*, Western Australia, February 2012. Available at <http://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/content/Publications.aspx> Accessed 10 August 2012.

734 Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Building Blocks: Best Practice Programs that Improve the Wellbeing of Children and Young People – Edition One*, Western Australia, February 2012, Available at <http://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/content/Publications.aspx> Accessed 10 August 2012. p16.

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Kidsmatter

Kidsmatter is a federally funded, national mental health initiative, which focuses on mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention in early childhood services. The program has been developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyond blue: the national depression* initiative, the Australian Psychological Society, and Principals Australia, and was supported by Australian Rotary Health Research Fund.⁷³⁵

The program has three streams:

- Kidsmatter Early Childhood (before school age);
- Kidsmatter Primary (primary schools); and
- Kidsmatter Transitions (assisting parents to facilitate transition to primary school).

Each section has four content components:

1. creating a sense of community within the early childhood service which promotes feelings of belonging, connectedness and inclusion for all children and families. This kind of environment within an early childhood service has been shown to have a positive effect on children's mental health.
2. development of children's social and emotional skills. Research shows that the development of social and emotional skills is fundamental to children's mental health, ability to learn, moral development and motivation to achieve. Children who develop social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, resolve conflict and feel positive about themselves and the world around them.
3. working with parents and carers to improve children's mental health and wellbeing.
4. early intervention for those with mental health issues.

The Kidsmatter program commenced with the primary school stream, which aimed to

- improve the mental health and well-being of primary school students;
- reduce mental health difficulties amongst students;
- achieve greater support for students experiencing mental health difficulties.

⁷³⁵ Slee PT, Lawson MJ, Russell A, Askill-Williams H, Dix KL, Owens L, Skrzypiec G, Spears B, *Kidsmatter Primary Evaluation Final Report: Executive Summary*, Centre for Analysis of Educational Futures, Flinders University of South Australia, 2009, p4.

The program was initially implemented as a pilot program in 100 schools during 2007-2008, which was subsequently evaluated by a research team at Flinders University.⁷³⁶ The evaluation found that the Kismatter trial over two years had the following positive impact in the schools in which it was implemented:

- There was evidence of change related to all four components of the Kismatter framework ;
- Kismatter was associated with statistically and practically significant improvements in students' measured mental health, in terms of both reduced mental health difficulties and increased mental health strengths;
- The impact of Kismatter was more apparent for students who were rated as having higher levels of mental health difficulties at the start of the trial;
- While there was similarity in the findings for school formally involved in Kismatter for one and two years there some measures showed stronger effects in the schools involved for two years.⁷³⁷

The evaluation found that there was a significant change in the number of children classified in the normal, borderline and abnormal ranges for mental health. The research found that the

*...reduction of students within the abnormal and borderline ranges was associated with a 5% increase in the proportion of students classified as being in the normal range. This represents a positive change for approximately 1 in 5 of the students who were originally in the abnormal and borderline ranges.*⁷³⁸

As the evaluation found, such 'whole-of-school' programs can have a significant effect.

The outcomes of the [Kismatter] trial are consistent with an emerging body of national and international literature that a 'whole of school' approach can be protective for students, promoting a positive shift in mental health for the whole school population, and helping to enhance

736 Slee PT, Lawson MJ, Russell A, Askill-Williams H, Dix KL, Owens L, Skrzypiec G, Spears B, *Kismatter Primary Evaluation Final Report: Executive Summary*, Centre for Analysis of Educational Futures, Flinders University of South Australia, 2009.

737 Slee PT, Lawson MJ, Russell A, Askill-Williams H, Dix KL, Owens L, Skrzypiec G, Spears B, *Kismatter Primary Evaluation Final Report: Executive Summary*, Centre for Analysis of Educational Futures, Flinders University of South Australia, 2009, p.4

738 Slee PT, Lawson MJ, Russell A, Askill-Williams H, Dix KL, Owens L, Skrzypiec G, Spears B, *Kismatter Primary Evaluation Final Report: Executive Summary*, Centre for Analysis of Educational Futures, Flinders University of South Australia, 2009, p8.

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*academic and social competencies through more positive interactions between all members of the school community.*⁷³⁹

Finding 58

The formal evaluation of Kismatter, a collaborative national initiative, found that it is associated with statistically and practically significant improvements in students' measured mental health, in terms of both reduced mental health difficulties and increased mental health strengths.

Initiatives such as Kismatter which can prevent, or reduce, the number of mental health issues for children, are vitally important.

Recommendation 25

Having regard to the significant numbers of children affected by mental health issues in the Western Australian school system, the Committee recommends that the Treasurer and the Minister for Health increase the funding in the 2013-14 budget to Best Beginnings and Kismatter to ensure that this most vulnerable section of the community is more widely assisted.

Lack of capacity of services for children with mental health issues

The Committee heard evidence from several experts about the shortages of mental health services for children in Western Australia. These shortages include the lower-level mental health services, designed to intervene prior to the child/family reaching a point of crisis. The Director General of the Department for Child Protection emphasised this point to the Committee.

*With respect to mental health, frankly, as would be no surprise to you given the government's substantial reform agenda for mental health, mental health services are pitched very much at the acute end of intervention...there is growth in other services such as Headspace, which might be termed intermediate mental health services. But we do struggle to have access to the amount of mental health service we would prefer. That is simply a supply and demand issue.*⁷⁴⁰

In addition, the Committee was told of a general absence of child and adolescent mental health specialists in Western Australia.

739 Slee PT, Lawson MJ, Russell A, Askill-Williams H, Dix KL, Owens L, Skrzypiec G, Spears B, *Kismatter Primary Evaluation Final Report: Executive Summary*, Centre for Analysis of Educational Futures, Flinders University of South Australia, 2009, p9.

740 Mr Terry Murphy, Director General, Department for Child Protection, *Transcript of Evidence*, 23 November 2011, p3.

When we look at a mental health service at the specialist end, we look at benchmarking of...full time equivalents, or FTEs, per 100 000 of population...you go back to what has been research to say this is the number of people that need at this level to actually adequately deliver a service. The UK data suggests that we need 21 FTE of community-based CAMHS, meaning Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service clinicians, per 100 000 of population. Queensland has come out with our Australian benchmarks and we are looking at 14 FTE per 100 000 general population for community-based CAMHS clinicians...we have got seven. ...we do not have enough. It has been grossly under-resourced and just completely ignored.⁷⁴¹

This evidence is consistent with the findings of the Commissioner for Children and Young People's (CCYP) report into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia.⁷⁴²

The Commissioner's inquiry found that:

The overwhelming evidence to the Inquiry was that the mental health needs of children and young people have not been afforded sufficient priority and there is an urgent need for reform in terms of both investment and focus.

In addition:

Evidence to the Inquiry revealed that there are very few services for children and young people experiencing mild to moderate mental health problems. The Inquiry heard many disturbing cases of children and young people being forced to wait until their mental illness had become severe before they were able to access a service.

Further, the primary public service which offers treatment for serious mental disorders (the Infant, Child, Adolescent and Youth Mental Health Service (ICAYMHS)) is so under-resourced that the Inquiry found it is no longer able to serve its client group adequately. This has resulted in lengthy waitlists and a focus on 'crisis' responses rather than comprehensive early intervention and treatment.⁷⁴³

741 Dr Caroline Goossens, Child Psychiatrist, Faculty of Child Psychiatry, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, *Transcript of Evidence*, 28 September 2011, p13.

742 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011.

743 Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, *Report of the Inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia*, Perth, April 2011, p13.

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The evidence to this Committee's inquiry reinforces the Commissioner's findings.

Finding 59

There is a significant shortage of mental health services for children in Western Australia. These shortages fall into two categories. The first is a shortage of lower-level mental health services, designed to intervene prior to the child/family reaching a point of crisis and the second is the general absence of child and adolescent mental health specialists in Western Australia. Based on UK data, the ratio should be 21 FTE of community-based Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinicians, per 100 000 of population. Queensland has 14 FTE per 100 000 general population for community-based CAMHS clinicians and Western Australia has 7 FTE.

Recommendation 26

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Mental Health that the State government provides funding in its 2013/14 budget to increase the ratio of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) clinicians to 21 FTE per 100,000 over the next 2 years.

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School health nurses and educational outcomes

The school nurse...spends most of the time with the children...the school nurses know each and every child usually, they know what is happening...Clearly there is a lack of school nurses in population health and education. It is probably something that would need to be addressed.⁷⁴⁴

School health nurses

This Committee has conducted several inquiries over the current parliament that have touched on the roles of community health nurses, particularly child and school health nurses. The most comprehensive of these reports was *Healthy Child - Healthy State: Improving Western Australia's Child Health Screening Programs*, tabled in Parliament on 21 May 2009. This report examined in depth the child health screening activities that are carried out in Western Australia. It found that:

*While WA's child health system aspires to emulate principles accepted in other jurisdictions...this Inquiry has found that it is currently inadequately funded to systematically collect and analyse data on child health conditions and to offer treatments in a timely fashion to all Western Australian children. However, this isn't a reflection of the dedication and quality of staff, nurses and teachers within the child health system. WA's child health screening process suffers because an under-resourced labour force works in a disjointed system that has responded too slowly to recent demographic changes and emerging conditions that impact on a child's learning.*⁷⁴⁵

There have been improvements made since this report was tabled, with the government investing in child development services and in additional child health nurse positions.

However, there has been no additional investment in school health nurses. In 2007, the government was notified that the Department of Health required an additional 135 school health nurses. To date the Department of Health, while reconfirming the

744 Professor Gunesh Rajan, Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery; Consultant, Ear and Skull Base Surgery, Fremantle Hospital, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p9.

745 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, *Healthy Child – Healthy State: Improving Western Australia's Child Health Screening Programs*, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 21 May 2009, p93.

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shortfall⁷⁴⁶, has not been successful in gaining funds to employ additional school health nurses despite growing population pressures.

*Undoubtedly there has been growth in our schools and the population increase has put a strain on services. I think we have reported previously to the committee that that is the case. So the services are under stress.*⁷⁴⁷

That 'stress' will increase as 'demand patterns are likely to change significantly when the Department of Education implements its policy to place Year 7 students in secondary schools from 2015.'⁷⁴⁸

The shortage of school health nurses is attributable to the increase in population in WA through an increasing birth rate and an increasing migration rate.

- From 2000 to 2010, the population of children and young people aged 0 to 17 years in WA grew by 11.4%.
- The strongest increase, of 21.45%, was among the early childhood age group of 0 to four years.⁷⁴⁹

This population bulge of small children, existent in 2010, is now entering the school system and poses an additional pressure on school health nurses.

The Department of Health advises that school health nurse numbers over the past 15 years are as follows:

Table 13.1: Number of students and School Health Nurses in Western Australia, 1996-2011⁷⁵⁰

Year	Number of students	Number of school health nurses employed	Ratio of nurses to students
1996	340,288	111	1:3066
2001	363,476	129	1:2818
2006	370,325	129	1:2871
2011	397,110	168	1:2364

However the recommended ratio is:

746 Mr Kim Snowball, Department of Health, Letter, 30 September 2012.

747 Mr Philip Aylward, Chief Executive Officer, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, *Transcript of Evidence*, 6 September 2012, p11,12.

748 Mr Kim Snowball, Department of Health, Letter, 30 September 2012.

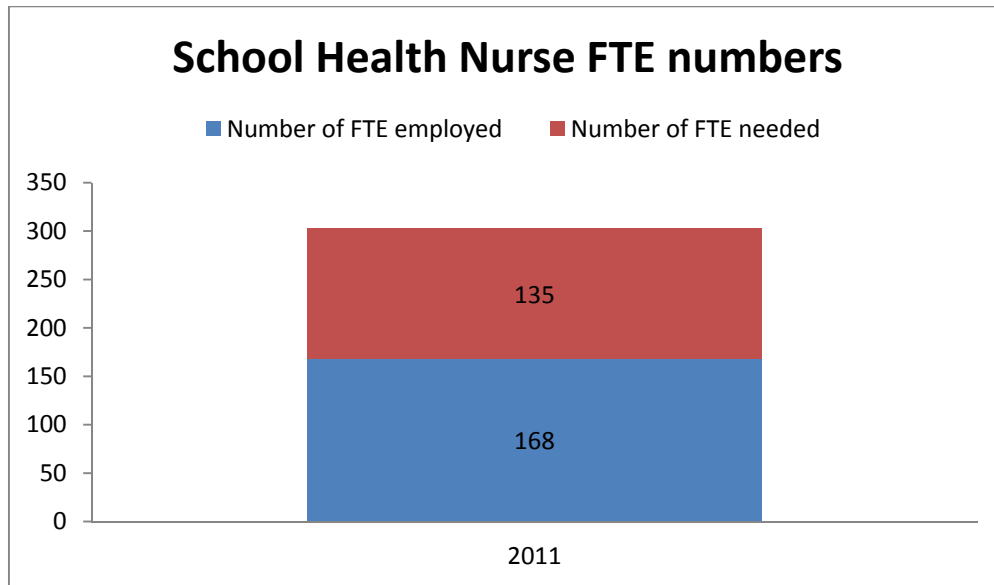
749 Education and Health Standing Committee, Legislative Assembly, *Child Health – Child Development: the first 3 years*, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 1 March 2012, p27-28.

750 Table derived from supplementary information provided to the Committee by Mr Kim Snowball, Director General, Department of Health, *Letter*, 5 September 2012.

- In Primary schools **1:1187**.
- In Secondary schools **1:1025**.⁷⁵¹

The shortfall is graphically illustrated in figure 13.1:

Figure 13.1: Number of FTE for school health nurses currently as against the number required.



The difference between the recommended ratio and the existing ratio is approximately 100%.

Secondary school health services provide primary health care to students in public schools which is about 60% of all high school students.⁷⁵²

Finding 60

Despite the attention of the government being drawn to the significant shortage of school health nurses in the public education sector over the past five years, there remains a current shortfall of at least 135 school health nurses, and the system is stated as being under stress and likely to further deteriorate. The current difference between the recommended workload and the existing workload is of the order of 100%.

Recommendation 27

The Committee draws the attention of the Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Health to the shortage of school health nurses and recommends an increase in the Department of Health's 2013/14 budget to fund 135 additional FTE across the State.

⁷⁵¹ Mr Kim Snowball, Department of Health, Letter, 30 September 2012.

⁷⁵² Mr Kim Snowball, Department of Health, Letter, 30 September 2012.

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The role of school health nurses

The policy of the Department of Health is unequivocal in terms of what it seeks to achieve in the school system through school health nurses:

In all government and non-government primary schools, health services focus on identification and early intervention of health and development issues, especially those issues which may impinge on a child's learning and wellbeing. Health staff work with parents and teachers to conduct school entry health assessments of children soon after they first commence school, usually in kindergarten. Monitoring and assessments are conducted with older children for whom a health concern has been identified. Health staff assist school staff and parents to develop health care plans for students with complex health needs, and also facilitate training for school staff so they may support students with special health needs. In addition, health staff support schools to plan systems for delivery of first aid and emergency health care; facilitate and deliver school-based immunisation programs; and may also support teachers with health-related curricula. Additionally, public health programs such as ear and trachoma programs are run in many primary schools particularly in remote areas.⁷⁵³

There is a three year (2010 – 2013) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the 'Provision of School Health Services for School Students Attending Public Schools' between the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Health (DOH).

Importantly, the MOU is the overarching, State-wide Agreement between the DOE and the DOH. The MOU is complemented by School Level Agreements which are negotiated between local schools, Health Service and District Education staff.

School Level Agreements are intended to guide service provision at the operational level, with due consideration of local needs, resources and circumstances. The MOU sets out the umbrella policy for the services provided by school health nurses, including the limitations of their role.⁷⁵⁴

In particular the MOU sets out the role as follows:

The aim of School Health Services is to enhance the health and development of children and adolescents. In brief, services incorporate the following broad areas:

753 Submission No. 12 from Department of Health, December 2011, p8.

754 Department of Education & Department of Health, *Memorandum of Understanding*, report 2010, p3.

a) Health promotion

School health service staff may support schools with a range of health promotion strategies, which are identified locally. A health promoting school involves the whole school community. Health education and health promotion strategies are used to reach all students including those who may already be showing signs of ill-health, others who may be at risk, and also students who have no apparent risk factors.

b) Early detection

Early detection programs aim to improve the health outcomes of those individuals identified as having health or development problems, by enabling early referral to appropriate services and support services. Standard screening programs are offered to all children at or soon after, school entry. Other early detection programs are negotiated to suit local needs.

c) Access to specialist health expertise

School Health Services aim to provide a flexible and adaptable service, within the limits of the resources available, which responds to the health needs of children and young people in schools. School Health Services encompass a range of programs under the broad service delivery areas of health promotion, early detection and specialist health expertise. In each area, services are delivered in collaboration with local school staff.⁷⁵⁵

School health nurses and impediments in practice

The strategy outlined in the MOU is faced with two significant impediments in practice. The first of these is the issue of resources. As outlined above, a significant shortfall in the numbers of school health nurses largely limits their role in many areas to little more than screening. Importantly, having screened for a problem, their ongoing capacity to follow up on the child is limited by the pressures of the role.

One of the issues is the pressure on the school health nurses. The MOU we have is that the nurses will engage in screening and follow up with whatever capacity they have. In reality, virtually all of their time is taken up in the screening rather than the follow-up, so the follow-up is then referred on and of course one of the problems that we have is that the families that are likely to follow up on a referral and take their

⁷⁵⁵ Department of Education & Department of Health, *Memorandum of Understanding*, report 2010, p4.

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*child off are not the same as the families that are most suffering from middle ear infections.*⁷⁵⁶

The second issue is that because of the historical under-resourcing of child health nurses, many of these children may have missed their earlier health checks. The Auditor General found in 2010 that as few as 10 % of children received their 3 year old check.⁷⁵⁷ This means that a larger proportion of children will be arriving at school without having received health and development monitoring. The Auditor General found that the impact of missed or delayed checks is that developmental delays are detected late.⁷⁵⁸

The consequence of the inability of school health nurses to follow through on referrals is felt in later years.

*The issue is that if we do not get those children into a referral pattern and have some intervention early, by the time they are picked up at five and six, the waiting lists at the child development centres are much longer and they are not seen as a priority. It does make their life very difficult.*⁷⁵⁹

School health nurses and hearing

As touched on in the chapter on hearing, school health nurses have a potentially critical role to play in the detection, treatment and referral for children with Otitis Media infections. This Committee's earlier report 14: *Report on key learnings from the Committee research trip 11-17 March 2012*, addressed the need for school health nurses to provide follow-up for children who have Otitis Media infections.

However, as outlined above, the nurses' capacity to do this work is limited by the pressure on their role. It is recognised that 'the poorest of the families in the more remote settings do not have the wherewithal or capacity to necessarily follow up on a referral, even though it has been identified that their child may have a hearing problem.'⁷⁶⁰

This means that those who bear the brunt of this lack of workforce capacity are the most disadvantaged children in the education and health systems.

756 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p3.

757 Western Australian Auditor General, *Universal Child Health Checks, Report 11 – November 2010*, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 24 November 2010, p18.

758 Western Australian Auditor General, *Universal Child Health Checks, Report 11 – November 2010*, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 24 November 2010, p7.

759 Ms Angela Poole, Media Spokesperson, Community Health Nurses WA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 November 2011, p4.

760 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General, Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p3.

The chapter on ear health in this report highlighted the massive public health problem Otitis Media is in Aboriginal communities where the prevalence of Otitis Media has been found to range from 40% to 70%. It drew attention to the Review of Government Service Provision, on 'Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011' which found that 'Indigenous children living in remote communities have the highest internationally published prevalence rates for Otitis Media.'⁷⁶¹

The Committee notes that the Department of Education position was outlined as follows:

*There is scope for a more formal agreement between the Departments of Health and Education to promote effective practice and ensure all schools with students affected by Otitis Media can access a coordinated range of supports from those Departments.'*⁷⁶²

Drawing on these facts and because of the urgent need to address the situation, the Committee's fourteenth report contained the following recommendation on page 5 of the Report:

The Committee strongly recommends that the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the purpose of preventing, identifying and ensuring prompt treatment for middle ear infections in children.

This Memorandum will facilitate the examination of all children in primary school by an appropriately qualified school or community nurse. Such examinations should be more frequent during the wet season.

A protocol should be developed to allow the school or community health nurse to examine a child at the beginning of the week and where a middle ear infection is present, to treat ear infections during school hours with antibiotics either kept at school or purchased from the local pharmacy.

Telemetry linked to a medical specialist can be used where there is any doubt as to the presence of an ear infection.

When a child misses school who is being treated for an ear infection, the school health nurse is to notify child development services and the local community health services to ensure another appropriately qualified person is able to visit the child at home to administer the antibiotics.

761 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011: Report*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2011, p5.52.

762 Supplementary Information from Department of Education, 11 June 2012, p2.

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*When the school nurse has treated a child on two consecutive occasions for an ear infection the child is to be referred to the Ear Nose and Throat Specialist.*⁷⁶³

The Minister for Health's response (available on the Committee's website) was as follows:

The Department of Health is currently strengthening its responses to the prevention, screening and treatment of ear health issues with a particular focus on Aboriginal children with the development of a Model of Care for otitis media. An expert panel of clinicians including Ear Nose and Throat specialists, public health physicians, community health nurses, speech pathologists, Aboriginal Health Workers, carers, General Practitioners, and other primary care providers will set direction to inform best practice and investment areas for children with ear health concerns.

The Model of Care will be used to inform and strengthen an existing Memorandum of Understanding (2010-2013) between the Department of Education and the Department of Health for school health services.

The Report's recommendation regarding the examination and subsequent treatment of children with middle ear infection is noted however currently there is legislative restriction on nurses in diagnosing illness and prescribing antibiotics preventing their capacity to provide an intervention of this type. Parents and guardians have the responsibility to give antibiotics, or consent to another person to give antibiotics to their children. School staff can administer antibiotics for children in their care if parents authorise and provide the medication.

Linking to specialist services using telemetry including teleotoscopy is expanding. Assessments conducted by primary care providers including community health nurses raising concern will always be followed by a referral to an accessible service. This takes a number of forms including, telemedicine, utilising the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme for visits to metropolitan or regional specials and/or wait listing to be seen by a visiting specialist.

The Department of Education has well defined responsibilities and protocols for school absences. These protocols do not use community health nurses. Community health nurses working in remote communities often are the only service providers with school, child and primary health care responsibilities.

The Education and Health Standing Committee is disappointed that, given the third world dimensions of the issue in Aboriginal communities the core factors leading to the lack of treatment have not been responded to; notably:

⁷⁶³ Education and Health Standing Committee, *Report on key learnings from the Committee research trip 11-17 March 2012*, Legislative Assembly, Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, 20 June 2012, pv.

- The shortage of school health nurses or their equivalent in some communities; and
- Their current inability to follow through on treatment as proposed, when screening has revealed an issue. It is the Committee's view that a phone call by the nurse to a GP or the use of telemetry would honour the requirements of legislation.

It is the Committee's view that the situation is resolved either by modifying the poisons act so that school health nurses who have been passed as proficient in ear examinations can administer antibiotics or the school health nurse can call the local GP or a GP in Perth or an ENT specialist who can order the antibiotics.

Finding 61

Recognising the massive public health problem Otitis Media is in our Aboriginal communities where the prevalence of Otitis Media ranges from 40% to 70% of the population; together with research that suggests that 'Indigenous children living in remote communities have the highest internationally published prevalence rates for Otitis Media', the Minister for Health's response to the Committee's Report 14 is inadequate.

Recommendation 28

The Committee strongly recommends that the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education develop a Memorandum of Understanding by June 2013 with the purpose of preventing, identifying and ensuring prompt treatment for middle ear infections in children.

This Memorandum will facilitate the examination of all children in primary school by an appropriately qualified school or community nurse. Such examinations should be more frequent in the North West during the wet season.

A protocol should be developed to allow the school or community health nurse to examine a child at the beginning of the week and where a middle ear infection is present, to treat ear infections during school hours with antibiotics either kept at school or purchased from the local pharmacy.

The protocol could include:

- the school health nurses calling a medical practitioner to prescribe the antibiotic;
- amendments being made to the Poisons Act to allow school health nurses who are competent in ear assessments to prescribe and treat children with antibiotics;
- Telemetry linked to a medical specialist where there is any doubt as to the presence of an ear infection or as considered necessary.

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When a child misses school who is being treated for an ear infection, the memorandum is to detail who the school health nurse is to notify to ensure another appropriately qualified person is able to visit the child at home to ensure the antibiotics are administered.

When the school health nurse has treated a child on two consecutive occasions for an ear infection the child is to be referred to the Ear Nose and Throat Specialist.

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Inclusive education for children with a disability

A good education matters...a good education provides the foundation that supports children and young people to be active participants in their communities, find fulfilling work and live a decent life. When students with disabilities are unable to enjoy a good education, their future is seriously compromised. A poor education is one of the key reasons why the economic and social participation rate of Australians with disabilities is so low.⁷⁶⁴

The disabled population

A significant proportion of children in Western Australia suffer an acknowledged disability.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that 4.1 % of children aged zero to four years have a severe or profound core activity limitation and are likely to be eligible for disability specialist services. The Australian Early Development Index profile of Australia's children notes that 4.4 % of children in their pre-primary years are reported to have chronic physical, intellectual or medical needs.⁷⁶⁵

In addition, disability projections for the period 2008 to 2013 indicate a 3.9 % growth in the preschool age group for children with disability. This number is derived from the population projection of 2.3 % growth and the prevalence of disability in this age group.⁷⁶⁶

Under the terms of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, there is a commitment by the Australian, State and Territory Governments to a national approach to improving the lives of people with disability through greater collaboration by governments, industry and the community. In particular:

764 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Held Back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools*, Melbourne, September 2012, p8. Available at http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=1781&Itemid=879, accessed 9 October 2012.

765 Australian Government Productivity Commission, *The Disability Services Commission*, report prepared by Productivity Commission Issues Paper November 2010 Early Childhood Development Workforce, p2.

766 Australian Government Productivity Commission, *The Disability Services Commission*, report prepared by Productivity Commission Issues Paper November 2010 Early Childhood Development Workforce, p2.

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Strategy 5 relates to learning and skills. It states that 'people with disability achieve their full potential through their participation in an inclusive high quality education system that is responsive to their needs. People with disability have opportunities to continue learning throughout their lives'.⁷⁶⁷

Inclusive education – a right?

Parents of children with disabilities and the disabled children themselves face many challenges in securing the best possible education. A recent Victorian study reported that amongst other things, parents noted attitudes that held back their children, including:

Inflexible policies which they feel deny students the opportunity to achieve, persistent experiences of bullying, the difference a committed school principal can make, and the lack of appropriate training for teachers, both at university and after qualifying, to make sure they could provide the best possible support to students.

Parents told us of the personal strain and distress and of constant negotiation to make sure their child was not left behind. Some gave up jobs, moved suburbs, or spent many hours a day travelling to make sure their child was at a school they felt could offer the best learning environment.⁷⁶⁸

In the course of this Inquiry, there were two main issues raised with the Committee in relation to the educational opportunities for children with disabilities, and both are central to the Department of Education's Principles of Inclusive Education, detailed below.

The first of these issues was access to, and portability of, additional funding for assistance to children with disabilities under the Schools Plus program. The second issue was that of the educational needs of children with a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder. These two issues will be examined below.

In 2004, the Education Department conducted a review of the provision of educational services for students with a disability. As part of this review of services, seven principles for inclusive education were identified. These are represented in the diagram below. The principles emphasise the importance of education service provision that meets the

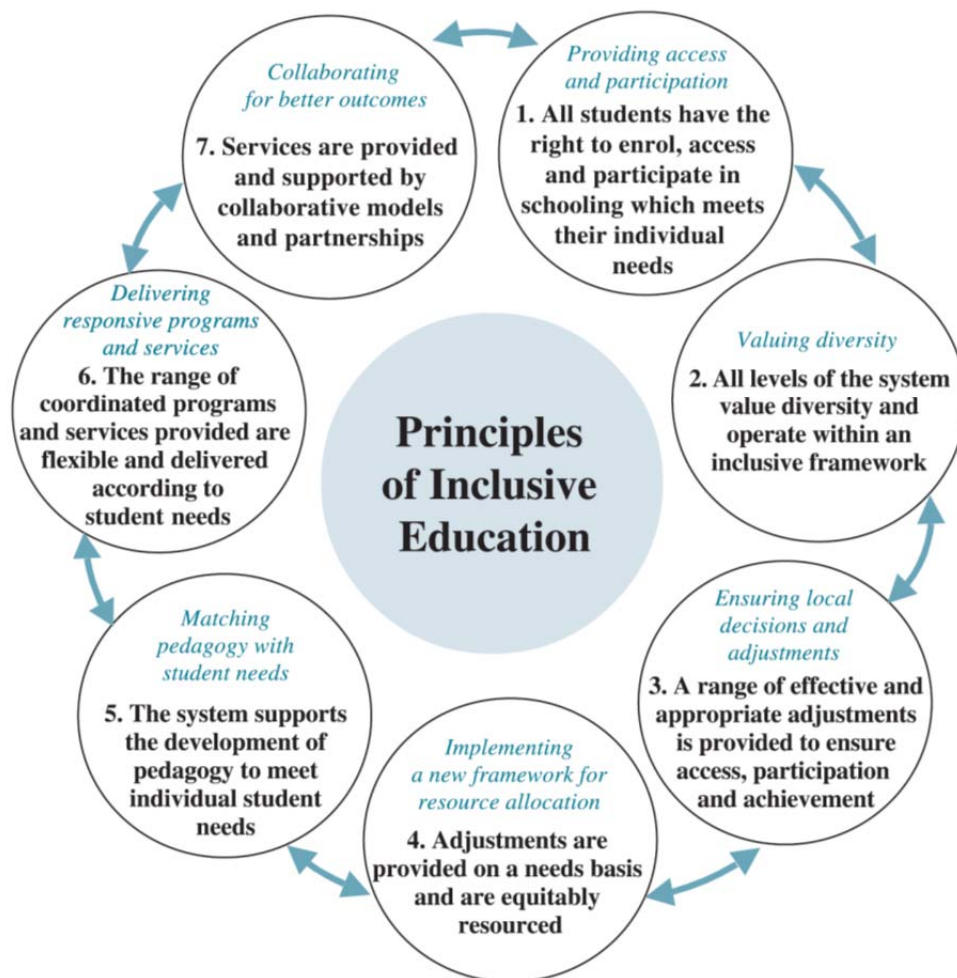
⁷⁶⁷ Submission No. 4 from Disability Services Commission, December 2012, p7.

⁷⁶⁸ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, *Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools.*, 2012, Available at: <http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index>. Accessed on 9 October 2012.

needs of the individual student, the necessity of making adjustments to meet student need, and the importance of adjustments being 'equitably resourced'.

Figure 14.1: The Seven Principles of Inclusive Education⁷⁶⁹

The Seven Principles of Inclusive Education



769 'The Seven Principles of Inclusive Education', from 'Pathways to the Future: A Report of the Review of Educational Services for Students with Disabilities in Government Schools: A Summary', Department of Education and Training, 2004. P11

Chapter 14

The availability and portability of Schools Plus funding

The issue of Schools Plus funding was raised in different contexts in the course of the Inquiry, including in relation to children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (as outlined in the Committee's earlier Report 15: *Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: the invisible disability*).

According to the Education Department:

*Schools Plus funding is available for eligible students to enable the provision of support required for students to access and participate in educational programs. The student has to be diagnosed under eight eligible groups including: Intellectual Disability; Global Developmental Delay (before 6 years); Autism; Vision Impairment; Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Severe Mental Disorder; Physical Disability; and Severe Medical/Health Condition.*⁷⁷⁰

*As at 30 June 2011, 7561 students with disability received targeted supplementary resource allocations through the Schools Plus Program. These resources supplement schools' capacity to meet the educational needs of students with disability.*⁷⁷¹

The total expenditure for Schools Plus in the 2011-12 financial year was expected to be in the vicinity of \$200 million.⁷⁷² In addition, the then Minister for Education told the Parliament that there is a significant rise in the number of students requiring funding through this program. 'The percentage increase each year of students with special needs receiving Schools Plus is something like 7 %.'⁷⁷³

It is clear that there is a significant investment in Schools Plus every year. \$200 million averaged across 7,561 students is an average expenditure of approximately \$26,500 per student. This is a considerable investment on top of the standard educational expenses for each child.

However, Schools Plus funding for supplementary resources **is confined to 'eligible' students in WA public schools.**⁷⁷⁴

770 Additional Information from Department of Education, 11 June 2012, Attachment 1, p13.

771 Department of Education, *Department of Education Annual Report 2010-11*, Perth, 20 September 2011, p8.

772 Dr Elizabeth Constable, Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p523c-558a.

773 Dr Elizabeth Constable, Minister for Education, Western Australia, Legislative Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates* (Hansard), 2 June 2011, p523c-558a.

774 Department of Education, *Western Australian Department of Education Implementation Plan for the More Support for Students with Disabilities Initiative*, p5. Available at: http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_partnership_agreements/education/more_support_for_student_with_disabilites/MSSD%20WA%20IP%20-%20current.pdf. Accessed on 9 October 2012.

Finding 62

Schools Plus funding to secure the provision of support required to access and participate in educational programs, is restricted to 'eligible' students in the public school system.

The Department of Education described some of the other support services for students with a disability. These are provided separately to or in addition to the assistance purchased with Schools Plus funding.

The Department provides a range of resources, services, support and early intervention programs for students with disabilities to ensure engagement and participation. These include:

- *Enrolment placement options including local schools, Education Support Schools and Centres (Primary and Secondary) and Language Development Centres.*
- *Support services to schools: Special Educational Needs (Disabilities); Special Education Needs (Sensory); Special Education Needs (Medical and Mental Health); the School Psychology Service; and the Statewide Speech and Language Service. Classroom teachers have access to professional support, visiting teachers and resources through the three schools for special education needs.⁷⁷⁵*

Inequity between the public and private systems

Through the course of this inquiry, the Committee was told of the inequity in service provision for students with a disability between public, and independent and Catholic schools. This was presented to the Committee in terms of the differences in public funding available for students with disabilities in each system.

A submission from the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) set out the current funding for students with disabilities in independent schools.

Currently independent schools only receive a minimum amount of funding for students with diagnosed disabilities, and this is significantly lower than what these students would receive in other education sectors. While independent schools do receive and welcome the State additional per capita loading for each child with a documented disability, this funding in itself is an acknowledgement that the current

775 Additional Information from Department of Education, 11 June 2012, Attachment 1, p13.

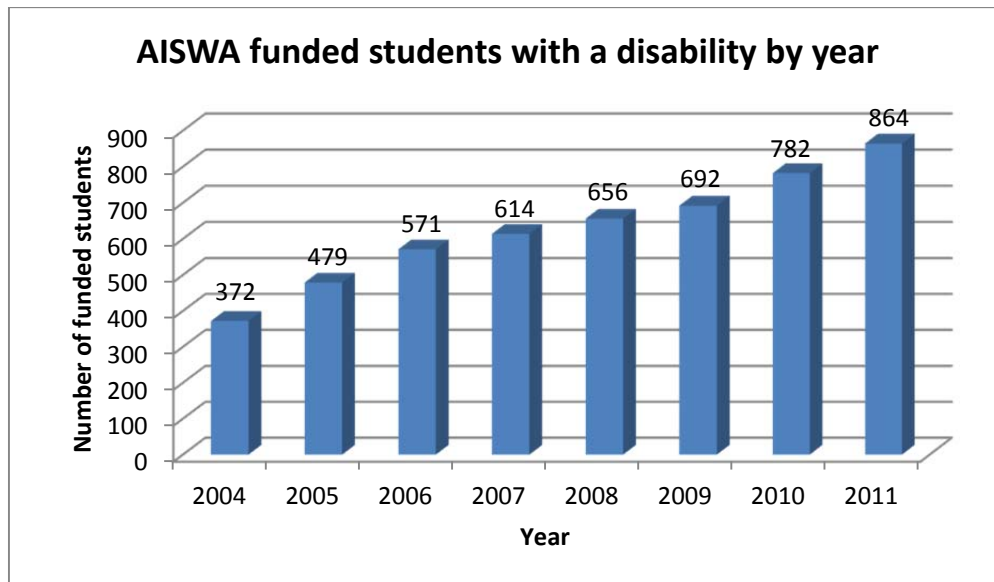
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Federal Supplementary funding is inadequate and even with this financial input, independent schools still receive significantly less per child with a disability than every other education sector.⁷⁷⁶

The submission pointed out that this disparity in funding places a significant financial and resourcing burden on schools to provide a quality education and appropriate support for these students.

In 2011 there were 864 students with a documented disability who were eligible for funding. This is more than double the number of students who were funded in 2004.⁷⁷⁷

Figure 14.2: AISWA funded students with a disability by year⁷⁷⁸



As the submission makes clear, this doubling in the numbers of students requiring additional support in the independent school system only includes ‘eligible’ students who are able to obtain a diagnosis. For a range of reasons, obtaining a diagnosis may be very difficult for some children and families.

Without a diagnosis, students are not able to be appropriately supported by schools, families or therapists and this directly affects their educational outcomes. Access is affected by:

776 Submission No. 9 from Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 19 December 2011, p2.

777 Submission No. 9 from Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 19 December 2011, p2.

778 Submission No. 9 from Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 19 December 2011, p2.

- *Distance from qualified professionals (in the case of remote schools)*
- *Limited number of qualified professionals available (in the case of remote regions and in some professional fields such as child psychiatry)*
- *Long waiting lists for professional services (this is an issue across most professional fields and in metro and regional areas)*
- *Cost of professional services (Eg1. The diagnostic process for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders involves seeing three different health professionals...for parents who want to avoid waiting lists of up to two years, the cost to see three professionals privately is prohibitive. Eg2. There is currently no government financial support for diagnosis or support for any learning difficulties such as Dyslexia which is usually diagnosed by a psychologist. This means that parents who cannot afford a private psychologist cannot have their child diagnosed and therefore cannot access appropriate services or offer evidence to schools for why their child needs additional educational support.)⁷⁷⁹*

All of these issues are obviously compounded for schools in remote areas, as distance and isolation make accessing services, particularly specialist professional services, much more difficult.

AISWA identified several groups of schools that face particular difficulties and struggle to improve educational outcomes for students with multiple additional needs. These are:

Remote Schools: these schools often have many students who are from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), who have hearing impairment, and who may suffer from difficulties arising from trauma, behaviour and mental health issues, irregular attendance, FASD and other undiagnosed disabilities and learning difficulties.

CARE Schools (Curriculum and Re-Engagement Schools): CARE schools were discussed at greater length earlier in this report. In this context, the Committee notes that despite these not-for-profit schools taking on marginalised youth with high support needs, even when individual students have previously qualified for Schools Plus funding, that funding does not carry across to the CARE school.

⁷⁷⁹ Submission No. 9 from Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 19 December 2011, p3.

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If a government school has gone through the process of getting them psychologically evaluated and they get Schools Plus funding, that funding only stays with the Department of Education. So even a kid with—I think we had this conversation in your office Peter—any student who has got Schools Plus funding then comes into a CARE school because that is the progression of that child, and we then have to go through the same process again using a much smaller pool of money through AISWA, and then that gets topped up with still a smaller amount from the Department of Education Services.⁷⁸⁰

The Committee was advised that in New South Wales, students who leave the public system to attend a similar type of school to the CARE schools in Western Australia, take their funding with them to the new system.

The Committee understands that AISWA has been in discussion with the Western Australian Minister for Education in regard to this issue, but that there has been no result at this stage. Given that public schools are, in effect, referring their most difficult students out to the CARE schools, it would seem logical that the funding attached to a student under Schools Plus should follow them to the CARE school, in a seamless manner.

Finding 63

Despite CARE schools taking on marginalised youth with high support needs, even when individual students have previously qualified for Schools Plus funding, that funding does not carry across to the CARE school when a student transfers to that school.

Recommendation 29

The Committee strongly recommends that the Department of Education amend the portability criteria of Schools Plus funding by June 2013 to enable students to remain eligible for funding when they transfer from a public school to a Curriculum and Re-engagement in Education School.

Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) Schools: according to AISWA, some of the low SES schools in the independent system 'offer low-fee education and regularly offer fee-assistance to their families. They are often small and so despite excellent intentions, often do not have the resources or infrastructure to offer specialist support to students with additional needs.'⁷⁸¹

780 Mr Dave Stevens, Principal, Alta-1, *Transcript of Evidence*, 13 June 2012, p2.

781 Submission No. 9 from Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 19 December 2011, p4.

The extent of the need for additional financial support for students with a disability in the independent school system is unclear. However, as made clear in a hearing with the Committee, the resources available are considerably lower than those in the public system.

We often have parents who have...decided to move from having their child in a government school to having their child in an independent school, and they will often come to the school and say "Previously my child was receiving 0.8 assistant time"...expecting something similar, and generally the reply of the independent school is, "that is not possible".

It would certainly be true that there are many, many examples of a child who is receiving close to full-time assistant time in a government school, and then, depending on the school, it may get anywhere from \$150 for the year, through to the maximum amount for our children on our top level of severity, for some of our high-fee schools, as small as less than \$5,000 for the year for a high-needs child...So even for a child who is allocated the very highest level of severity, it would not be possible for any of our schools to use that funding to employ I would say anything above maybe a 0.6 assistant, if that is what they chose to do with it.⁷⁸²

The disparity between the support available to disabled students in the public system and the independent system is clear.

It is apparent to the Committee that there is an inequity of support available to children with a disability in the public and independent school system.

Finding 64

There is a demonstrable inequity of financial support for children with disabilities in the education system. The level of support available in the private sector is significantly less than that available in the public sector due to scarce resources.

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends the Minister for Education reassess the portability of Schools Plus funding for children with a disability by June 2013 to ensure equity of support for disabled children irrespective of whether they are in the public or independent school systems.

782 Submission No. 9 from Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 19 December 2011, p4.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

The Committee received several submissions that related to the experience of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Western Australian education system. The issues facing families with children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder were covered in some detail in this Committee's report 15: *Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: the invisible disability*, tabled in Parliament on 20 September 2012. This report will not repeat this material, but will instead focus on the educational challenges these families and children face.

Autism Spectrum Disorders affect an increasing number of Western Australian children.

Prevalence rates for all forms of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) worldwide have risen dramatically since the mid-1960s. One in 88 U.S. children has an ASD, according to a new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, representing a 23 % increase in prevalence from the previous autism report, released in 2009, which estimated that autism affected one in 110 children...One recent Australian report similarly indicates that more than 1% of Australian school-age children have a confirmed diagnosis of Autistic Disorder or Asperger's Disorder.⁷⁸³

Children with an ASD experience three types of impairments: 'idiosyncratic difficulties with communication, socialization and stereotyped behaviour'.⁷⁸⁴ In addition, children with an ASD may have cognitive difficulties including 'deficits in theory of mind skills, difficulties with executive function, weak central coherence, sensory processing and motor functioning problems'.⁷⁸⁵ By contrast, such students may have relative cognitive strengths in the areas of rote memory, visual spatial abilities, compartmentalised learning, preference for routine and rules, intense interests, and being logical.⁷⁸⁶

Research indicates these students have potential for good educational outcomes when they have access to timely, appropriate best practice early intervention and their difficulties are accommodated and their

783 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p2.

784 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p2.

785 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p2.

786 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p2.

*relative strengths utilized with appropriate use of evidence-based ASD educational teaching and learning practice.*⁷⁸⁷

As outlined above, the Western Australian Department of Education has a policy on inclusive education for all students, which emphasises the importance of education meeting the individual needs of each student. Feedback from the parents of children with an ASD suggests that for some students, their educational experience is not meeting their needs. As a submission with attached feedback from parents argued:

*recent international, Australian and WA research has shown that students with intellectual and cognitive disabilities, including those with an ASD, often cannot access reliable and consistent mainstream inclusive practice that maximizes their progress over time...Concerns have been raised about the lack of appropriate, individualized attention and support available, the high attrition rates and the inordinate amount of bullying experienced by students with an ASD in mainstream settings...Additionally, such students often experience social isolation, anxiety and sensory difficulties in mainstream settings where their need for routine and predictability is often at odds with the chaotic, noisy happenings of mainstream school life, especially at the high school level.*⁷⁸⁸

Identified needs of students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Three main problems with education were identified by parents of children with an ASD.

1. Inadequate/inappropriate accommodations made for children with an ASD within the mainstream schooling system. A selection of statements from parents was sent to the Committee which detailed the frustrations parents felt with the 'inclusive mainstreaming approach'. A representative sample follows:

*We feel deeply let down by the Department of Education, whose website states is '...committed to inclusive schooling and the provision of effective classroom programs that value the diversity of students'. Never has a **false** word been spoken...Excuse our cynicism, but ... it appears that the DET and school involved has not familiarized itself with the implementation of its own principle of inclusive*

787 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p2.

788 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p3-4.

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*education...the enormous gap between these Principles and reality is, to be honest, laughable.*⁷⁸⁹

*Inclusive schooling is a wonderful idea but its current practice does not seem to work for many children because the levels of anxiety they feel when left unsupervised in playgrounds with their peers is unhealthy. The curriculum modifications in class are inadequate and it is also unfair to expect a teacher to be able to teach and accommodate so many different learning styles.*⁷⁹⁰

As the submission makes clear, 'many families who have a child with an ASD are under constant pressure because of the unreliability of the inclusive experience in mainstream Western Australian schools.' In addition, it was felt that 'there is an urgent need for greater understanding, support and application of best practice teaching and learning principles of children with an ASD in mainstream schools especially at the high school level.'⁷⁹¹

2. Lack of support and assistance for families who choose to home-school their child with an ASD.

A growing number of parents in WA have been compelled to home educate their children with an ASD...Unfortunately, WA families can only choose to home school their child with an ASD if their family circumstances can support such a decision because there is presently no government funding or appropriate formal expertise provided...

*Additionally, families routinely find the entry requirements particularly stringent when they try to gain the support of the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) to guide the home education of their child with an ASD even though such support has been shown to be beneficial to both the child and their family.*⁷⁹²

Submitters felt that a variety of mechanisms of assistance should be available to families, including:

- The establishment of Home Schooling Consultants (Diversity) who would provide best practice guidance regarding home schooling of children with special needs

789 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, Appendix 1, p12.

790 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, Appendix 1, p14.

791 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p4.

792 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p4.

and access to appropriate support networks, curriculum materials and professional development;

- Relaxed entry into Schools of Isolated and Distance Education for the families who wish to use the service; and
- Redistribution of the per-capita funding that would otherwise be used to educate that student at a mainstream education site to the home schooling parent for use in the child's education.⁷⁹³

3. The need for a dedicated school for students with an Asperger's Disorder and high functioning Autism Disorder. This point was made by several parents, given that high-functioning ASD children are unable to access the segregated school sites for children with an intellectual disability. It was reported to the Committee that dedicated schools for children with an ASD are run successfully in other states and internationally, and that Western Australia should consider a similar mechanism.

*I believe the training given to educational support assistants is not sufficient to give them the skills to deal with this condition and puts enormous stress on themselves, the child and the family. The same goes for the teacher and it is grossly unfair to expect the staff in the classroom to cope with this and all the other children. What is needed is schools specific to our children particularly high functioning autism.*⁷⁹⁴

It was suggested that the State Government should fund a:

*K-12 school especially designed for students with an Asperger's Disorder and high functioning Autistic Disorder where students would be able to have their idiosyncratic profiles understood and accommodated by appropriately trained staff using best practice teaching and learning principles for students with an ASD.*⁷⁹⁵

It is clear from the parent feedback that the Committee received (available on the Committee's website) that many parents experience significant frustration with the educational opportunities and provision available for children with an ASD in Western Australia.

793 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p6.

794 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, Appendix 1, p14.

795 Submission No. 23 from Dr Jasmine McDonald, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Western Australia, 19 June 2012, p6.

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The Committee did not have time to fully investigate ASD. However, the concerns raised in submissions are included in this report to ensure that the Government (and the Department of Education) is aware of these issues.

Recommendation 31

The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education seek funding in the 2013-14 budget to conduct a 6 month review of the provision and accessibility of educational opportunities for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Western Australia, to consider increased support for home schooling and the value of a dedicated school for children with ASD.

Chapter 15

Identified issues for the education of gifted students

This chapter addresses the issue of the provision of tailored and appropriate educational opportunities for the 10% of the student population who are assessed as 'gifted and talented'.

Gifted and Talented Students

The Committee received several submissions to this Inquiry in relation to the issue of the educational provision for 'gifted and talented students'. It was felt by the submitters that the provision of educational opportunities for gifted and talented students is sometimes insufficient or overlooked.

According to the 'Gifted and Talented Guidelines' from the Western Australian Department of Education,

***Giftedness** designates the possession and use of outstanding natural abilities, called aptitudes, in at least one ability domain.*

***Talent** designates the outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities, called competencies (knowledge and skills) in at least one field of human activity. Talent emerges from ability as a consequence of the student's learning experience.*

...These definitions reflect the distinction between ability and performance and recognise other factors in the development of a person's giftedness into talents.⁷⁹⁶

As detailed in a submission to the Committee, according to the 2011 census there were 363,718 children attending school in WA. Of these, 236,387 children (65%) attended Government schools, and the remaining 127,331 (35%) were spread across the independent and Catholic schools.⁷⁹⁷

Using Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent which identifies 10% of the population as within the gifted range, there are

⁷⁹⁶ Department of Education, *Gifted and Talented Guidelines*, Perth, 1 March 2011, p3. Available at www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum-support/giftedandtalented/detcms/navigation/for-teachers/identification/characteristics-of-gifted---talented-students/ accessed 17 August 2012.

⁷⁹⁷ Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2012, p10.

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*38,371 gifted students in our schools, of which 23,638 attend Government schools.*⁷⁹⁸

Finding 65

Based on research, it is thought that 10% of students are gifted. This means that based on 2011 figures, there were in the order of 38,371 gifted students in Western Australian schools, of which 23,638 attended public schools.

The Committee was referred to the two Senate inquiries into the education of gifted children in Australia (in 1988 and 2001), and the more recent inquiry by the Education and Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria.

The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee Inquiry in 2001 found that:

*These [gifted] children have special needs in the education system; for many their needs are not being met; and many suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress as a result.*⁷⁹⁹

In addition, the Senate Committee found that:

*There is a duty to help all children achieve their potential. The common belief that the gifted do not need special help because they will succeed anyway is contradicted by many studies of underachievement and demotivation among gifted children.*⁸⁰⁰

The recent Victorian Committee report found that ‘underachievement appears to be widespread among gifted students. Between 10% and 50% of gifted students will never meet their potential.’⁸⁰¹ It is thought that a significant number of gifted students drop out of school before the completion of year 12.

798 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2012, p10. Original emphasis.

799 Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, 2 October 2001, pxiii. Available at www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=eet_ctte/completed_inquiries/1999-02/gifted/report/contents/htm. Accessed 17 August 2012.

800 Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, 2 October 2001, pxiii. Available at www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=eet_ctte/completed_inquiries/1999-02/gifted/report/contents/htm. Accessed 17 August 2012.

801 Education and Training Committee, *Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, June 2012, p1.

*Underachievement in gifted students is not well understood. The available research suggests that gifted underachievement is influenced by a broad range of factors including school, home, culture and peers.*⁸⁰²

The Commonwealth Government's response to the Senate report stated that it:

*Supports the underlying assumption of the Report that all Australian children should have the opportunity to maximise their educational potential. It is in the national interest that every child's gifts and talents should be nurtured and allowed to flourish.*⁸⁰³

Submitters to this Inquiry felt that the provision of appropriate educational opportunities for gifted students was both in the national interest, and a matter of equity.

Our gifted young people are our most precious natural resource. There are gifted students in virtually every classroom, across all socio-economic levels of society...

*Lower quality teachers, untrained to recognise or accommodate gifted students hinder the achievement of the goal of equity and excellence outlined in The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People. When equity is interpreted as everyone having the same opportunities, or equality of outcome (demonstrated by everyone achieving at the same level) rather than equity of opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest via access to curriculum at the appropriate level or pacing, our most able students do not experience equity. They are in fact disadvantaged, and potential is not developed into talent.*⁸⁰⁴

It was emphasised that gifted students need special learning arrangements just as much as children with other learning needs.

Gifted students do not always achieve highly and this is most often as a direct result of inappropriate opportunities to develop their potential and remain motivated learners. The premise that 'they are bright

802 Education and Training Committee, *Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, June 2012, p6.

803 *Government Response to the Report of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee on the Education of Gifted Children*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, 19 August 2002, p1. Available at www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=eet_ctte/completed_inquiries/1999-02/gifted/index.htm Accessed 17 August 2012.

804 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2012, p5. Original emphasis.

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*therefore they will be fine without help' is simply untrue. Gifted students have different learning needs in the same way that students with intellectual disabilities or other learning difficulties do.*⁸⁰⁵

Finding 66

Gifted students have different learning needs in the same way that students with other learning needs do. Underachievement is widespread amongst gifted students, but the reasons for it are not well understood.

Department of Education policy for Gifted and Talented students

The Western Australian Department of Education has a policy on the education of gifted and talented students, and has issued 'Gifted and Talented Guidelines' to assist schools in catering for these children.⁸⁰⁶

The guidelines identify three forms of provision for additional educational opportunities for gifted students. The guidelines state that:

*It is important that the ability of gifted and talented students be accepted, valued and fostered by teachers, parents, peers and the community. Schools, parents and the students themselves need to consider the provision of learning experiences, which broaden the student's knowledge, skills and understanding.*⁸⁰⁷

Additional provision for gifted and talented students

The three forms of additional provision are:

School based: school-based provision ensures schools and teachers provide a challenging and extended curriculum to enable the gifts and talents of students to emerge, be recognised, and be developed. This form of provision is the responsibility of all teachers and relates to approximately 10% of the population...additionally, schools may develop strategies which allow the most able students to learn together.

Supplementary – primary and secondary: supplementary provision enables the most gifted and talented students to interact with their

805 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2012, p3.

806 Department of Education, *Gifted and Talented Guidelines*, Perth, effective 1 March 2011, available at www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum/support/giftedandtalented/detcms/navigation/for-teachers/identification/characteristics-of-gifted---talented-students/ accessed 17 August 2012.

807 Department of Education, *Gifted and Talented Guidelines*, Perth, effective 1 March 2011, available at www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum/support/giftedandtalented/detcms/navigation/for-teachers/identification/characteristics-of-gifted---talented-students/ accessed 17 August 2012, p9.

gifted and talented peers in specific curriculum fields at higher levels than can normally be provided in the regular classroom or school. At the primary level, Regional Executive Directors are responsible for the selection and implementation of the organisational structures for supplementary provision for gifted and talented students. Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) provides one such organisational structure. At the secondary level, the Department of Education supports numerous high schools with a range of selective programs. These include academic, arts and languages.

Selective schools: Full-time provision for identified students, selected through rigorous assessment processes provides whole-school environments for talent development. Currently there are two selective secondary schools, one for academic and the other for arts-gifted students.⁸⁰⁸

Differentiation of curriculum

One of the significant areas suggested in the Education Department guidelines for catering for gifted students is that of 'differentiated curriculum'. This relates to both school-based and supplementary programs, particularly to in-class programs run by teachers on an ongoing basis. 'An effective program for gifted and talented students enables them to fulfil their potential through opportunities to direct, manage and negotiate their own learning, both as group members and as individuals.'⁸⁰⁹

According to guidance from the Education Department website, differentiation may involve the following:

- compacting the curriculum to remove skills or concepts the student has already mastered;
- identifying independent projects for the student in areas of interest;
- grouping students together for project work that matches their skill level;
- setting tiered assignments, on the same topic but requiring different levels of work/understanding etc;

808 Department of Education, *Gifted and Talented Guidelines*, Perth, effective 1 March 2011, available at www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum/support/giftedandtalented/detcms/navigation/for-teachers/identification/characteristics-of-gifted---talented-students/ accessed 17 August 2012, p9.

809 Department of Education, *Gifted and Talented: Differentiated Curriculum*, available at www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum/support/giftedandtalented/detcms/school-support-programs/differentiated-curriculum.en?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-1969226 accessed 17 August 2012.

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- using mentorships/apprenticeships for students to develop skills in a field with a resource person from school or the community to assist them to complete a task.⁸¹⁰

Other identified means of catering to gifted students include:

- enrichment – to broaden the range of experience for all students;
- extension – to encourage expansion of knowledge and skills in the usual curriculum; and
- acceleration – where gifted and talented students are able to participate in learning at higher levels, usually with older students. This may be through accelerating the student to a higher year level, or by allowing them to work with a higher year level for particular subjects or classes.⁸¹¹

However, it is clear that the differentiated provision of curriculum in a classroom is an added challenge for a teacher who may have a range of special needs within their class. As the Director General acknowledged:

...in any regular classroom I think what teachers will say to you is that the demographic, over time, is changing somewhat...They report...for example, that there are more students with autism; we have seen a growth of up to 14 %, I think, of students with autism...in any one classroom you could have students with autism, you could perhaps have someone with a learning difficulty, you have Aboriginal students who are perhaps struggling in areas, mental health issues are on the rise, and then you have students who are particularly bright.

So we agree that teachers are stretched to ensure that every student is receiving a good level of instruction and stretch. But saying that, we provide a lot of resources for schools to ensure that everyone gets their fair go. In fact, we provide about \$54 million a year in supplementary resourcing for schools, so that where students of the different natures that you are describing are there, additional resources are provided to be able to cope with those particular differences that might exist between groups. We also have, for example, particular programs for

810 Department of Education, *Gifted and Talented: Differentiated Curriculum*, available at www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum-support/giftedandtalented/detcms/school-support-programs/differentiated-curriculum.en?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-1969226 accessed 17 August 2012.

811 Department of Education, *Gifted and Talented: Differentiated Curriculum*, available at www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum-support/giftedandtalented/detcms/school-support-programs/differentiated-curriculum.en?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-1969226 accessed 17 August 2012.

*extension in primary schools. You would be familiar with the PEAC [Primary Extension and Challenge] program. In high school, we have gifted and talented programs but we also have some specialist programs...I think it is a challenge.*⁸¹²

The Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia gave an example of the difference that may exist within a class:

*I was talking to a teacher just yesterday and she was voicing her frustration that she had a year 7 class where there was a young lady reading at a six-year-old-level and there was a young lady reading at a 16-year-old level, and she was expected to differentiate a 10-year age gap within that year 7 class.*⁸¹³

In addition, AISWA addressed the fact that for some schools, what used to be considered a 'normal distribution' of students no longer exists.

*...what we are seeing more and more is that both school-wide and in any given class, we are not seeing any norm curve that looks like a regular norm curve. We are seeing norm curves that are either skewed to one end of the other depending on the school, where they have a big bulk of students down at one end or the other. We also have a number of our schools where the norm curve actually has a big dip in the middle...that puts enormous pressure on our teachers. I think that gifted aspect links into the mention in our submission of pre-service training in that really the majority of our teachers are not prepared for that and do not have the skills to teach a classroom that is that diverse.*⁸¹⁴

Finding 67

Differentiation of the curriculum to suit the needs of gifted students is an added challenge for teachers, who may already be managing a number of students with different learning needs within the classroom.

Some issues with provision of education for gifted and talented students

One submission raised a number of suggested shortcomings in educating the more gifted students, as follows:

812 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p8.

813 Mrs Michelle Bishop, Inclusive Education Consultant, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 May 2012, p9.

814 Ms Kylie Bice, Senior Inclusive Education Consultant, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 2 May 2012, p9.

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Teacher quality and training:

As described by AISWA, it is felt that Western Australian teachers are not well prepared to teach gifted students in the classroom:

There are no government mandates or guidelines for the provision of appropriate educational opportunities for gifted students. This is a group of students with enormous potential and while some schools have put measures in place to cater for this unique group of students, it remains an underserved population...the neglect of this group has enormous implications on improving their educational outcomes which are frequently lower than they could be...School leaders and teachers at independent schools consistently report to AISWA that they feel they have not received adequate pre-service training to give them the understanding, information and skills they need to teach students with additional needs (including disabilities, learning difficulties, NESD, behaviour and mental health issues, gifted etc).⁸¹⁵

Another submitter stated:

...our teachers continue to enter the classroom unprepared to recognise, or nurture, gifted students. Pre-service teachers in WA do not receive training in identifying gifted students nor are they appropriately equipped to differentiate the curriculum for those who are identified...No university in WA currently includes any training at pre-service levels despite the fact that all teachers will teach these students.⁸¹⁶

The Committee endorses the call for awareness of giftedness, identification of gifted students, and differentiation of curriculum to be included in pre-service teacher education courses.⁸¹⁷

The Committee considers that student teachers should be prepared to teach the gifted children (who may make up 10% of the students), as well as children with special needs. Expanding a teacher's skills in curriculum differentiation will assist all students in a classroom, not just the gifted students.

Training of school psychologists:

815 Submission No. 9 from Mr Ron Gorman, Deputy Director, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 19 December 2011, p6.

816 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2011, p3. Original emphasis.

817 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2011, p5.

Submission 28 to this Inquiry raised the issue of the training that school psychologists receive for working with gifted children, and the role they play in identifying and then catering for gifted children. According to this submitter,

*...giftedness is not a component of training for psychologists, including school psychologists, in any state in Australia at the present time. Content of courses offered is prescribed by the Australian Psychologist Accreditation Council (APAC) who do not make it a requirement. Some psychologists and school psychologists choose an elective unit in Special Needs which may briefly mention giftedness. No units currently focus on giftedness in WA.*⁸¹⁸

As psychologists are often called upon to assist with the identification of gifted students, and with the development of educational and behavioural plans for gifted students, it is clear that some preparation in this area would be useful. Again, if 10% of the student population is considered to be gifted, it is important that school psychologists receive the necessary training to manage the demands of these students.

Limited programs for academically talented students:

As 10% of the student population can be classed as gifted, there is a need for the provision of specialist programs for these students.

*Parents have reported that the Department of Education has indicated that there are approximately 2000 places in the Primary Extension and Academic Challenge (PEAC) programs in government schools in WA. When you add in the places in Selective High Schools and Specialist programs in High Schools (approximately 700 for each of Year 8, 9 and 10), there are approximately 4,100 places for gifted students where they are grouped with like ability peers. This amounts to appropriate opportunities for just 17% of our gifted students attending government schools.*⁸¹⁹

While it is to be hoped that in-school provision and differentiation of the curriculum will assist in meeting the needs of these students, it was suggested to this Committee that greater funding is needed 'for programs so all gifted children have the opportunity to access places and work with like minds for the majority of their time.'⁸²⁰

There is one school in Western Australia that selects its students on the basis of their academic gifts and talents. The school is the Perth Modern School which operates as an Independent Public School. In 2011, the school had 930 students enrolled from Year 8

818 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2011, p6.

819 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2011, p6. Original emphasis.

820 Submission No. 28 from Mr Derrin Cramer, 26 July 2012, p14.

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to 12. The campus consists of 483 boys and 447 girls. Students come from a wide variety of metropolitan and regional locations throughout Western Australia. With a 100% graduation rate, the school provides assistance to students in gaining tertiary scholarships including Cambridge and Oxford Universities and supports students in accessing tutoring courses and master classes. Its tag line is 'exceptional schooling, exceptional students'.⁸²¹

However, Perth Modern School's student population represents just 2.42% of the estimated number of gifted and talented students in this state.

Professor Louden of the University of Western Australia linked this perceived lack of opportunity to Australia's 'falling behind' in the international educational ranking systems such as PISA.

*So in what way is Australia falling behind? It is not falling behind in the achievement of average kids; it is not falling behind in the achievement of kids who are less likely to do well. We do quite okay there. Where we are falling behind is in the level of achievement of the most able children, because the amount of hours and the amount of directed effort that young Korean children put into school achievement is much greater than the amount of directed effort that most Australian kids put in – so the countries that have done better than us in the OECD tests in recent years. Our performance has stayed about the same at most levels, but at the very top, kids in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore and Korea are pushing ahead of us because the most committed students are more committed than most of our most committed students.*⁸²²

However, as Professor Louden made clear, there is a balance to be found between greater educational opportunities and pressure for success.

What I am saying is that our performance is not too bad, and I might go on to say that some of the countries that are passing us, and we need to worry about those, you would not be entirely happy with the amount of pressure that is put on young people in order to get that extra amount of achievement. So it is a mixed blessing. I do think that it is important that we have structures that cause children, especially older teenagers and young adults, to work very hard, because if you try hard, you will do well. ...So I think it is very important that at the

821 Perth Modern School, *Annual Report 2011*, 2011 Available at: <http://www.perthmodernschool.det.wa.edu.au/Portals/0/docs/Annual%20Report%202011.pdf>. Accessed on 6 November 2012.

822 Winthrop Professor Bill Louden, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p11.

*end of our schooling system we have structures that encourage kids who are going to go on in education to try hard, and I think examinations are an important part of that.*⁸²³

The Committee feels that the time constraints of this Inquiry have limited its ability to thoroughly examine the issue of education for gifted and talented students in Western Australia. However, it is clear from the evidence the Committee received that it is a contentious area that deserves greater consideration. The Victorian parliamentary committee devoted an entire inquiry to the issue in Victoria. This Committee certainly feels that it is an area that merits further inquiry in Western Australia, as well as further investment.

Finding 68

The Committee finds that the education of gifted and talented students in Western Australia merits further inquiry and investment.

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Education investigates the adequacy of current educational opportunities for gifted students in the public education system in Western Australia, with a view to expanding programs that cater for gifted students over the next five years.

823 Winthrop Professor Bill Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p11.

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Additional issues raised

This chapter summarises some additional areas for improving educational outcomes that have not already been addressed in this report or in the preceding five reports that make up the Committee's response to this Inquiry.

In the course of this Inquiry, there were a number of issues raised by members of the public that have fallen outside the scope of this Report and the preceding five reports. Because of the imminent prorogation and subsequent dissolution of Parliament, the Committee has not been able to invest the time to adequately inquire into these matters. However they are detailed here in short form for the public record.

Teachers

Teachers are central to educational outcomes: good teachers have a particularly positive impact on educational outcomes, and poor teachers have a particularly negative impact. International research has shown that good teachers are especially important for students who are struggling, and that the impact on a child's education of a poor teacher can last for years.

The effect of poor quality teaching on student outcomes is debilitating and cumulative...The effects of quality teaching on educational outcomes are greater than those that arise from children's backgrounds. ...A reliance on curriculum standards and state-wide assessment strategies without paying due attention to teacher quality appears to be insufficient to gain the improvements in student outcomes sought.⁸²⁴

It is clear that good teachers are the single most important resource in the education system. As one educational expert told the Committee:

...the greatest resource of all is a knowledgeable and skilful teacher who cares about that group of kids, who believes they can learn.⁸²⁵

824 Linda Darling-Hammond, 2000, quoted in National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, *Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations*, December 2005, Department of Education, Science and Training, p54.

825 Professor Bill Loudon, Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia, *Transcript of Evidence*, 8 August 2012, p4.

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In acknowledging this, the Committee concluded that to do this topic justice would require an Inquiry in its own right, one that canvassed the many relevant issues, including teacher training, recruitment, retention, professional development, mentoring, support, allocation of working hours and remuneration and conditions.

The Committee acknowledges that it has not investigated these issues in full, but feels obliged to include some of the issues that were raised during the course of the inquiry.

Some witnesses expressed concerns in respect to:

- The adequacy of teacher training in preparing graduate teachers for the classroom;
- The need for greater support for graduate teachers including mentoring; and
- Teacher placements.

Adequacy of teacher training in preparing graduate teachers for the classroom

Whether or not teachers are well prepared for their role in the classroom is of vital importance. International OECD research has shown that ‘many teachers find their initial education disconnected from the requirements for classroom teaching.’⁸²⁶ The Committee discussed this issue with a panel of representatives from the education schools of three of Western Australia’s universities.

The university representatives agreed that they do not have sufficient time to train their undergraduate teaching students in, for example, the full range of skills for teaching literacy.

*Once again, I just emphasise that having the course and the content in no way means that our students go out with expertise to the level that they need. We know that. It is evident and clear.*⁸²⁷

And:

*Teacher training does need to be more intense, if we are going to seriously address this and to give us a chance to develop the knowledge base and skills.*⁸²⁸

826 Quoted in Ben Jensen, *Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia*, Grattan Institute, February 2012, p14.

827 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p8.

828 Associate Professor Deslea Konza, Researcher, Language and Literacy, Edith Cowan University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p13.

Need for greater support for graduate teachers including mentoring

As outlined in the earlier chapter on literacy, in some schools the dominant culture is one of privacy of practice. The need for mentoring and support for all teachers, but more especially recent graduates was highlighted, as made clear in the following statement.

Certainly, I think that young novice teachers, when confronted with the realities that are outside a practicum where they have got a teacher supporting them, need a mentor situation so that they can look at the context within which they are put and actually learn through experience and through extra support and help. I think, ultimately,...they do not know what they do not know.⁸²⁹

The recent report by the Grattan Institute on the differences between the Australian education system and those in East Asia that have overtaken Australia in the international rankings systems, found that mentoring for teachers is an important factor in improving educational outcomes.⁸³⁰

The Grattan Institute reported on findings from the OECD 2008 Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS), which found that in many countries, including Australia:

Mentoring and induction programs are poor. Most countries, including Australia, have such programs. Yet new teachers say they often fail to provide constructive feedback based on classroom observations. They are disconnected from student learning.⁸³¹

Teacher placements

The issue of teacher placement and retention in regional and remote schools was raised with the Committee on several occasions.

During the Committee's visit to the Pilbara in March 2012, witnesses commented on the high numbers of young and inexperienced teachers who move to the region. This means that for that region, professional development assumed an even greater importance than it might otherwise have done.

More particularly, there is an identified pressing need for better cultural orientation for teachers recruited to work in remote schools and schools with high numbers of Indigenous students. One agency raised cultural preparation and 'teacher preparation

829 Ms Yvonne Sawers, Literacy Educator, Curtin University, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 July 2012, p8.

830 Jensen, B., Hunter, A., Sonnemann, J., and Burns, T., *Catching Up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia*, Report No. 2012-3, Grattan Institute, February 2012.

831 Jensen, B., Hunter, A., Sonnemann, J., and Burns, T., *Catching Up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia*, Report No. 2012-3, Grattan Institute, February 2012, p13-14.

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in cultural protocols specific for the community they are entering' as a priority issue.⁸³²
According to the submission, all teachers should receive on-going training in the cultural protocols of the community in which they work.⁸³³

The question was asked:

How does "the Education Department" select and prepare and train staff to work in schools such as ours? (Predominately children from four different language groups and often from "community living" backgrounds where there is evidence of trauma and poverty). We seem to get many, young, inexperienced teachers who come for a short while and then disappear back to the city.

Is a staffing plan designed around the needs of our children whereby there is a carefully thought out plan of what it is we exactly need in terms of experience, skill and strength and those educators are sought after or is it that vacancies are just filled? I personally never forget talking to the previous Principal in July 2010 who told me he couldn't wait to leave as he had "done his time" and was going back south to a better school!⁸³⁴

The staffing challenges faced by the Department of Education are widely acknowledged. In 2011, the Western Australian Auditor General carried out an audit that looked at teacher placement in schools.⁸³⁵ The audit focused on the processes to fill teacher vacancies in public schools at metropolitan, country and remote locations. The Audit asked whether 'DoE's processes for filling teacher vacancies (are) meeting its objectives', and whether 'DoE (has) identified and developed strategies for managing risks associated with all its processes for filling teacher vacancies.'⁸³⁶

As the audit details, the traditional DoE staffing system has been centrally controlled. This has in large part been as a result of the challenges of finding staff to work in remote schools:

The remoteness of many WA schools is a major reason that some schools have difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers. DoE

832 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, 15 March 2012, p7.

833 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, 15 March 2012, p12.

834 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, 15 March 2012, p13.

835 Western Australian Auditor General, *Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools*, Report 6 - August 2011, Perth, 31 August 2011.

836 Western Australian Auditor General, *Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools*, Report 6 - August 2011, Perth, 31 August 2011, p7.

regards providing schools with enough staff throughout the year as one of its core responsibilities. To ensure hard to staff schools have sufficient teachers, DoE has for many years used a rules based central placement process to place teachers in vacant positions...While filling vacancies in hard to staff schools is a priority, the central placement process is also used to fill most other teaching vacancies in one 'bulk run' prior to the start of each school year...Just over 41 % of the teaching workforce are centrally placed into a position each year.⁸³⁷

In recent years, two new staffing mechanisms have been introduced to give schools, and teachers, greater flexibility and control over staffing decisions. Independent public schools use an independent merit-based selection process, and other public schools can use the 'School Select' system. These two different approaches are outlined in full in the Auditor General's report.

The Committee received feedback during the course of this inquiry that some Principals consider that the best thing about being an Independent school is the freedom to recruit staff independently. Every independent school the Committee visited spoke very positively of the staff recruitment processes available under the Independent Public School (IPS) mechanism.

While the benefits to those schools which are able to take up the IPS program are clear, the Auditor General reports of legitimate concerns in respect to those schools that are unable to join the IPS system, or are considered 'unattractive' placements.

Interviews with central staff and principals, and the results of our teacher survey, showed that there are broadly held concerns that the IPS initiative will create a system where some schools are uncompetitive. IPSs have a number of perceived advantages in the open market that could result in a concentration of particular types of teachers in those schools, while other schools find it difficult to attract diverse or high quality teachers. There is the concern that some schools attract and retain the 'best' teachers. A possible outcome in an open market is that IPSs are more effective in recruiting teachers with experience and specific skills. Other schools may be left with concentrations of inexperienced staff, or a reliance on fixed term staff that causes problems with teacher continuity.⁸³⁸

837 Western Australian Auditor General, *Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools*, Report 6 - August 2011, Perth, 31 August 2011, p10.

838 Western Australian Auditor General, *Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools*, Report 6 - August 2011, Perth, 31 August 2011, p22.

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As made clear in the submission to this Committee from Fitzroy Crossing,⁸³⁹ the impact of such staffing decisions can be considerable for some schools.

The Department of Education's response to the Audit stated that:

There will always be a number of schools and specialist teaching areas that will be unable to attract teachers without central support and targeted recruitment strategies to ensure continuity of staff and uninterrupted delivery of educational programs. The findings of this report are in general congruent with the Department's own research outcomes and reflect the premises upon which the ongoing reforms to school staffing processes are based.⁸⁴⁰

The Committee understands that the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Legislative Assembly is currently examining the Department of Education's response to this audit by the Auditor General. Therefore, this Committee will not make any recommendations in relation to this issue in the absence of findings by the PAC.

Disengagement

The first section of this report dealt with the issue of non-attendance. A related problem is the issue of students who remain in attendance at school but are disengaged from the learning process.

Engagement with school is defined at three interrelated levels:

- Behavioural engagement, which refers to children and young people's participation in education, including the academic, social and extracurricular activities of the school;
- Emotional engagement, which reflects children and young people's sense of belonging or connectedness, affiliation, attachment or bonding to the school and teachers; and investment in learning and their intrinsic motivation; and
- Cognitive engagement, which relates to children and young people's investment in learning and their intrinsic motivation and self-regulation.⁸⁴¹

839 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, 15 March 2012, p13.

840 Western Australian Auditor General, *Right Teacher, Right Place, Right Time: Teacher Placement in Public Schools*, Report 6 - August 2011, Perth, 31 August 2011, p9.

841 KPMG, *Education provision for young people at risk of disengaging or disengaged from school*, 2009, p115. Available at: http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/Re-engaging_Our_Kids_KPMG_Apr2010.pdf. Accessed on 8 October 2012.

Students who are disengaged from learning and school pose a difficult and multifaceted problem for teachers and the education system more generally.

For many witnesses and submitters to the Inquiry, the issue of student engagement was of significant concern. One submitter asked:

*We feel deeply concerned about the fact that for the last thirty years we have had only one or two students complete Year 12. One has to question; if the money and resources are being poured into school such as ours - why is it that we still can't engage the students or assist them to want to come to and stay at school?*⁸⁴²

Many witnesses to the Committee discussed the fact that while disengagement may become most obvious in the later years of schooling, it has its roots much earlier in a student's school life. The Director General of the Department of Education pointed out that some children begin to disengage from learning as early as year 3.

*If we take the year 11s out of it for a moment and talk about disengagement per se, a body of research says that a group of boys in about year 3 start disengaging from schooling in general. There are various transition points, but they are arbitrary points in the schooling sector, so it is different for different groups of kids. The research has raised boys in year 3 as a particular issue that warrants some attention. Year 11 and 12 children's disposition to their learning is well set before 11 and 12. So if you are focussing on engagement and focussing only on years 11 and 12, you have left your run a bit too late. Our focus is on engagement right through all the schooling years. That is why we put such an emphasis, I guess, on things like student services, particularly in secondary. Engagement is not, and should not, be characterised as only a secondary problem.*⁸⁴³

It was clear from discussion with the Department of Education that while there are a variety of suggested reasons for why children disengage from learning, there is no one clear factor that explains the phenomenon.

A large number of theories are put up. One of those is the degree of feminisation of primary schools and the lack of male role models in primary school. I am not saying that is the reason, but that has been speculated on as a particular reason. The other thing is that, typically – this is not a Western Australian thing; it is not even an Australia thing;

842 Submission No. 19 from Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre, 15 March 2012, p7.

843 Ms Sharyn O'Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p18.

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it is a worldwide phenomenon - girls do develop quicker in those early years. Boys do seem to lag behind and by the time you get to year 3, it can be quite noticeable that the best students, the ones that are achieving well – the top students – tend to be the girls. A number of boys say, “Well, I’m not going to play that game, I’ll play the other game where I’m better”, sort of mentality, if you like.⁸⁴⁴

There are also explanations related to the teaching style and content that seek to explain why children, particularly boys, start to disengage at the year 3 level.

There is also in the curriculum and the pedagogy et cetera that it is the typical point at which there is a bit of a movement from the conceptual where you have a lot of play; you have a lot of tactile, concrete-... There is a shift to the discipline of writing and sitting at the desk a bit more. It is changing the concrete, I guess to the theoretical...⁸⁴⁵

What these types of explanations have in common is a focus on what is happening in the school as being the reason for disengagement. However, as discussed at some length in the earlier section of this report, a variety of factors from a child or student’s home life can have an enormous impact on their engagement with school.

Also the other noticeable point of transition or disengagement for Aboriginal boys is around year 5 or 6 where they are starting culturally to be more akin to a man. Particularly as we are a highly feminised workforce, the acceptance of the authority of the women is a huge issue. That is one that is a bit more obvious.⁸⁴⁶

The School of Education at the University of Edith Cowan conducted a study (published in 2009) on the level of engagement of students with schooling and the impact this had on their academic outcomes.⁸⁴⁷ It is known as the ‘Pipeline Project’, and the Committee was referred to it as a good source of information in relation to disengagement in Western Australian schools.

As the diagram below shows, this study found that a student’s ability or willingness to engage with an academic task can be impacted by a broad range of factors, including home life, mental health conditions, classroom behaviour, and teacher interventions.

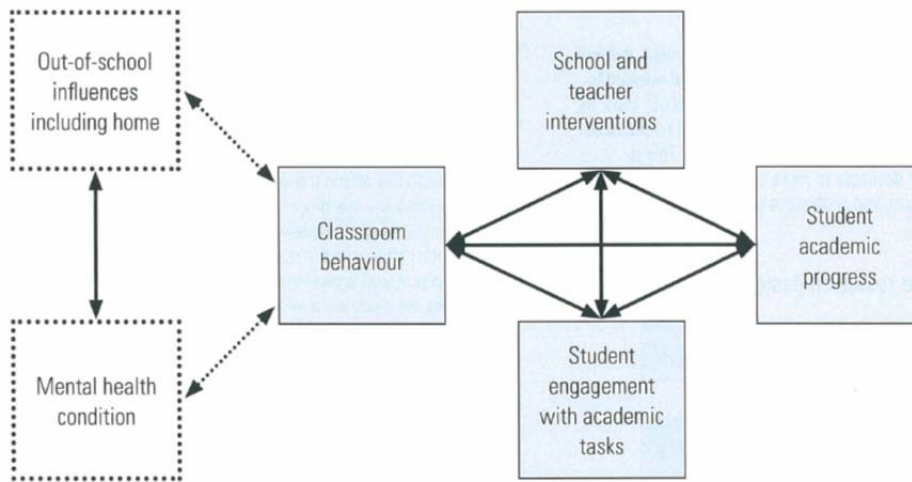
844 Mr David Axworthy, Deputy Director General Schools, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p18.

845 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19.

846 Ms Sharyn O’Neill, Director General, Department of Education, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 May 2012, p19

847 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarcyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009

Figure 16.1: Pipeline model for investigating student behaviour and academic progress⁸⁴⁸



This study examined cohorts of students at years 2, 4, 6 and 8 in 2005, and then tracked the students in each cohort for four years. This meant that the study collected data that spanned year 2 to year 11. A total of 31 schools in the metropolitan area of Perth took part in the study.⁸⁴⁹

The study focused on the behaviour of students in class and whether they were productively engaged with the class or were showing 'unproductive' behaviours. Students showing unproductive behaviours were rated against a 'Student Behaviour Checklist' with 10 categories of unproductive behaviours. The results of the survey found that students could be grouped into one of four categories:

- Productive: approximately 60% of students behave productively in class;
- Disengaged: 20% of students are in this group, and are characterised as being disengaged from instruction but not aggressive or non-compliant;
- Low-Level Disruptive: this group constitutes approximately 12% of students, who are reported to show a mix of behaviours, of which the most common was disruptive behaviour exemplified by calling out, seeking attention and provoking others;

848 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarcyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p21.

849 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarcyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, pvi.

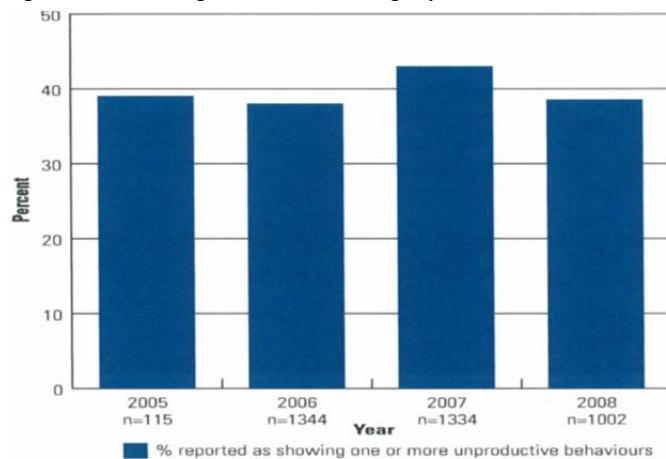
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- Uncooperative: this group is characterised by aggressive and non-compliant behaviour, with unproductive behaviours across five or more categories. Approximately 8% of students were included in this group.⁸⁵⁰

On average, 60% of students were considered to be behaving productively each year.

The situation varied within individual schools where some classes were more difficult to manage than others; and among schools. In some schools teachers reported nearly 80% of their students to behave productively whereas in others, as few as 20% were reported to behave productively. While differences among schools were generally related to the socio-economic status of the suburbs from which they drew their enrolments, there were exceptions.⁸⁵¹

Figure 16.2: Percentage of students showing unproductive behaviours across all cohorts 2005-2008⁸⁵²



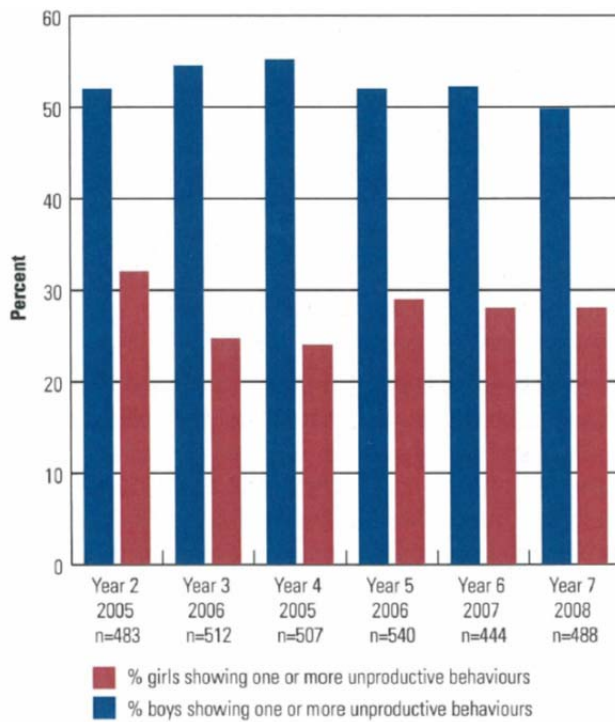
As the following graph shows, gender is relevant to the level of unproductive behaviour demonstrated.

850 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarcyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, pvii.

851 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarcyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, pvii.

852 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarcyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p28.

Figure 16.3: Percentage of students showing unproductive behaviours in years 2-7 by gender⁸⁵³



A comparison of the rates in primary and secondary schools shows that while there is a clear peak of disengaged and unproductive behaviour in year 10, it is by no means only a secondary school problem.

853 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarcyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p50.

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Figure 16.4: Percentage of students showing productive or unproductive behaviours in years 2-7⁸⁵⁴

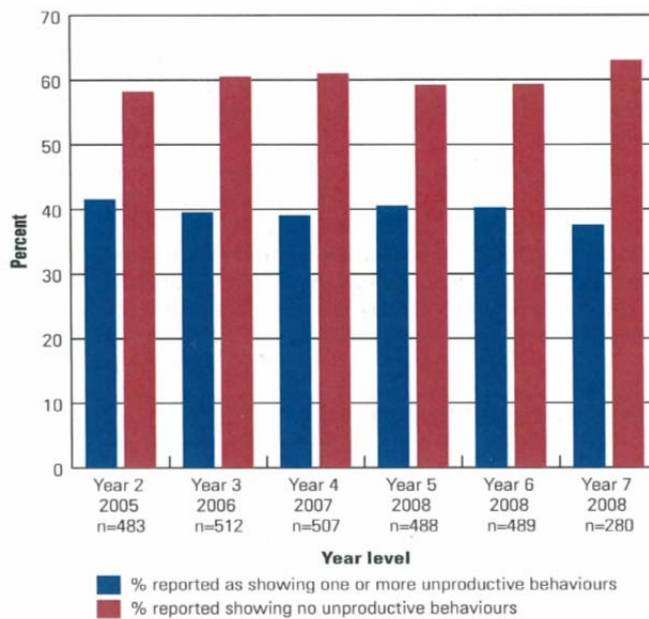
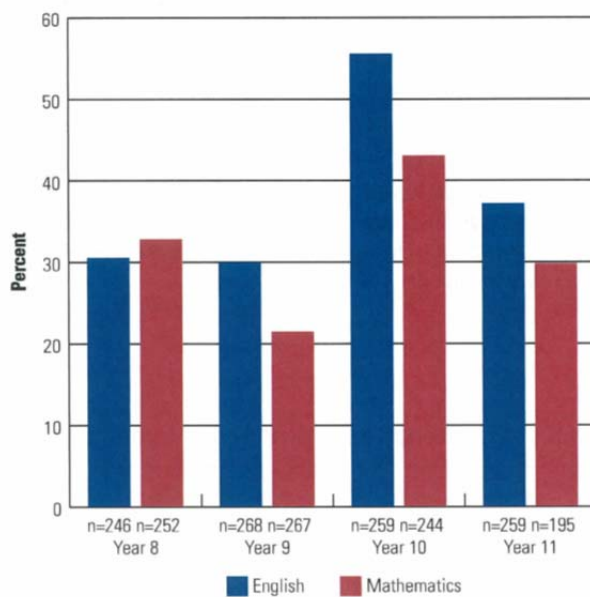


Figure 16.5: Percentage of students showing unproductive behaviours in English and mathematics classes, Years 8-11.⁸⁵⁵



854 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p29.

855 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p29.

The study looked at the consistency of unproductive behaviour amongst students, and whether a student in the productive group always stays productive, and if an uncooperative student necessarily remains uncooperative.

*The Pipeline Project sought to map the behaviour of students over a four-year period. The analyses of the responses to the Student Behaviour Questionnaire showed the behaviour of about 40% of students to be set on a steady, productive trajectory extending over four consecutive years. Of the remaining 60%, nearly one third (19.5% of all students) were reported to be unproductive during each of the four years...about 40% were consistently productive and about 20% were consistently unproductive. The behaviour of the remainder fluctuated from year to year.*⁸⁵⁶

While 20% of students acting in an unproductive manner appears likely to have a significant impact on educational outcomes, the study sought to distinguish between the types of disengaged behaviour, to identify those students for whom their behaviour was impacting on their academic outcomes.

*When severity of the impact of the students' behaviour was taken into account, the percentage of students who were consistently and seriously unproductive shrank to 3%. That is, only a small percentage of students appear to be locked into a pattern of behaviour that is seriously impeding their academic progress.*⁸⁵⁷

Also of interest was the finding that students are not all set on a permanent trajectory of either productive or unproductive behaviour.

*The Pipeline data showed that the behaviour and academic performance of about half the students did not follow a smooth, steady trajectory; but over a four-year period there were ups and downs, and good years and not so good years. The trend lines based on cohort mean scores belie the fact that the individual pathways of many students zigzagged during the year, and from year to year.*⁸⁵⁸

856 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, pvii.

857 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, pvii.

858 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, pviii.

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The evidence of the early onset of disengaged behaviour, and the variability in an individual student's level of engagement, combine to suggest that early interventions of some sort could be effective in improving engagement with learning. As the study highlighted, only 'a small number of students (approximately 3%) behave in ways that have a serious impact on their learning over four consecutive years.'⁸⁵⁹

Of significance is the high proportion of students who are disengaged but not disruptive. These students are unlikely to be the target of any form of intervention in the classroom, as much of the intervention is directed at the 8% of significantly uncooperative students. Yet interventions that targeted the 20% of disengaged and 12% of low level disruptive students may actually make more difference.

Finally, the Pipeline Project emphasised the 'incontrovertible evidence' that 'the home is the source of many of the behavioural problems that impede learning at school.'⁸⁶⁰ The report recommended, and this Committee agrees, that schools which face significant levels of unproductive behaviour amongst their students should receive extra funding and assistance from the Department of Education to employ staff to address these 'out-of-school' issues.⁸⁶¹

The need to value education

Many people posed the question of the Committee as to whether parents valued education as they ought. In some areas, it was felt that people saw education as low on the schedule of pressing daily priorities. In other areas, it was felt that while people paid lip service to the value of education, their actions in removing their children from school for holidays and other activities suggested otherwise. The impact of this lack of value on education was discussed in the attendance chapters of this report, as was the social marketing strategy encouraging attendance that was run by the Department of Education. As that strategy demonstrated, it is not a simple thing to change a societal attitude.

Nonetheless, it is clear that, for many stakeholders, a greater emphasis on the importance of education is needed in Western Australia. This will benefit children and families, as well as the state and its economy.

859 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p. ix.

860 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p. x.

861 M. Angus, T. McDonald, C. Ormond, R. Rybarczyk, A. Taylor, A. Winterton, *Trajectories of Classroom Behaviour and Academic Progress: A Study of Engagement*, School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Perth, 2009, p. x.

Boarding facilities in regional areas

One issue that was repeatedly raised with the Committee was that of the need for greater accommodation options for students in rural and remote areas to support better educational outcomes.

As a model for how such facilities can work, the Catholic Education Office highlighted the successful partnership between government and non-government organisations in the development of the Broome Hostel.

Provision of additional funds to hostels such as that located in Broome provides realistic opportunities for students from remote communities in Kimberley schools to access quality education and training, particularly in senior secondary education. The model of partnership between Catholic Education and the Country Hostels Association has been a successful example of government and non-government providers working together for the betterment of the community. The opportunity exists to significantly expand this facility... The provision of similar facilities in centres such as Karratha could also be considered.⁸⁶²

In a briefing in Karratha, the Committee was told of the need for hostel facilities in the Pilbara. The Committee was advised that Aboriginal parents and parents of children who used the school of the air wanted hostel facilities in the region to enable their children to be educated without needing to leave the Pilbara.⁸⁶³

In Roebourne, the Yaandina Family Centre discussed the need for an ‘away place’, which would provide a hostel-type facility for students to stay in during the school week. It was discussed as a possible respite style facility, where children could go in on a Sunday night, spend the school week in the hostel in an environment conducive to attending school, and then go home to their family on a Friday night.⁸⁶⁴

In Broome, the Committee was told of the success of the residential college that was opened in 2008. The Broome Residential College is a new facility and service providing boarding places for geographically isolated students in the Kimberley Region. The College caters to students attending both Broome Senior High School and Saint Mary’s College and is designed to blend with the natural environment, provide a state of the art facility, and maintain environmental sustainability. The design and establishment of the facility involved much consultation with representatives from the Broome

862 Submission No. 6 from Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 12 December 2011, p2-3.

863 *Briefing*, Pilbara Education Regional Office, Karratha, 12 March 2012.

864 *Briefing*, Yaandina Family Centre, Roebourne, 13 March 2012

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community and paid close attention to ensuring consultation with the Rubibi Traditional Owners.

As submitted by the Catholic Education Office, the establishment of the facility was a joint venture between the Western Australian Department of Education, Country High School Hostels Authority and the Catholic Education Office.

The Committee was told that the College is a very popular facility and there is always a waiting list for students to get a place. Construction of an extension was due in 2012.⁸⁶⁵

There was also discussion that while some towns (such as Kununurra) now have a hostel with a limited capacity for students, some members of the community felt that hostels should have facilities to accommodate parents wishing to visit their children.

For communities considering an 'away place' style facility for students to stay in during the school week, it was emphasised that such facilities could be used as places to provide the 'wrap-around' services that families require. Family support services could be provided in conjunction with the hostels, with many people wanting programs designed to strengthen parenting and family functioning as a whole.⁸⁶⁶

During a consultation in Halls Creek, the Committee was advised of the high rate of transiency of the school population; as much as 55% of the Halls Creek District High School transitions into or out of the school each year. The Committee was advised that COAG has decided to build a residential hostel in Halls Creek, although it is not clear at what stage any planning or funding may be at for this project. The concern in providing accommodation for students from outlying areas to come to the town is that this poses significant challenges for the school's infrastructure. The current high school is a converted primary school facility which is stated as not having sufficient room for the current cohort, without adding to the numbers.⁸⁶⁷

Manea Senior College in Bunbury made clear to the Committee that the need for hostel accommodation for school students is not confined to the remote north of the state. The Committee was told that Bunbury as a town needs boarding facilities, and that Manea Senior College currently has students who travel from Harvey, Collie, Bridgetown, and Dunsborough on a daily basis.⁸⁶⁸

It is clear from the representations made to the Committee in various regional and remote towns that hostel accommodation for school students is a priority for many communities. Many parents do not wish or cannot afford to send their children to

865 *Briefing*, Kimberley Education Regional Office, Broome, 14 March 2012.

866 *Briefing*, Kimberley Education Regional Office, Broome, 14 March 2012.

867 *Briefing*, Forum on Education in Halls Creek, 15 March 2012.

868 *Briefing*, Manea Senior College, Bunbury, 11 May 2012.

Perth for their education. Each community's need is slightly different, and the role of a hostel would be different depending on the community and the needs of the students.

Finding 69

The provision of hostel and boarding accommodation for school students in regional and remote towns is a priority for many community members.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that in 2013 the Minister for Education investigate the need for increased student boarding facilities in regional and remote communities. Such an inquiry should consult with the affected communities to develop a plan to enable more children to have access to boarding facilities closer to their home communities.

Parenting programs

The importance of improving parenting skills in order to improve educational outcomes was repeatedly stressed to the Committee. In addition, witnesses emphasised the negative impact that poor parenting skills can have on a child's life, and educational outcomes.

In several places the Committee visited, community members stated that the thing their community really needed was an expansion of parenting programs. As an example, in Roebourne, the Committee was told that parenting programs are desperately needed in the area. It was suggested that in that community's context, programs should be run in the school, as there are many very young parents in the town.

Additionally, a parenting program should target fathers as well as mothers, and cover issues such as:

- The roles and responsibilities of parents;
- The need for the father to be involved and to support the mother;
- The need for discipline and boundaries;
- How to discipline a child;
- Sexual health
- Communication skills
- Anger management (particularly for men); and

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- The role of a parent versus the role of a friend.⁸⁶⁹

This message was reinforced by witnesses in Karratha, Broome, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Bunbury, and in metropolitan briefings and hearings.

According to research, programs that focus on supporting parenting in the early years aim to influence the behaviours of children, parents and families in order to reduce the risk or ameliorate the effect of less than optimal social and physical environments. There is a wide range of programs in existence, which can be generally grouped into two categories:

1. short term interventions aimed at helping parents to improve their relationship with their child; and
2. home visiting programs – which include various programs, supports and services delivered to the family by a person visiting the home.⁸⁷⁰

Generally, ‘there is a body of evidence that demonstrates that parenting programs are the key to promoting the wellbeing of children and preventing the development of later problems.’ There is ‘some evidence that parenting programs may improve some outcomes associated with child abuse and neglect, such as poor parent-child interactions.’⁸⁷¹

As discussed in the section of this report on child mental health (Chapter twelve), the *Best Beginnings* program run jointly by the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Health, provides one successful model which has recently been expanded to regional areas. *Best Beginnings* is by no means the only option, and the Committee is aware of other programs such as the Triple P program that has been shown by research to be highly effective.

As has been demonstrated by several chapters of this report, (including those on attendance, literacy and health), parental engagement and good parenting skills are vital to good educational outcomes.

Finding 70

Parental engagement and good parenting skills are vital to good educational outcomes. Through submissions and briefings, community members in Western Australia are

869 Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, *Briefing*, Roebourne, 12 March 2012.

870 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Parenting in the early years: effectiveness of parenting support programs for Indigenous families*, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Resource Sheet no. 16, August 2012, p1.

871 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Parenting in the early years: effectiveness of parenting support programs for Indigenous families*, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Resource Sheet no. 16, August 2012, p1.

calling on the government to provide parenting programs for families and communities in need. The Committee finds that an investment in parenting programs is likely to result in an improvement in educational outcomes.

Recommendation 34

The Committee recommends to the Minister for Community Services that, in 2013, the number of parenting programs run in Western Australia be increased with improved accessibility.

Appendix One

Inquiry Terms of Reference

An inquiry into improving educational outcomes for Western Australians of all ages

1. Current and future resourcing of new methods and activities to improve educational outcomes such as e-learning and school partnerships;
2. Factors influencing positive and negative childhood development from birth to year 12;
3. Facilitating greater opportunities to engage all students in year 11 and 12;
4. Improving access and opportunities for adult learning in regional and remote WA; and
5. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome: prevalence, prevention, identification, funding and treatment to improve education, social and economic outcomes.

The Committee will report by 30 November 2012.

Appendix Two

Committee's functions and powers

The functions of the Committee are to review and report to the Assembly on:

- a) The outcomes and administration of the departments within the Committee's portfolio responsibilities;
- b) Annual reports of government departments laid on the Table of the House;
- c) The adequacy of legislation and regulations within its jurisdiction; and
- d) Any matters referred to it by the Assembly including a bill, motion, petition, vote or expenditure, other financial matter, report or paper.

At the commencement of each Parliament and as often thereafter as the Speaker considers necessary, the Speaker will determine and table a schedule showing the portfolio of responsibilities for each committee. Annual reports of government departments and authorities tabled in the Assembly will stand referred to the relevant committee for any inquiry the committee may make.

Whenever a committee receives or determines for itself fresh or amended terms of reference, the committee will forward them to each standing and select committee of the Assembly and Joint Committee of the Assembly and Council. The Speaker will announce them to the Assembly at the next opportunity and arrange for them to be placed on the notice boards of the Assembly.

Appendix Three

Submissions received

Name	Position	Organisation	Date
Dr Dawn Butterworth	President	National Council of Women of WA Inc	October 2011
Ms Amanda Gillett	Community Services Manager	Association of Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors	November 2011
Dr Ron Chalmers	Director General	Disability Services Commission	December 2011
Ms Michelle Scott	Commissioner	Commissioner for Children and Young people	December 2011
Mr Ron Dullard	Director	Catholic Education Office of Western Australia	December 2011
Mr Stephen Loosely	Member	Victorian Institute of Teaching	December 2011
Mr Matt Burrows	CEO	Therapy Focus	December 2011
Mr Ron Gorman	Deputy Director	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia	December 2011
Dr Ruth Shean	Director General	Department of Training and Workforce Development	December 2011
Mr Warwick Smith	Operations Manager	Peel and Rockingham Kwinana Mental Health Service	December 2011
Mr Kim Snowball	Director General	Department of Health	December 2011
Mr Terry Murphy	Director General	Department for Child Protection	December 2011
Clinical Professor Carol Bower	Senior Principal Research Fellow	Telethon Institute for Child Health Research	January 2012
Ms Sharyn O'Neill	Director General	Department of Education	January 2012

Ms Louise Sylvan	Chief Executive Officer	Australian National Preventive Health Agency	February 2012
Dr Elizabeth Stamopoulos	Senior Lecturer	Edith Cowan University	February 2012
		Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association WA (CPSU/CSA)	March 2012
Ms Emily Carter	Deputy CEO	Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Womens Resource Centre	March 2012
Professor John Boulton	Senior Paediatrician		March 2012
Mr Michael Thorn	Chief Executive	Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education	April 2012
		Russell Family Fetal Alcohol Disorder Association	May 2012
Dr Jasmine McDonald	Honorary Research Fellow	Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia	June 2012
Ms Melissa Kelly and Mr Patrick Barter			June 2012
Dr Leslie E Bolitho	President	The Royal Australasian College of Physicians	June 2012
Dr Lesley Williams	Honorary Research Fellow	Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia	June 2012
		Telethon Institute of Child Health Research	July 2012
Mr Derrin Cramer	Gifted Education Consultant and Author	Thinking Ahead	July 2012

Appendix Four

Hearings

Date	Name	Position	Organisation
21 September 2011	Ms Rae Walter	CEO	Ngala
	Ms Elaine Bennett	Director	Ngala
	Ms Kim Wedge	Clinical Services	Ngala
21 September 2011	Ms Susan Kiely	Representative for AEDI, A/Senior Coordinator Service Development	Child and Adolescent Health Service, Department of Health
	Ms Robyn Kinkade	Manager Special Projects	Department of Education
	Ms Gail Clark	AEDI Coordinator	Department of Education
28 September 2011	Dr Caroline Goossens	Child Psychiatrist	Faculty of Child Psychiatry
19 October 2011	Mr Kevin Brahim	State Director	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	Ms Anne Russell-Brown	Group Director Social Outreach and Advocacy	St John of God Healthcare
	Ms Anna Roberts	Group Manager Early Years	St John of God Healthcare
	Mrs Cecilia Cox	Group Coordinator, Strong Family Strong Culture Program	St John of God Healthcare
2 November 2011	Mrs Angela Poole	Media Spokesperson	Community Health Nurses WA
9 November 2011	Mrs Amanda Gillett	Community Services Manager	Association of Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors
	Mr Joel Richards	Youth Programs Coordinator	Association of Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors
	Mr Gerard Neesham	Chief Executive Officer	Clontarf Foundation

	Ms Stephanie Syme	Chief Financial Officer	Clontarf Foundation
23 November 2011	Mr Terry Murphy	Director General	Department for Child Protection
	Mr Dawson Ruhl	Chief Executive Officer	Child Australia
30 November 2011	Mrs Kate Gatti	Area Director, Population Health	WA Country Health Service
	Mr Ian Smith	Chief Executive Officer	WA Country Health Service
	Mr Philip Aylward	Chief Executive, Child and Adolescent Health Services	Department of Health
	Mr Mark Morrissey	Executive Director, Community Child Health	Department of Health
22 February 2012	Mrs Ruth Griffiths	Child Health Nurse	Child and Adolescent Community Health, Department of Health
	Miss Elise McLernon	Child Health Nurse	Child and Adolescent Community Health, Department of Health
	Mrs Lynette Sprigg	Community Clinical Nurse Manager	Child and Adolescent Community Health, Department of Health
21 March 2012	Mr Lindsay Hale	A/Executive Director, Statewide Planning and Delivery	Department of Education
	Ms Deborah Bevan	Manager, E-schooling	Department of Education
	Mr Bevan Doyle	Chief Information Officer	Department of Education
29 March 2012	Mrs Kate Gatti	Clinical Lead, Child and Youth Health Network and Population Health	WA Country Health Service

	Ms Sarah McKerracher	A/Development Officer supporting Child and Youth Health Network	Department of Health
	Dr Colleen O'Leary	Epidemiologist, Alcohol and Pregnancy Researcher	Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute
2 May 2012	Mr Ron Gorman	Deputy Director	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
	Ms Kylie Bice	Senior Inclusive Education Consultant	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
	Ms Michelle Bishop	Inclusive Education Consultant	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
9 May 2012	Ms Sharyn O'Neill	Director General	Department of Education
	Mr David Axworthy	Deputy Director General	Department of Education
	Ms Juanita Healy	Executive Director, Statewide Services	Department of Education
	Mr Martin Clery	Assistant Executive Director, Statewide Services	Department of Education
	Mr Bevan Doyle	Chief Information Officer	Department of Education
	Ms Debra Sayce	Director of religious Education/Assistant Director of Learning and Teaching	Catholic Education Office
	Ms Stephanie Jackiewicz	Team Leader, Early Years Learning and Care	Catholic Education Office
	Dr Ruth Shean	Director General	Department of Training and Workforce Development
	Ms Brenda Micale	Director, Policy Planning and Research	Department of Training and Workforce Development

	Dr James Fitzpatrick	Paediatric Senior Registrar, Chief Investigator	Marulu – the Lililwan Project The George Institute for Global Health
16 May 2012	Professor Carol Bower	Senior Principal Research Officer, Division of Population Sciences	Telethon Institute of Child Health Research
	Dr Rochelle Watkins	Postdoctoral Research Fellow	Telethon Institute of Child Health Research
13 June 2012	Mr Dave Stevens	Principal	Alta-1
	Mr Gary Robinson	Aboriginal Independent Community Schools Advisor (Perth)	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
20 June 2012	The Hon Wayne Martin	Chief Justice of Western Australia	Supreme Court of Western Australia
	Mr Neill Guard	Executive Director	Drug and Alcohol Office
	Mr Gary Kirby	Director, Prevention and Workforce Development	Drug and Alcohol Office
9 July 2012	Mrs Joyce Bootsma	School Registrar	Department of Education
	Ms Rikki Hendon	Branch Assistant Secretary	CPSU/CSA
	Mr Russell Clark	ICT Officer	CPSU/CSA
	Dr Jeremy Pagram	University Lecturer	Edith Cowan University
	Dr Paul Newhouse	Education researcher	Edith Cowan University
	Dr Ashley Aitken	Senior Lecturer	Curtin University
	Dr Raewyn Mutch	Paediatrician	Telethon Institute of Child Health Research
	Professor Gunesh Rajan	Professor Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Consultant Ear and Skullbase Surgeon	University of Western Australia Department of Health
	Ms Mandy Nayton	Educational and Developmental Psychologist, CEO	DSF Literacy and Clinical Services

Appendix Five

Briefings

Date	Name	Position	Organisation
10 October 2011 Adelaide	Dr Tom Karmel	Managing Director	National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)
	Ms Moira Breda	Standards Manager	National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)
	Mr Graham Jaeschke	General Manager South Australia	The Smith Family
	Mr Brenton Wright	Previous advisor to the Government of Western Australia	
	Ms Phillipa Duigan	Director Youth Engagement and Inclusion	Department of Education and Children's Services
11 October 2011 Adelaide	Mr Daniel Cox	Director Service Modernisation	South Australian Health
	Mr Adam Kilvert	Manager, Service Modernisation	South Australian Health
	Ms Sue Miers	Director	NOFASARD
12 October 2011 Canberra	Dr Evan Arthur	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	Ms Karel Williams	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	Mr James Hart	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

	Mr David Hardy	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	Mr Daniel Owen	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	Ms Jo Calwell	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	Ms Joy Petch	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	Robin Shannon	Canberra Office	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
	The Hon Dr Sharman Stone	Parliamentary Liaison Group for the Prevention of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)/Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)	Federal Parliament
	Ms Lisa Carroll et al	Deputy Secretary	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)
13 October 2011	Ms Sarah Cavanagh	Kidsmatter	The Australian Psychological Society
	Ms Jo Lawrence	Kidsmatter	The Australian Psychological Society

	Ms Lynette O'Grady	Kidsmatter	The Australian Psychological Society
	Dr Sharon Goldfeld	Senior Fellow Child Health Advisor	Centre for Community Child Health Victoria Office for Children
	Dr Daryl Higgins	Deputy Director (Research)	Australian Institute of Family Studies
	Dr Ben Edwards	Senior Research Fellow	Australian Institute of Family Studies
	Dr Jenny Proimos	Paediatrician and Adolescent Health Consultant Principal Medical Advisor	Centre for Adolescent Health Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
	Professor Collette Taylor	Chair of Early Childhood Education and Care	Melbourne Graduate School of Education
14 October 2011 Melbourne	Mr John Fleming	Head of Precinct	Berwick Campus, Haileybury College
12 March 2012 Karratha	Ms Sue Cuneo	Regional Executive Director	Pilbara Regional Education Office Forum
	Ms Nicole Davey	School Psychologist	
	Ms Jane Gartland	Senior School Psychologist	
	Mr Bruce McCauley	Mentor Principal	
	Ms Valerie McPherson	Coordinator Regional Operations	
	Ms Felicity Watt	School Psychologist	
	Ms Amelia Hulin	Coordinator Regional Services	
	Mr Ray McMillan	Principal, Roebourne District High School	
	Ms Lauren Nardone	Participation Coordinator, Karratha	
	Ms Hayley Sture	A/Engagement and Transitions Manager, Participation Team	

	Ms Tracy Cowie	Deputy Principal, Peg's Creek Primary School	
	Mr Niel Smith	Principal, Tambrey Primary School	
12 March 2012 Karratha Community Forum	Ms Diane Pentz	CEO	Regional Development Australia Pilbara
	Ms Kathy Holt	Children's Services Officer	Department for Communities
	Ms Joanne Abbott		Department for Communities
	Ms Lynsey Wellings	Co-ordinator	Karratha Family Centre
	Ms Susan Shirtliff	CEO	Ngarliyarndu Bindirri Aboriginal Corporation
	Mr Michael Nikakis		PCYC
	Ms Lisa Taylor	Manager Community Projects and Engagement	Pilbara Cities Office
	Ms Kelly Strange	Workforce Development Co- ordinator	Pilbara Joblink
	Ms Bo Keo	Youth Broker	Pilbara Joblink
	Mr Peter Gaiter	Manager	Pindan College
	Ms Sharon Vertigan	Councillor	Shire of Roebourne
	Ms Fiona White- Hartig	Shire President	Shire of Roebourne
	Ms Daphne Trevurza		The Smith Family
	Ms Leanne Gaiter	Project Manager	West Pilbara Communities for Children
	Ms Shannon McCarthy	EYG Coordinator	West Pilbara Communities for Children
	Ms Bianca Crake	Indigenous Affairs Advisor	Woodside Energy Ltd
	Ms Julie Pope	Co-ordinator, Karratha Education Initiatives	Woodside Energy Ltd
	Ms Jackie Bickendorf	Manager Youth Services Newman	YMCA Early Learning Centre
	Ms Kaye Van Niewkuyk		YMCA Early Learning Centre

	Ms Jennie Burns	Executive Manager, Family and Children's Services	YMCA Perth
	Ms Louise Giolotto	Executive Manager, Family and Community Services	YMCA Perth
12 March 2012 Roebourne	Mr Daniel Brown	CEO	Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
	Ms Sharon Deshow	Smoking Cessation	Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
	Ms Elaine Laraia	Prison Health	Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
	Ms Joy Fordham	Child and Maternal Health Nurse	Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
	Ms Anne Flynn	Child and Maternal Health Nurse	Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation
13 March 2012 Roebourne	Ms Veronica Rodenburg	CEO	Yaandina Family Centre
13 March 2012 Karratha	Mr Greg Kelly	Principal	Karratha Senior High School
14 March 2012 Broome	Mr John Collins	Coordinator Regional Services, Kimberley Education Regional Office	Department of Education
	Ms Edie Wright	Manager Aboriginal Education, Kimberley Education Regional Office	Department of Education
	Ms Maureen Carter	CEO	Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services, Fitzroy Crossing
	Dr John Boulton	Senior Paediatrician	WA Country Health Service
	Mr Tim O'Brien	Director, Kimberley Population Health	WA Country Health Service

	Professor Lyn Henderson-Yates	Deputy Vice Chancellor (Broome)	Notre Dame University
	Professor Neil Drew	Deputy Head of Campus	Notre Dame University
	Associate Dean Jenny Connell	Associate Dean	Notre Dame University
15 March 2012 Halls Creek	Ms Tracey Gillett	District Director, East Kimberley	Department for Child Protection
	Ms Karen Withers		Department for Child Protection
	Ms Wendy Burns		Department for Child Protection
	Mr Richard Smit	Team Leader	Youth Services Halls Creek
	Ms Clare Gray		Catholic Education Office
	Mr Clifton Fong	Principal	Halls Creek District High School
	Mr Dean Savoia	Principal	Red Hill Catholic Primary School
	Ms Jodie Bedford	Aboriginal Education Officer	Halls Creek TAFE
15 March 2012 Fitzroy Crossing	Ms Sarah Mist	Youth Project Worker	Fitzroy Crossing
	Ms Carol Erlank	Director of Nursing	Fitzroy Valley Health Service
16 March 2012 Fitzroy Crossing	Ms Carolyn Davey	Principal	Karrayilli Adult Education Centre Aboriginal Corporation
16 April 2012 Canada	Dr Jocelynn Cook	Executive Director	The Canada FASD Research Network
	Ms Valerie Flynn	Manager	FASD Strategic Programming Unit, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada
	Ms Anne-Marie Bedard	A/Manager	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Division of Childhood and Adolescence, Public Health Agency of Canada
17 April 2012 Canada	Dr David Butler-Jones	Chief Public Health Officer	Canada

11 May 2012 Bunbury	Mr Paul Matthews	Principal	Manea Senior College
	Mr Rod Rykers	Associate Principal	Manea Senior College
4 July 2012 Cairns	Mr Noel Pearson	Director	Cape York Institute
	Ms Danielle Toon	CEO	Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy
	Ms Bernardine Denigan	CEO	Cape York Partnerships
	Mr Tim Leach		Cape York Partnerships
5 July 2012 Brisbane	Dr Chris Sarra	The Stronger Smarter Institute	Queensland University of Technology
	Dr Heather Douglas	Director of Postgraduate Research Programs	TC Beirne School of Law, University of Queensland
	Dr Alan Cody	Senior eResearch Fellow and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)	Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology, University of Queensland
	Prof Mick Manus	Professor	Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology, University of Queensland
	Prof Phil Long	Professor	Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology, University of Queensland
6 July 2012 Canberra	Mr Michael Thorn	CEO	Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education
	Ms Sarah Ward	Senior Policy Officer	Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education
13 August 2012 Perth	Mr Bevan Doyle	Chief Information Office	Department of Education

21 August 2012 Perth	Mr Glenn Venn	Director Infrastructure and Telecommunications	Department of Education
5 September 2012 Perth	Mr Geoff Metcalf	Principal	Roseworth Primary School, Girrawheen

Appendix Six

Committee survey of selected metropolitan schools

As part of this inquiry, the Committee undertook a survey of a selection of 20 metropolitan public schools on the issue of school attendance. An email was sent to the selected schools. The text of the email was as follows:

The Education and Health Standing Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into improving educational outcomes for Western Australians

Your school has been selected as part of a small random sample of metropolitan primary and secondary schools to assist with this inquiry.

Part of the inquiry involves looking at school attendance and the various factors that influence whether children and young people attend school. We would like you to advise:

- *What are the main issues affecting attendance at your school?*
- *What measures and/or programmes has the school implemented to improve attendance?*
- *What has been the impact of these measures?*
- *How has this impact been determined?*

We would also be happy to receive any general comments you would like to make about attendance issues in your school.

We ask that you provide this information by Monday 27 August 2012.

Appendix Seven

Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSSO	Australian Council of State School Associations
ADHD	Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
AISWA	Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
ALLS	Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey
APL	Australian Parents Council
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASETTS	Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors
BRAMS	Broome Aboriginal Medical Service
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Health Service
CARE	Curriculum and Re-Engagement
CCYP	Commissioner for Children and Young People
CHN	Child Health Nurse
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COPMI	Child/Children of a Parent with a Mental Illness
CYAAA	Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy
DCP	Department for Child Protection
DoE	Department of Education
DEEWR	Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations
DoH	Department of Health
DI	Direct Instruction

DTWD	Department of Training and Workforce Development
ECU	Edith Cowan University
ENT	Ear, Nose and Throat
EON	Edge of Nowhere Foundation
EPDS	Edinburgh Post Natal Depression Scale
ESL	English as a Second Language
FASD	Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GP	General Practitioner
HDWA	Health Department of Western Australia
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPS	Independent Public School
K-12	Kindergarten to Year 12
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLS	National Literacy Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OM	Otitis Media
OPD	Out Patient Department
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PALL	Principals as Literacy Leaders
PEAC	Primary Extension and Challenge
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SHN	School Health Nurse
SIDE	Schools of Isolated and Distance Education
STP	State Training Provider (formerly known as TAFE)
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Study
TICHR	Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
UK	United Kingdom of Britain
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WACE	Western Australian Certificate of Education
WACHS	Western Australian Country Health Service
WHO	World Health Organization