

Division 25: School Curriculum and Standards Authority, \$34 245 000 —

Ms L.L. Baker, Chairman.

Mr J.H.D. Day, Minister for Planning representing the Minister for Education.

Mr A. Blagaich, Chief Executive Officer.

Ms J. Nairn, Director, Corporate Services.

Ms J. Healy, Director, Policy and Planning.

[Witnesses introduced.]

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Armadale.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I refer to page 296, and my question is about the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy. However, I want to preface my question by referring to the NAPLAN results shown on page 273. There seems to have been a regression in performance in certain areas under NAPLAN, which brings into focus my question. I think the NAPLAN results come out in September. Is there any move by the department to try to get these results earlier because that may assist in trying to improve future NAPLAN results?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: I will ask Mr Blagaich to reply.

Mr A. Blagaich: Yes, there is a move nationally to try to bring the results out sooner for parents. There is certainly talk about a NAPLAN online, which would certainly increase our flexibility in getting information back out. In terms of that happening, some things have to be put into place. We have contracts currently in place that we have negotiated. At the moment we are renegotiating the contract and, as part of that, we have asked for things to come forward. We have advised the minister that we would most likely be able to make it a week earlier at this stage, and then we will have to work through the process of negotiating and getting the results out much sooner. When we do move online, the intention is to do that, but there are other issues, obviously, associated with taking NAPLAN online.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Mr Blagaich may not want to answer this question—I am taking a liberty. Is there any concern about or explanation for the performance decreasing in certain NAPLAN areas?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: That is not something that this agency can really answer; it needs to be answered by probably the three education systems we have in this state.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Is there any discussion about NAPLAN moving earlier? The earlier question was about the results. I know there is some commentary that perhaps if the tests themselves were earlier, it would restrict the concentration of schools practising for NAPLAN, and then they could get on with their normal curriculum.

Mr A. Blagaich: That discussion happens with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. It basically sets up the whole agenda and the timetable for us across the country, so that is something that we negotiate when we are at the table with it. Now that we have an explicit Australian Curriculum in the K–10 area, we think we will be able to at least provide a better line-up to curriculum. The links are not as explicit now because we do not have a common curriculum around the country. That should assist in some of those decisions about when to place things. We could go earlier. Then negotiation has to happen with ACARA as to whether we would go earlier, but we have certainly heard the same requests from schools.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I go back to the results and when they are available. Is it September across the country?

Mr A. Blagaich: Yes. Across the country we all go together—we try to go together. The discussions at the moment are about whether we could release stuff without the summary data. We are clearly all pushed to have the summary data—the comparisons across the country—done all at once. That is the bit that takes the extra time. We could actually release school results much quicker, but the consensus amongst the jurisdictions is that we should have the entire summary data available at the same time as we go, so that is something that needs to be debated as well.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Mr Blagaich said that the states try to release their data at the same time. Is that achieved?

Mr A. Blagaich: By and large, within about a week. Last year there was an issue. Some results were printed incorrectly, so we had to stall things. Therefore, some states went a couple of days earlier. But, by and large, it is achieved. The intention is to go out together.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Does it concern the authority at all, if at all, that the growing trend—this is only anecdotal evidence, and certainly comes from my area—is that teachers and some schools are doing mock NAPLAN tests

for the year prior? Is the authority concerned that it is going to skew or corrupt the figures and the usefulness of NAPLAN?

[12.40 pm]

Mr J.H.D. DAY: My layperson's comment would be that if students are gaining literacy skills, however that is achieved, it is probably a desirable thing. Whether there is a particular problem with what the member just mentioned, I will ask the chief executive officer to comment.

Mr A. Blagaich: We are trying to get a balanced curriculum in schools. We would really like schools to look at the entire breadth of learning; we know that National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy tests only a sliver of the work, and there is much to be covered in the Australian curriculum. We are concerned about an over focus on prep and drill et cetera, and would much prefer to recommend to schools that they approach the teaching of the entire curriculum and do a good job of that and then take the sample, the cut, in the test, rather than overemphasising the test.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: This is a matter of policy, I suppose, rather than the effect of what we have seen happen. We are now seeing what was said at the start of NAPLAN, that there would be a trend to teach to the test. I cannot substantiate the depth and amount of that, but it is apparently coming to pass. Does the department or the authority have any intention to do something formally, rather than just have a generalised view that we should teach the whole curriculum, which is what NAPLAN was designed to slice into?

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Overall, if this is an issue that is happening, it needs to be addressed by the management of schools and the education system. The Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the independent schools system need to address it. I will ask Mr Blagaich to deal with it from here.

Mr A. Blagaich: So far with the Australian curriculum, we have implemented phase 1, which is English, maths, science and history. Phases 2 and 3 are problematic for Western Australia, because what has been presented to us by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority is in bands for years 1 and 2, years 2 and 3 and so on. We have been down that path once before with the whole outcomes-based education thing and have said that is not good enough. Professor David Andrigh, who is on the board, has said that we are not going down that pathway. We have to undo the Australian curriculum, using the content that ACARA has given us and dividing it back into years—year 1, year 2, year 3 and year 4—and then inserting some standards. We are getting calls from schools for some recommendations around hours: “How much should we be covering in our schools?” We know that we want 50 per cent of our time in the early years in primary school to be absolutely explicitly around literacy and numeracy. We know that we need some stuff around numeracy and it is clear that that has to happen. We believe that will come with that time recommendation. We have some negotiations still to do and consultations with schools, because this is always problematic. For example, on languages, it is great to specify that kids have an entitlement to learn a language, but can we get a language teacher at every school around the country? These are issues that we have all had to confront. Over the course of the next five to six months, we will go into a consultation process with schools specifically and system and sector leaders around this time recommendation. When that time recommendation comes through, it will be about saying that schools have to tackle the whole lot; they cannot just be pitching or just covering the stuff that is covered in NAPLAN. We are recommending very strongly through the board that that statement be made, so that schools have an idea of what they should be covering to get that breadth.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: In this context it is worth noting that so far \$20 million has been provided by the government to allow the authority to adopt and adapt the Australian curriculum for Western Australian needs. Since February this year, the authority has undertaken a review of the Australian curriculum for that purpose and it has been recognised that we need to review the disciplines of history, geography, civics and citizenship, and economics and business to ensure a complete humanities and social science learning area. I am advised that over the next three years the additional funding will support a series of development activities, which will be undertaken in conjunction with teachers and schools to complete the curriculum and assessment guidelines and associated policies for the implementation of phases 2 and 3 of the Australian curriculum subjects in 2017.

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Given the minister's comments, it seems to be a comprehensive approach. If I asked the authority, “Is \$20 million enough?” it may well say, “No, not nearly.” So I will not even go there. I saw a lot of smiles behind the minister.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: There are not too many government agencies that would not say that!

Mr P.C. TINLEY: Surely, there are some reasonable ones.

My question is about the next step in the review of the curriculum, particularly the humanities, which is of interest to a lot of people. Is the minister or someone in the authority in a position to talk about the inclusion of Aboriginal history in the curriculum; and, if so, how much?

Mr A. Blagaich: I will give a little bit of background on the humanities. ACARA released the history curriculum with English, maths and science. Our primary school teachers have done a phenomenal job getting

the history curriculum going, but geography, business and economics, and civics and citizenship are in phase 2. Our primary teachers have done a great job filling the time with history, but they say, “Now that there is all of this content written for geography, business and economics, and civics and citizenship, when can we fit that in?” We are taking the approach that to make this work, we have to identify a core curriculum, what every kid is entitled to have out of the curriculum, and then an additional curriculum. In that we have to look at making sure that the Aboriginal histories of Australia are included. That is there, specifically in the curriculum, but also it exists as a cross-curriculum priority. The front of all our documentation for the “Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline” clearly articulates that that must be covered. But we have to get this in a syllabus. We have been missing a syllabus for a long time, what a teacher has to teach. The young teacher—not necessarily in age, but in experience—has to be given good guidance about what they have to cover and we have to make sure that that is in there. That is the work that we are doing right now.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, there is one more question before we finish this division.

Mr N.W. MORTON: Minister, this question may have been answered in previous divisions, but I seek clarification. I refer to the first dot point under the heading “Significant Issues Impacting the Agency” on page 294 of budget paper No 2, which refers to the changes to the Western Australian Certificate of Education. Could the minister outline the support being given to the rollout of WACE across schools in 2015–16 in years 11 and 12? I think it is good that students should leave school with either a certificate II or an ATAR ranking. The member for Fremantle asked about the \$1.4 million in the last division, but I seek clarification of the entire support being delivered to schools.

Mr J.H.D. DAY: Since February last year, the authority has provided 75 presentations to staff from the government, Catholic and independent school sectors; rural and overseas schools by teleconference and webinar; also the state training providers and the universities; the Department of Training and Workforce Development; and parents and home education providers. At the end of March this year, the authority published a range of materials on its website to assist teachers in implementing the 2015–16 WACE program, including PowerPoint presentations. Over 200 ATAR and general support syllabuses have been developed, including VET and industry-specific courses. There have been some syllabus changes, and sample externally set tasks and marking keys for all general courses, and sample examinations for the 13 new Australian curriculum-based ATAR courses have been provided—I will not go through them all. There is also a draft Western Australian Certificate of Education manual 2015-16 for consultation, and webinars are underway to provide opportunities for teacher discussion about detailed changes and the new courses. Quite a bit of information is available there.

The appropriation was recommended.

[12.50 pm]