

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

**REVIEW OF THE FUNCTIONS EXERCISED BY THE
COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 13 JUNE 2018**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Hon Dr Sally Talbot, MLC (Chair)
Mr K.M. O'Donnell, MLA (Deputy Chair)
Hon Donna Faragher, MLC
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski, MLA**

Hearing commenced at 10.59 am**Mrs SIOBHAN ALLEN****Executive Director, Parents and Friends Federation of Western Australia, examined:**

The CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to assist the committee in its review of the exercise of the functions of the Commissioner for Children and Young People. You know who we are. I would like to bring to your attention that the purpose of this morning's hearing is to discuss the "School and Learning Consultation: Technical Report" produced by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in January this year. It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege; however, this privilege does not apply to anything you might say outside of today's proceedings. This is a public hearing. Hansard will be making a transcript that, in due course, will be published on the committee's website. If during the hearing you feel that the evidence you are about to give should be given confidentially, please let us know so that we can respond appropriately.

Do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

Mrs ALLEN: No, I do not.

The CHAIR: Would you like to start with an opening statement before we proceed to the series of questions?

Mrs ALLEN: I will, thank you.

The Parents and Friends Federation of WA, or PFFWA, extend their thanks to the joint standing committee for the opportunity to provide feedback from the parents of children in Catholic schools, whom it represents, on the "School and Learning Consultation: Technical Report" published by the Commissioner for Children and Young People. There is no more important work than that of working with children. Our children are our future. They are our future and they are the future of this country. We are extraordinarily lucky to be raising children in a country like Australia. Most of our children have universal access to education and, not only that, in many cases we continue as parents to have the ability to choose the education which best meets our children's needs.

My thoughts and contribution to this standing committee will be predominantly from the parent perspective. I would like to start off by saying that as a peak parent body, PFFWA would like to have seen a parent representative on the initial reference group, which was established to inform the development and implementation of the consultation. Through the research conducted by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, children and young people have been given a unique opportunity to help identify those issues which contribute to their engagement with school and therefore enhance their outcomes both academically and from the very important wellbeing perspective. Attention does need to be drawn, however, to those children from vulnerable backgrounds who, for whatever reason, do not or cannot attend school. Where it is acknowledged that these families may be more difficult to reach, it is important that continued effort is made to hear their voices. More research and consideration needs to be given to these children and, wherever possible, parents and carers need to be involved in the discussion. In order to create any kind of constructive change within an organisation, or in this case within the educational sphere, consultation with all stakeholders is essential.

In the area of education, children are the key stakeholders and so the work that has been done by the commissioner in consulting with children across all the domains is essential. Many would suggest that children may not have the capacity to have meaningful conversations around something as definitive as education, but the articulate way in which they responded to the survey proves otherwise. Their insights regarding quality relationships were particularly perceptive and demonstrate the value in involving them in conversations regarding all issues that affect them while at school. These could potentially include bullying, cyber safety and even behaviour management. It would be great, therefore, to see larger quantities of children and young people consulted with going forward.

As advocates of parent engagement in student learning and wellbeing, PFFWA are pleased to know that children, especially those at secondary level, identify family involvement and interest as one of the primary factors contributing to their engagement at school. As parents, we have long been aware of the positive outcomes when parents are involved in a positive way in their children's learning, and it is affirming to know that children feel the same way. Whilst the report affirms that the approaches within schools meet the needs of most children and young people, parents believe that schools could improve parent engagement strategies further. In finding 4, the children surveyed seemed pretty clear on what they require in terms of support from their parents. While the recommendation refers to governing authorities and other parent program providers supporting parents in accessing information from online sources, PFFWA and indeed other peak parent bodies suggested schools and parents should work together to create parent engagement strategies that are then embedded in the school culture. This would also contribute significantly to assisting children in getting the help they need, whether to complete homework or in dealing with other issues they come up against.

The commissioner alludes to the fact that continued advocacy is needed in this space and PFFWA would ask that parents and carers, where at all possible, should be included in these conversations. This would include parents, teachers and school leaders developing deliberate programs that would build the capacity of parents to engage in more meaningful ways in their children's educational journey from kindy right through to year 12. Modelling good relationships between teachers and parents at this level contributes to children's sense of safety and wellbeing and, of course, the children and young people who took part in the consultation identified that high-quality relationships are key to their engagement with school, not only with their peers, but with their teachers and parents. Development of these high-quality relationships have been alluded to in several of the recommendations, particularly across finding 3. PFFWA have long been advocates of the development of a unit for pre-service teachers, which would develop their capacity in building relationships not only with students but with parents also. Many teachers, whilst highly knowledgeable about their specialist area, may not have the capacity to deliver the knowledge in a way that engages the student and many feel a lack of confidence in this area.

With regard to recommendation 8, "NSOS data or other such mechanisms be used to monitor this"—it came at the end of recommendation 8—we would like to suggest that perhaps that line should read "to monitor, report and then act." Recommendations 13 and 14 are essential to implement. Mental health and wellbeing are major issues for too many of our children and young people. Early intervention is key in trying to address this. It is also essential that parents are engaged in this conversation. It is very apparent from the "School and Learning Consultation: Technical Report" that as parents, we have a lot to learn from our children. We need to listen more and lecture less. The report demonstrates that many children and young people are very capable of coming up with suggestions and solutions to their own issues while empathising with those who do not have that capacity.

PFFWA would like to thank the commissioner for his work in this area and for bringing to our attention the voice of our children and young people. This will no doubt assist us as educators—both parents and teachers—about how we can assist them to be the best that they can be and to help bring them to their full potential.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. That is another great opening statement. There is lots of material there for us to reflect on.

Perhaps I can start where we finished with the previous witnesses. You made a comment in your opening statement about the possibility of including a parent rep on the initial reference body. What is your ongoing engagement with the commissioner? Does your organisation have a relationship with the commissioner and his office?

Mrs ALLEN: We have met with the previous commissioner. We have not met with this commissioner in an official capacity and certainly after the report, it was something that, when we read the report, we thought: “Right; this is our next step. We need to go here now.” We had talked about it probably a month or six weeks ago, but then were invited to participate in this committee and thought it would be better to put it off until after this happened. But it is certainly on our agenda moving forward. As mentioned, the voice of the children states very clearly what we have been talking about for a long time, which is when parents are involved in a positive manner, it will affect them in a positive way as well.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: So the commissioner or his office does not proactively engage with the Parents and Friends Federation?

Mrs ALLEN: No, we have not been contacted by the commissioner. I have sat on a panel with the commissioner through the Catholic Education Office recently when they launched their child safe framework. The commissioner came along to that day and I sat on the panel where I talked about the parent perspective into the child safe framework and he was there as well, but we have not been contacted by his office to meet.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: Obviously, and this was reflected in the earlier hearing, the role of the commissioner is to be the voice of children and young people but, equally, as part of that, parents have an important role. Would you see that there would be benefit to him having, I suppose, greater contact with all sectors of the education community, whether it is public schools, Catholic education or the independent school sector?

Mrs ALLEN: Absolutely. I think that these issues around student engagement are cross-sectoral. They involve all our children. It does not matter where they are at school, all of our children have a right to feel safe at school and therefore to learn. So, absolutely I think it is one of those issues that we need to work on as a community and not necessarily as individual sectors.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: That is something we might feed back to him.

[11.10 am]

The CHAIR: You have made some general comments about the report and the extensive areas that are canvassed by the report. Are there areas where you think there is a need for expansion or further inquiry to be made? How would you see this body of work we have now contributing to policy-making and practice over the next couple of decades?

Mrs ALLEN: As was mentioned in the previous hearing, I think it needs to be extended. I would like to see a lot more children involved in it. I would definitely like it to be an opt-out system. I think that my perception of surveys is that when you give the people the option not to participate, you are going to get the people either who have a grievance, potentially, or the yes-people who are going

to support what is going on around them. I think that is the value of the interviews and face-to-face conversations that they had. I think there is real value in that because I think that provides the really rich data and children really having that opportunity to say exactly what they feel and to bring up issues and concerns that were not raised in the survey questions. I think that there is potential for it to be extended. I do not know whether that was because of resources but, when you look at 1 800 children, that could be potentially one large school, so we have many, many more children. I know that it was done across quite a diverse group of children, which was good, but I think we need to burrow down more into the children in vulnerable places. For Aboriginal children, children with disability, refugee children and children with English as a second language, we need to figure out better ways to engage those children and their families in the conversation.

The CHAIR: Interestingly, and I think it was to the slight surprise of the committee, it is actually a policy setting of the department to run these kinds of research projects on an opt-in basis, but the committee has taken a very active concern in this and we are negotiating with the minister now. We think we might have a change on the horizon, so that is quite encouraging.

Mrs ALLEN: That would be good.

The CHAIR: I am heartened by the support from you and the previous witnesses as well for that move. Can I ask you a little bit about the way that your P and Fs operate? Do you actively encourage, or do you have policies and programs that facilitate, the engagement and involvement of parents with their child's schooling and their child's physical environment at school?

Mrs ALLEN: We do. We have some programs that are available to very early years' parents, so parents of children in years 3 and 4. Those programs assist parents in understanding how their children learn how to read and write, so it is very practical, hands-on information. There is a new maths one coming on board quite soon. We also have a program that is available for Aboriginal communities. The program is available to, I think predominantly ATAs and those type of people who work in schools that have worked with the program. It is a very easy-to-access program in that the language is very accessible for parents but it also provides outcomes. A lot of programs that parents engage in, they do it because they think it is the right thing to do by their children, which is a great reason to do it; they can actually see the outcomes. The outcomes will be, "You will understand more clearly how your children learn how to read." I think it is really important that parents understand that is what they are going to get out of attending those programs. We do have those for the very early years.

Whilst going around schools—because we visit schools on a very regular basis, we have 162 schools in our sector and we are a skinny little organisation, but we try to get to every school every second year, if we can; sometimes the Kimberley schools make that a little bit tricky, but we try as best we can—with technology coming on board now, we tend to contact more schools through Skype and that kind of thing and we are looking to progress that. The current president of our organisation is from Broome, so she skypes into our council meetings. That is starting to work quite well, so we are looking at ways that we can expand that.

We talk about parent engagement all the time as we go to schools. We ensure that parents understand very clearly that they are the first and ongoing educators of their children and it is their role and responsibility to engage in their learning as well. We make that very clear to parents and, in all of those meetings, the principal will be present as well, so the principals of our schools attend all P and F meetings. It is starting to gain traction, although, as was mentioned previously, there is still a little bit of misunderstanding between what involvement looks like and what engagement in learning looks like. As part of the national Catholic school parents body, we have been engaging in some research across the country around parent engagement, what teachers and leaders think it is,

what parents think it is, and we are now at this stage that we are going to get together in two weeks to start building a toolkit using the information that we have gleaned from that research. So, hopefully, we will get something really good from that.

In terms of secondary schools, it was very heartening to hear the students say that even at secondary school, they want their parents to be around because there is a myth that abounds that apparently when our children go to secondary school, they do not want us around anymore! We, as parents, know that is not the case. They do not want us there in the same place—they do not want us doing a roster in the classroom, for instance—but they want to know that we are there. The capacities and knowledge that we need as parents to understand is different in secondary school and the students alluded to it very well when they said, “We don’t expect help with our homework but we want help to get help to help us with our homework.” We think it is really important that parents are aware of that. Sometimes parents feel really scared about the potential of having to help with year 10 maths homework, but it is more about if your child is struggling with year 10 maths homework, what are the things that they can do, without that parent going to school to say, “What is happening here?” You need to build the capacity in your child to seek help for themselves so that their voice continues to be heard. We talk with parents about that kind of thing. We use that example from time to time.

We are just about to develop an event around year 9 and year 10 in the subject selection space. It is really, really important for parents to be involved in that space. Some recent research that came out of the new national careers body. I cannot remember what they are called, but when they did research about careers, they found that over 80 per cent of children come to their parents first regarding careers advice. That is really significant, so that brought home to us that parents need to be helped and assisted in that space. We are looking in term 3 to put together an event where we invite parents in with, hopefully, Allan Blagaich from SCSA, to talk about that space. I think we are going to call it “Demystifying the WACE” because people do not really think too much about it until they are in that space themselves. They hear all the acronyms—WACE, OLNA, and ATAR—and it is a bit of a minefield for them. We will try and do that cross-sectorally with my friends who spoke earlier on, because, again, that is something we should all be working together to help parents help their children make good decisions in that space.

The CHAIR: The connection between hearing the voice of children, which is the commissioner’s brief, and schools hearing the voice of parents—how would you describe that? The voice of parents is distinct. How does it facilitate us as a community enabling children’s voices to be heard?

[11.20 am]

Mrs ALLEN: It is a very important voice because, as was alluded to earlier as well, parents are experts in their own children. They can bring to the table knowledge about their own children that the school would potentially not have. We encourage parents to ensure that they do that. So when there are issues happening at home—maybe there has been a death in the family, or things happen that are going to impact on the way children behave at school—it is really important that parents make that known to the school, because that will help them in the way that they are dealing with their children as well. I suppose we look at it as a bit of a three-legged stool—the student, the parent and the school. If one of the legs falls off the stool, it becomes little bit wobbly. So we think it is really important that the three groups work together. We have kind of moved away, I suppose, at PFFWA from talking about the parent voice, although it still is. But sometimes when we hear the term “parent voice”, it comes across as maybe a bit of a belligerent voice or perhaps an aggressive voice. So we have started to talk more about the parent perspective, and that schools need to hear the parent perspective in conversations that involve them and their children, because parents, as

well as children, are key stakeholders in education too. So they can bring something different to the table that perhaps would not have been heard before. We hear that a lot at the Catholic Education office of Western Australia. We are invited to sit on all of their committees, to bring that parent perspective to conversations.

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: With this kind of parent voice and parent engagement lens on, can you talk to us about the Leading Lights project that the Catholic Education office is doing. It is supposed to be around kind of engaging on all three of those stool legs, but how is it perceived from a parent's point of view?

Mrs ALLEN: Obviously I am not highly qualified to speak about Leading Lights. I am very aware of it, and we are actually working with the office and the team at Leading Lights at the moment, helping to build a parent portal. The portals are the part that are being looked at at the moment, and they have invited us in because they think obviously if it is a parent portal, parents need to have some kind of a say in how that is going to be developed. So we are talking with them about what we want to see, what would be useful for us to see and what is going to advantage the children. We work on that analogy where all the work we do—whether it is within our office, externally to our office at a national level—even though we are there to represent and advocate for parents, the child is at the centre of all our conversations. So we are working very closely with the Leading Lights team on that part of it at the moment. It is a huge project, and it is very difficult to see what the end outcome is going to look like, but it is very exciting. It looks like it is going to provide capacity for great engagement in different ways, so using technology to engage. One of the parts that appealed to me when it was being spoken about initially was the ability for students to work together with groups of students outside of their own school. So they might be working on projects. Students tend to do that quite a bit anyway online and using YouTube clips and Khan Academy, and all these types of things that kids use now. So it would be really good for them to be able to use a system that has been audited in such a way that the content that is on there, we can be sure as parents that it is appropriate content and it is going to contribute. So I think moving forward, technology would have to be used. I see great benefits for students in rural and remote areas regarding that, because I think they are hard done by in many ways, particularly in their access to subjects and that kind of thing. So I think there is great potential for students to be able to engage in classes through Leading Lights-type technology.

Hon DONNA FARAGHER: During the earlier hearing we had some discussion around the recommendations from the report around pre-service training. I am keen to hear from you with respect to that particular aspect, and whether or not you would see that as of benefit—I think you are probably going to say yes. But also within that, if that was something to be explored further, how you would not like or not like to see—but I would expect you would say like to see—that parent perspective, I am going to use the words that you have used, in terms of I suppose helping and supporting that pre-service training so we are getting teachers who have those skills both for dealing with students, first and foremost, but also very much so with parents as well.

Mrs ALLEN: I think it is absolutely essential. I think as well as for our students—it is really important in that space, and I will talk about that in a minute—in terms of teacher wellbeing, it is really important. I feel very sorry for some young early careers teacher who comes out into the workforce and the first thing that they are confronted with, two or three months into their job, is an irate parent who thinks they are doing things all wrong, and, “Why hasn’t my child got an A”, and all these types of things. It is very, very tricky for them. So I think there is certainly work to be done to help to build their capacity in establishing good relationships with parents and teachers. Obviously with students, absolutely they have to be able to communicate well with teachers. As I mentioned in my opening statement, there is no point in having teachers who are all over their topic and very clever

in what they are taught how to teach if they cannot impart that information to children in a way that makes it contextual for them and they want to engage with it. That is really important.

In terms of parents, it is equally important from the perspective that at some stage as parents we all have to have a tricky conversation with our child's teacher. We do not like to think that is going to happen, but it does. We can go in like a bull at a gate as well, and then the teacher can become the bull at the gate. A wall goes up between the two, and never the twain shall meet! So that is not beneficial to our children; it does not work at all. I think work needs to be done with pre-service teachers to help them to accommodate this. Work needs to be done with parents as well. We have developed some brochures and resources for parents on how to have those conversations with teachers, and we have been fairly blunt in the way that we have put the wording in those brochures. We do not call it "how to deal with conflict". Our resource is called "Road to Resolution"; we think is a more positive way.

We also encourage parents at the beginning of the year—this is much easier to do in primary school, but it can be done in secondary as well—to go and meet their child's teacher. Where else do you go and drop your children off for six hours every day and you do not go and meet the people they are with? We say that by going in and establishing a relationship with the teacher, ensuring they know how to contact you should they need to—all those type of housekeeping things—it builds that kind of soft relationship so that when the difficult conversation has to happen, that relationship has already been established and the conversation becomes much easier. That benefits teachers in the long run as well. It makes their job a little bit easier. It will make parents feel a little bit more comfortable in having those conversations, and of course when children see that being modelled in that way, that contributes to their safe feeling in school as well. I can only think that there would be nothing more disturbing for a child sitting at the dinner table at night, hearing their parents talk in a negative way about their teacher. What makes that child want to go back to school the next day? So we talk about safety in the physical and mental sense, but this is just a really basic way to ensure that children feel safe, and of course, as we know, children will not learn if they do not feel safe. So it is absolutely essential that all those little safety mechanisms are in place to ensure that they feel that way.

The CHAIR: Does your organisation encourage teachers to sit on P and F committees?

[11.30 am]

Mrs ALLEN: Not really. They would not invite teachers, I do not think. In some schools they do. It would be very different in every school—probably in some country schools. In country, rural and remote schools, quite often the teachers are there because quite often they are parents in the school as well, so they will be there. We would tend not to encourage teachers to take on executive roles on groups because it is the space for the parent forum. Our school leaders are always in attendance, so whether it is the principal or their nominee would always be there. But one of the ways we have been looking at—we see P and Fs kind of starting to change as well. Times have moved on. Their role in fundraising is diminishing a little bit because most of them collect a parent levy, which is placed on the school fee schedule. So, that is the fundraising in a sense. We talk to our P and Fs about their role being about fundraising and friend raising, with the friend-raising element being really, really important. As they are moving a little bit away from fundraising, we are looking at new ways they can work with their schools and we are encouraging parent groups, principals and members of school boards to sit together at the beginning of the year and have a bit of a planning session about what is going on, so look at the school improvement plans or the quality Catholic schools system that we have in our system. What are the school's goals and objectives that they are trying to achieve by the end of the year and how can we, as parents, help you to achieve them?

Again, it is about that modelling really good relationships at that level and, hopefully, that culture trickles down into the school. If it is not happening at that level, it will not happen at the bottom level. So if parents and leaders and teachers are not getting on well, it is highly unlikely that the children will be as well, so we are trying to introduce that concept, slowly but surely into our schools. It is getting great uptake in some spaces and some people are just a little bit slower at coming on board. But I must say, most of our schools now would involve parents in the strategic planning so when they are doing new strategic planning, parents will always be a part of that. In some of our schools, particularly our order-run schools where recruitment for new principals will be kind of outside CEWA, parents will be involved on those panels as well, so that parent perspective is heard around who is going to be potentially leading the school. I think it is getting better and I think as the capacity of parent groups grows, schools can see the benefit of involving parents more as well.

The CHAIR: On those areas that are troubling about the report, as you heard in the earlier session, we referred to children feeling safe at school, the relative silencing of children with disabilities or children who need assistance outside the school curriculum. Can I phrase the question in a similar way to the way I phrased it in the previous hearing? None of it was a surprise to us to know that there are children who are struggling on all those fronts. Are you aware of programs, policies or practices in the schools where the P and Fs are involved, where things are working really well, where somebody is being innovative and somebody has created something that has changed the culture to improve things in that regard?

Mrs ALLEN: Catholic schools, as you know, are mandated to provide education to the vulnerable and marginalised children and try very, very hard to do that. I think they are predominantly successful at that, although not as successful as they would like to be in some spaces. I would say that Aboriginal education would be one of those spaces. Certainly as a parent group, again as was alluded to in the previous hearing, it is a very difficult space to work in. We are very conscious of being culturally aware and not making mistakes in that space. We know it is a place we are not very good at, so rather than do sweeping changes, we are trying to talk to people in individual places to see what is happening there, how we could potentially engage with parents there and are there things that we can be helping with? It is very difficult. We have subcommittees that sit under our council. We do have one for parents of students with disability, which is chaired by one of my colleagues who has a child with a disability. We have a little marketing and communications group and we tried very hard to set up an Aboriginal parents group. But we seemed to come up against barriers all the time, things like, you need to be really careful who you ask because this group of people may not like to sit at the table with this group of people. That became very tricky for us because we actually do not have an Aboriginal parent sitting on our council. It is something that we would like to do but we would rather, in a sense, that they come to us rather than we seek them to have the “token” Aboriginal person. We think it is really important that parents come on an equal footing. It is something that we think about and talk about a lot. I did go out and visit Clontarf last year and spoke with the principal there and their Aboriginal liaison officer. They are doing a fantastic job there. They are doing a really, really good job. I was amazed by the principal, who, whilst he was having a conversation with me, seemed to have eyes all over his head. He was watching what was going on out through windows, being really aware of, why is that child there and all that kind of thing. They are doing a fantastic job. My own daughter is at St Brigid’s school in Lesmurdie and they are doing a great job with the Aboriginal boarding girls they have there. They are doing a really good job in ensuring that there is inclusivity in the school, that the opportunity is there for the girls but they are very inclusive as part of the school community, and I think that that is probably the key.

I know that a lot of our schools are engaged in trauma-informed learning and I think that is really important. That is a space they could potentially bring parents in to, to help them and their

understanding about the effects that trauma has on children and can have a long-lasting effect. There are some really good pockets of things going on. I think as parents we potentially need to become a little bit more aware of them so that we can advocate more for them. Certainly, children with disability are well looked after in our schools. We have a lot of schools that have special ed centres and there are great facilities for children there. I suppose using the experience I have of my colleague whose daughter is a child with a disability, she feels that the school that has the special ed centre which caters to her very specific needs but then the opportunities that she has to be in the mainstream classroom are really, really advantageous to her. In fact, she went on school camp about three weeks ago and my colleague did not get a call to go and collect her! That was a huge step for them as a family. The other thing I should say is that I think the benefits that the other children in the class gain from having a student with disability are completely overlooked. I think it builds empathy in them; it builds awareness that we are not all alike and that we need to look out for each other. I think there are huge advantages in having inclusive education for all these vulnerable and marginalised children.

The CHAIR: Are there any other questions from other committee members?

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: Not about that. I have another question. I know that in the primary schools in particular, there has been a move towards contemporary learning spaces and flexible learning spaces and not just the spaces but the contemporary learning pedagogy that goes with it. In terms of engaging children, how important do you feel that move has been in making sure that they are engaged in schools and how does it affect their learning?

Mrs ALLEN: I have read a little bit about this, not so much the pedagogical side, but the actual classrooms. There is kind of contradictory evidence at the moment, I suppose. I think it is one of those things that when a teacher knows their students very well, they will kind of have a feel whether that will work for them or not. I do agree that it is very hard for little boys to stay still and sit at a desk for a long time, so I think to be looking at other opportunities that they can continue to learn but maybe not in exactly that way is really useful. I do think that information needs to be shared with parents, whether the schools choose to go down that way, because I did have a conversation with a parent about two years ago who said, “As you know, we pay fees for our children to go to Catholic schools.” She went in at the beginning of the year and had not been aware what was going to happen and said, “All this money I’m paying and they don’t even have a desk to sit at; they’re sitting on a beanbag!” Again, we need to involve everybody concerned. I think it is important to provide the research to parents that shows this actually is something that could potentially work. I know there is research out there that shows that class sizes do not have a massive impact. I think teachers would potentially disagree with that statement but there is research to demonstrate that class sizes are not the biggest impact on student learning. Again, to make that research available to parents I think gets them on board and they become advocates of it then rather than always going up against things. I think there is a place for that, but I do not think it should be mandatory that that is what everybody has to do. Maybe that is part of the pre-service learning as well—really identifying the kids who would benefit from that kind of thing.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for your engagement with the committee. It has been very illuminating. Thank you particularly for your opening statement with those specific comments on the recommendations. That will be very useful in guiding the committee’s thoughts on this matter.

A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days of the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned in this period, it would be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot

be altered, but should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary document for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence.

Thank you very much.

Mrs ALLEN: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 11.40 am
