

Adolescents and young adults at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes

Report Number 9

Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation

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Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory



Committee membership

Ms Kerrie Tucker MLA, Chair

Mr Wayne Berry MLA, Deputy Chair

Mrs Jacqui Burke, (appointed 13 February 2001)

Mr Harold Hird MLA, (discharged 13 February 2001)

Secretary: Ms Judith Henderson

Administration: Ms Judy Moutia

Resolution of appointment

The following general purpose standing committees be established to inquire into and report on matters referred to it by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community:

...a Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation to examine education, schooling, training services, children's, youth and family services and sport and recreation and any other related matter.

Minutes of Proceedings, No 2, 28 April 1998, pp 15-19. Amended 25 November 1999.

Terms of reference

Inquire into and report on adolescents and young adults at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes with particular reference to:

- the relevance of mainstream school programs for young people at risk;
- the availability of alternative educational programs;
- support for families and young people to encourage retention in education and training including financial support and support for schools and other agencies;
- support and programs available for young people at risk of not developing adequate literacy and numeracy skills;
- attendance and truancy;
- gaps in services;
- the impact of the common youth allowance on young people and educational institutions;
- any other related matter.

Preface

In 1997 the Social Policy Committee of the Legislative Assembly produced a report on Services for Children at Risk in the ACT. A number of recommendations of that report referred to education services and early intervention and prevention strategies.

This report further details the ways in which we can support students, families and schools so that all students can achieve a reasonable educational outcome. It is as much about how we can make schools and other educational programs relevant, inclusive and caring for all students and their families as it is about identifying and supporting students who may be particularly at risk.

There are serious social pressures on a significant number of students in our schools which do place them particularly at risk. Evidence to this Committee left no doubt that it is to the enormous credit of many of these students that they manage to do as well as they do. These pressures include little or no family support, poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, mental health problems, physical and emotional abuse, discrimination due to race (for the indigenous community in particular) and sexuality, disability and behavioural and emotional disturbance.

While schools and other educational programs cannot be expected to take responsibility for all these social problems they have a crucial opportunity to assist and support students and their families when they are engaged with the education system. Once students have dropped out they are much less likely to be noticed or assisted in any way until there are even more serious issues to be dealt with.

There is no doubt that properly resourced educational programs which are flexible and student centred and which take into account the social context of the student are invaluable. After all, there is no point expecting a student to co-operate if he or she is hungry, frightened or worried. Rather, there has to be an holistic approach in which all relevant services are integrated, service providers are able to respond effectively as a team and, most importantly, the response is based on respect for the individuals concerned. The need for such integration has been stressed in many previous reports tabled in the Assembly dealing with social services.

Early school leaving is likely to lead to less positive employment potential and to anti social behaviour. But it is not simply a question of

attendance. Students who do complete their education but who have had a negative social and emotional experience of school can carry the consequences through their lives.

If the culture of schools is supportive and inclusive, prejudices evident in the broader community can be constructively challenged. Most prejudice comes from ignorance. Surely schools are the place where that ignorance can be replaced with knowledge and understanding.

The integration of services, the team approach, and the fundamental respect for every student concerned reflects an ethic of care; and it is that ethic which we need to recognise and support across the education system. If we are successful in meeting the challenges presented in this report there will be long term benefits not only for students and families but for the whole community.

Kerrie Tucker MLA
Chair

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Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

7.16. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- review the current approach to curriculum development in schools; and
- evaluate the flexibility and appropriateness of the curricula for the varying student needs.

Recommendation 2

7.21. The committee recommends that the Government:

- review the level of resourcing for the High Schools for the New Millennium Project to ensure all schools can reasonably benefit from the project; and
- fund an extension of the project for at least a further three years.

Recommendation 3

7.25. The committee recommends that the Government review resource levels for secondary colleges in view of the changing patterns of enrolment.

Recommendation 4

7.31. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- evaluate current programs aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination in schools;
- review the resources available to schools for professional and curriculum development aimed at eliminating discrimination of all forms, with a view to increasing those resources; and



- take an ongoing role in monitoring and ensuring quality programs aimed at eliminating discrimination in all schools.

Recommendation 5

7.37. The committee recommends that in examining the incidence of non-attendance in government schools, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling:

- make recommendations about systems to be put in place to identify students who are non-attenders; and
- develop supportive strategies to assist these students to stay in school in line with the approaches being taken with the High Schools for the New Millennium Project.

Recommendation 6

7.42. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- continue to monitor the progress of indigenous students and regularly report to the Assembly on that progress; and
- provide supplementary resources for indigenous education as required.

Recommendation 7

7.50. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- urgently review the effectiveness of the array of alternative programs available; and
- develop a policy framework for alternative education programs before establishing new alternative programs.

Recommendation 8

7.54. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services implement the recommendations of the review of

the DCAP and Eclipse programs particularly the recommendations relating to staffing.

Recommendation 9

7.61. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- examine the effectiveness of the policies on suspension and exclusion in managing student behaviour as part of its review of these policies;
- conduct a full review of the behaviour management support programs including the withdrawal units; and
- ensure that any changes emanating from the review are adequately resourced and supported.

Recommendation 10

7.67. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services review the research on transition periods and develop guidelines for schools on how to develop strategies to deal with issues arising from transition between sectors.

Recommendation 11

7.71. The committee recommends that the Government promote the development of collaborative interagency approaches to supporting at-risk students.

Recommendation 12

7.74. The committee recommends that the Government ensure adequate funds are provided to implement the services required following completion of the framework for support for students at risk and the assessment of need.

Recommendation 13

7.78. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- review the options for student welfare support in government schools with a view to increasing the availability and array of student welfare support;
- review the working arrangements for school counsellors to ensure that they are able to take an holistic approach (such as working with students and families outside the school environment); and
- review the reporting and supervisory arrangements for school counsellors to ensure client confidentiality.

Recommendation 14

7.82. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- develop a system response which will allow early identification of children whose education is disadvantaged due to poverty;
- review the needs of these students and develop appropriate support structures.

Recommendation 15

7.89. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services address the need for supplementary learning assistance and flexible support in upper primary school, high school and secondary college.

Recommendation 16

7.94. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services develop a system-wide policy on communication between home and school in support of children's learning.

Recommendation 17

7.98. The committee recommends that the Government take note of the *Early Years Study* and its implementation and consider the need for the instigation across the ACT of a system of early childhood development and parenting support.

Recommendation 18

7.103. The committee recommends that the Government establish a task force to develop strategies to address the drug and alcohol problem in the ACT community.

1. Introduction

1.1. The report *Non-completion of school in Australia: The changing patterns of participation and outcomes*, (the ACER report), released by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in September 2000, made it clear that those who do not complete school to Year 12 find it harder to gain job security and face a greater risk of exclusion in a society that requires active learning well beyond the school years. The report stresses the importance of policies that reduce the rates of non-completion (early school leaving) and improve opportunities for further learning.¹

1.2. The report of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum *Young People's Transition from Education to Work: Performance Indicators*, also provides clear evidence that early school leavers are at risk. The report concludes that 'Lack of basic education qualifications is a source of the longer-term vulnerability for many young people in the labour market. ...Services need to be delivered in such a way that they empower all young people, especially those 'at risk' to construct their journey from compulsory education to stable employment in an integrated way'.²

1.3. In addressing this inquiry, the committee wishes to focus on the way education programs are delivered to those at risk of leaving school early, to identify areas where the system is failing the target group and to make recommendations which will result in improved learning outcomes for this group.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.4. On 15 February 1999, the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into adolescents and young adults at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes

1.5. Advertisements detailing the inquiry's terms of reference and inviting input were placed in *The Canberra Times* and *The Chronicle* in February 1999. In addition, letters advising of the inquiry and inviting input were sent to organisations and individuals known to have an interest in the matter.

¹ Lamb S, Dwyer P, Wyn J, *Non completion of school in Australia: the changing patterns of participation and outcomes*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report Number 16, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, September 2000.

² Quoted in Submission 22, ACT Government, p 3.

1.6. In response, the committee received 32 submissions and heard from 60 witnesses at hearings. A number of witnesses were heard *in camera*. A list of submissions is at Appendix 1 and a list of witnesses who gave evidence at public hearings is at Appendix 2.

1.7. The committee visited the following programs in the ACT:

- the Belconnen High School Support Program
- Galilee Day Program
- Youth in the City
- The Eclipse and Stay programs at the Canberra College
- Narrabundah College

1.8. The committee visited the following schools in the Melbourne metropolitan area:

- Kensington Community High School
- The Island Campus, Collingwood Community College
- Sherbrooke Community School.

1.9. The committee held discussions in Victoria with officials of the Department of Education, Employment and Training, with Mr Andrew Fuller of LaTrobe University and with Mr Roger Holdsworth of the Youth Research Centre, Melbourne University.

1.10. Due to the requirement for the committee to undertake a number of other inquiries that had tight deadlines, work on this inquiry has from time to time been suspended for short periods.

Acknowledgements

1.11. The committee wishes to thank all those who took an interest in the inquiry. The committee was particularly grateful to the young people who shared their views and experiences.

2. Identifying adolescents and young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes

Why do young people leave school early?

2.1. Young people leave the education system early for a variety of reasons, at different stages, with differing attitudes, expectations and prospects for the future.³ The Youth Research Centre identified a number of categories of young people who leave school early or are at risk of doing so. They are as follows.

- *Positive choice*: those who leave school making a positive choice to take up other options. They will only need minimum assistance with job training or placement.
- *Opportune leavers*: those who leave school to find a job or to establish a personal relationship more preferable to school (eg having a baby). In the short term this group is not interested in any assistance, but in the longer term, need assistance to either re-enter school or employment.
- *Would-be leavers*: those who would prefer to leave but are continuing for now. Flexible school programs enable these young people to stay on.
- *Circumstantial leavers*: those who are forced out of school for non-educational reasons. Low-income families are particularly vulnerable as are young people who become homeless. Greater flexibility and income support is needed for such students.
- *Discouraged leavers*: those whose experience of school has been discouraging. They have had no success and therefore performance and interest in school is low. They need lots of support and flexibility to remain or re-enter school or training.

³ Submission 6, Galilee.

- *Alienated leavers*: many have left school really early. It is more difficult to meet their needs than the needs of the discouraged leavers. High flexibility in curriculum and attendance could reduce their level of alienation. Post school experiences of this group are crucial for their future education, training or job placement.⁴

Risk factors

2.2. Young people at risk of leaving school early will typically display an array of risk factors and signs such as:⁵

- extremely poor self image and low self esteem;
- a history of truancy, school refusal or school phobia, often chronic;
- lack of competence in English or native language;
- poor social and communication skills, confused social values;
- low level of academic achievement, poor work habits and general lack of interest and effort;
- learning difficulties;
- drug and alcohol abuse, deviant behaviour and criminal activity;
- disobedience at school and at home, showing aggression and loathing of teachers and perceived authority figures;
- homelessness or involved in the welfare system;
- poverty either at home or as a result of homelessness;
- dysfunctional families, lack of extended family support, parents with lack of parenting skills;
- multiple changes in home, family, community and school especially for those in substitute care;

⁴ Youth Research Centre, *Early School Leavers*, Research Report No 4., Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne Institute of Education, Parkville, 1990.

⁵ Submissions 1, Centacare; 2, Barnardos; 6, Galilee; 9, Northside High School Support Centre; 10, ACT Council for Adult Literacy; 11, Marymead Child and Family Centre; 15, Caroline Chisholm High School Board; 16, Youth Coalition of the ACT; 19, SPELD ACT; 20, The Canberra College; 21, AEU ACT Branch; 22, ACT Government.

- sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect;
- unsuccessful or inappropriate educational experiences leading to alienation and disengagement;
- inability to establish meaningful relationships with peers or adults, lack of support mechanisms, isolated, peer group problems;
- cultural conflicts;
- early and ongoing negative and distressing experiences at school;
- lack of basic physical needs, shelter, food, clothing, security and love;
- psychiatric problems, disability or ability problems.

Contributing factors

2.3. Research and evidence received during the inquiry suggest that there are a number of recurring issues that contribute to young people being at risk of leaving school early. These are outlined in more detail in the following sections.

The family and home

2.4. The family is the social institution in which children and young people grow and develop. As Galilee pointed out, there is much evidence to suggest that many families are both unwilling and unable to provide the care, support and love a young person needs to continue their schooling.⁶ Some of the major difficulties and issues being experienced by families are:

- insufficient support, or lack of appropriate parenting skills;
- family breakdown and conflict;
- unemployment;
- stress arising from financial struggles such as accommodation issues.

2.5. Galilee also reported that many young people who experience difficulties at school have been seriously abused, physically, emotionally

⁶ Submission 6, Galilee.

and sexually, others face constant neglect and rejection. More commonly young people identify a general lack of parental concern, lack of supportive relationships and involvement of parents with them. Incest and domestic violence are also common especially for young people who become homeless.⁷

2.6. Many young people leave school because of family problems, as it affects their ability to attend regularly and to complete school work. In a study by the Youth Research Centre in Victoria young people who had left school early identified the following as affecting their ability to attend school:

- abuse in the home directed at the young person or other family members;
- lack of parental support for the young person's study commitments;
- a home environment not conducive to study;
- transitory parental work patterns (affecting young people's ability to settle in any one school);
- an expectation that a young person will work and contribute to family finances.⁸

Homelessness

2.7. As a result of the home environment and family relationships some young people leave home and become homeless. Homelessness has been identified as a factor in early school leaving, as continuing education with no adult support, no stable home, no money or any resources to meet basic needs is difficult for any young person.⁹

2.8. The State of the Territory Report for 1999 reports that the ACT has the lowest rate of homelessness in the country at 40.3 per 10,000 of the population¹⁰ which amounts to just over 1,200 people. A proportion of these are young people.

⁷ Submission 6, Galilee.

⁸ Holden E, Dwyer P, 'Making the break, leaving school early' *Disaffiliated Early School Leavers Study Working Paper No 8*, Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne Institute of Education, Parkville, 1992.

⁹ Webber C and Hayduck K, *Leaving School Early*, Galilee Inc, Canberra, 1995.

¹⁰ *State of the Territory Report 1999*, p 66.

2.9. A census conducted in May 1994 identified 270 homeless secondary school students in the ACT.¹¹ Webber and Hayduck reported that the literature suggests homelessness is an increasing problem which is likely to result in more young people leaving school.¹²

2.10. Webber and Hayduck argue that homeless young people are a particularly 'at-risk' sub-group of students, especially those aged 13-16 years. They face the same general problems as other 'at-risk' young people who are living within a stable home and family environment, plus they have to contend with the following additional challenges:

- lack of stable, secure accommodation
- lack of financial support
- lack of parental/adult/mentor support
- disrupted social fabric, including significant relationships
- homeless peer group influence
- survival priorities become a life focus; education may be neglected in importance
- poor self esteem.

Substitute care

2.11. Children in substitute care can experience multiple changes in home, family, community and school. They can also have experienced serious neglect and/or abuse. There is a number of problems that can be highlighted as contributing further to the disadvantage of young people who are in substitute care. The committee was told that these are:

- a lack of communication between schools and foster parents and residential workers;
- insufficient information provided to schools about a child in substitute care;

¹¹ Mackenzie David and Chamberlain Chris, 'The National Census of Homeless School Students' *Youth Studies Australia*, Autumn 1995, pp 22-28.

¹² Webber C and Hayduck K, *Leaving School Early*, Galilee Inc, Canberra, 1995.

- unwillingness of some schools to take students who are in substitute care;
- placements at a school may only be temporary offering insufficient time for schools to implement suitable programs to assist these students;
- inadequate resources to deal with emotional/behaviour issues and student support in general.¹³

Mental health

2.12. Mental health problems among young people are also contributors to early school leaving. Mental illness can have a significant impact on the stability of schooling and family life.

2.13. In evidence to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, Kosky contended that that 10 to 15 per cent of the population of adolescents in Australia have some form of mental health problem.¹⁴

Substance abuse

2.14. The Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia report that the most recent surveys show that drug use by young people aged 14 to 19 years is very high and shows no sign of reducing in the near future. One in four teenagers smoke, with 16 per cent of these describing themselves as regular smokers. Over two thirds of young people drink with 30 per cent describing themselves as regular drinkers.¹⁵ Of the young people surveyed in 1998, 38 percent reported they had used an illicit drug recently. This was a 6 per cent increase from the 1995 survey.¹⁶

2.15. In the ACT, the committee notes that of 30 students surveyed at one of the alternative high school programs, 25 reported using illicit drugs (mainly alcohol and marijuana) with almost half the group saying this was a frequent occurrence.¹⁷

¹³ Transcript, p 236-244.

¹⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *A report on aspects of youth homelessness*, 1995, p 302.

¹⁵ The Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia, *Drug Policy 2000: A new agenda for harm reduction*, June 2000, p 105.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Holdsworth R and Moffat A, *The Eclipse Program, The Dickson College Alternative Program – The report of a Review 1999-2000*, p 12.

2.16. The use of illicit drugs among young indigenous people is of enormous concern. The Aboriginal Health Service estimates that 10 per cent of Canberra's indigenous community, including children as young as ten, are using heroin.¹⁸

Behaviour

2.17. Unacceptable behaviour among students can also be a contributor. Many of the contributors discussed thus far (such as the family situation, homelessness or mental health problems) could cause outbursts of unacceptable or erratic behaviour.

2.18. Galilee pointed out that most often the behaviour will be noticed, but not perceived as an expression of life struggles, and this may place the young person into a life of trouble at school. The behaviour and reprimands for that behaviour may escalate until the school or the young person sees no future in continuing.¹⁹

2.19. Schools are in a unique position to identify maladjustment early in the life of children and adolescents. However the Autism Association claimed that the cause of challenging behaviour of children with autism spectrum disorder is often not identified and these children are treated in a way that is inappropriate.²⁰ Galilee asserted that while focusing on behaviour improvement may yield more acceptable behaviour and more time spent on learning, the down side is that poor behaviour is often a reflection of other circumstances, particularly home influence, which may need to be addressed first before behaviour can really be improved.²¹

Carer responsibilities

2.20. Young people with carer responsibilities can find it very difficult to attend school for the whole school day and to do their homework and participate in extra curricular activities. Some of the issues faced by young carers are encapsulated in the following comment made by a nine-year-old to the ACT Young Carers Network.

I usually get up at about 4.30 am so that I can get Mum out of bed, wash her, take her to the toilet and get her dressed. Then I get my brothers up and get them ready for the day.

¹⁸ *The Canberra Times*, 15 September 2000, p 3.

¹⁹ Submission 6, Galilee.

²⁰ Submission 31, Autism Association of the ACT Inc.

²¹ Submission 6, Galilee.

I'm usually really tired at school and I'm always getting into trouble for not doing all my homework. I just wish someone else could help me.²²

Harassment

2.21. The committee heard that there are particular groups of students who are harassed at school because of their beliefs, racial background or sexuality and that this affects their successful participation in the education system. These include same-sex-attracted young people and indigenous young people.²³

Education system

2.22. Galilee reported that the practices of schools themselves can have a negative impact on students, contributing to early leaving and exacerbating a host of inappropriate behaviours that can escalate in the school environment.²⁴

2.23. In a national longitudinal study conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research, experiences of school were found to provide an increasingly strong push to leave in the mid 1990s compared with the early 1980s. This was despite curriculum reform in post compulsory education for this group of young people. A possible explanation for the increase in those citing school experiences as a reason for leaving is that as the retention rates to year 12 have increased, schools are left with a smaller group of early leavers who have become progressively harder to encourage to remain at school.²⁵

Those identified as at risk by the inquiry

2.24. The target groups for this inquiry comprises adolescents and young people at risk of leaving ACT government schools without attaining an outcome that enables them to proceed to vocational education and training or other tertiary education, that is, not attaining a Year 12 Certificate. The target group is a varied population. A number of groups

²² Submission 25, Young Carers' Network, p 1.

²³ Transcript, p 130, p 281, Confidential evidence 18 May 2000, 17 August 2000, Submission 6, Appendix 3.

²⁴ Submission 6, Galilee.

²⁵ Lamb S, Dwyer P, Wyn J, *Non completion of school in Australia: the changing patterns of participation and outcomes*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report Number 16, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, September 2000.

of young people emerged as being at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes. In addition to those young people aged 12 to 18 not at school, college, in further education or training or in the workforce they include:

- young people living in poverty
- young people with limited or no family support
- homeless young people
- young people engaged in substance abuse
- young people with learning difficulties
- young people with mental health problems
- some young people with autism spectrum disorder attending mainstream schools
- some Indigenous young people
- some same-sex-attracted young people
- young people with behavioural or emotional disturbance.

2.25. There are exceptions. Some students who leave school before the completion of Year 12, do so to enter employment or other forms of training. However, even those who find employment at this age may have limited employment prospects as adults because they have not completed formal schooling to the end of Year 12.

What happens to young people who leave school early?

2.26. Some of directions and situations that young people move into after leaving school early are reported as:

- family dependence
- unskilled employment
- income support
- education such as TAFE

- criminal activity and drug abuse.²⁶

2.27. According to one of the authors of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) study, *Non completion of school in Australia*, there are very few jobs and apprenticeships available to early school leavers in Canberra because Canberra has so little industry. Early school leavers in the ACT have the nation's worst job prospects with little choice but to move, go back to study or seek unemployment benefits.²⁷

²⁶ Holden E, *Getting a Life: pathways and early school leavers*, Disaffiliated early school leavers study working paper number 9, Youth Research Centre, The University of Melbourne Institute of Education, Parkville, 1992.

Lamb S, Dwyer P, Wyn J, *Non completion of school in Australia: the changing patterns of participation and outcomes*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report Number 16, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, September 2000.

²⁷ *ACT dropouts have worst job prospects: study* The Canberra Times, p 3, 19 October 2000.

3. Indicators of students at risk of leaving school early

3.1. The national study conducted by ACER reported that the main indicators of early leaving in the mid-1990s were strongly related to social background, gender and type of school. Early leavers remained over represented by young people from lower socio-economic-status backgrounds, rural areas, government schools and English-speaking families, and were more often low achievers, and males.²⁸

3.2. In addition to these broad indicators, the committee was advised of a number of indicators that help to define the extent of students at risk in the ACT school system. The key indicator is student drop-out rates to the end of Year 12. Other indicators include truancy and non-attendance, suspensions and exclusions, students in personal circumstances which compromise their well being and their capacity to achieve satisfactory educational outcomes, and literacy and numeracy outcomes.²⁹

Student drop out rates

3.3. While ACT Government schools have higher retention rates to Year 12 compared with other States, there is still a significant proportion of students who drop out of school before achieving a Year 12 certificate.

3.4. Students may drop out of the school system immediately after turning age 15 or at the end of Year 10. Others enrol in Year 11 but drop out subsequently before completing Year 12. Some remain until the end of Year 12 but do not receive a Year 12 Certificate. Other students such as those engaged in truancy and persistent non-attendance may drop out well before turning 15 and there is no system for identifying these students.

3.5. Anecdotal evidence from the Secondary Principals' Council indicates that a large number of students are leaving school before completing Year 10. After a time out of school many of these students want to return to school but do not know how to go about it.³⁰

²⁸ Lamb S, Dwyer P, Wyn J, *Non completion of school in Australia: the changing patterns of participation and outcomes*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report Number 16, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, September 2000, p viii.

²⁹ Submissions 22, ACT Government; 27, ACT Council of P&Cs.

³⁰ Transcript, p 367.

3.6. Information provided in response to a question taken on notice by the Minister for Education indicates that retention rates from Year 7 to Year 10 have fallen markedly from 102.7 per cent in 1997, to 96 per cent in 1999.³¹ Some of this could be attributed to movement from the government to the non-government sector. However, when the committee discussed the matter with the officials of the Department of Education and Community Services, they cautioned that this data is based on apparent retention rates rather than actual retention rates. To produce data based on actual retention rates involves tracking every student, which is a complex and costly exercise.³² The department advised that it has begun work on refining the data collection process that will provide better analysis of that data for policy development and college and high school management processes.³³ The committee welcomes this move.

3.7. In 1997-98, only 79 per cent of the cohort of Year 7 students received a Year 10 Certificate four years later.³⁴ Later annual reports have not included this measure. While some of these students may have repeated the year and subsequently received the qualification these figures are nevertheless disturbing.

3.8. Information from the Department of Education and Community Services annual reports over the last three years indicates that about 12 per cent (approximately 240) of Year 10 students do not proceed to secondary college the following year.³⁵

3.9. The ACT Council of P&Cs reported that anecdotal information from schools indicates that up to five per cent of students leave school before or at the end of Year 10 in government schools. Published retention rates to Year 11 in government schools do not provide a way of estimating the drop-out rate before then because these rates include students transferring from non-government to government schools.

3.10. The Minister for Education advised that departmental figures for 1999, indicate that three per cent of students enrolled in Year 10 did not receive a Year 10 Certificate suggesting they did not complete Year 10.³⁶ Therefore ACT Council of P&Cs estimate of the number of Year 10

³¹ Debates of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, *Weekly Hansard*, 23, 24, 25 May 2000, p 1943.

³² Transcript, p 318.

³³ Transcript, p 319.

³⁴ Department of Education and Community Services, *Annual Report 1997-98*.

³⁵ Debates of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, *Weekly Hansard*, 23, 24 25 May 2000, p 1943.

³⁶ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 15 November 2000.

students either leaving before or at the end of Year 10 does not seem unrealistic and may be an underestimate.

3.11. Retention rates to Years 11 and 12 provide another indication of the extent of the drop-out rate before completing Year 12. Retention rates are estimated on the basis of the school census in August. Retention rates to Year 11 in government schools are significantly above those to Year 12 in the following year indicating a proportion of students do not proceed to Year 12.

3.12. Of those who do proceed to secondary college, approximately 15 per cent or 500 do not proceed to Year 12. In the last three years a total of 20 per cent of enrolments in Year 11 (or 1,350 students) did not receive a Year 12 certificate the following year.

3.13. Information provided by the Minister for Education reveals that in August 1998, the apparent retention rate to Year 11 in ACT government schools was 125.6 per cent but in the following year the retention rate to Year 12 (at August) was 110 per cent³⁷. This disparity in retention rates to Years 11 and 12 in succeeding years indicates a significant attrition rate of students leaving school before the end of Year 12. Some 16 per cent of the Year 7 cohort of 1994 did not remain in college until August of their Year 12. It amounted to about 12 per cent of the Year 11 enrolments in 1998. In other years, the proportion has been as high as 15 per cent. Over the last decade it has varied between 10-15 per cent.

3.14. Another period when students drop out is between enrolment in Year 11 at the February census and the August census of the same year. However, comparison of the February and August census figures for Year 11 suggest that only a small number of students (usually less than 50 students or about 1-2 per cent of students who enrol in Year 11) do not continue beyond August of their first year in college.

3.15. There are much greater differences between the number of students enrolled in Year 11 in August and the number enrolled in Year 12 in the following year. Over the last four years the difference between Year 11 enrolments in August and Year 12 enrolments in the following February has varied from 103 in February 1998 to 263 in February 2000, and 176

³⁷ Debates of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, *Weekly Hansard*, 23, 24, 25 May 2000, p 1943.

in 2001.³⁸ While some may have gone to non-government schools or transferred out of Canberra, the numbers leaving are of concern.

3.16. Some students who remain in college to Year 12 and until the August census still do not receive a Year 12 Certificate. There is some variation from year-to-year, but from the information published by the Board of Senior Secondary Studies in the Department of Education and Community Services' annual reports it appears to be of the order of 3-7 per cent of students who enrolled in Year 11 in the previous year.³⁹

3.17. Overall, the Council of P&Cs reported that data provided by the Department of Education and Community Services indicates that, over the last decade, approximately 20 per cent of students who enrol in Year 11 do not receive a Year 12 Certificate in the following year.⁴⁰

3.18. The Government reported that the number of young people in the ACT aged 15 to 19 who leave school early and do not proceed to other education, training or employment is estimated at 400 to 500 each year.⁴¹ This excludes those who remain at school until the end of Year 12 and do not receive a Year 12 Certificate.

Truancy and non-attendance

3.19. The committee was told that there is anecdotal evidence of truancy and persistent non-attendance by some students which requires investigation.⁴² For example, the Secondary Principals' Council told the committee that there is a large number of students who drop out of high school and are never seen again, despite efforts of the school to track them.⁴³

3.20. A number of organisations claimed that schools have limited powers to deal with persistent non-attendance and truancy.⁴⁴

3.21. Persistent non-attendance is distinguished from truancy in that the children involved are not actually enrolled at a school and their parents/carers have not or are unable to enrol these children.

³⁸ Department of Education and Community Services, Government Schools Census Bulletins.

³⁹ Department of Education and Community Services, Annual Reports.

⁴⁰ Submission 27, ACT Council of P&Cs, p 3.

⁴¹ Submission 22, ACT Government, p 3.

⁴² Submission 27, ACT Council of P&Cs.

⁴³ Transcript, p 367.

⁴⁴ Submissions 6, Galilee; 12, Primary Principals' Association; 21, AEU ACT Branch; 27, ACT Council of P&Cs.

3.22. Children who are persistently absent from school are at grave risk. Their non-attendance threatens their success in education and learning and therefore future satisfying employment. They may also be vulnerable to anti-social behaviour, criminal offence or activities and lifestyle that threaten their personal safety and life chances.

3.23. The Minister for Education advised that no official record is available on the number of students who have truanted or who are persistent non-attenders.⁴⁵ This is of great concern to the committee as it indicates that the extent of the problem is unknown.

3.24. The Minister, however, reported that the Ministerial Advisory Council is examining the incidence of non-attendance at both primary and secondary schools, paying particular attention to student groups already identified as 'at risk'.⁴⁶

Suspensions and exclusions

3.25. Severe behaviour problems that are manifested in suspension and exclusion from school may also be indicative of potential students at risk.

3.26. Department of Education and Community Services' (DECS) data⁴⁷ shows that in 1999, there were 1792 suspensions in ACT government schools, involving 1209 students. The majority of suspensions (1450) occurred in high school, with 300 suspensions in primary school and 41 in college.

3.27. In 2000, there were 1685 suspensions, involving 1033 students or 2.6 per cent of the student population. Once again the majority of suspensions (1341) occurred in high schools, with 312 in primary schools and 32 in college.⁴⁸

3.28. In 2000, as in previous years, the majority of students suspended (83 per cent) were male. The committee notes that suspensions occur even in the early years of schooling. In 1999, 33 suspensions occurred in the years Kindergarten to Year 2 with 58 in 2000, an increase of concern.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 15 November 2000.

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ *ibid*

⁴⁸ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 16 May 2001.

⁴⁹ *ibid*

3.29. The committee notes that since they peaked in 1997, the number of suspensions per year has slowly declined from 1963 in 1997 to 1685 in 2000.⁵⁰

Literacy and numeracy outcomes

3.30. Literacy and numeracy outcomes are a very important indicator of potential students at risk. The Department of Education and Community Services and the Australian Literacy Educators Association reported that research indicates the importance of literacy and numeracy achievement to educational outcomes in adolescence.⁵¹

3.31. A review of the Dickson College Alternative Program, one of the long-term alternative programs, indicated that about half of the students had reading ages at least five years below their chronological age at the time of enrolment.⁵² This program is specifically targeted at students at risk of not completing school.

3.32. The literacy results for Year 3 are generally very good, with only a small proportion of students not achieving expected levels. However, in Year 5, some 12 per cent of students were significantly behind their peers in writing in both 1997 and 1998. In 1998 about 10 per cent of students were having difficulty in meeting numeracy expectations in Year 5.⁵³

3.33. Reading and numeracy results for years 3 and 5 have shown improvement over the years. In 2000, 94.8 per cent of Year 3 students achieved the national benchmark (introduced in 1999) compared with 89.9 per cent in 1999. In 2000, 90.8 per cent of Year 5 students in government schools performed above the national benchmark compared with 90.4 per cent in 1999.⁵⁴

3.34. Results for Year 7 students in 2000 showed improvements over 1999 in reading and numeracy. However there was a significant increase in the number of students performing at the lowest level in writing from 11 per cent in 1999 to 23.6 per cent in 2000.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 15 November 2000 and 16 May 2001.

⁵¹ Submissions 8, Australian Literacy Educators Association; 22, ACT Government.

⁵² Holdsworth R and Moffat A, *The Eclipse Program, The Dickson College Alternative Program – The report of a Review 1999-2000*, p 12.

⁵³ Submission 22, ACT Government, p 5.

⁵⁴ Minister for Education, Media release, *ACT Year 3 and 5 students excel in reading*, 30 November 2000.

⁵⁵ ACT Government School Education, *Literacy and Numeracy Performance 2000*, Department of Education and Community Services, 2001.

3.35. Results in 2000 for Year 9 students in reading, writing and numeracy were below the 1999 level, with the number of students not achieving basic level skills doubling from 1999. Results from Year 9 writing are of great concern. They show a large increase in the number of students at the lowest achievement level from 15.5 per cent in 1999 to a huge 41.1 per cent in 2000.⁵⁶

3.36. The results for indigenous students are also of great concern. In 1999, across all strands indigenous students' average performance in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 was significantly below system average performance. Overall the differences in performance of indigenous students compared to the system performance are far greater in the male population than the female.⁵⁷ Results for 2000 showed an improvement at each assessment year level. However a higher proportion of indigenous students are still in the bottom profile level of each year level.⁵⁸

3.37. Literacy assessments undertaken in recent years indicate that the majority of students are performing at expected levels of literacy or above, with a significant proportion of students well above the expected levels. However, the tests also show many students are falling further behind in their literacy development as they proceed through primary school. There is a very large range of outcomes in literacy in each year cohort assessed. Numeracy assessments also reveal a group of students as having difficulty.

3.38. These results provide an indicator as to where additional help is needed. For example the Year 7 and Year 9 cohorts of 2000 (who are in Years 8 and 10 in 2001) need assistance with writing if they are to achieve satisfactory levels in future. Additional help is also needed for many indigenous students. About 10 per cent of the 1997 and 1998 Year 5 cohorts were behind in writing. These students would be in Years 8 and 9 in 2001.

3.39. According to the Council of P&Cs, these results represent the absolute minimum extent of literacy and numeracy learning problems

⁵⁶ ACT Government School Education, *Literacy and Numeracy Performance 2000*, Department of Education and Community Services, 2001.

⁵⁷ Minister for Education, *Six monthly report on performance on indigenous education*, Report to the ACT Legislative Assembly, tabled on 7 September 2000.

⁵⁸ Minister for Education, *Indigenous Education, Six monthly report to 28 February 2001* Report to the ACT Legislative Assembly, tabled on 28 March 2001.

Personal circumstances that compromise the well being of young people

3.40. Related to the indicators already discussed is the increasing concern about the welfare of many young people in schools in the ACT and its impact on their learning development. Student wellbeing plays a role in satisfactory achievement of education and training outcomes. Personal circumstances such as nutrition, health, housing, parental support, home environment and financial security can have an impact on learning.

Conclusion

3.41. While there are a number of clear indicators of students at risk of leaving school early, data on many of these indicators is either not available or its accuracy questioned. It is important that comprehensive and accurate data is available for all indicators.

3.42. School retention rates that are available are based on apparent retention rates rather than actual rates. To produce data based on actual rates would involve tracking each student, which would be a costly exercise. Nevertheless, in the absence of more accurate data the apparent rates indicate a problem, which must be addressed.

3.43. There is no consolidated data on the numbers of students who truant or are persistent non-attenders. This matter must be addressed.

3.44. Information on literacy and numeracy achievements of students is available and needs to be used as a basis for individual planning and intervention.

4. Relevance of current mainstream programs

4.1. There is a general perception that mainstream secondary schools in the ACT only cater for the ‘average’ young person and do not have much flexibility to meet the needs of students outside the norm.⁵⁹ The committee found this to be the case with many mainstream schools, however it also received evidence about some exciting initiatives offered by some schools aimed at assisting those outside the norm.

4.2. Those reported to be outside the norm include:

- young people suffering chronic illness leading to interruptions to schooling;
- young pregnant women whose schooling is interrupted;
- young people who are incarcerated;
- young people not living in the family home;
- young people with emotional and behavioural disturbances; and
- students with learning difficulties.

4.3. Barnardos, reported that young people who do not live in the family home, young people with behavioural problems, those with physical/psychological difficulties and those returning to school after a break can find it particularly difficult to cope with integrating into mainstream schools. Many schools do not have the flexibility to cope with such groups. Young people, for instance who do not live in the family home may find it difficult getting to school on time. They may also not have the financial resources to pay for transport to and from school, which increases their attendance problems.⁶⁰

4.4. Dr Murik of the University of Canberra reported that his studies over a number of years of young people who experience difficulty with schooling seem to indicate that a significant number have to cope with a difficult socio-economic background, including family breakdown. Many

⁵⁹ Submissions 2, Barnardos Australia; 3, Alan Christie; 5, Audrey Guy; 6, Galilee; 12, Primary Principals’ Association; 13, Richmond Fellowship; 15, Caroline Chisholm High School Board; 19, SPELD ACT; 20, The Canberra College; 21, AEU ACT Branch; 23, Mr Horsfield.

⁶⁰ Submission 2, Barnardos Australia.

of these students fail to find the current school curriculum relevant to their needs.⁶¹

4.5. Mainstream education facilities are not able to cope with severely disruptive, often anti-social behaviour displayed by many adolescents. The committee was told that there is a long waiting list for placement in the department's behaviour management units. The Richmond Fellowship, which operates a day program for young people placed in its residential care facilities, reported that it receives on a daily basis, urgent requests from schools around Canberra to enrol young people with serious behaviour problems, if only on a temporary basis.⁶²

4.6. Another group of students reported to experience difficulties with the approach adopted in mainstream schools is those with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These students require additional support with organisational skills, note taking, understanding instructions, and one-to-one assistance with their learning.⁶³

4.7. Many indigenous students also often experience difficulties with coping with mainstream schools as they are currently structured and operate.

4.8. Concerns were expressed about the impact on the education of indigenous students⁶⁴ and same-sex-attracted students of homophobic and culturally insensitive or racist attitudes evident in some schools.⁶⁵

4.9. Galilee's submission asserted that indigenous students today still face difficulties with the non-indigenous schooling system, such as racial abuse and vilification, negative comments about their families and their behaviours on the basis of race, prejudicial treatment, being treated as a child at school when they are treated as adults at home, being spoken to in a domineering manner, strong talk, and being made to feel personally guilty for getting extra money and special benefits.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Submission 30, Dr Joe Murik.

⁶² Submission 13, Richmond Fellowship.

⁶³ Submissions 18, ADHD Support Group; 19, SPELD ACT; and 20, The Canberra College.

⁶⁴ Transcript, p 127.

⁶⁵ Transcript p 69, p 129, p 155.

⁶⁶ Submission 6, Galilee, Appendix 3.

4.10. The committee raised these comments with members of the indigenous community who confirmed that these issues are still of concern in some schools.⁶⁷

Year 11 and 12 curriculum

4.11. Secondary colleges reported that they are enrolling more and more students who need assistance with basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy and organisational skills.⁶⁸

4.12. They also reported that they are receiving more and more students who have been enrolled in learning centres and learning assistance programs. In addition the Youth Allowance has resulted in young people returning to school after a break and requiring additional support to enable them to adjust and benefit from the college experience. Secondary colleges are also noticing an increasing trend of students who may have dropped out at 16 or 17 re-enrolling in their late teens.

4.13. According to the Secondary Principals' Council, secondary colleges are not provided with additional resources for these groups of students who often require intensive support, such as individual learning programs.⁶⁹

4.14. Community Education and Training reported that it has observed a strong demand from Year 11 and 12 students for or its outreach literacy program. This program is generally offered to unemployed young people and those leaving school early. However demand is now coming from students who cannot get enough support to improve their literacy skills within the college system.⁷⁰

4.15. Barnardos raised a related issue. They claimed that the year 11 and 12 curriculum is seen to be heavily weighted towards young people who wish to participate in tertiary study, making it difficult for young people who wish to finish their schooling at year 12.⁷¹

4.16. Secondary colleges need to be able to adapt their programs to meet the needs of the range of students staying on to Year 12. The committee

⁶⁷ Confidential evidence

⁶⁸ Transcript, p 366.

⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰ Submission 29, Community Education and Training.

⁷¹ Submission 2, Barnardos Australia.

heard of examples where the colleges are making a concerted effort to accommodate the changing client group, within the resources available.

Year 9

4.17. Year 9 is often a particularly problematic time. Students are coping with the physical, social and emotional issues of mid-adolescence. Serious behaviour problems are often evident, suspensions rates are high,⁷² and there is a lack of school connectedness among many students. Year 9 is increasingly seen by researchers as a time when more flexibility in school programs is needed to keep students engaged in school.⁷³ It was suggested to the committee that a quite radical approach be adopted to Year 9 programs where the emphasis is taken off literacy and numeracy and placed on personal wellbeing. According to some, Year 9 programs need to be redesigned to focus on individual projects, group projects such as the development of videos or undertaking community surveys, physical activities, business enterprises, and life skills programs

4.18. Some work commenced in 2001 in the ACT to engage Year 9 students more. The Year 9 pilot exhibitions program, sometimes referred to as 'rich tasks' requires students to engage themselves in the preparation of a research based assignment that is presented to the community and other students. Students gain accreditation for their work which is assessed across a range of attributes. The project will be trailed in all high schools in September 2001.

Literacy and numeracy

4.19. The relevance of programs in literacy and numeracy was raised by two researchers, Dr Tony Liddicoat of the Australian National University and Ms Glenda Shopen of the Australian Catholic University. They told the committee that there is a mismatch between the literacy and numeracy practices of schools and those that students use in their lives outside school and between the goals and interests of students and the curricula of schools.⁷⁴

4.20. These mismatches are most obvious in:

⁷² From 1995 to 2000 suspension rates were highest in Years 8 and 9. (Minister for Education correspondence dated 15 November 2000 and 16 May 2001.

⁷³ Discussions with Mr Andrew Fuller, Latrobe University, Mr Roger Holdsworth, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne University.

⁷⁴ Transcript, p 136-137.

- a school focus on literacy that privileges literature and creative response as core literacy compared to a home/community focus on literacy for information and as a basis for action;
- a school focus on print literacy as the dominant form of literacy compared to a home/community focus on screen based literacy;
- schools not making links or valuing the rich networks of practice involving their literacy and numeracy skills developed by students—this leads to school becoming irrelevant for the lives of a number of students, especially for those outside educated, middle-class families.

4.21. They also pointed out that literacy and numeracy practices at home and school are gendered and there is a lack of role models both at home and school. For literature-based practices that predominate in primary school, and in language arts in high school, the majority of role models are women. For technology- and information based literacies, which become more important in secondary school, the majority of role models are women. While schools have included film as part of the literacy program, the things that boys are typically involved in such as computer games and video games are seen to be in competition with the literacies that schools teach.⁷⁵

4.22. The level of support available to students having literacy and numeracy difficulties in the middle years was reported to be insufficient.⁷⁶ The Primary Principals' Association reported that primary schools may have some students who are severely at risk of not achieving in literacy and numeracy, but the school may not qualify for any additional resources. There are also some students who have long-term learning disabilities who need more than the learning assistance program can offer but who do not qualify for special education.⁷⁷ Schools are frustrated by this situation. They recognise that there is a need for additional, flexible support for these students but are frustrated by the inflexible system of allocation of additional resources.

4.23. The suitability of learning assistance programs for students in the upper primary years was questioned. According to some researchers these

⁷⁵ Transcript, p 136.

⁷⁶ Submission 12, Primary Principals' Association; Paper tabled by Dr Liddicoat and Ms Shopen, 18 May 2000.

⁷⁷ Submission 12, Primary Principals' Association.

programs are more suitable for younger students, that is students in Years 3 and 4.⁷⁸

4.24. The committee raised the matter of support for primary students with poor literacy and numeracy skills with the Minister for Education. The Minister's response referred largely to initiatives in the very early years of schooling. The committee supports intervention in the early years but also considers that there is often a need for further intervention later in the primary school years. The evidence before the committee indicates that this is a gap.

The transition from primary to high school

4.25. The committee heard from a number of people who expressed concern about how the transition between Year 6 and Year 7 is managed. This is a critical time in developing what Fuller et al describe as resilience. Resilience is defined as:

the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life. Even when hardship and adversity arise, it is as if the person has an elasticised rope around them that helps them to rebound when things get low, and to maintain their shape as a person.⁷⁹

4.26. Students who have difficulty with the transition from primary school to high school may be at risk of not completing school. Some high schools together with their feeder primary schools have developed strategies for easing the transition from primary to high school. However, there is a need to address this issue in a more systemic way.

Vocational education

4.27. There is a group of students who would benefit from more work-related programs. The committee was told that work experience programs meet some of this need but are restricted to particular minimum ages and have requirements that exclude some students in need. The more recent vocational education and training programs also do not meet the needs of some students for similar reasons.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Paper tabled by Dr Liddicoat and Ms Shopen, 18 May.

⁷⁹ Fuller A, McGraw K and Goodyear M, *The Mind of Youth*, Department of Education, Melbourne, 1998.

⁸⁰ Submission 15, Caroline Chisholm High School Board.

4.28. Further, according to the Secondary Principals' Council while the vocational programs have been a very useful curriculum initiative for many college-aged students they are resource intensive. Teachers are required to go to workplaces to do workplace assessments. Factors outside the control of schools also impact on the schools' resources. Most of the funding comes from the Commonwealth and decisions are sometimes made that have a resource impact on schools. For example, teachers doing workplace assessments are required to upgrade their qualifications.⁸¹

4.29. Despite these difficulties ACT government schools offer a high proportion of vocational education programs and the Territory overall has one of the highest percentages of vocational education and training in schools in Australia. One hundred per cent of ACT government secondary schools offer vocational education and training that involves time in the workplace.⁸²

School structure

4.30. Galilee contended that there is a strong connection between the structure and functioning of the school and early school leaving. Students are leaving school because of alienating practices, structures and rules.⁸³

4.31. The ACER national study on early school leavers expressed a similar view. That study reported that research evidence suggests that there is a delicate balance between factors of achievement and educational 'success' and elements of personal satisfaction and 'belonging', that need to be taken into account in devising school programs to engage potential early school leavers.⁸⁴

4.32. It is clear that some students cannot cope with the structured institutional approach of mainstream schools and do better in a more flexible environment. Others need a more flexible environment because due to individual circumstances they move in and out of school.

⁸¹ Transcript, p 374.

⁸² Minister for Education, media release dated 15 May 2001.

⁸³ Submission 6, Galilee; Long R, *The educational needs of 'at risk' adolescents: developments in education*, Appendix 1 to Submission 6, Galilee.

⁸⁴ Lamb S, Dwyer P, Wyn J, *Non completion of school in Australia: the changing patterns of participation and outcomes*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report Number 16, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, September 2000.

Some examples of flexible approaches

4.33. A number of schools have established more flexible environments. Some schools are working in partnership with youth centres. For example, at Gold Creek School a youth worker works within the school on one day a week to share information, cater for pastoral care needs and establish access to weekend support services.⁸⁵

4.34. The Youth Focus program at Melrose High School provides a variety of off-line programs. These include programs for anger management, anxiety reduction, boys in education, motor tech and permaculture.⁸⁶ Also at Melrose High School a group of 10 teachers have been trained in case management with young people as part of a pilot program under the full service schools model.⁸⁷

4.35. Youth workers attend the breakfast programs run in partnership with the YMCA at a number of high schools. These programs, as well as providing a breakfast, cater for counselling needs of the students. The committee was told that while there is a demand for more of these programs, funding is severely limited.⁸⁸

4.36. Lanyon High School provides the CIT Certificate in Adult General Education. Stromlo, Campbell, Belconnen and Ginninderra High Schools provide opportunities for students to use the 'research centre' model of self-study or tutor guided study as an alternative to the traditional classroom.⁸⁹ Caroline Chisholm High School reported that it has pioneered an approach that has significantly reduced alienation among students.⁹⁰

4.37. Narrabundah College has instigated a project entitled the Resilience Project, which is designed to assist young people who are at risk of 'slipping through the net' of support that the college conventionally provides, through a series of workshops aimed at building resilience in students. The school developed the project in consultation with In Sync, a team building and personal development consultancy. This project began in 1999 with support from Healthpact. In 2001 it was extended to Dickson College.⁹¹ Even though it commends Healthpact for

⁸⁵ Submission 22, ACT Government.

⁸⁶ *ibid*

⁸⁷ Transcript, p 199.

⁸⁸ Transcript, p 74.

⁸⁹ Submission 22, ACT Government

⁹⁰ Submission 15, Caroline Chisholm High School Board.

⁹¹ Submission 31, Narrabundah College Board.

supporting this program, the committee is concerned that this project like many other innovative projects, that operate as a result of the initiative taken by individual staff, can only proceed if they are successful in obtaining a special grant. The committee hopes that Healthpact will continue to support such projects. The committee also hopes that the Department of Education and Community Services will take more responsibility for encouraging, fostering and funding such projects.

The ‘High Schools for the New Millennium’ project

4.38. The Minister advised that this initiative previously known as ‘The Affirming the High School Years’ project will provide structural change in high school teaching and learning to provide for a more flexible learning environment, focused on the learning needs of young adolescents in the 21st century and with more emphasis on achievement of competencies. It will involve curriculum and organisational restructuring and will be combined with developing IT competency standards in close consultation with business.⁹²

4.39. It is a three-year project with an initial focus on implementing change projects at the school level that commenced in June 2000. The project provides direction and funding for change projects that will lead to improved outcomes in shaping school cultures, structural change, learning and assessment. Funding of \$1 million over the three years has been allocated.

4.40. It will involve new approaches to teaching and learning and changes to increase the involvement of adolescent students in decisions about their education, school policies and organisation. Professional development programs for school staff will support the changes. A range of detailed proposals for improving and updating school organisation and management are being followed up, including:

- the use of some of the methods of adult learning for years 9 and 10;
- introduction of more alternative learning programs and settings within and outside schools;
- obtaining feedback by regularly surveying students on teaching and learning methods;

⁹² Department of Education and Community Services, *Annual Report 1999-2000*.

- involving students in real small business and community action projects;
- a new Year 10 Certificate which will include student key competencies;
- literacy and numeracy assessments in Years 7 and 9;
- broadening links between the full service schools program, enterprise education and the project; and
- broadening the professional base of personnel employed in schools for example including youth workers, social workers and police community development workers.⁹³

4.41. The Secondary Principals' Council reported that the program is making a difference in individual schools.⁹⁴

4.42. While the level of funding (\$1 million over three years from 1999-2002)⁹⁵ appears significant to put it in perspective it is worth looking at how much this amounts to on a per school basis to gain a better understanding of what can be achieved with this project. The funding allocated would only provide \$59,000 for each of the 17 high schools over the whole three-year period or just under \$20,000 per year for each high school.

Middle schooling

4.43. The Department of Education and Community Services supports the middle school concept. A middle schooling model has been introduced at Gold Creek School, where year 6 students are co-located with those in years 7 and 8 to provide an easier transition from primary to secondary school.

Conclusion

4.44. Mainstream secondary schools, especially high schools are struggling to provide programs that engage at-risk students.

⁹³ Submission 22, ACT Government; Department of Education and Community Services *Annual Report 1999-2000*.

⁹⁴ Transcript, p 373.

⁹⁵ *Budget Paper No 3, 1999-2000*, p 178.

4.45. While a number of schools have established more flexible approaches to the structure and delivery of programs in high schools, there is a need to totally review the current appropriateness of the high school system and its relevance to students of the twenty first century.

4.46. Issues such as the transition between primary and high school, the relevance of the curriculum, the structure and culture of schools, how best to deal with Year 9, how to ensure an inclusive and accepting culture, whether the middle school concept needs to be more widely implemented, all need serious consideration.

4.47. The High Schools for the New Millennium Project aims to address some of these issues. However the committee questions whether the considerable change needed can be addressed within the timeframe and resources allocated for the project.

4.48. The committee commends the flexible approaches to curriculum and support that schools are undertaking, however is concerned that funding for many such projects is reliant on enterprising teachers seeking grants from organisations other than the Department of Education and Community Services.

4.49. The evidence before the committee indicates that there is a gap in learner assistance support in the upper primary years.

5. Alternative programs

5.1. There is debate over whether the most effective way to provide an education service for at-risk students is through an inclusive model or through a range of alternative models.

5.2. Proponents for the inclusive or non-categorisation approach argue that all children can learn given effective instruction and that it is more just and productive to have all children in the school system.⁹⁶

5.3. Whilst educators agree that labelling is generally destructive to the needs of children there are a number of factors that work against the implementation of the ideal. The costs of lower class sizes, support staff, extra professional development and curriculum redesign inhibit the implementation of educative measures in schools with at-risk students. At-risk students themselves are not likely to succeed in a system that they believe has failed them, they are more likely to re-engage in education in an environment where they believe that they can change their own future.⁹⁷ Current school structures and curriculum also work against some students engaging in education.

5.4. Schools have the autonomy to develop a diverse range of programs to meet the needs of their students. There are some excellent examples of schools that have developed alternative approaches to building supportive, challenging and exciting learning environments.

5.5. However, for some students, often despite the best efforts of the school, mainstream schools are inappropriate and alternative programs are needed.

5.6. Brooks et al⁹⁸ list six intervention models that categorise common initiatives in addressing the needs of at-risk young people in schools. They are:

- **community-based partial withdrawal**—students are withdrawn from mainstream school on a part-time or temporary basis to a project

⁹⁶ Long, Robert, *Educational needs of at-risk adolescents: Developments in education*, Appendix 1 to Submission 6, Galilee.

⁹⁷ Long, Robert, *Educational needs of at-risk adolescents: Developments in education*, Appendix 1 to Submission 6, Galilee.

⁹⁸ Brooks M, Milne C, Paterson K, Johansson K, Hart K, *Under Age School Leaving: A report examining approaches to assisting young people at risk of leaving school before the legal school leaving age*, National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, National Clearing House for Youth Studies, Tasmania, 1997.

operating in a community setting, with the aim of eventually reintegrating students back into mainstream school;

- **school-based partial withdrawal**—students are withdrawn from normal classes to participate in an alternative program operating in the school; the initiative may operate as a full-time or part-time annex within the school or a time-out program parallel to normal classes;
- **community school**—comprehensive education and support program operating as an alternative to mainstream school; participants are usually not expected to return to mainstream school;
- **outreach services**—provision of specialist support to a number of schools within a particular geographic area; and
- **integrated whole school**—a whole school approach to target at-risk students within the school community through innovative curriculum and welfare measures.

5.7. At the time of the inquiry there was a range of alternative educational programs in the ACT, including examples of the first four types listed above.

Short-term alternative educational programs

5.8. Short-term alternatives include programs available in withdrawal units when behavioural, emotional, educational or social problems require intensive intervention. These are primary-level student management programs at Weston, Yarralumla and Urambi, and at the secondary level the Adolescent Development Unit, the Adolescent Day Unit and the High School Support Centres at Belconnen and Tuggeranong. Students may attend for 20 weeks in these programs except for the High School Support Centres which are very short term (about two weeks).

Support for students with behavioural problems

5.9. There are a number of students each year who exhibit serious behavioural problems and whose learning outcomes are affected.

5.10. The Department of Education and Community Services supports these students in several ways such as school-based support provided by itinerant student management consultants, school counsellors, the occasional provision of supplementary teachers' assistants at mainstream schools and withdrawal units.

5.11. The committee was told that support for students with serious behavioural problems is inadequate. The waiting times are often very long, especially for placement in some of the withdrawal units, the gender balance is an issue in the withdrawal units, and there appear to be limitations to the effectiveness of both the withdrawal units and the itinerant support provided.⁹⁹

5.12. The Primary Principals' Association reported that the support available is too short. Students are placed in the withdrawal units for a limit of 20 weeks, during which time they maintain contact with their home school. The assumption is that once they have completed their time in the withdrawal unit they will return to the home school. However according to the Primary Principals' Association often returning to the home school is not appropriate as they are returning to the same situation without the support needed.¹⁰⁰

5.13. The Primary Principals' Association called for more places in withdrawal units and for placements of longer periods.¹⁰¹

5.14. The 2001-2002 Budget provides funding for an additional behaviour management unit for lower primary aged students. This unit will be located on the north side of Canberra, to alleviate the pressure on the waiting list for the Urambi Unit. Some of the \$62,000 allocated for 2001-2002 will be used for professional development of teachers.¹⁰²

5.15. While schools can apply for additional support in the form of a special teachers' assistant to assist them to manage students with severe emotional and behavioural problems at the school level, the Primary Principals' Association reported that such support is only granted in extreme cases and for a very limited time, usually days. This is not satisfactory as such students need consistent long-term individually tailored programs to prevent the problem increasing.¹⁰³

5.16. The Minister for Education advised that the Promoting Positive Behaviours in Primary Schools steering committee is examining ways of promoting positive behaviours in primary schools. Part of this review is to identify the students who need assistance with behaviour issues and to

⁹⁹ Submission 12, Primary Principals' Association ; Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001; Secondary Principals' Association, Transcript, p 380.

¹⁰⁰ Submission 12, Primary Principals' Association.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

¹⁰² Uncorrected Proof Transcript, Inquiry into the Draft Budget Initiatives for 2001-2002 for the Department of Education and Community Services and related agencies, March 2001. P 9.

¹⁰³ Submission 12, Primary Principals' Association.

examine ways of providing resources in a fairer and more equitable manner as well as examining service delivery options. This committee expects to report on some options by the end of 2001.¹⁰⁴

5.17. The withdrawal behaviour management programs for secondary students are the Adolescent Development Program at Dairy Flat and the Adolescent Day Unit. These programs have been in existence for some time. They operate from different resource bases with a consequent differing number of students who can access them. They are also managed by different areas within the Department of Education and Community Services. The Dairy Flat program is managed by the Student Participation Section of the Schools Directorate, while the Adolescent Day Unit is managed by the Children's, Youth and Family Services Bureau.

5.18. Evidence before the committee indicates that support for behaviour management has been an area of great concern to schools for a long period. The present system of withdrawing students from mainstream settings and providing itinerant support for teachers does not appear to be effective. Many students need a period longer than 20 weeks to enable change in their behaviour to occur.

5.19. The Department of Education and Community Services acknowledged the difficulties with the current arrangements for supporting students with behavioural problems. The Minister advised that since the current models have been in place for some time a review is needed. The Minister went on to say:

The issue of who owns the problem is an important one. With this in mind it seems that the answer lies in the curriculum and support services provided at the school base, rather than transferring students to units for 'therapy'. At any one time, the fact that places are limited and waitlists are long requires a re-think of our current behaviour management strategies, and linking this to curriculum content, delivery and assessment.¹⁰⁵

5.20. There are differing views in the research about the most effective kinds of programs that can be offered to students with behavioural problems. The current models need to be reviewed and evaluated to

¹⁰⁴ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001; Transcript, p 300.

¹⁰⁵ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001.

determine their effectiveness in the context of the current body of research. Schools are currently struggling to provide the resources needed to address some of the less serious behaviour management problems at the school level. Any changes resulting from a review, especially any at the school level, must be properly resourced.

Long-term alternative educational programs

Alternatives operated by the Department of Education and Community Services

5.21. The Ginninderra Alternative Program (GAP), aims to assist individual students in achieving a Year 10 Certificate in a relaxed and supportive school environment. It offers a flexible delivery of education that caters for individual needs. It enrolls 15 to 18 year-olds who have not completed their Year 10 Certificate for various reasons such as difficult family circumstances, disability, personal situations learning difficulties or ill health. Students must attend a minimum of six hours of class sessions per week and make a commitment to 10 to 12 hours per week for study outside school time.¹⁰⁶

5.22. The STAY program at The Canberra College has been developed specifically for students at risk of leaving before completing their course. It has two components:

- a study assistance centre for literacy and numeracy on the Weston Campus: and
- a centre to assist with personal, family and developmental issues at the Woden Campus.

5.23. The Dickson College Alternative Program (DCAP) and the Eclipse Program at The Canberra College, Weston Campus provide places for up to 100 students from Years 8 to 12. Both provide programs for students, often with emotional or family problems for whom mainstream school arrangements are unsuited. Students (from any level) may enrol in mainstream college classes and have access to work experience programs.

¹⁰⁶ Ginninderra District High School, *Ginninderra Alternative Program –Information Guide for Students, Parents and Community Members*.

Evaluation of Eclipse and DCAP

5.24. An evaluation of the DCAP and the Eclipse Program, while strongly endorsing the achievements of the programs under difficult circumstances, highlighted a number of issues that need addressing. Many of these issues were also raised by inquiry participants.

5.25. Of major concern to the review team was the inadequate level of staffing.

Faced with the intense demands that this student population places on core staff, the Review's impression is of two programs **just** coping with the diverse demands of developing and maintaining a learning program, social skills development and meeting whole student (ie beyond school) needs. The Programs are staffed on a similar basis to 'mainstream' high schools; they are significantly disadvantaged in staffing terms with respect to other units in the ACT (and elsewhere in Australia) enrolling similar populations.¹⁰⁷

5.26. The programs were intended for a diverse range of students whose needs in terms of learning approaches were not catered for in mainstream settings. The review points out that student enrolment in the programs has become dominated by those with a history of school rejection, poor attendance and/or confrontational behaviour. This has resulted in the programs to some extent becoming last resort options for students rather than offering diversity for those who learn differently.

5.27. The review made a series of recommendations relating to:

- increased staffing ratios and changes to the mix of staffing;
- increased levels of administrative support;
- changes to the selection process for staffing for the programs to ensure suitability of staff for the programs;

¹⁰⁷ Holdsworth Roger and Moffat Andy, *The Eclipse Program, The Dickson College Alternative Program, The Report of a Review 1999-2000*, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, May 2000.

- clarification of enrolment criteria and the development of a system-wide understanding of students appropriate to be referred to the programs;
- the development of a systematic information and co-ordination structure at departmental level to integrate the provision of alternative programs to enable placement, referral and application on the basis of known capacity to meet student needs;
- the need to clarify departmental expectations of the programs, the processes of referrals, the processes by which judgements are made on appropriate referrals how students are supported on exit; and
- the need for more comprehensive program planning.¹⁰⁸

5.28. The review warned that there are continuing and increasing social and economic costs associated with failing to meet the needs of these students. It stressed that while both DCAP and Eclipse are demonstrating the capacity to achieve substantial gains for these students, they need to be resourced to ensure this happens

5.29. The committee raised these matters with the Minister for Education and officials. It was told that some of the recommendations have been or are being addressed, such as changes to some aspects of the selection process for teachers, an examination of the referral systems and clarification of enrolment criteria.¹⁰⁹

5.30. However the Minister advised that the staffing ratios have not changed since the review. The programs have the flexibility to convert teaching points to teacher assistant points, employment of a youth worker or additional administrative staff. The principal decides on the mix of staff.¹¹⁰

5.31. The committee is most concerned that such little attention has been paid to the recommendations of the review, particularly in relation to the staffing issues. It became clear to the committee following a visit to the Eclipse program that for the programs to be fully effective the staffing issues must be addressed along with the implementation of the other recommendations.

¹⁰⁸ Holdsworth Roger and Moffat Andy, *The Eclipse Program, The Dickson College Alternative Program, The Report of a Review 1999-2000*, Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne, May 2000.

¹⁰⁹ Transcript, pp 316, 317.

¹¹⁰ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 9 May 2001.

Alternatives operated by community organisations

Galilee Day Program

5.32. Galilee operates an alternative educational program based on a relational model founded in the value of each young person and their need to be respected, loved and humanised by the institution. It differs from many of the other alternatives that are based upon the behaviourist mode of operation. The strength of the program is its co-location with a range of activities and enterprises, such as a farm, a nursery and a glass blowing studio. The program is funded by Family Services and is for substitute care clients, most of whom come from very dysfunctional family backgrounds.¹¹¹ It is a registered non-government school that offers students the opportunity to complete a Year 10 Certificate.

Phoenix Day Program

5.33. Richmond Fellowship operates the Phoenix Day Program for young people who have experienced difficulty in the traditional school setting. Most of its participants are from Richmond Fellowship refugees.

Youth in the City

5.34. Youth in the City operates 'Education Access' jointly with the Department of Education and Community Services. It aims to provide opportunities for young people not accessing mainstream education. Support is provided on a drop in basis in literacy and life skills, career counselling, access to educational facilities and labour market programs and individual assessment.

Resourcing

5.35. Each of the above programs reported difficulties resourcing their programs.

5.36. Some additional funds have been provided for Youth in the City in the 2001-2002 budget to enable the program to expand, which the committee welcomes.

5.37. Galilee claims that it needs at least one additional staff member to enable it to operate on a more sound basis with the capacity to underpin staff and the program, when staff need time out. Galilee told the

¹¹¹ Submission 6, Galilee; Transcript, p 38.

committee that its Day Program enrolls students that no other school in the ACT can handle/cope with, students with special needs, often with mental and emotional disabilities and often with social inadequacies which make them virtually unable to function. This places a very high level of stress on its staff. Galilee also requires funding for capital improvements such as an adequate toilet block.¹¹²

5.38. Richmond Fellowship told the committee that the Phoenix Day Program is extremely limited by funding in what it can do. Under its contract with Family Services, Richmond Fellowship is required to offer a day program for young people in its shelters. That can be simply baby-sitting activities. However the Fellowship believes that the young people need more than that but funding restrictions do not allow the employment of a teacher who would be able to provide remedial literacy and numeracy activities as well as deal with other educational issues.¹¹³

Vocationally oriented alternative programs

5.39. The Minister acknowledged that there is a need for an increase in access to relevant vocational education and training courses in Years 10 and 11.¹¹⁴

5.40. There are no purely vocationally oriented alternative programs in the ACT.

5.41. The committee visited The Island in North Fitzroy, Victoria. The Island is a program run by the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training that offers a full time education and training program with a focus on developing vocational skills and a readiness for work ethic. Students must be aged 15 to be eligible for enrolment. Most students attend the program for six months.

5.42. The program offers a range of workshop based activities. These include building and construction, carpentry and woodwork, automotive, cooking and catering, literacy and numeracy, design studio and art. Students take the opportunity to experience all workshops with a time emphasis on their key interest areas. All students are expected to take one unit each in cooking and catering and in design studio. Units last 9 days.

¹¹² Submission 17 (Galilee) to the inquiry into the 2001-2002 draft budget initiatives for the Department of Education and Community Services and related agencies.

¹¹³ Transcript, p 1.

¹¹⁴ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001.

Literacy and numeracy, sport and physical extension programs are built into fortnightly schedules. Music is an elective.

5.43. Staff at the program include qualified trades people as well as teachers.

5.44. On completion, most students move into apprenticeships or employment.

5.45. There is interest in establishing a similar program in the ACT.

Availability of alternatives

5.46. While there are a number of alternative programs in the ACT, there are many concerns.

5.47. The committee heard that:

- places are very limited;¹¹⁵
- the range of programs is limited;¹¹⁶
- information on the programs is difficult to find;¹¹⁷
- making referrals to alternative programs is difficult;¹¹⁸
- available alternatives often become dumping grounds for students with severe behavioural problems;¹¹⁹
- teachers working in alternative programs need special skills and training;
- there are no alternatives for younger high school students ie years 7 and 8;¹²⁰ and
- reduction in the number of ‘offline’ programs is putting pressure on other alternative programs such as Galilee and the Phoenix Day Program.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Submissions 12, Primary Principals’ Association; 13, Richmond Fellowship; 15, Caroline Chisholm High School Board; 21, AEU ACT Branch; 24, Youth in the City; 25, Young Carers’ Network.

¹¹⁶ Submissions 2, Barnardos Australia; 6, Galilee; 7, Gungahlin Regional Community Service Inc.

¹¹⁷ Submission 16, Youth Coalition of the ACT.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Submissions 16, Youth Coalition of the ACT; 21 AEU-ACT Branch.

¹²⁰ Informal discussions Belconnen High School Support Program

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study

5.48. An OECD study on young people's transition from education to work in Australia recommended for students at risk of leaving school early, the establishment of networks of smaller scale alternative secondary schools such as those that operate in Denmark in a satellite-arrangement with mainstream schools.¹²²

Policy and co-ordination

5.49. The committee heard that the availability of alternative programs is not well communicated among schools and the wider community. Further there is a need for more co-ordination.¹²³

5.50. Concerns were expressed to the committee about the lack of a specific policy or overall plan that co-ordinates education for at-risk young people. Programs such as the Boys Offline Program at Stromlo High School and the School without Walls (SWOW) are closed, while new alternatives are established almost on a reactionary basis. The Chief Executive of the Department of Education and Community Services cautioned that before moving on to establish new alternative settings it was important to examine what is in place and to look at different models.¹²⁴

5.51. The Minister advised that there is no specific policy apart from an approach designed to assist as many young people as possible to complete 13 years of schooling. Mapping existing provision across the ACT is complex and extensive, covering a multitude of agencies.¹²⁵

5.52. The Minister acknowledged that it is time to put this work into an integrated and co-ordinated policy framework.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Transcript p 11, p 48.

¹²² OECD, *Country Note: Australia*,. Report to the Australian Government and the OECD arising from the transition review visit, Paris, OECD, August 1997. (Written by R Schwartz, P McKenzie, A Hasan and E Nexelmann)

¹²³ Transcript, p 369.

¹²⁴ Transcript, p 337.

¹²⁵ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001.

¹²⁶ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001

Conclusion

5.53. While it is possible to aim for an inclusive method where no children are segregated in special programs such as alternative settings, alternatives are necessary for young people who have become so alienated from the system. There must be an attempt to give them a new start. It can be argued that while the cost of ensuring all schools are flexible and inclusive is high, the committee is of the view that all students will benefit in the long-term if it is not necessary to segregate those less able to cope.

5.54. The system of support for behaviour management in place at the time of the inquiry does not appear to be meeting the needs of schools or some of the students accessing these programs. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive review of support for behaviour management across the system. The committee notes that the Department of Education and Community Services has acknowledged this need and some work has begun.

5.55. The evaluation of the DCAP and Eclipse alternative programs raised a number of serious concerns about the level of resourcing, the enrolment criteria, program planning and co-ordination. While some of the issues raised in the evaluation have been addressed, the committee considers that if these programs continue to enrol the same mix of students, the issues not yet addressed in the recommendations must be implemented if the programs are to provide a true alternative to mainstream.

5.56. While there are a number of alternative programs in the ACT, many are operating within serious resource constraints.

5.57. Alternative programs have not been developed within an integrated and co-ordinated policy framework. This results in a fragmented approach that may not ensure the best use of resources, accessibility and that the needs of many high-risk students are met. Before establishing any additional alternative programs a system level review of how effectively existing programs are meeting the needs of the target group needs to be undertaken along with changes to the structure and curriculum in high schools.

6. Support for families and students

6.1. Factors outside the control of the school are significant determinants of school achievement. Evidence suggests that a large proportion of students at risk of leaving school early is from families experiencing poverty, unemployment, family dysfunction or substance abuse. For many students education will fail until these other issues are addressed.

Areas for improvement

6.2. Schools are limited in how far they can go in addressing these broad problems. Yet they are in an ideal position to identify the students at risk; to develop early intervention/prevention strategies; to co-ordinate counselling and support services; and to link students and families to welfare services.

6.3. Several suggestions were made to improve support services to students at risk of leaving school early. These included:

- employment of social workers and youth workers in schools to work with counsellors in case management;¹²⁷
- the provision by Government agencies of outreach workers at schools;¹²⁸
- the provision of crisis accommodation outreach services in schools;¹²⁹
- access to Youth Connection by non-government schools;¹³⁰
- increased funding for youth services to enable them to provide outreach services in schools;¹³¹
- better training for teachers to enable them to respond more effectively to the needs of the wide range of students;¹³² (however they cannot be

¹²⁷ Submissions 24, Youth in the City; Transcript p 95.

¹²⁸ Submission 24, Youth in the City.

¹²⁹ *ibid*

¹³⁰ Submission 1, Centacare.

¹³¹ Submissions 24, Youth in the City; 14, YWCA; Transcript, p 79.

¹³² Transcript, p 95.

expected to be specialists in areas as diverse as dealing with the needs of homeless students, students who are substance abusing etc):

- the establishment of a separate counselling service in addition to the role school counsellors have;¹³³ and
- recognition of the need to have specialist counsellors for particular issues such as substance abuse, sexual abuse, acute mental illness.¹³⁴

Support services

6.4. The committee was told that the conventional approach that involves discrete agencies, organisations and individual schools taking responsibility for selective parts of the problem will either maintain or compound the level of fragmentation of resources, duplication of effort and overlap of services.¹³⁵ An holistic and integrated approach is necessary between schools, parents, community agencies and organisations.¹³⁶

6.5. Before this can be achieved, as pointed out by a number of participants, a thorough analysis of need must be undertaken along with an analysis and mapping of existing services.¹³⁷

6.6. This section examines major support services available to government schools in place at the time of the inquiry. Some of these services are available system wide such as the school counsellor service, while others relate to specific schools or specific client groups. In addition to the services described in this section there is a large number of non-government community-based support services and health services which provide support for families and young people.

School counselling service

6.7. The committee heard a number of criticisms of the school counselling service.

¹³³ Transcript, p 192.

¹³⁴ Transcript, p 171, p 190-191; Transcript, p 371.

¹³⁵ Submissions 6, Galilee, 21, AEU ACT Branch.

¹³⁶ Submissions 6, Galilee; 7, Gungahlin Regional Community Service Inc; 15, Caroline Chisholm High School Board; 16, Youth Coalition of the ACT; 21, AEU ACT Branch; 27, ACT Council of P&Cs.

¹³⁷ For example - Transcript, p 80; Submissions 24, Youth in the City; 16 Youth Coalition of the ACT.

6.8. School counsellors are part of the staff of a school and responsible to the school principal. It was suggested to the committee that this arrangement results in a conflict of interest for the school counsellor. It is not clear whether they are working for the school or the individual student.¹³⁸ A way of dealing with this situation is to continue to have school counsellors situated in schools but with responsibility to a counselling service rather than the school principal.¹³⁹

6.9. Confidentiality issues were also reported to be a problem in some schools. A number of witnesses, stressed the importance of respecting the child's confidentiality.¹⁴⁰ When this occurs it becomes a co-operative endeavour to work to provide what is in the best interests of the child. For example if a teacher needs to be involved to help deal with an issue, the counsellor would seek the child's permission to involve a teacher. In instances where it is not appropriate to obtain the child's informed consent for example in cases of mandatory reporting or breaches of the law, the child must be informed that the information cannot be held confidential.¹⁴¹

6.10. Again in this inquiry, the committee heard that there are some limitations as to how school counsellors can work. There are difficulties for them in taking a systemic approach to children's issues. Such an approach often requires working with parents or in the context of other community concerns and sees the school as one element of the community. However, parents' issues are not seen as issues for the school and school counsellors do not usually accompany students to make contact with other agencies.¹⁴²

6.11. The committee raised this matter with the Minister for Education and was told that 'despite the many demands on their time, many counsellors in fact do work with students and their families outside the school environs'.¹⁴³

6.12. The fact that many counsellors work with students and their families outside the school environment indicates that these counsellors understand the importance of a more systemic approach and are not

¹³⁸ Transcript, p 83, p 189

¹³⁹ *ibid*

¹⁴⁰ For example Dr Plummer, Transcript, p 189; Community Education and Training, Transcript, p 201; Primary Principals' Association, Transcript p 234; Lowanna Transcript, p 83; Submission 14, YWCA..

¹⁴¹ Transcript, p 189.

¹⁴² Transcript, p 188.

¹⁴³ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001.

focussing simply on the child's achievements within the school environment. However the committee received no evidence to indicate that a systemic approach is the norm.

6.13. The clinical supervision available to school counsellors was also criticised. School counsellors are supervised by the school principal and senior counsellors are supervised by the Manager, Student Participation Section in the Department of Education and Community Services. The department advised that professional or clinical supervision can be provided by a person qualified in counselling or psychology. Senior counsellors are responsible for supporting and supervising the professional practice of school counsellors, but school counsellors are able to access private psychologists or counsellors for short or long-term professional counselling.¹⁴⁴

6.14. The substance of the criticism is that since there is only one school counsellor (who is not full-time) in each school they are not able to access clinical supervision from within the school and must rely on the senior counsellor within the system. The committee heard that senior counsellors are extremely busy and often unable to offer clinical supervision. Many counsellors pay privately for clinical supervision.¹⁴⁵ The committee considers this situation unsatisfactory.

6.15. The Secondary Principals' Council and the Primary Principals' Association both told the committee that the availability of school counselling support is very important to them. According to these groups there is only one secondary school that has a full-time counsellor, Canberra College which is a dual campus school with an enrolment of just over 1,000 students. Both organisations told the committee that the availability of a full time counsellor in each school would make a big difference to how effectively schools were able to support at-risk students.¹⁴⁶ Some schools allocate some of their teaching points to a counsellor to enable them to have a counsellor full time. This means that staffing in another area of the school is reduced.¹⁴⁷

6.16. The need for additional counselling services in schools has been raised for many years. What is not clear is how these services should be provided. A range of support has been suggested, including maintaining the status quo, engaging some social workers in schools, having a

¹⁴⁴ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 21 February 2001.

¹⁴⁵ Transcript, p 187.

¹⁴⁶ Transcript, p 234, p 372.

¹⁴⁷ Transcript, p 234; p 372.

counselling service separate from the control of schools, and accessing expanded community counselling services. Some have reported particular benefits of specialist community counselling services such as the Drug Referral and Information Centre when it is important to have a problem, for example, substance abuse managed by specialists outside the school environment.¹⁴⁸

6.17. The role of school counsellors is very broad. They have specific expertise in educational testing which is a very important part of their role. They also must have skills in a wide range of other areas to enable them to assist students with the large variety of issues they present with.

Youth Connection

6.18. The Youth Connection service operates from the Children's Youth and Family Services Bureau. The program works with young people 12 to 16 years of age who are at risk of leaving school early. It is staffed with four youth workers and a co-ordinator with one of the positions dealing specifically with young people from an indigenous background.¹⁴⁹

6.19. The primary issue for 95 per cent of the 92 young people who presented to the program in 2000 was truancy. Other issues were substance abuse (53 per cent), school behaviour (53 per cent), and depression (43 per cent). Seven young people who were referred to the program were unable to be accommodated due to limits on case loads.¹⁵⁰

6.20. The majority of clients, 75 per cent, accessing Youth Connection in 2000 were male. Indigenous young people made up 21 per cent of the clients.¹⁵¹

6.21. Family circumstances of clients in 2000 was broken down as follows—single parent families 65 per cent; young people in substitute care 29 per cent; and homeless young people 16 per cent.¹⁵²

6.22. Youth Connection claims to take an holistic approach to assisting young people to address their problems, which includes addressing the fundamental issue of alienation.

¹⁴⁸ Transcript, p 371.

¹⁴⁹ ACT Department of Education and Community Services, *Report on Youth Connection: Meeting the needs of at-risk students in the ACT*, 2001.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

¹⁵² *ibid*

6.23. Comments received by the committee about the effectiveness of Youth Connection were mixed, especially in relation to links with Family Services and Youth Justice. The fact that seven referrals were not able to be accepted in 2000 due to case loads is of concern.

Indigenous Youth Centre

6.24. The Indigenous Youth Centre, Gudan Gulwan offers support to indigenous young people. Many of the young people accessing the program have dropped out of school. In fact in 1999-2000, Gudan Gulwan worked with 23 families whose children had left school, usually after year 7 or year 8.

6.25. The committee observed an urgent need for additional resources at Gudan Gulwan to enable the centre to provide some educational support for its clients.

The 'Schools as Communities' project

6.26. This project was announced in the 2000-01 budget and will focus on families and children who are at risk. The project aims to improve social and educational outcomes for children and young people by creating stronger relationships between the school, families and communities. The project will link families with health, community and education services. It will include specific initiatives to address the needs and educational outcomes of at-risk children and young people.¹⁵³

6.27. 'Schools as Communities' is focussed in particular areas. It commenced at the beginning of 2001 in eight schools chosen using a number of data sets from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Family Services. The schools are: Ginninderra District High School, Holt Primary School, Charnwood Primary School, Narrabundah Primary School, Isabella Plains Primary School, Richardson Primary School, MacGregor Primary School and Higgins Primary School.¹⁵⁴

6.28. Eight staff have been employed to implement the project. The annual budget is \$700,000.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Inquiry into the 1999-2000 Annual and Financial Reports of the Department of Education and Community Services and related agencies, Uncorrected Proof Transcript, 20 December 2000, pp 37, 38.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵⁵ Transcript, p 38.

6.29. In the medium to long-term the project will involve local schools becoming a hub for community activities in a broader capacity.¹⁵⁶

6.30. The Secondary Principals' Council told the committee that the high school participating in the program is already observing a positive impact from the additional support.¹⁵⁷

6.31. The committee is very supportive of the concept of the 'Schools as Communities' project. It has the potential to improve outcomes for some at-risk children and young people.

Full service schools

6.32. A number of programs have been established as part of the *Full Service Schools Program for Students at Risk*, a program funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). In the ACT a Full Service Schools Unit was established to manage and co-ordinate projects funded under the scheme. Funding runs out in June 2001.

6.33. The following projects have been established.

- *The Stairs program*, which offers one-to-one case management for young people.
- *'Preparing yourself for the future' course*, runs for six to eight weeks and is designed for young people who have dropped out, or are about to drop out. It is based around the transition period from Year 10 to Year 11.
- *'The Bay'- Canberra College*, which offers on-site access to students to a range of health and support services.
- *Canberra High School – ACE (Alternative Community Education) Program*, a part-time and casual work skills program run in partnership with the HTC Vocational Institute Pty Ltd and Westfield Shopping Town. The program provides training in customer service, application and curriculum vitae development, management and organisational skills, occupational health and safety, interview skills, business operation skills.

¹⁵⁶ 2000-2001 Budget Paper No 3, p 66.

¹⁵⁷ Transcript, p 371.

- *Lyneham High School - Youth Initiatives Project (YIP)*, which provides a tailored program for individual students involving community groups and youth agencies in the support of the young people.
- *Melrose High School – Case Management Skills*, which provides teachers with nationally accredited qualifications in case management, crisis intervention, youth advocacy, worker support and networking with community agencies to equip them with skills to better support students at risk.

6.34. Although Commonwealth funding for these projects will cease, the committee was advised that a number of the sustainable programs will continue such as the GAP program at Ginninderra High School and the Bay at Canberra College.¹⁵⁸

Families and Schools Together (FAST)

6.35. At Melrose Primary School the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program was introduced in 2000. The aim of the program is to open up communication channels within families. It involves families cooking and having a meal together. It provides opportunities for families to sit together and discuss issues as well as opportunities for networking with other families.

2001-2002 budget initiatives

6.36. A number of initiatives that aim to support children and young people at-risk or their families were announced in the 2001-2002 budget. The committee is pleased to see the Government giving recognition to these areas of need. A description of these programs follows.

Indigenous Youth Centre

6.37. The committee is pleased to note that additional funds have been provided in the 2001-2002 budget to enable Gugan Gulwan to expand its services and incorporate a High School Support Centre.

¹⁵⁸ Transcript, p 306.

Supporting families with adolescents

6.38. Funding for this initiative is \$0.939 million over four years. The program aims to provide a pro-active early intervention program for families with adolescent children who are experiencing family conflict and/or dealing with issues such as substance abuse. The program will focus on young people aged 16 and under and have the resources to intervene within 48 hours. It will include components of high intensity family mediation and counselling, and the capacity for ongoing follow up to manage and prevent the escalation of family crisis.¹⁵⁹

Youth Connection family support

6.39. The Youth Connection Service will be expanded to provide a specialised family counselling service for 60 at-risk families, in order to support improvements in the level of resilience in these families. A total of \$0.307 million has been allocated over four years.

Support for students at risk

6.40. Funding proposed for this initiative is \$0.839 million over four years. A Support for Students at Risk Program will be established to support students at risk of early school leaving.¹⁶⁰

6.41. In March 2001, the committee was told that this program would build on the case management strategies developed by the Full Service Schools Unit. A co-ordinator and three case managers would be employed to work with identified students, parents, schools and the community to ensure a smooth transition from school to employment or training or higher education.¹⁶¹

6.42. However, by May 2001 as a result of additional initiatives proposed in the 2001-2002 budget the proposal had been significantly modified.

6.43. As a first stage a framework and action plan will be developed, which will create the basis for the allocation of funding. The development of the framework will be informed by mapping of the services available and an analysis of need. As part of the program it is expected that a

¹⁵⁹ 2001-2002 Budget Paper No 3, p 69.

¹⁶⁰ 2001-2002 Budget Paper No 3, p 68.

¹⁶¹ Inquiry into the 2001-2002 draft budget initiatives for the Department of Education and Community Services and related agencies, Uncorrected Proof Transcript 5 March 2001, p 11.

number of focus areas will be examined. These will include literacy, numeracy, interagency collaboration, transition from high school to college, curriculum and pedagogy.¹⁶²

6.44. In discussions with officials during the inquiry into the 2001-2002 draft budget initiatives, the committee gained the impression that this program will be focussed particularly on the college system, although at that time research was being undertaken to identify where the major needs are.¹⁶³

6.45. The committee is pleased to note that a mapping project of existing services and an analysis of need is being planned. However the committee stresses that this project needs to be extensive, that is cover the wide array of services required by students at risk and not be limited to educational services nor to a particular student level.

Recreation support program for at-risk youth

6.46. Funding of \$0.450 million over four years has been proposed to establish a community-based program to provide accessible sport, recreation, and support programs for at-risk youth. The program will work intensively with young people to increase community participation and encourage the constructive use of leisure time. According to the Government the target group will include young people aged between 12 and 25 years who are at risk of homelessness, substance abuse, being victims of crime, or becoming involved in the youth justice system.¹⁶⁴

Young carers' package

6.47. Young carers are a particularly vulnerable group. The effects of their responsibilities on their lives include high levels of absenteeism and lateness with homework, low self esteem, and high levels of anxiety and stress. Support for young carers to enable them to succeed in education is an issue that was raised during the committee's inquiry.

6.48. To support young carers, the Government has allocated \$0.95 million over four years, commencing with \$0.125 million in 2001-2002. The aim of this initiative is to raise awareness of young carer issues with

¹⁶² Uncorrected Proof Transcript, Select Committee on Estimates, 17 May 2001, p 3; and 21 May 2001, p 26.

¹⁶³ Inquiry into the 2001-2002 draft budget initiatives for the Department of Education and Community Services and related agencies, Uncorrected Proof Transcript 5 March 2001, p 12.

¹⁶⁴ 2001-2002 Budget Paper No 3, p 69-70.

schools, professionals, community and government services. It will also assist with a brokerage program that supports young carers in their education by providing such assistance as additional tuition and school materials, as well as support in addressing their responsibilities, accessing counselling and providing in-house practical support.¹⁶⁵

6.49. The committee strongly supports additional assistance for young carers. The committee would be concerned if the responsibilities of young carers were not reduced, by for example providing additional respite care, to enable them to take advantage of the counselling and other support offered under this initiative. The committee would not want to see young carers facing any additional stress.

Parent/carers involvement

6.50. Throughout the inquiry the importance of parental/carers support and involvement in their child's education was stressed.

6.51. Teachers involved in alternative programs placed strong emphasis on the importance of parent/carers involvement.

6.52. The Wanniasa K-10 Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA) Committee pointed out the importance of involvement of the indigenous community on matters relating to decisions on curriculum, educational disadvantage and changes that would have a significant impact on indigenous students.¹⁶⁶

6.53. In a review of the literature, the Australian Centre for Equity through Education noted that there is a substantial body of research that links family and parent/carers involvement in schools to the academic and social success of students, in particular students at risk.¹⁶⁷

6.54. Yet research by Shopen and Liddicoat (1998b and 1999) notes that communication with school is a general problem for parents and voluntary tutors.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ 2001-2002 Budget Paper No 3, p 81.

¹⁶⁶ Submission 26.

¹⁶⁷ Mukherjee Dev, *Strategies and programs that improve educational outcomes for students at risk*. Paper prepared by the Australian Centre for Equity through Education for the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, 1999.

¹⁶⁸ Shopen G and Liddicoat A, *Partnership in perspective: Parents and teachers in the middle school years*, Proceedings of the ALEA/AATE National Conference, Canberra, ALEA/AATE, 1998. Liddicoat A and Shopen G, 'What makes partnership valid? Home-school communication and parent-

6.55. In a recent *Parent Forum* paper, Cobbold (2000)¹⁶⁹ points out that while many schools have long established approaches to involving parents/carers in many ways, there are significant problems and gaps in the development of parent/carer participation at both the system and school levels. The major areas identified relevant to this inquiry are:

- the nature of support for parent/carer involvement in the learning of their children is at an elementary level;
- despite the benefits of parent/carer participation and widespread acceptance of the idea of parent/carer participation, few schools have comprehensive plans to involve parents and families;
- training for teachers on parent/carer participation is inadequate and duty statements do not specify developing relationships with parents/carers about students' learning.

6.56. There are also barriers to participation from both the school and parent/carer perspective.

6.57. Barriers at the school level include beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of staff to parent/carer participation.

6.58. Barriers from the parent/carer perspective include feelings of inadequacy, failure, poor self esteem, negative past experiences with the school system, transport problems and economic, emotional, health or time constraints.

6.59. Another barrier for parents/carers reported to the committee is that parents who want to support their children's learning are not being able to help in useful ways. Shopen and Liddicoat told the committee that this arises for two main reasons.

6.60. Firstly parents do not find out soon enough that their children are experiencing problems. As one parent told the researchers:

He was allowed to slip through year after year. I'd go up there, 'Oh he's doing fine. He's lovely.' Good reports and I relied on that, and it wasn't until he hit school (this school) that I knew there was a problem. They never brought it to

school partnerships', *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 22,1, 1999. Liddicoat A and Shopen G, *Final Report of the Volunteer Tutoring Program Research Project*, 2000.

¹⁶⁹ Cobbold T, 'School and Community Links: Objectives and Priorities', *Parent Forum No 6*, ACT Council of P&C Associations, June 2000.

my attention. I mean, he could probably still be doing marvellously at (previous school), because they don't really care.¹⁷⁰

6.61. Another reason put forward is that parents/carers have difficulty in getting their concerns about their children's abilities heard and seeing action being taken as the following example from the research indicates.

I just know now, like I've got to the stage where you don't ask questions any more because you know you're going to get a ridiculous answer of 'It'll come' or 'They're not the worst in the class' or 'We haven't done that yet', you know, so after a while you tend to give up and I think that happens to a lot of people.¹⁷¹

6.62. The involvement of parents of students at risk is often very low. Ways need to be found to improve this, which will involve looking at issues causing stress to families such as poverty, drug and alcohol abuse and mental illness.

6.63. The committee is not aware of the existence of any system-wide policy on communication between the school and home. Some schools have developed school-based policies that support parent/carers and teachers in their common goal of enhancing children's learning.¹⁷²

6.64. Some interesting programs to encourage parent/carer participation in their children's learning have been commenced at a system level.

6.65. A kit entitled *Strengthening Partnerships* which is designed to create and foster links between parents/carers, students and teachers, has been distributed to all ACT primary and high schools. The kit has the ultimate aim of improving literacy and numeracy. It was developed following extensive research by Dr Tony Liddicoat from the Australian National University and Ms Glenda Shopen from the Australian Catholic University.¹⁷³ The kit includes three modules, namely: home school communication; homework; and integrated practices. The Home School Communication Manual will assist schools to assess and evaluate their

¹⁷⁰ Liddicoat Tony and Shopen Glenda, paper tabled on 18 May 2000.

¹⁷¹ *ibid*

¹⁷² Shopen G, Liddicoat A with Fitzgerald R, *Meeting the Challenge supporting partnerships between home and school in the middle years*, ACT SPELL Project, Department of Education and Community Services, Canberra, 1999.

¹⁷³ This research was entitled the SPELL project (Supportive practices for the of literacy learning project (ACT SPELL)).

communication practices, develop home-school/school-home communication policy and implement and evaluate that policy. The homework module examines types of homework, problems parents/carers experience when supporting homework, redesigning homework to support learning at home and other ways to support homework. The integrating home and school practices module presents a teaching strategy to engage students by linking their experiences outside the classroom with what happens in the classroom.¹⁷⁴

6.66. Another program, Parents as Teachers commenced in March 2001. This program, a pilot program closely linked to the Schools as Communities program, is available to families with a child under six months of age and is operating in Richardson and Isabella Plains. It is designed to support parents prenatally and during their children's first three years. Participating families receive a home visit at least once a month during the first three years of their child's life. The program aims to:

- teach parents to stimulate their children's intellectual, language, social and motor development;
- increase parents' feelings of competence and confidence;
- strengthen family relationships;
- prevent child abuse and neglect;
- and provide for early detection of developmental problems.¹⁷⁵

6.67. These two programs are aimed at parents/carers who are in different stages of parenting. The Parents as Teachers program hopefully will have sustained effects in that the participants will take a long-term interest in supporting their children's learning.

Early intervention

6.68. The report by the Australian Institute of Criminology *Aggression and the Development of Delinquent Behaviour in Children*,¹⁷⁶ reveals that

¹⁷⁴ Minister for Education, Media Release, 31 October 2000.

¹⁷⁵ Budget 2001, *Progressing Social Capital in Canberra*, p 21.

¹⁷⁶ Bor W, Najman J M, O'Callaghan M, Williams G M, and Anstey K, 'Aggression and the Development of Delinquent Behaviour in Children', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, May 2001.

aggression at age five is a very strong predictor of the following at age fourteen:

- continuing adolescent aggressive behaviour;
- delinquent behaviour;
- contact with agencies known to deal with delinquents; and
- suspension from school.

6.69. The report argues for effective early intervention programs during the preschool years, such as those that emphasise parent management training as a strategy to reduce such behaviour in the teenage years and as a crime prevention measure.

6.70. The final report of the *Early Years Study* conducted in Ontario , Canada in 1998 and 1999 provides a strong argument for the need to ensure that children receive the best possible opportunities for development from infancy as a means of improving educational outcomes for at-risk children. The report recommends the establishment in Ontario of a new system for early childhood development and parenting support involving all sectors of society.

6.71. It argues that if this challenge is not taken up, all that can be done is to continue the way we are now without any real hope of changed outcomes. We can continue to hope that schools, social, and health services will be able to cope, even though they say they are not coping now. We can hope that children will ‘grow out of’ behaviour and learning problems that were set in early life, even though evidence suggests that many will have great difficulty doing so and will not reach their full potential. We can put more funds into policing and correctional services and other special services even though that will be expensive and unlikely to make much of a difference.¹⁷⁷

6.72. The major conclusions of the study are as follows.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ McCain Margaret and Mustard J Fraser, *Early Years Study: Reversing the real brain drain* ,April 1999 [cited 21 February 2001] Available from Internet: URL: www.childsec.gov.on.ca

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*

- Early experiences and stimulating, positive interactions with adults and other children are far more important for brain development than previously realised.
- The early years from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health.
- A young child's brain develops through stimulation of the sensing pathways (such as seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting) from early experiences. A child who misses positive stimulation or is subject to chronic stress in the first few years may have difficulty overcoming a bad start.
- The brain's development is a seamless continuum and therefore initiatives for early childhood development and learning should also be a continuum. Learning in the early years should be based on quality developmentally-attuned interactions with primary caregivers and opportunities for play-based problem solving with other children that stimulate brain development.
- There is clear evidence that in all socio-economic groups, good early childhood development programs that involve parents or other primary caregivers of young children can influence how they relate to and care for children in the home and significantly improve outcomes for children's behaviour, learning and health in later life. There is also a relationship between the timing of these program and outcomes—the earlier the better.
- The very early years of a child's life are as important for an educated, competent population as any other period.

6.73. These conclusions are compelling. The Government of Ontario has begun taking steps to instigate a new system for early childhood development and parenting support.

6.74. The question is how can the Australian Capital Territory benefit from these findings? What needs to be done to ensure that young children get the best start?

6.75. The committee received evidence from the Community Paediatrician and other witnesses¹⁷⁹ that despite the recent initiatives, such

¹⁷⁹ Transcript, p 294.

as Parentlink and the Schools as Communities project, there is still much to be done. There is a need to rethink what is available in the ACT from before birth until school age in terms of accessible broad ranging support for families. Early home visiting; a well co-ordinated health program to examine issues such as nutrition, now known to be vital for brain development; and family support to help with discipline issues are areas where much more emphasis is needed.¹⁸⁰

6.76. In examining ways of providing an enhanced system of early childhood development and parenting support in the ACT it would be important to tap into existing services such as childcare centres, playgroups, preschools, and post natal services to determine and implement strategies for reaching families.

Conclusion

6.77. The support needed for families and young people experiencing difficulties with the school system is multi-faceted. As Pittman states:

Anyone who has worked intensely on any discrete youth problem (eg teen pregnancy) learns quickly that the problem is intertwined with education, with opportunity structures, with family connection and support, and with a range of developmental issues which cannot be ignored if any intervention is to be successful.¹⁸¹

6.78. The inter-relatedness of all facets of a young person's life must be taken into account when developing support services.

6.79. The inquiry has identified some problems with the school counselling service. However, the evidence before the committee is compelling about the need for schools to have additional counselling support. The question is how can that support be best provided.

6.80. The committee received mixed views about the effectiveness of Youth Connection Service. The committee is concerned that all referrals were not able to be accepted in 2000 and hopes that with the increased funding announced in the 2001-2002 budget this pressure will be alleviated.

¹⁸⁰ Transcript, p 274.

¹⁸¹ Pittman K, *Preventing youth problems and promoting youth development: competing priorities or inseparable goals?* 1996, <http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/youth/konopka.html>

6.81. While it is too early to determine the effectiveness of The Schools as Communities program which began operating at the beginning of 2001, initial reports about its effectiveness are encouraging. The evaluation planned for 2001-2002 will provide useful information on the effectiveness of the program, and any weaknesses and gaps.

6.82. Continued benefits are being experienced by some schools from the Commonwealth funded Full Service Schools project.

6.83. The availability of support services for indigenous young people and their families continues to be a concern to the committee. The committee is pleased to note that the Government has recognised a need to increase services and provided additional funding for the Indigenous Youth Service in 2001-2002.

6.84. The initiatives proposed in the 2001-2002 budget to provide support for various groups are welcome. However it is not clear how many of them will be co-ordinated, for example, 'Youth Connection family support' and 'Supporting families with adolescents'. It is also unclear whether some, such as 'Support for students at risk', will be adequately resourced to enable them to have a broad enough focus to be able to pick up on all groups of students at risk, for example, those with an underlying mental illness or drug and alcohol issues.

6.85. Parent/carer participation in their children's learning and development is of utmost importance. The inquiry has identified a range of barriers from both the school and parent/carer perspective which need to be addressed. There is no system-wide policy on communication between the home and the school or on support services.

6.86. Recent studies such as *Aggression and the Development of Delinquent Behaviour in Children* and the *Early Years Study* provide strong support for early intervention. The committee is strongly of the view that, if the present and future governments of the ACT are serious about reducing the number of adolescents and young adults at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes, a concerted effort must be made at the earliest opportunity to reach and support families. This support needs to integrate addressing any social stresses, such as housing, sexual abuse, domestic violence and poverty.

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7. Improving outcomes

7.1. This chapter recaps the major findings of the inquiry and makes recommendations aimed at improving outcomes for adolescents and young adults at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes.

The need for change

7.2. During the inquiry it became clear that there is a need to develop new policies and strategies to address the needs of young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes.

7.3. The information available against the indicators outlined earlier in this report shows that there is a significant proportion of students who are at risk.

7.4. Evidence received by the inquiry and current research provide consistent views about what is wrong with the current system and where change needs to be made.

7.5. For example, Webber and Hayduck (1995) reported that providers identified the following factors at the school level as contributing to young people leaving school early:

- lack of accountability to disadvantaged groups; and
- lack of responsibility for at-risk students.¹⁸²

7.6. They went on to report that service providers argued that changes are needed in:

- curriculum content;
- the availability of alternatives and flexible approaches;
- teaching strategies to encourage self direction and ownership of learning;
- group sizes; and
- support schemes.

¹⁸² Webber C and Hayduck K, *Leaving School Early*, Galilee, Canberra 1995.

7.7. Young people interviewed in the Webber and Hayduck study raised a number of issues including:

- more help with learning is needed
- teaching methods are inappropriate
- more identified sources of support are needed, and
- education needs to be better linked to employment.¹⁸³

7.8. The ACER study identified negative experiences of school as one of the reasons given for leaving school before the completion of year 12, along with the desire to get a job and earn money. The study reported an increase during the 1990s in negative experiences of school as a reason for leaving school early.¹⁸⁴

7.9. There are also factors outside the school that have a strong impact and need addressing. These include family dysfunction, homelessness, poverty, health issues, particularly mental health problems, and substance abuse. Addressing these requires a long-term, co-ordinated approach.

Recognition of the need for change

7.10. Within the ACT a number of initiatives have commenced to address the issue of early school leavers. They aim to connect students to society and include the following:

- the High Schools for the New Millennium project;
- the Full Service Schools project;
- the Schools as Communities project;

7.11. Further initiatives are proposed in the 2001-2002 budget.

Recommendations for change

7.12. The committee has identified four distinct reform agendas to improve educational outcomes for students at risk. They are:

¹⁸³ Submission 6, Galilee.

¹⁸⁴ Lamb S, Dwyer P, Wyn J, *Non completion of school in Australia: the changing patterns of participation and outcomes*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, Research Report Number 16, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, September 2000.

- school reform, which involves teachers, students and parents developing initiatives to improve learning outcomes in all aspects of school such as curriculum, teaching and assessment;
- inter-agency reform (or school and community links), which involves linking schools with appropriate health, children's and youth services in a collaborative manner;
- parent/carer involvement; and
- early intervention , that is providing accessible, broad ranging support to families from before birth until school age.

School reform

Curriculum

7.13. A general theme emerging from the evidence is the unsuitability, inflexibility and inappropriateness of much of the curriculum in schools for today's students.

7.14. Schools are responsible for the development of curriculum. There is little central guidance and support with the number of curriculum consultants being reduced over the years.

7.15. The committee considers that it is time to evaluate the current approach to curriculum development in schools.

Recommendation 1

7.16. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- **review the current approach to curriculum development in schools; and**
- **evaluate the flexibility and appropriateness of the curricula for the varying student needs.**

High school reform

7.17. The high school years are recognised as being particularly difficult years for engaging students at risk. All high schools have individual programs aimed at meeting the needs of its at-risk students within the

resources provided. However evidence before the committee indicates that there is an urgent need for substantial reform in high schools.

7.18. Issues that need addressing include the curriculum, including literacy and numeracy, the structure of the schools, the transition between primary and high school, and inclusivity.

7.19. The High Schools for the New Millennium project aims at addressing many of these issues. Funding for that project will cease in June 2002. The committee is most concerned that the funding and the timeframe for this project are insufficient to ensure the change that is required across the high school system.

7.20. The committee considers that funding for the High Schools for the New Millennium project needs to be reviewed to ensure that all schools can reasonably benefit from the project. In addition the project needs to be funded for at least a further three years if it is to achieve the change required.

Recommendation 2

7.21. The committee recommends that the Government:

- **review the level of resourcing for the High Schools for the New Millennium Project to ensure all schools can reasonably benefit from the project; and**
- **fund an extension of the project for at least a further three years.**

Secondary college curriculum

7.22. Over the last few years, the enrolment profile in secondary colleges has changed as a result of the introduction of the Youth Allowance and greater numbers of students enrolling from learner assistance programs and learning centres together with students who do not wish to continue on to tertiary education.

7.23. Colleges are now needing to offer a range of remedial programs to assist many of their students.

7.24. However they are having difficulty in meeting the needs of this more diverse student population within existing resources.

Recommendation 3

7.25. The committee recommends that the Government review resource levels for secondary colleges in view of the changing patterns of enrolment.

Inclusivity

7.26. The school population includes students with a wide variety of interests and from a wide variety of backgrounds. Schools need to be able to cater for a diverse range of backgrounds and interests. They have a responsibility to promote inclusivity, however they cannot do this in isolation—community support is crucial.

7.27. Evidence before the committee indicates that many schools are working very hard in this area. However, in some, racist and homophobic attitudes have been reported.

7.28. The committee notes that the Department of Education and Community Services has acknowledged a need to address inclusivity further. Two of the key commitments of the recently released draft consultation paper *Services to Indigenous People Strategic Plan 2001-04*¹⁸⁵ relate to inclusivity. They are

- eliminating racism; and
- creating educational and service environments that are welcoming, safe, supportive and culturally inclusive.

7.29. The committee accepts that these are difficult issues to address because attitudes prevalent in some parts of the community can have a negative impact on the positive work being done by schools.

7.30. However, schools must continue to ensure that they do not adopt discriminative practices or allow the development of discriminative attitudes and that students have a strong awareness of attitudes and behaviours that are unacceptable. All schools must make a concerted effort with staff, students and the community to eliminate discriminative attitudes and behaviours. This may require additional resources for professional and curriculum development.

¹⁸⁵ ACT Department of Education and Community Services, *Services to Indigenous People Strategic Plan 2001-2004*, May 2001.

Recommendation 4

7.31. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- **evaluate current programs aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination in schools;**
- **review the resources available to schools for professional and curriculum development aimed at eliminating discrimination of all forms, with a view to increasing those resources; and**
- **take an ongoing role in monitoring and ensuring quality programs aimed at eliminating discrimination in all schools.**

Monitoring attendance

7.32. Schools have a range of strategies in place to monitor attendance and to track down students who fail to attend school. However despite these attempts anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a large group of students, particularly of high school age, who drop out of school and are never seen again.

7.33. There is no system-wide approach to monitoring attendance, and no official record of the number of students who regularly truant or who are persistent non-attenders.

7.34. Yet, this is the group of young people who are probably at the greatest risk of never completing their education and the extent of the problem is unknown.

7.35. The committee considers that this matter must be addressed urgently if those at greatest risk are to be identified and supported.

7.36. The committee notes that since the matter was raised the Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling has been asked to examine the incidence of non-attendance. The committee strongly recommends that as part of its work, the Ministerial Advisory Council make recommendations about systems to be put in place to identify these students and to develop strategies to assist them to stay in school.

Recommendation 5

7.37. The committee recommends that in examining the incidence of non-attendance in government schools, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling:

- **make recommendations about systems to be put in place to identify students who are non-attenders; and**
- **develop supportive strategies to assist these students to stay in school in line with the approaches being taken with the High Schools for the New Millennium Project.**

Indigenous education

7.38. As a group, indigenous students are at the greatest risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes.

7.39. The committee notes the efforts that have been made to improve outcomes for indigenous students over the last year. However, much remains to be done.

7.40. The establishment of a high school support centre for indigenous students as part of the 2001-2002 budget is a much-needed program.

7.41. The committee encourages the Department of Education and Community Services to continue to monitor and report on the progress of indigenous students and to provide additional resources as needed.

Recommendation 6

7.42. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- **continue to monitor the progress of indigenous students and regularly report to the Assembly on that progress; and**
- **provide supplementary resources for indigenous education as required.**

Long-term alternative programs

7.43. There are a number of projects underway aimed at reforming the high school system. However the committee is of the view that even after the reforms in the secondary school system, such as those outlined in the

High Schools for the New Millennium Project, and other initiatives such as middle schooling are completed there will be students whose educational and developmental needs are unlikely to be met within the mainstream school system. These include some students who have had difficulty in mastering the basics of literacy and numeracy in mainstream schools, as well as those with behavioural issues and a history of non-attendance and suspensions.

7.44. While the best long-term approach may be to change the mainstream school system, there is a need to provide programs for those students who are at risk now. These students cannot wait for long-term strategies and need access to alternatives to mainstream programs.

7.45. It is clear from the evidence that, despite the recent attempts to establish alternative programs within the public school system, there are many students who would benefit from such programs who are unable to access them.

7.46. However before embarking on establishing more alternatives, the committee considers that two matters must be addressed, namely:

- policy and co-ordination; and
- the recommendations of the review of the existing long-term alternatives—DCAP and Eclipse.

Policy and co-ordination

7.47. The committee was most concerned that planning for alternative programs has not been developed in an integrated and co-ordinated way. There is no policy framework relating to alternative education.

7.48. The committee was also concerned to hear that the availability of alternative programs is not well communicated among schools and the wider community and that there is a need for better co-ordination.

7.49. The committee considers that there is an urgent need for the Department of Education and Community Services to review the alternative programs in operation and then to develop a policy framework for alternative education before establishing new alternative programs.

Recommendation 7

7.50. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- **urgently review the effectiveness of the array of alternative programs available; and**
- **develop a policy framework for alternative education programs before establishing new alternative programs.**

Review of DCAP and Eclipse

7.51. At the time of the inquiry these programs were seen as last resort options with enrolments dominated by students with behavioural problems, histories of significant non-attendance and suspensions.

7.52. They are not adequately resourced, their proposed student population is not well defined, and information about enrolment criteria and referral procedures is unclear.

7.53. The review of the DCAP and Eclipse programs conducted by the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne made a series of recommendations about these issues and the committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services implement these recommendations to ensure best practice in these programs.

Recommendation 8

7.54. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services implement the recommendations of the review of the DCAP and Eclipse programs particularly the recommendations relating to staffing.

Short term alternative programs

7.55. The short-term alternative programs of greatest concern are the behaviour management programs.

7.56. Support for behaviour management has been a major concern of schools for many years. The support services in place such as itinerant teacher support and withdrawal units do not appear to be effective in meeting the needs of students and schools. Schools claim that the waiting time for entry is too long and that the 20-week program is often too short to bring about the desired change. There are also concerns about the

concept of withdrawing students for ‘therapy’ and ownership of the problem, that is, whether it is the home school or the system. It was suggested that the answer may lie in the curriculum and support services provided at the school base.¹⁸⁶

7.57. The current models need to be reviewed and evaluated to determine their effectiveness in the context of contemporary research.

7.58. School resources are stretched to the limit to deal with some of the less serious behaviour management problems, therefore any changes as a result of a review must be adequately resourced and supported with extensive professional development.

7.59. The committee understands that some review work has commenced. The committee supports this work and calls on the Department of Education and Community Services to conduct a full review of the primary and secondary behaviour management support programs including the withdrawal units.

7.60. A related issue is that of the policies on suspension and exclusion. The committee notes that the Department of Education and Community Services intends to review these policies in second semester 2001¹⁸⁷ and suggests that part of this review include a review of the effectiveness of these policies in managing student behaviour.

Recommendation 9

7.61. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- **examine the effectiveness of the policies on suspension and exclusion in managing student behaviour as part of its review of these policies;**
- **conduct a full review of the behaviour management support programs including the withdrawal units; and**
- **ensure that any changes emanating from the review are adequately resourced and supported.**

¹⁸⁶ Minister for Education, correspondence dated 22 February 2001.

¹⁸⁷ ACT Department of Education and Community Service, Internet site, cited 11 July 2001.

Critical transition periods

7.62. The inquiry has identified the transition from primary to high school and from high school to college as critical periods for students. When students encounter difficulties with these transitions their education can suffer.

7.63. At the time of the inquiry research into this matter was being undertaken at LaTrobe University.

7.64. The committee is aware of some excellent school-based programs in place to alleviate some of the problems associated with the transition between sectors.

7.65. Given that a total restructure of the education system to address this issue is unlikely, other ways need to be found.

7.66. The committee would like to see the Department of Education and Community Services taking a more systemic approach to this issue by ensuring all schools have strategies in place, appropriate for their communities, for dealing with the issue of transition.

Recommendation 10

7.67. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services review the research on transition periods and develop guidelines for schools on how to develop strategies to deal with issues arising from transition between sectors.

Support for students and families

Student welfare support

Interagency approaches

7.68. There is a wide array of support services for students at risk including school-based services and community-based services. These have not been well co-ordinated nor in a large proportion of cases has an holistic approach been taken.

7.69. Since there is usually a number of underlying reasons why a young person does not continue or faces difficulties at school, an holistic and integrated approach to support is necessary between schools, parents,

community agencies and organisations. The conventional approach that involves discrete agencies, organisations and individual schools taking responsibility for selective parts of the problem will either maintain or compound the level of fragmentation of resources, duplication of effort and overlap of services.

7.70. Schools cannot be expected to have all the strategies to assist students at risk. Schools have a role in identifying students at risk and in linking students to integrated health, welfare, and support services. Rather than an approach of communication, co-operation and co-ordination, an approach of interagency collaboration is needed in providing support to this group. Some work is being done to ensure an holistic, collaborative approach, for example through the Schools as Communities project that is operating in selected suburb and through the Health Promoting Schools.

Recommendation 11

7.71. The committee recommends that the Government promote the development of collaborative interagency approaches to supporting at-risk students.

Framework for support services

7.72. At the time of the inquiry there was no framework in place for support services for students at risk. The committee was told that the Department of Education and Community Services plans to develop a framework that will include mapping of services and an assessment of need. The committee supports this long overdue initiative, but stresses that it must cover the wide array of services required by students at risk and include educational services, health services and other non educational support services.

7.73. The committee also supports the other initiatives to support students at risk outlined in the 2001-2001 budget. These will add to the array of support services available. At this stage it is difficult to make an assessment of the adequacy of the additional funding provided in the 2001-2002 budget. This will become clearer following the completion of the framework and assessment of need. The committee considers that it is crucial that adequate funds are provided for the support services identified during this process.

Recommendation 12

7.74. The committee recommends that the Government ensure adequate funds are provided to implement the services required following completion of the framework for support for students at risk and the assessment of need.

School counselling service

7.75. The committee continues to hear that the support available to schools in terms of counselling services is inadequate. The vast majority of schools do not have a full time counsellor. Some schools consider counselling support so important that they use some of their teaching points to buy additional counselling services.

7.76. Apart from the need for additional counsellors, some problems with the current school counselling service were identified. These include: the limitations placed on school counsellors in working outside the school with a student, for example, accompanying a student to a community-based service or working with parents in the home; the perceived problems with confidentiality arising from the counsellor being responsible to the school principal; and the availability of clinical supervision within the Department of Education and Community Services for school counsellors

7.77. Clearly counselling support is of great importance to schools. Options for providing additional counselling need to be examined. In addition to increasing the number of school counsellors other options raised in the inquiry include greater access by schools to community-based counselling services, and the funding and employment of social workers and youth workers in schools.

Recommendation 13

7.78. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- **review the options for student welfare support in government schools with a view to increasing the availability and array of student welfare support;**
- **review the working arrangements for school counsellors to ensure that they are able to take an holistic approach (such as working with students and families outside the school environment); and**
- **review the reporting and supervisory arrangements for school counsellors to ensure client confidentiality.**

Support for students in poverty

7.79. The committee received strong evidence that students living in poverty are at great risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes. Issues associated with poverty such as poor housing, poor nutrition, lack of money for school supplies and activities can seriously disadvantage educational outcomes.

7.80. The committee notes that there is a number of system-wide and school-based programs in place to support students in poverty. These include the schools equity fund, the junior secondary school bursary scheme (restricted to 14- and 15- year-olds), the Bay at Canberra College which offers a free medical service, and the breakfast programs run by the YWCA.

7.81. However the committee is concerned that this support is not sufficient to meet the deeper structural problems associated with poverty.

Recommendation 14

7.82. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services:

- **develop a system response which will allow early identification of children whose education is disadvantaged due to poverty;**
- **review the needs of these students and develop appropriate support structures.**

Supplementary learning assistance

7.83. The evidence before the committee indicates that while the majority of students are achieving satisfactory levels in literacy and numeracy, there is a group for whom supplementary assistance is needed.

7.84. There is a particular need for supplementary assistance in the high school area especially in writing. The results of the 2000 literacy and numeracy assessments indicated large increases in the proportion of students performing at the lowest levels in writing in Years 7 and 9 and in reading in Year 9.

7.85. Flexible approaches are required. There are some indications that high school students are seeking support outside the school system because they either cannot access such support at school or they are uncomfortable with the approaches taken.

7.86. Indigenous students represent another group where supplementary learning assistance is required. As a result of efforts made by the Department of Education and Community Services some improvements have been made by this group in the last year. However, a higher proportion of indigenous students is still in the bottom profile levels of each year level in the ACT Assessment Program.

7.87. There is also a need for flexible support programs for students having literacy and numeracy difficulties in the middle years, particularly the late primary years.

7.88. The enrolment profile in secondary colleges has reportedly changed in the last few years with more students enrolling who require assistance in literacy and numeracy.

Recommendation 15

7.89. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services address the need for supplementary learning assistance and flexible support in upper primary school, high school and secondary college.

Parent/carer involvement in their children's learning

7.90. Parent/carer involvement in their children's learning has been demonstrated to be a significant factor in children's educational outcomes, especially at-risk children.

7.91. However, the evidence before the committee indicates that the meaningful involvement of many parents/carers in their children's learning is low, especially for at-risk children.

7.92. Ways need to be found to reduce the barriers between schools and parents to improve parent/carer involvement. At the time of the inquiry the committee was unaware of any system-wide policy on communication between the home and school or parent/carer involvement.

7.93. The paper produced by the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations *School and community links* and the research by Liddicoat and Shopen provide a useful starting point in addressing this matter.

Recommendation 16

7.94. The committee recommends that the Department of Education and Community Services develop a system-wide policy on communication between home and school in support of children's learning.

Early intervention

7.95. In examining how to tackle the problem of adolescents and young adults at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes a number of approaches need to be considered. Certainly

changes to some aspects of the school system and the support services available to school-age children and their families will result in improvements. However the issue needs to be addressed even before families come in contact with the school system.

7.96. There is a strong view among some professionals in the community that despite the new programs that have been introduced such as Schools as Communities, Parents as Teachers and Parentlink, there is a need to rethink what is available in the ACT from before birth until school age in terms of accessible broad ranging support for families.

7.97. The *Early Years Study* conducted and implemented in Ontario Canada provides a useful model.

Recommendation 17

7.98. The committee recommends that the Government take note of the *Early Years Study* and its implementation and consider the need for the instigation across the ACT of a system of early childhood development and parenting support.

Drug and alcohol abuse

7.99. Family dysfunction has been identified as one of the major reasons why many young people do not achieve satisfactory education and training outcomes. There are many reasons why families become dysfunctional. One of the stresses that can lead to family dysfunction is substance abuse, particularly drug and/or alcohol abuse.

7.100. Evidence before the committee suggests that drug abuse is a growing problem, particularly in some sectors of the community, that is resulting in lack of family support for young people, increased crime, educational disruption and social exclusion.

7.101. The committee is of the view that as a community we need to develop smarter, better-targeted interventions to try to address this problem.

7.102. To this end the committee suggests that the Government establish a task force similar to the Poverty Task Group to examine ways of addressing the drug and alcohol problem, because it is having such a pervasive effect on families, young people and children.

Recommendation 18

7.103. The committee recommends that the Government establish a task force to develop strategies to address the drug and alcohol problem in the ACT community.

Kerrie Tucker MLA
Chair
17 July 2001

Appendix 1 - Submissions received

- 1 Centacare (Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn)
- 2 Barnardos Australia (Canberra)
- 3 Alan Christie
- 4 Beerwah & District Youth Activities Centre
- 5 Audrey Guy
- 6 Galilee Inc
- 7 Gungahlin Regional Community Service Inc (GRCS)
- 8 Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) ACT
- 9 Northside High School Student Support Centre (NHSSSC)
- 10 ACT Council for Adult Literacy (ACTCAL)
- 11 Marymead Child and Family Centre
- 12 Primary Principals Association (PPA)
- 13 The Richmond Fellowship of the ACT Inc
- 14 YWCA Canberra
- 15 Caroline Chisholm High School Board
- 16 Youth Coalition of the ACT
- 17 Sara Bhas
- 18 Canberra & Queanbeyan Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
Support Group Inc
- 19 Specific Learning Difficulties Association (SPELD) ACT Inc
- 20 The Canberra College
- 21 Australian Education Union, ACT Branch
- 22 Minister Education ACT Government
- 23 Mr Rob Horsfield

- 24 Youth in the City
- 25 Young Carers' Network
- 26 Wanniasa K-10 School ASSPA Committee
- 27 ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc
- 28 The ErOS Foundation
- 29 Community Education and Training
- 30 Dr Joe Murik
- 31 Narrabundah College Board
- 32 Dr Andrew Brien, Autism Association of the ACT

Appendix 2 - Witnesses appearing at public hearings

13 April 2000

For the Richmond Fellowship

Mr Wilf Rath Director

For the Youth Coalition of the ACT

Ms Kerry Browning, Executive Officer

Ms Melanie Earl Policy Officer

For the Canberra and Queanbeyan Attention Deficit Disorder Support Group and SPELD

Ms Beryl Gover Secretary/Treasurer

Dr Rob Apathy Honorary Consultant

For Galilee Inc

Mr Craig Webber Director

Mr Stephen Walker Coordinator Galilee Day Program

20 April 2000

For Marymead

Dr Diana Boswell Senior Associate, Thomas Wright Institute

Mr Greg Aldridge Manager High Support Program

For the Australian Education Union

Mr Clive Haggart President

Ms Fiona MacGregor Professional Officer

For the YWCA

Ms Julia Nesbitt Deputy Executive Director

Ms Michelle Baumgardner Youth Support Worker

Ms Michelle Callen Program Manager AXYS Youth Health Service

For Lowanna Young Women's Service

Ms Marilyn Graham Co-ordinator

4 May 2000

For Youth in the City

Mr Tim Moore Education Outreach Worker

Ms Sonya Prentice Family Liaison and Youth Activities Worker

Mr Robert Lowe Student, Youth in the City

For the Young Carers' Network

Ms Mary Gays

Ms Lisa Kelly

Mr Tim Moore

As an individual

Mr Paul Reed

18 May 2000

As an individual

Ms Siobhan Leyne

For the Australian National University

Dr Tony Liddicoat

For the Australian Catholic University (ACT campus)

Ms Glenda Shopen

20 July 2000

As an individual

Mr Rob Horsfield

For the AIDS Action Council

Mr Daniel Coase General Manager

17 August 2000

For Women's Information Resources and Education on Drugs and
Dependency (WIREDDD)

Ms Sukalpa Goldflam Coordinator

For the Australian Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights

Mr John Davey ACT Representative

As an individual

Dr Sandi Plummer

21 September 2000

For Community Education and Training

Ms Kim Sattler Executive Director

Ms Amy McGinn

5 October 2000

For the Primary Principals' Association

Dr Bill Maiden Member

Ms Trish Wilks Member

For the Foster Carers' Association of the ACT

Mrs Sue Mannion_ President

Mr David Pring Treasurer

For the Australian Federal Police

Detective Superintendent Phil Newton Co-ordinator Crime
Prevention and Tactical
Support

Mr Michel Quall Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer

9 November 2000

For the University of Canberra

Dr Joe Murik School of Professional and Community Education

For the National Association of for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Dr Sue Packer

For Open Family

Ms Michelle Fisher Co-ordinator Foster Care Programs

For the Indigenous Social Development Institute

Ms Marie Coleman Director

1 February 2001

Mr Bill Stefaniak Minister for Education

For the Department of Education and Community Services

Ms Fran Hinton Chief Executive

Mr James Coleborne Executive Director, Education and Training

Mr Allan Hird Director, School Programs

Mr Rob McConchie Director Schools, Southside

Ms Narelle Hargreaves Director Schools, Northside

8 February 2001

Mr Michael Moore Minister for Health, Housing and Community
Services

For the Department of Education and Community Services

Ms Fran Hinton Chief Executive

Ms Sue Birtles Executive Director, Children's, Youth and
Family Services Bureau

Mr Tony Carmichael Manager, Youth Services

For the Department of Health, Housing and Community Care

Ms Fran Barry Manager, Alcohol and Drug Unit

Mr Simon Rosenberg Manager, Mental Health and Corrections
Health

10 May 2001

For the ACT Secondary Principals' Association

Mr Terry O'Keeffe President

Mr Greg Robinson Deputy President

Ms Wendy Coutts Member

Appendix 3 - Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ADD	Attention deficit disorder
ADHD	Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
CIT	Canberra Institute of Technology
Council of P&Cs	ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations Inc
DCAP	Dickson College Alternative Program
DECS	Department of Education and Community Services
FAST	Families and Schools Together
GAP	Ginninderra Alternative Program
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SWOW	School without Walls

Appendix 4 - Additional comments from Mr Berry MLA, Deputy Chair

RESOURCING

1. I support this report in its entirety and consider that action on the recommendations will lead to better outcomes for adolescents and young adults. It is however perplexing to me that these issues might have escaped Government notice and how, when considering the 2001-2002 budget, a higher priority would be given to free school buses than on programs in our schools that would help these young people.
2. I am disappointed that my committee colleagues would not agree to the inclusion of any comment in relation to this example of misdirected spending in this report. I disagree with their assessment that the issue might create a diversion from the report's worthy recommendations. Quite the contrary in my view, failing to point to such an obvious example of inappropriate Government spending priorities leaves a gap in the commendable work of the committee.
3. Much of the government rhetoric on the resource implications of committee recommendations has emphasised the need to identify funds for proposed initiatives. This is a message that is repeated ad nauseam in the face of calls for more resources such as those which should be initiated as a consequence of this report.
4. I regard this approach as a fending device to avoid the responsibility of setting priorities on issues of serious import in the community. In this inquiry the committee has been bombarded with evidence of deserving areas in schools in need of funding. The question from government will be- where will the money come from?
5. The Estimates Committee Inquiry into the 2001-2002 budget also heard evidence of sorely needed funding in government and non-government schools from Mr Clive Haggar of the Australian Education Union commenting on the free school bus scheme. Mr Haggar said:

I would suggest to you that even those that travel substantial distances, if given the option of, say, investing this money in programs for reductions of

*class sizes or students at risk, would prefer to see that money invested in their educational programs for their children.*¹⁸⁸

The Vice President of the ACT Council of P&C Associations, Grant Battersby raised similar concerns in relation to funding needed for student support highlighting the impact of cuts in colleges when he told the Estimates Committee:

*As president of the Narrabundah P&C, I can say that the P&C there is spending a lot of its money on providing support to students through the health program, the resilience program. We appreciate that the teachers there are doing a wonderful job. They are concerned that they have had to cut back some of their programs because of the reductions in the number of teachers in colleges in recent years, and so on. But those kids at SRCs are those who are doing quite well in the system anyway, I would think. Ian talks about supplementary learning assistance and so on. There is a serious problem for those kids who are not doing well in the system and we need support for them, because the cost to them individually and the cost to the community of not completing secondary education is very high. That is the sort of thing that should be targeted by a government that is trying to do the best for its community.*¹⁸⁹

The President of the ACT Council of P&C Associations, Dr Ian Morgan said:

*Our concern with that proposal is that it is not a targeted proposal; in other words, it does not address disadvantage, which we think is what needs to be targeted.*¹⁹⁰

And he went on to say:

*It would certainly include the possibility of reduced class sizes, where that was what the school—the principal, the teachers and the entire school community—felt was appropriate, but it would also encompass the possibility of what we think is equally important, namely, the supplementary learning assistance and supplementary student welfare support that are needed.*¹⁹¹

The need for support for young people at risk is a strong element that emerges from this evidence.

6. While there is evidence that resources are stretched in various areas of education there is no evidence that the government's preferred

¹⁸⁸ Select Committee on Estimates 2001-2002, Transcript, 24 May 2001, p 5.

¹⁸⁹ Select Committee on Estimates 2001-2002, Transcript, 22 May 2001, p 39.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*

¹⁹¹ *ibid*

initiative of free school buses is a perceived area of need. In fact evidence given to the Estimates Committee was that there had been no calls for free school buses over this term of the government and that the issue hadn't arisen during the draft budget process.

7. In answer to questions the Minister for Education told the Estimates Committee that no research had been done and that he didn't believe that it was possible to do research into the impact of the plan on local area schools in the ACT. In response to question about whether any work had been done on the government's plan and whether discussions had been held with New South Wales, the Chief of the Department of Education and Community Services Fran Hinton confirmed this when she said:

*We have not done any recent work other than the information that was provided in the context of the deliberations of government in this budget.*¹⁹²

The same hearings of the Estimates Committee heard that the issue had not arisen until late in the budget process.

8. In his response to a question in the Assembly (Draft Hansard 19 June page 43) the Minister for Urban Services told the Assembly that there were 16,248 applications for free school bus passes. He informed the Assembly that 6,728 students were from government and 9,520 were from non-government schools. According to committee calculations this means that around 89 percent of government school students and 57 percent of non-government school students will receive no benefit. In all close to 75 percent of all students will receive no benefit from this scheme.
9. The Minister also said that the Government expected these applications to rise to 20,000 by September. At best this means that two thirds of students will miss out on any benefit.
10. It is evident that the free school bus scheme has been developed in a research vacuum which demonstrates an indifference to the impact the scheme might have on the Territory's neighbourhood school system.
11. It is abundantly clear that the allocation of \$27 million to a free school bus system is an inequitable distribution of government funding where

¹⁹² Select Committee on Estimates 2001-2002, Transcript, 17 May 2001, p 15.

a minority of students will receive a benefit none of which enhances their education.

12. In my view any reading of this report and its recommendations will draw the conclusion that the \$27 million allocated for a free school bus scheme would, if reallocated to schools, do much to counter the negative outcomes highlighted in this report.

Wayne Berry MLA