

Inquiry into 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports

Report Number 2.

Standing Committee on Education

February 2003

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory



Committee membership

Ms Karin MacDonald MLA (Chair)

Mr Steve Pratt MLA (Deputy Chair)

Ms Roslyn Dundas MLA

Secretary: Mr David Skinner

Administration: Ms Judy Moutia

Resolution of appointment

To examine matters related to early childhood education and care, primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary education, non-government education, arts and culture, sport and recreation.

Minutes of Proceedings, ACT Legislative Assembly, No. 2 - 11 December 2001, p 12.

Terms of reference

Inquire into and report on the Annual and Financial Reports for the calendar year 2001 and the financial year 2001-2002 as determined by the Speaker.

(referred 26 September 2002)

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Summary of recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

The committee recommends that the Government devise appropriate qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria for the Youth Connection program.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The committee recommends that the Government keep the Standing Committee on Education apprised of developments regarding the creation of a school board at Quamby as well as providing general information about the educational arrangements at the Centre as advancements and/or changes come about.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The committee recommends that the Government keep the committee informed about the progress of the funding model pilot program for Special Education as it progresses and, in particular, the information, views and advice generated by the reference group.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The committee recommends that the Department of Education provides advice, guidance and support to individual schools regarding the insurance of school computers.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The committee recommends that the Government make public any amendments to the exposure draft of the Education Bill with enough time for additional community consultation, prior to debate in Assembly.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The committee recommends that the Government examine measures which increase the uptake of professional development among teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The committee recommends that:

- a) all reviews and reports conducted by the Department be listed in the appropriate section/category of the annual report; and**
- b) this information is repeated in an appendix showing all departmental reviews and reports.**

Chapter 1. Issues

Background

1.1. On 26 September 2002, the Standing Committee on Education was tasked with examining and reporting on the annual and financial reports of the portfolio areas for which it is responsible including: early childhood education and care; primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary education; non-government education; arts and culture; and sport and recreation¹.

1.2. The committee made a decision to direct its attention primarily towards the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services and, in particular, the education component of the department.

1.3. To this end, the committee has produced a brief report commenting on the accountability issues associated with the annual reports as well as highlighting several areas that were of specific interest to members of the committee.

Conduct of Inquiry

1.4. The committee conducted one public hearing on 13 December 2002. The committee heard from the Minister for Education, Mr Simon Corbell MLA, officials within the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services as well as the Canberra Institute of Technology.

1.5. The committee wishes to thank the Minister and departmental officials for their co-operation and candour during this scrutiny process.

Reporting requirements

1.6. The committee notes that all the reports it reviewed appear to meet the reporting requirements outlined in the Chief Minister's Annual Reports Directions.

1.7. The committee is pleased to note that the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services has adopted a recommendation from the Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation (4th Assembly) suggesting that annual reports be available on the Internet.

¹ The committee was also responsible for examining the Children's, Youth and Family Services component of the Department, which is not usually part of the committee's responsibilities.

The committee supports this improvement in accountability, transparency and ease of access to annual report information.

Administrative arrangements

1.8. Not long after the change of Government in 2001, the Labor Government restructured the allocation of roles and functions of various agencies within the public service.

1.9. For example, as part of this restructure, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was transferred from the Education Department to the new Department of Health Disability and Community Services.

1.10. The committee is concerned that the integrity and continuity of reporting arrangements be maintained in the process of transferring the function to another department.

1.11. The committee thought this particularly important in order to maintain overall accountability of the different government programs and the departments that administer them.

Youth Connection

1.12. Youth Connection is a youth work and family support service providing support, assistance and advocacy for young people who are at risk of not completing school. While the committee was informed that the program met or exceeded its target relating to participation levels, it also learned that no evaluation criteria had been established to determine the degree of success the program was having in its stated goal of keeping children at school.

1.13. Given that the program has been operating for a considerable period of time, the committee is concerned that such performance and evaluation criteria have not been devised. The committee makes a recommendation to this effect below.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Government devise appropriate qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria for the Youth Connection program.

Quamby

1.14. The committee notes that the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services Annual Report contains an Official Visitor's report in relation to Quamby Youth Detention Centre.

1.15. The 2001-2002 Official Visitor's report notes that:

I have always been interested in the education program offered to the residents. Almost invariably, these young people have very disrupted educational histories. So their time in Quamby is an opportunity to try and make some improvements in this area - surely in the interest of society as well as the individuals. The school should be run as a school, with relevant, challenging programs and all residents should attend each day. For a time, I was please with the program offered but have concerns at this time. The Education Department must take responsibility for the quality of the program and the provision of sufficient staff, competent to teach the programs to these young people.²

1.16. The committee heard that, in an effort to improve the quality of education programs at Quamby, the Government is in the process of establishing a school board which would be responsible for overseeing the education program at the Centre as well as monitoring students' progress.

1.17. The committee is greatly supportive of this initiative and is interested in being kept apprised of developments in this area. The committee will keep a watching brief and recommends that the Government keep a channel of information flowing to the committee about any advances or changes to the educational arrangements at Quamby.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Government keep the Standing Committee on Education apprised of developments regarding the creation of a school board at Quamby as well as providing general information about the educational arrangements at the Centre as advancements and/or changes come about.

² Department of Education and Community Services 'Annual Report 2001-2002' p 222.

Special education

1.18. In the public hearing, the committee was advised that the Government will conduct a pilot program to test a new funding model in relation to the Special Education section of the Department. The pilot program was said to arise out of a review of the administrative and funding arrangements for students with disabilities.

1.19. The committee was pleased to hear that the pilot was not directed towards bringing about a reduction in the funding allocation to special education³. The Government noted that while the manner in which the total 'bucket' of money is distributed may change, the size of the bucket itself would not change⁴.

1.20. The committee was informed that a reference group made up of parents of students with special needs and others will be involved in reviewing the outcomes of the pilot and the committee is interested in being kept apprised of developments, comments and the views expressed by the reference group.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Government keep the committee informed about the progress of the funding model pilot program for Special Education as it progresses and, in particular, the information, views and advice generated by the reference group.

School computers

1.21. The committee received evidence that taking out insurance for computers purchased by schools is done at the discretion of the individual schools themselves.

1.22. While the committee supports some of the flexibility provided by school-based management, the committee believes that it is appropriate for the Department to provide guidance and support in relation to insurance of computer equipment.

³ Transcript, 13 December 2002, p 21, Mr Corbell

⁴ Ibid, p 21.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Department of Education provides advice, guidance and support to individual schools regarding the insurance of school computers.

Education Bill

1.23. In the public hearing, the Minister informed the committee that following extensive community consultation on the exposure draft of the Education Bill, the Department had provided him with a revised report on the outcomes of that consultation which identify potential areas for amendment.

1.24. The committee was left with the impression that should amendments flow from the Department's revised report, members of the public may not be given the opportunity to view the proposed changes.

1.25. While the committee understands that the development and evolution of the Bill has been protracted, the committee notes concerns expressed by members of the public that this opportunity might not be forthcoming.

1.26. The committee believes that should amendments arise out of the Department's revised report, it would be useful to make public the nature of those amendments and has made a recommendation to this effect below.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the Government make public any amendments to the exposure draft of the Education Bill with enough time for additional community consultation, prior to debate in Assembly.

Home Schooling

1.27. The committee is aware of concerns expressed by some members of the community that provisions for regulating and monitoring home schooling within the exposure draft of the Education Bill are over-zealous.

1.28. In particular, a concern was raised with some members of the committee that a perception exists that under the proposed legislation officers from the Department may be able to enter a home without the permission of the householder.

1.29. Responding to these concerns the Minister assured the committee that this was never the intention of the relevant part of the bill and that the issue would be clarified in the legislation before being tabled in the Assembly⁵.

1.30. The committee is satisfied with this approach.

Teachers' Professional Development

1.31. The committee was pleased to learn that monies allocated to a professional development fund for teachers is quarantined. However, the committee notes that in the last financial year the professional development fund was not expended to the same level estimated by the government at the outset of the financial year.

1.32. The committee is concerned that professional development opportunities may not be achieving full utilisation and proposes that an investigation into measures which increase utilisation be undertaken.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Government examine measures which increase the uptake of professional development among teachers.

Tenders

1.33. The committee notes a major variance in performance measures pertaining to the successful determination of tenders within the Vocational Education and Training output class.

1.34. The Government set a target of 80 per cent for achieving the successful determination of tenders within 50 days but only managed to achieve 45 per cent⁶. This is explained in the footnotes of the annual

⁵ Transcript, 13 December 2002, p 18, Mr Corbell.

⁶ Department of Education and Community Services 'Annual Report 2001-2002' p 140.

report as being the consequence of, ‘revisions in the documentation’⁷ and in the public hearing was put down to a tightening up in procurement guidelines⁸.

1.35. The committee will keep a watching brief on this performance measure.

Reviews and reports

1.36. The committee is concerned that there are reports that have been produced by parts of the department that are not mentioned in the annual report.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that:

- a) all reviews and reports conducted by the Department be listed in the appropriate section/category of the annual report; and**
- b) this information is repeated in an appendix showing all departmental reviews and reports.**

Karin Macdonald MLA
Chair

12 February 2003

⁷ Ibid, p 140.

⁸ Transcript, 13 December 2002, p 65, Mr Wheeler.

Appendix 1 – List of Witnesses

Public hearing 13 December 2002

1. Mr Simon Corbell MLA, Minister for Education
2. Ms Fran Hinton, Chief Executive, Department of Education, Youth and Family Services
3. Ms Sue Birtles, Executive Director, Children's, Youth and Family Services.
4. Mr Trevor Wheeler, Executive Director, Vocational Education and Training, Corporate
5. Mr James Coleborne, Executive Director, School Education
6. Mr Craig Curry, Director, School Operations
7. Mr Peter Veenker, Chief Executive, CIT