



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUNG PEOPLE

2006-07 ANNUAL REPORT HEARINGS

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE Supplementary Question No. 21

The Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People asked on 3 March 2008:

- Q21 It has been claimed that there has been no improvement on literacy and numeracy standards in the last 40 years despite dollars, research and changes to the system. (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/02/11/2159246.htm>)
- (a) Is that a problem?
 - (b) Are the standards relating to literacy and numeracy the same in the 1960's as they are now?

MR BARR: The answer to the question is as follows:

- (a) The focus of the study was to compare dollars spent in the 1960s compared to education funding in 2003 and examine productivity changes in terms of student outcomes. The findings do not take into account the several factors:

There is increasing diversity of the student population across Australia, both through broader ethnicity and greater participation. The number of students coming from non-English backgrounds has increased as a result of migration. Over the past thirty years, more students have come from non English speaking backgrounds and have varied experiences in literacy, numeracy and life experiences, including trauma from war. Students are now encouraged to stay longer at school and all previously marginalised groups of students are encouraged to continue with schooling. For instance there is now greater participation by Indigenous students in schooling.

In macro terms the study measured total dollars spent on education against literacy and numeracy outcomes. While the results may appear to show a drop in productivity, expenditure on education is complex and covers many factors. For instance, expenditure on education across all Australian states has been expanded to cater for the needs of children in remote areas. A more comprehensive breakdown of total budget funding would be needed to make broad statements about productivity in terms of student outcomes.

- (b) Students are facing increasing challenges as literacy demands change, partly due to new technology. As a result, students are being taught a broader range of literacy skills including a focus on contextual understanding. There are a range of areas currently measured that were not measured in the 1960s. It is therefore not possible to draw any meaningful comparison between the results currently being achieved by student and those achieved by students in the 1960s.

However, ACT students continue to perform well against national reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks. The 2006 benchmark results show that the performance of ACT students in years 3, 5 and 7 in reading and numeracy was amongst the highest in the country.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People

Signature:

Date:

By the Minister for Education and Training, Mr Andrew Barr MLA