

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

RESPONSE TO MINISTER FOR EDUCATION ON CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT 457 VISA STUDENTS

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN
AT PERTH
THURSDAY, 27 AUGUST 2009**

Members

Dr J.M. Woollard (Chairman)
Ms L.L. Baker (Deputy Chairman)
Mr P.B. Watson
Mr I.C. Blayney
Mr P. Abetz

Hearing commenced at 2.57 pm

TARR, MS NATALIE

**Principal Consultant ESL/ESD,
Department of Education and Training Western Australia,
examined:**

FRANCE, MR BARRY

**Principal, Applecross Primary School,
examined:**

DARBY, MR NEIL DESMOND

**Director, Schools,
Department of Education and Training Western Australia,
examined:**

REID, MS JACQUELINE DONNA

**Manager, Disabilities,
Department of Education and Training Western Australia,
examined:**

LONG, MRS MOIRA

**ESL Primary School Teacher,
Applecross Primary School,
examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence in relation to difficulties experienced within the education sector that relate to funding for children whose parents are on 457 visas, children for whom English is a second language, and children who have intellectual or physical disabilities. I am Janet Woollard, the chair, and the other committee member here today is Mr Peter Abetz. Mr Dave Worth, our principal research officer, will be joining us, and we also have Hansard. This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly. This hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking you to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important to understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. As this is a public hearing, Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to my document or documents in the course of the hearing, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed to a discussion on the issues and the questions that we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence before a parliamentary inquiry?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you read and receive the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the “Details of Witness” form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today’s hearing?

The Witnesses: No.

The CHAIRMAN: In that case, would you please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee today.

Ms Tarr: I am the Principal Consultant for English as a Second Language and English as a Second Dialect. I am based at the Department of Education and Training, and I have been in that role for the past six months.

Mr France: I am the principal of Applecross Primary School. We have students from an ESL background, students on 457s, and some students with special needs. I have been the principal of that school for the past six years.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we move around the table, I need to thank you very much, Barry. Applecross Primary School is only 200 or 300 metres from my electorate office, so I probably hear more from the parents at that school than do other members. I have had complaints about these issues—as have all members—from parents in all areas, but because Applecross Primary is very close to my office, the parents may be finding it a bit easier to come to see me.

Mr France: Thank you very much.

Mr Darby: I am the director of schools, Fremantle education district office. The Fremantle-Peel education office extends from Canning Bridge to Waroona. It consists of 134 public schools, and I have oversight of 39 of those schools, and senior high schools, in relation to participation in the raising the school leaving age strategy.

Ms Reid: I am the manager, disabilities, in the Department of Education and Training. I am responsible for looking after and managing the targeted support and resources for students with disabilities across the state, some of whom may have ELS and ESD issues.

Mrs Long: I am the ESL teacher at three schools—Applecross Primary School, Ardross Primary School and Mt Pleasant Primary School. I have been in that role for about two years.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. The background to inviting you here today is that you will all be aware of the numerous media articles and the concern in the community about this issue. The minister actually spoke to me briefly about this issue late last year, so we submitted some questions to the department and asked for some statistics. When the statistics came back, not only were they a great surprise in terms of the numbers, but also they were not necessarily the same statistics that I knew of from my discussions with parents—that is, they certainly did not match up with the statistics for some of the local schools. That was in relation to 457 visas. There were many complaints about funding and support. I know that you are doing a wonderful job, Moira, because the parents speak very highly of you, but they would like six of you rather than only one of you! The other problem is in relation to funding for children with disabilities. We have brought that in with this because, last year, when the minister came with me on a visit to several of the schools in my area, that was an issue that came up as part of those discussions, and that issue continues to arise. I will ask you to make some opening comments, Neil, and we will then discuss the issues one by one. We will look at the issue with 457s, then the issue of ESL, and then the issue of funding for children who have intellectual or physical disabilities. Neil, would you like to give us a summary from your regional perspective, and from the state perspective, of 457s?

Mr Darby: Certainly over the last number of years there has been an increase in 457s in the state. That is stating the obvious, but I need to put it on the record. Some of the 457s who come to Western Australia are from an English speaking background, and others are obviously from a non-

English speaking background. As part of the background to my opening comments, the Department of Education and Training's English as a second language program for students on permanent residency visas has previously been funded by the commonwealth new arrivals program.

The CHAIRMAN: Can we discuss the 457s first?

Mr P. ABETZ: It is all related. You cannot really separate ESL from 457s because it is so interconnected.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. We will let you continue and then we may come back to you with some questions.

Mr Darby: In 2009, the CNAP allocation to WA was \$7 220 928. These funds were used to enable eligible ESL students to access ESL support, including intensive English centres—or IECs—and support and cell programs. The funds provide the ESL visiting teacher service, the ESL resource centre, the ESL district and central office positions, and the ESL specialist teacher salaries and EA salaries and contingencies. Students on temporary 457 visas have not been eligible to access CNAP-funded programs. They are also not eligible to enrol in IECs or ESL programs, or access the ESL VT service, unless there is spare capacity. Given the large number of students who are ESL, that capacity is seldom spare.

The CHAIRMAN: You have given us the sum of money that was available in January of this year. Could you just describe for the committee the difference in the funding before January of this year?

Mr Darby: I cannot give the precise figure before January of this year, but it was of the same ilk. Again, the funding to ESL was provided as part of the commonwealth contribution, and there was again last year no contribution to 457 provision unless there was spare capacity. As a consequence of concerns raised by schools through the accountability process, and also via complaints from members of Parliament and from the State School Teachers' Union, and from other sources, including stakeholders such as members of the public and parents, about the lack of ESL program support for 457s, some money was provided in April 2009 to 75 metropolitan and regional primary and secondary schools with significant numbers of ESL students on temporary 457 visas.

[3.10 pm]

Mr P. ABETZ: That was from the state?

Mr Darby: Can you clarify that commonwealth funding?

Ms Tarr: No additional funding was provided from the state.

Mr P. ABETZ: Was this extra commonwealth funding?

Mr Darby: Yes; via the CNAP.

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, you just said that additional funding was provided in March of this year and that it was forwarded to some schools.

Mr Darby: Yes; in April of this year.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we, by way of supplementary information, ask you to provide us with details of the additional funding, including the schools that the funding was made available to and how that funding was made available to them?

Mr Darby: Sure. If I may, Janet, in the 75 schools that received this money there was a disbursement of between \$5 000 and \$12 000 to purchase ESL resources to support these learners. In addition, commonwealth literacy and numeracy program funds—acronym CLNP—totalling \$422 000 were also provided; this money was again to purchase resources for ESL students. This money, provided to schools, was commonwealth money and, again, there was no state provision.

Mr P. ABETZ: When you say “resources”, do you mean the money was used for equipment and not for staff salaries?

Mr Darby: That is correct.

The CHAIRMAN: You are saying about \$5 000 to \$12 000?

Mr Darby: Yes; depending on the school and the cell, it was between \$5 000 and \$12 000. As has been indicated, we will supply the details.

The CHAIRMAN: Natalie, as you have responsibility for this in central office, could you explain to the committee the difficulties that have been put to you by both teaching staff and the parents of children for whom English is a second language and who attend our schools under 457 visas?

Ms Tarr: I guess the key point is that many or most of the students are in mainstream classes with up to 30 or 33 children per class. Mainstream teachers do not necessarily have the specialist English as a second language qualification and do not understand second language acquisition and the process that students need to go through to acquire a second language. Also, they have to make significant teaching and learning adjustments to enable the 457 non-English-speaking children to reach some success in the classroom. Basically, the teachers feel inadequate. We get calls from parents or from agencies that bring out 457 visa holders saying that these children have no English and asking where they can go to school. If there is no spare capacity in the intensive English centre programs, they are directed to their local primary school or secondary school.

The CHAIRMAN: Given you have responsibility at a state level, are you aware of funding arrangements in other states?

Ms Tarr: Yes, I am. I am sorry, but I did not bring that table with me. However, in some states they actually charge 457 visa holders additional fees to access intensive English support.

The CHAIRMAN: And the ESL students?

Ms Tarr: The 457 ESL students—to access programs and ESL support.

The CHAIRMAN: We were actually given information from the minister. I think New South Wales charges less than one of the other states —

Mr P. ABETZ: New South Wales charges only \$13 000 a year, which is a pretty hefty sum.

The CHAIRMAN: New South Wales charges \$4 500 for kindergarten students, \$4 500 for students in years 7 to 10 and \$5 000 for students in years 11 and 12. In the ACT, the figures are higher.

Mr P. ABETZ: They charge \$13 500 for years 11 and 12—per student.

The CHAIRMAN: Given that we are dealing with the two together, are you able to provide the committee with the number of 457 visa students in our schools?

Ms Tarr: According to the February census we had about 1 200 students with English as a second language needs who were unable to access ESL support.

The CHAIRMAN: Because they were 457 visa students?

Ms Tarr: Because they were 457 visa holders.

The CHAIRMAN: So you are saying that there were 1 200 students.

Ms Tarr: There were 1 154 students in February. We have just done the August school census and we are waiting for the figures from that.

The CHAIRMAN: I think that that figure is actually less—I do not have the statistics in front of me. Do you have them?

Mr P. ABETZ: I have the figures here. These are the figures that came through.

The CHAIRMAN: No, I summarised them.

Mr P. ABETZ: I do not think I have a summary.

The CHAIRMAN: I think the figures were much higher.

On the basis of the figure that you have mentioned—1 100 students—and the NSW figures, which are less than the ACT figures, we would obviously have something like an additional 100 ESL teachers in Western Australia to help in the school system. How is the funding worked out on a district basis to give support to schools that have students on 457 visas and for whom English is a second language?

Ms Tarr: At the moment, we are conducting an ESL review because we are very aware of the increasing needs of both humanitarian entrants into the state and 457 visa holders. The department is aware of this need and is reviewing all of the services that it provides. Basically, under the CNAP funding arrangement, the commonwealth gave us \$5 800 per eligible student. It costs in excess of \$10 000 per student in an intensive English centre, and that includes teacher time, ethnic education assistant time, psychology time and school support worker time.

Mr P. ABETZ: Are humanitarian visa holders eligible for ESL support?

Ms Tarr: Yes, they are.

Mr P. ABETZ: So the humanitarian visa holders are eligible, but the 457 visa holders are not? Is that correct?

Ms Tarr: Yes; that is in accordance with our enrolment policy.

Mr P. ABETZ: Yes, fine, right. In one of the schools in my electorate, roughly 25 per cent of the students in the school either have parents on 457 visas or English as a second language; some of the students are permanent residents with English as a second language. All these kids are in mainstream school and the pressure on their teachers is pretty formidable. Pressure is even on the need to provide professional development to classroom teachers to help them cope. Is it fair to say that the ESL branch is understaffed, overworked and, therefore, really not in a position to provide as much PD for teachers as you think ought to be provided?

Ms Tarr: Perhaps, yes. We do have four district consultants in the metropolitan area. The primary role of those consultants is to support schools with ESL students—to provide professional learning. In the past two weeks, there has been significant professional learning in the areas of the ESL progress maps, which is a monitoring and assessment tool. A professional learning day was run yesterday in which K-3 student ESL learning needs were addressed. That attracted mainstream teachers. Professional learning is provided. Also, the ESL resource centre sends out about 7 000 items a year to teachers across the metropolitan area and also sends resources to remote and regional teachers. We run intensive training courses through the Professional Learning Institute. In the school holidays we run a four-day course in ESL for mainstream teachers and we provide that at no charge to the teachers.

Mr P. ABETZ: Was there a good take-up on that?

Ms Tarr: There was; I think there were about 35 or 40 attendees. It is very intensive, with a lot of coursework that needs to be done. They will come back in the following school holidays to do another two days.

Mr P. ABETZ: I have been told—and want to check if it is correct or not—that no student prior to year 1 is actually eligible for any ESL help. Is it correct that a child in preprimary who does not speak a word of English—coming from an ESL background, English is not yet a second language because the child has not learnt a first language—is not eligible for ESL assistance?

Ms Tarr: There is actually a linguistic debate about what is the best support to give in the early years to ESL students. Research shows that it is better that students develop a strong first language and acquire a second language in a supportive environment that is non-threatening. Our kindergarten and preprimary teachers run very good programs in which they scaffold language and provide good opportunities for children to develop English in, as I said, a non-threatening environment. If they have ESL needs after they have been in kindy or preprimary, or even if they

have arrived halfway through preprimary and have ESL needs, they are entitled to attend an intensive English centre for year 1. We have ESL visiting teachers who identify those students through schools and who work with parents and the teachers to enrol the child in the following year. We are trialling a preprimary class at the moment at the Koondoola Intensive English Centre, where some preprimary children are receiving intensive English for six months to determine if they need to attend IEC in year 1 or if they can attend mainstream school.

[3.20 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Are you aware of what happens in Victoria for students?

Ms Tarr: There are different models across the states. We have actually recently done a new scan to go with the ESL review to see what is going on in other states. As I said earlier, it comes down to the language acquisition debate as well.

The CHAIRMAN: I believe in Victoria, with those children who need assistance, I think it is six months intensive assistance they give in the first six months, and then four years follow-on assistance for those ESL students. We will come back to the funding arrangements, but what we are doing here is we are hoping to support the minister really, in a way, to seek additional funds from the federal government for students who are at our schools and whose parents are on 457 visas; who have English as a second language or who have disabilities. Barry, when you were talking about the funding arrangements before, I agreed with you that under the previous scheme, before 1 January, under ESL funding, the funding was for new arrivals and excluded 457s. But since January this year, under the national employment agreement between the commonwealth, states and territories, it is now a specific purpose payment to the states, so that 457 children, since January of this year, have been eligible to receive some support through that funding.

Mr P. ABETZ: But only where there is space.

The CHAIRMAN: Neil, did I get this right: this was prior to 2009, when some additional funding could be brought in, but since January, under the COAG agreement—the national employment agreement—I believe the funding that is now provided from the commonwealth to the states also will cover children who are on 457 visas? I think that that funding, from my understanding, is now population-based. Personally, I think it is insufficient because we could have a higher number of students in WA who are on 457 visas or have English as a second language. I am hoping there will be a review of that funding so that those states that have a higher number of students get additional support from that funding.

Barry, at Applecross Primary School, how many students do you have with ESL and with 457 visas? Not with the visas, but who are attending school, whose parents have 457 visas?

Mr France: In a school of approximately 430 students—I did not bring the current census figures with me—in the ESL student profile, I have 41 students who are identified as English as a second language, of which we are funded for 25. In terms of the 457 students, I might have to ask Moira if she knows the exact number.

Mrs Long: I do. I wrote it in pen on the bottom.

Mr France: But that is not the total number.

Mrs Long: The total number I do not have, of ESL-457 visas.

Mr France: I can tell you there are 13 457-ESL kids in our school who do need some educational support, but I would need to get back to you.

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, how many?

Mr France: Thirteen.

The CHAIRMAN: Thirteen ESL?

Mr France: Thirteen 457 students who need some ESL support but are currently not provided with that, unless we can find a way of doing that. I would need to get back to you with the exact number of 457 students at Applecross. I do not have that with me.

The CHAIRMAN: In that case could I ask you to supply, by supplementary information for Applecross Primary School, the number of students who are there basically with 457 visas, and the number of students for whom English is a second language.

Mr France: I can tell you the number of students for whom English is a second language. I have 73 students who do not speak English at home.

The CHAIRMAN: The committee has two other inquiries going on. We are really doing this to give a brief report to the minister, and hopefully the department will pursue this further. It is easier, rather than asking for the figures throughout, maybe we might just do the cluster that Applecross comes in with.

Ms Tarr: I have those figures.

Mr Darby: I can provide the Applecross cell, which includes Applecross, Ardross and Mt Pleasant. Moira teaches across two of those schools. There are 41 457 students. If you want other cells—the Burrendah cell has 18; Riverton, 21; Rossmoyne, 24; Brookman, 44; Murdoch, 10; Winthrop, 4; and Applecross, 41. That is just a sample of some of our cells.

Mr P. ABETZ: That is actually ESL students whose parents are on 457 visas, who are getting the benefit of that extra education; or they are the ones that are not getting it?

Mr Darby: They are not getting it.

The CHAIRMAN: You are saying that was 13 at Applecross?

Mr Darby: Applecross Primary in the Applecross cell—which includes Applecross Primary, Mt Pleasant and Ardross—there are 41.

The CHAIRMAN: It is interesting. I would have thought it was much higher than that, from the parents who have been down from different classrooms saying that there are difficulties. Barry, please do not take this incorrectly—Applecross Primary School has a wonderful reputation in the community and the parents there are very happy. I have been approached in terms of what support am I, as are other members, giving to the school because of the difficulties that are being faced by both other children in the classrooms and also teachers in the classrooms who are having to try and run two sets of curricula—one for the students who are having difficulties with their English and one for the students for whom English is their primary language.

Mr Darby: The complaints—some parents may not know if their child is ESL and 457, or just ESL. But the quantum has increased over time and parents are cognisant of that. They raise their concerns in relation to meeting the needs of some children as needs not being met. Inequitable support provision is the main source of complaint that we are receiving in the Department of Education and Training both at district school and central level. The other source of complaint is the time taken from other children in the classes of temporary 457s. This is a common concern that is expressed to people like Moira, to Barry and myself, and through to Natalie.

The CHAIRMAN: I will carry on with Barry and then move over to Moira. Barry, could you explain, from a hands-on perspective at the grassroots level, the complaints that are being made to you in relation to difficulties with both children whose parents have 457s and children for whom English is a second language?

Mr France: Most of the complaints that I receive relate to those made by teachers and are probably very similar to the ones that Natalie was explaining—their lack of professional expertise in catering adequately for children who are from an English as a second language background, and I suppose their frustration when we see children who are very capable but not able to engage to the extent that we know they can. One of the issues that Moira and I talked about recently was to take, for instance,

a little girl who is particularly capable in non-verbal dimensions but struggles in the verbal dimensions. So therefore her access into the PEAC-based program, with the primary extension challenge, up until now their opportunities have been somewhat limited.

It is actually trying to get those children to achieve their potential and to perform. They are the major concerns that we have. The other concerns teachers express are where these children perhaps under-perform their potential and it needs to be accounted for. In times of public display of our schools data, I suppose that is a difficulty that we have to explain.

[3.30 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Moira, would you like to please come in? You have it firsthand.

Mrs Long: I do. As Natalie said, we recently did our August census and the figures are quite striking. I get funding for stages 1 and 2 eligible visa children. In my three-school cell I have 53 of those. On top of that, I have 41 457 visas—that is, 41 on top of 53—and we have to try to fit them in where there is space, and there is no space. I know as a teacher on the ground. So we end up diluting ourselves. I imagine the source of some complaints from ESL parents would be, “My kids are not getting enough time with the ESL teacher.”

The CHAIRMAN: Because you are trying to share —

Mrs Long: I am trying to help as many children as possible.

The CHAIRMAN: For those 41 additional 457 children that you have in your cluster, if we use the base sum from New South Wales, that would be something like \$160 000, two other full-time equivalent staff helping with those students. I am also aware of the fact that while there are only two states that currently charge those fees for 457 visas, other states have in the past matched and even increased what the commonwealth is providing to the states to support students for whom English is a second language. I think it is wonderful that we have a new minister. I am very hopeful that when all these statistics are put to her, which she is basically asking for because she knows that there is a problem in the area, there will be increased state funding and we will be able to give her some good evidence to go in and back it to get additional federal funds for this area.

Mr P. ABETZ: Janet, you mentioned before the change in funding with the COAG agreement and so on.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr P. ABETZ: The way I understood you to say that gave me the impression, perhaps wrongly, that there is now funding coming to the state for children of 457 visa holders for whom English is a second language, but my understanding from what is being said is that children of 457-visa-holder parents are still not able to access that unless there happens to be space, but with the current pressure there simply is not space, so they are simply still 100 per cent missing out pretty much. Would that be —

The CHAIRMAN: Is that your understanding?

Mr Darby: That is my understanding. May I just add to that, Janet. It is just that with the national partnership funding and other agreements through or via COAG, the money will now come to Treasury, and the state and department will then negotiate.

The CHAIRMAN: I believe that that money came to Treasury as at January of this year. I would ask again then maybe, Neil, because you have the expertise in this area, if you could provide us by supplementary information the details of the previous funding formula and the current funding formula. I could have it wrong, but I was under the impression that under the new COAG and the national employment agreement, the funding that was made available to WA in January can be used for ESL, 457 visas, and it is up to the state to determine now where that funding goes, but that funding is population based, which is why I think that there are still inequities there. There are gross inequities now in the system, but the funding formula that the commonwealth has proposed may be

a step in the right direction of saying that 457s can come in under this formula, so that those states that are maybe not currently charging those fees will have some income available, but there still is a big need.

Mr Darby: If I might say just in terms of looking over the horizon, with the announcement of Gorgon progressing to where it may progress to, and the same with Pluto, and given the Fremantle-Peel industrial strip and Austal Ships and ACEP and other resources, it is a significant area for 457 uptake, as it is in other electorates. We are just not sure what the quantum will be there either, but we are anticipating significant growth.

Mr P. ABETZ: Just one other question on that. If people who arrive here already have permanent residency because they have gone through the various processes when they arrive here, and their students or children are not able to speak English, if they come as permanent residents, are they eligible for the ESL programs or not?

Mrs Long: Yes.

Mr Darby: Yes. They are eligible if they enrol. Once they enrol, if they enrol, they are eligible to attend an IEC within the first six months of enrolment. They go into the intensive English centre. Natalie was deputy principal of one recently and was working with both refugee children and residents in that capacity.

Mr P. ABETZ: One of the things that happens is that a lot of people come here on 457 visas, particularly from South Africa, with a view to actually migrating, and so if their employer is happy with them after six or eight weeks of being here, the employer sponsors them for PR, and then if the health checks and everything go quite smoothly, within eight weeks they can actually progress to PR. I was just curious to know whether those children, having changed from 457 to PR, would be entitled to ESL help. But if that process from landing takes more than six months, they have missed out on that initial six-month period and therefore would not be eligible. Am I understanding that correctly, Neil, or not?

Mr Darby: Natalie, you might need to —

Ms Tarr: Sure. We really consider it case by case and what the needs of the students are. That is our first priority.

The CHAIRMAN: You are saying that currently within each district or each cluster, funding is provided for ESL students based on priority.

Ms Tarr: Based on needs, and at the moment the visa category as well.

The CHAIRMAN: Before we move on from the needs, what key performance indicators or what tools do you use to identify those needs?

Ms Tarr: We have a new document that we have just produced in WA called the “ESL/ESD Progress Map”. In the past we have used monitoring and assessing tools from other states, such as the Band Scales and the ESL Scales. We can actually determine the level of reading, writing, speaking and listening that a child is at, and then ascertain what their needs are and where is the best place for them.

The CHAIRMAN: Could I, by way again of supplementary information, ask for the previous tools and for the current tools. Moira, I guess you would be the person who actually uses these tools to assess the level of need for students.

Mrs Long: That is right. If I may say as well that when these 457 students come in with ESL needs, we do not have the funding for them to go to IECs. What we are having now is that we are getting complete non-speakers going into our mainstream classrooms. A lot of the children do speak a mouthful of English. They need a lot of help, but at least that can start to function. But we now have a handful who do not speak any, and that is putting other pressures on our mainstream teachers.

The CHAIRMAN: Could you give us how many students you would have approximately and how many would be going into the classroom with no English? Maybe we will give it three levels for now, because it would be very interesting to look at the tools afterwards. But if we say no English, then minimum and moderate. We will not have high level, because otherwise they would not need your support.

[3.40 pm]

Mrs Long: No, that is correct. For example, say we have 10 preprimary and kindy students, I would assume nearly all of those would not speak any English, so there might be eight at a guess.

The CHAIRMAN: Who would not speak English?

Mrs Long: Who would not speak English, and they would go into the structured classroom that Natalie spoke about, in the normal preprimary kindy system. I have 17 children coming in at stage 1, not funded; they are on 457 visas. One of the problems is that they appear all the time throughout the year, so it is very hard to get a snapshot; the snapshot is really inaccurate. Maybe about four or five might come in with no English, but they would really be noticed in the school system. They really stand out. All the rest would have low to moderate English. There would not be very many who could do that.

The CHAIRMAN: When they are coming in with these problems with English as their primary language, what is the optimum assimilation period within the classroom and the worst case scenario for some of these students. Could you describe those for us?

Mrs Long: For somebody who does not speak English? I would expect them to start to function in the playground socially within about three or four months, if they do not have learning difficulties. That is another topic. They would not be catching up with their peers for a good two or three years, and it takes seven years, really, to completely fit into the system. It takes seven years for an ESL child to completely fit in.

The CHAIRMAN: That might be why, in Victoria, they have the six-month intensive program, and then four years of an almost acute program for those students to help them catch up. I am hoping that there will be some improvements as a result of the assessments you are doing now.

Mr P. ABETZ: Did you say seven years? I came as a migrant kid in 1961 and could not speak a word of English and was dumped in a mainstream class. I was the only non-English speaking kid in that class back in Tasmania. That was in March, 1961. By the end of that year I could converse reasonably well, and within 12 or 18 months I was up with all the other kids at school. Was I an exception? I am just surprised; I would have thought that two years would have been the average.

Mrs Long: That is why we have stage one and stage two. It is the first two years of their schooling, and it suffices. In an ideal world, I would like to have them for longer, but two years will really get them set up very well. We need to be able to monitor them from that point onwards.

The CHAIRMAN: Were you aware, Moira, that other states actually charge fees and that those fees are means tested? For parents who cannot afford those fees, other support is made available by the state, but for parents who can afford the fees, the additional support is given in classrooms.

Mrs Long: I am aware of it, but not in any detail.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we maybe move to Jacqueline? You have responsibility for funding for this. I am sure you try very hard to get the maximum amount of funding; this is my area, so I will give any support I can. Can you tell me about the funding arrangements last year, before the changes, and the funding arrangements now? I believe that you could put in for funding last year, even for 457 students, under various commonwealth programs. What additional funding did you seek from the commonwealth government prior to January 2009 for students on 457 visas?

Ms Reid: I do not think we did, actually. We get a recurrent sum of about \$145.6 million a year, which is not really capped. That amount goes to provide resources. In Western Australia, about

three per cent of our students have disabilities, and Schools Plus funding goes towards funding 3.2 per cent of the student population.

The CHAIRMAN: Do the figures you have given me relate to the nearest district, or is it —

Ms Reid: No, this is the total amount of funding that is available for Schools Plus resourcing for the entire state.

Mr P. ABETZ: Schools Plus is the disability funding?

Ms Reid: That is right. I will start with that. Schools Plus funding is a resource that is provided to support students who have disabilities from eight particular categories. Is the committee aware of those categories?

Mr P. ABETZ: I am, but perhaps we could go through them.

Ms Reid: The categories are global development delay; intellectual disability; autism; visual impairment; deaf and hard of hearing; severe mental disorder; physical disability; and severe medical and health conditions. In order to access that, students on a 457 visa have exactly the same rights of access. There is no discrimination, but if they have a diagnosis of a disability under one or more of those categories and their teachers determine that they need support to make teaching and learning adjustments for those students to be able to access the curriculum—the teaching and learning adjustments are not based on their ESL difficulties; they are based on the disability that the child presents with—then they have full right of access Schools Plus funding. They can also enrol in the education support centre. Is the committee familiar with the centres? They are like special schools on the site of mainstream schools, primary or secondary. They can also enrol in education support schools. Really there is no differentiation of 457 visa students.

The CHAIRMAN: Moira, to whom are the assessments submitted to, and how are they submitted? Could you explain that process?

Mrs Long: We assess each child as they come into the school, and should they fall into a category where they can go to the intensive English centre, we will pass that information on to the intensive English centre, and it will accommodate the child. At some point—it is up to the parents when—on advice from the intensive English centre, they will come back into our schools, having had some intensive English.

The CHAIRMAN: How do you notify Jacqueline and Neil, in relation to the three schools and the students that you assess, of the needs of those students so that they are able to look at that? Are you full time between the three schools?

Mrs Long: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: How many students?

Mrs Long: I do not know the total number in each school, but I can give you the number of ESL kids.

The CHAIRMAN: Could you provide us by way of supplementary information the statistics of your workload for both children with 457 visas and children with ESL?

Mr P. ABETZ: I am wondering whether there is some confusion happening here; I am not clear in my own mind about whether you are actually talking now about disability or if we have gone back to ESL. There are two issues.

The CHAIRMAN: I am going to move on to disability funding as a separate issue.

Mr P. ABETZ: No, that is fine; as long as we are still talking purely about ESL. I thought we were talking with Jacqueline about disability funding, were we not?

Ms Reid: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: That is why I came back to Moira to finish off ESL before we moved on.

Mr P. ABETZ: Okay, right; as long as we are clear on what we are talking about.

Mrs Long: May I add something? We also get stuck when we have students with learning disabilities, but they are not sufficiently clearly diagnosed as to go into Jacqueline's system. We have children, for example, who need to go to a language development centre, and they are not funded.

Ms Reid: No, they are funded. Students with 457 visas can go to language development centres.

Ms Tarr: Jacqui found that out today.

Mrs Long: I was going to say, we answered that question yesterday!

The CHAIRMAN: So yesterday they could not go to those centres, but today they can!

Ms Reid: I think yesterday you spoke to one person, but I thought it did not seem right, so I had it clarified again, and 457 students are eligible to enrol in language development centres. They only take students who do not have an intellectual disability and who are younger than a year 1 age level and also have very complex receptive and expressive language difficulties. English as a Second Language may not come under that.

The CHAIRMAN: The language centre is available for students up to year 1?

Ms Reid: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Moira, could you also provide statistics on how many students up to year 1 over the past two years would have been eligible from the assessments you have undertaken, to go to those language development centres, and how many children actually attended those language development centres?

Then just to finish off with Moira about assessments, because Moira does the assessments and determines which level the child is at, be it level 1, level 2 or level 3. Is that information then prepared as a summary that you submit to somebody?

[3.50 pm]

Mrs Long: I prepare it as a summary for my school and my cell, and if anybody requests it, then they can use that information. We use it for our ongoing assessments so that we can report on the students.

The CHAIRMAN: I am interested in how that is used to give you access to the appropriate funding, and maybe give an extra 0.5. You seem to have a very large number of students who are in need.

Mrs Long: I do.

The CHAIRMAN: How are those statistics used to allocated your FTE equivalent positions?

Mrs Long: We use the new ESL progress maps to decide whether the children are stage 1 or stage 2, or whether they need to go to the IEC. All that information comes from our census, which is done twice a year. That is the data that is the most useful for us to ask for additional funding.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we have the data for your cluster dating back for the last five years, since it is taken twice a year and the statistics are already there? In addition to that, could we also have the number of full-time equivalent positions that have been available to give support to those students over the last five years, just to see how the two interrelate?

Mrs Long: I can provide that information for our Applecross cluster.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr Darby: May I add to that answer?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr Darby: In terms of the data and its aggregation, once the cells have put their data together, then the child enrolls. If they are of an eligible visa category—457s are not—then they can enter an IEC within their first six months of entry into Australia. That is only for compulsory age children; obviously 457s can only take up spare capacity.

In terms of the cell data, Moira would work with her schools and keep the data at the cell level, and then determine deployment of staff in conjunction with the principals. That data is also passed on to a coordinator, based in the district office, who reports to the director, who then looks at the data across the entire district and makes application, argument and advocacy to the centre for further resources. As a consequence of that, just recently we have had additional ESL VT—visiting teachers—and staff appointed to some cells in our area, between the Kwinana, Riverton and Langford areas.

The CHAIRMAN: Neil, in relation to the appointment of ESL staff, is there a work code formula for each category that the ESL teachers are putting in to you? How do you cope with the workload that might be like this at one school and like this at another school? How is the formula worked out?

Mr Darby: I will pass to Natalie to answer that one in a second. It is a moving feast in one respect. When the Northern Hemisphere schools shut down in the middle of the year, we tend to get some large enrolments coming through from English, South Asian and European schools, and then there is also the intake at the start of the year. The formula then has to be adjusted to meet those needs, and Natalie's team works with our district office to negotiate staffing. I will pass over to Natalie to talk about the specific formula.

Ms Tarr: We actually have over 100 ESL programs across the metropolitan area, either intensive English centres, ESL cell programs, which are based across one, two or three schools, or ESL support programs which involve one or two teachers, depending on the need, being appointed either in a primary school or a secondary school to support the students at that site. Basically the ratio has been 1:30—one FTE to 30 eligible ESL students—but as I said earlier, we are having an ESL review. We are very aware that some schools may not have enough FTEs to cater for the ESL needs of the students, particularly as we had a significant number of humanitarian entrants arrive a few years ago; they require more intensive English support. Initially our intensive English centres were just for one year, and then children go to mainstream, but because the humanitarian entrants were from limited schooling backgrounds, they stayed for two years and a lot of places were taken up because the students were remaining there for two years.

Mr P. ABETZ: What sort of family support is available for humanitarian entrants, such as refugees who have come from perhaps Sudan and have come from a totally different cultural situation and have never seen a flushing toilet and all that sort of thing? It is probably not a Department of Education and Training responsibility, but I am curious to know who picks that up. Is that picked up in the school setting? Can you enlighten us on that?

Ms Tarr: There is a scheme called IHSS provided by the Department of Immigration, and its workers support newly arrived humanitarian entrants for six months. Then they move to the settlement grants program—SPG—and it picks up the families for an additional year or two after that.

Mr P. ABETZ: So they are generally looked after reasonably well?

Ms Tarr: They have caseworkers that are overloaded. The families that are coming in, particularly those that have come from African backgrounds, have had significant health issues, and they have been very large families of up to 10. There are complex issues around that. In two of our intensive English centres we have an integrated services centre, which was an Office of Multicultural Interests initiative through DIaC, and basically we have counsellors, mental health workers, nurses, and multicultural community-based liaison officers based at two IEC sites to support these families. There are a lot of agencies and a lot of collaboration between agencies.

Ms Reid: There is another agency called ASeTTTS, which offers a lot of support for individuals and families who require trauma counselling and that sort of thing.

The CHAIRMAN: How many ESL teachers did you say you have for your district?

Mr Darby: I do not know offhand. Can I take that question on notice?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes. The minister has provided me with the number of students at each school, but I do not have the number of ESL teachers, and it would be nice to compare the figures. I can compare clusters today, but if you could provide the number of ESL teachers for each district, that would be wonderful. Returning to the subject of support, Moira, are the parents within your cluster seeking additional private language support outside; and, which not-for-profit organisations are based in the area? We know you do not have enough time, so if parents realise that additional support is needed, who can you refer them off to?

Mrs Long: I refer them to the private sector, and they go off to Kumon and private tutoring et cetera if they feel they are not getting enough help.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any not-for-profit organisations they can be referred to?

Mrs Long: Not that I am aware of.

Ms Tarr: Some of the agencies such as Centrecare, the Migrant Resource Centre and the Gowrie Centre run after-school English classes. I know that the Office of Multicultural Interests is doing a scan of students for whom English is a second language in secondary schools at the moment, to establish homework classes after school in the Cannington area.

Mr P. ABETZ: I am also aware of retired school teachers who are helping some of the South African kids, who are reasonable at English but who feel they want to improve, on a voluntary basis.

[4.00 pm]

Mrs Long: On the school volunteer program—if there are enough school volunteers around you could ask somebody else.

The CHAIRMAN: Moira, do you have any knowledge of what the fees are at the Kumon centre?

Mrs Long: No. I do not imagine it is cheap, but in our sort of area that is not always an issue for the parents. However, of course the issue may be that they may say that they should not have to go.

Mr France: I was just going to add that a complexity that we sometimes find when we deal with some of these parents in that there is sometimes a stigma in them actually accessing the LDCs or IECs, and so despite the best advice, they choose not to send their children there and leave them in mainstream. That is a significant issue for us, particularly with parents of children from South East Asia.

Mrs Long: It is a new issue that has come up; that is, they want their children to be whatever they deem to be normal, mainstream.

The CHAIRMAN: So, they do not want to accept that they need additional assistance?

Mrs Long: Yes. They tend to not mind it quietly, but they do not want it publicly; they do not want too much noise made about the fact that they are ESL, but they do realise that their children need the help and the benefit that that help gets. Yes, that has happened a few times.

Mr P. ABETZ: I have a more general question about the place of ESL and the issues of ESL within the department of education as a whole. Would it be fair to say that ESL tends to be a poor cousin in the overall structure of the department? The person who is in charge of ESL, the highest person in the department—what sort of level are they actually on in terms of what sort of clout they have in terms of the administrative—when it comes to framing budgets and things like that? Am I making myself clear? Is it a level 7 position or a level 10 or what is it?

The CHAIRMAN: I think he is asking why is it so underfunded.

Ms Tarr: It is a level 7 position and there is also a level 6 in central office. However, as a level 7, I have a direct open line to my manager, Pat Kiddey, and also to the director, who I speak to on a daily basis about ESL issues—that is, Juanita Healy. I know that she speaks to Andrew Thompson, and also David Axworthy, who is at the top there.

Mr P. ABETZ: Natalie, you are the highest person in the education department dealing with ESL, is that right?

Ms Tarr: I am at the moment.

Mr P. ABETZ: Okay, fair enough, I was not aware of that. I will frame my question a little differently, sorry about that. Basically, do you feel that you get sufficient ear of the powers that be above you to put the case for ESL and do you feel you are being heard sufficiently?

Ms Tarr: Definitely. I have only been in the role for six months but I was in central office five years before that. I believe that we are being very supported in primary programs under the management team, the leadership team, that we have. I know that in the past six months that I have been in the role, when I have highlighted, particularly to Juanita Healy, what the issues are, I have been listened to and I have basically been told, “Okay then, what needs to be done? Let’s go and do it.”

Mr P. ABETZ: In the broad picture, if we were to cater for the 457 visa kids who are currently not eligible and if a policy decision were made by government that 457 kids are entitled to ESL, how many extra million dollars would you need a year—just a ballpark figure?

Ms Tarr: I could not probably pluck that figure from my head. However, I think probably in the submission that Janet is reading we have said maybe an additional \$4 million minimum a year. Our intensive English centres have a minimum of 100 students, about 12 teachers, plus education assistants, and a deputy. They are expensive programs to run. As Moira said, if an intensive English centre is not what parents want for the 457s, then we would have to look at other models, and that is also what we are covering in the ESL review by scoping other states to see what is best practice across Australia.

Mr P. ABETZ: When should that review be ready do you think?

Ms Tarr: I am hoping in the next two months so recommendations can be implemented for 2010.

Mr P. ABETZ: Thank you.

Mr Darby: If I may answer, schools are certainly looking for relief. The place of ESL within the directorates within the Department of Education and Training historically go back to ESL being a curriculum issue. How do you address the curriculum needs that will take us right through to kids in secondary school? Therefore, the notion is that it has been placed in curriculum to address the needs of kids as a learning medium, but the changing face of ESL provision has come about with the change in the visa status of 457.

The CHAIRMAN: Getting back to the basics again with you, Moira, with this biannual report that you do, are the students assessed biannually?

Mrs Long: They are because —

The CHAIRMAN: Each student is assessed biannually?

Mrs Long: Yes, because we report on them per semester.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that both the ESL students and the 457 students?

Mrs Long: It is all the ESL students that we are funded for, and it depends how much we see the 457s and have managed to fit them into our system whether we can make a judgement on them to report; if not, they are reported on by their mainstream teachers.

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, Barry, can I come back to you. How do the mainstream teachers know, unless the students are coming in not speaking English, how many 457 students they have in a classroom?

Mr France: I suppose it would appear on the enrolment details that the teacher receives for the student. Some teachers probably are not aware of some of the 457 students in their class because they do not have an English issue; they are native speakers. Clearly, they very quickly become aware of those who are not native English speakers or whose first language is not English because of the difficulties they have in understanding the instructions. We also have a process that we have developed within the school where Moira is notified very quickly upon these students' arrival and makes contact with the class teachers more or less as these children arrive in the class.

Mrs Long: Janet, it works a lot better if you have an effective ESL teacher on the site who can do all that communication, otherwise nobody is going to be looking at who has what visa. But they do immediately notice it when they are reporting and at national times such as NAPLAN testing.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure that I agree with you then. In fact, looking at the numbers, particularly just at Applecross Primary, if means-based fees were sought in WA, the same as they are sought in other states, I think you would be full time simply at Applecross Primary School, and it maybe would not take seven years for those children to be assimilated into the classroom, the playground and the social structure in which those children have to engage.

Ms Tarr: Excuse me, Janet; can I just add that the seven years Moira is talking about is for basic interpersonal communication skills. All of the research that is worldwide says it takes five to seven years to access a first language, and to be cognitively academic and proficient takes seven to 12 years. Therefore, it depends on many, many factors—the willingness of the students, how strong the first language of the student is, how settled they are into the country, what support they are getting, how willing they are as learners, and whether they have any other disabilities or issues as well. There are many factors.

The CHAIRMAN: I accept what you are saying that for some children it could take much longer for them to be fully integrated within the system, but I certainly think that the support that is given in some other states, that intensive support for so many years, must surely help those children.

Mrs Long: When children get to a point where they can be released into the mainstream, we do not hold them for seven years—they just go. If you are a Peter—go! As long as we are convinced that you are being educated fully, can take that education on board and perform to your maximum, not just an average. I think that is what we have to be convinced of.

The CHAIRMAN: Moira, I know you are going to provide us with the statistics over the past years. In fact, since I have had this information back from the minister—I have a list in my database of who has called me on this issue—the statistics that I have been given are different from the statistics that have been provided by the department; the figures that I have been given by some of my schools are much higher. I am particularly interested in both 457 and ESL within your cluster schools. Can you give me those figures? Also, Barry, can you check with your teaching staff and provide those figures to me, because the figures in this report are different from what P&C groups have given me.

[4.10 pm]

Mr Darby: Can I clarify? Are they public schools only?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes, which is why I am asking. I have the numbers school by school and district by district. I am sure that whatever formula the department uses for ESL teachers is the same formula that is used in other schools or in other districts. When we look at what is happening in the other states, we can then recommend to the minister which formula from which state may be more appropriate.

Mr Darby: Sure.

The CHAIRMAN: That is, whether we should be charging fees or whether we should have more intensive support programs for ESL students, like the Victorian model. We hope that the minister will conduct a thorough inquiry, but we are hoping to give her some pointers. We will be presenting a brief report to Parliament. Bearing in mind that it will be a brief report, and we have not discussed children with intellectual disabilities, we asked the department if you could to bring someone along with responsibility at a school level for writing those applications—actually, we asked Sharon O’Neil, and we did not ask you!

Mr Darby: There are several hats here; Barry has two and also Jacquie.

Ms Reid: That is, in a sense, another issue. Schools Plus is under review at the moment. The formulation and preparation of School Plus documentation for resourcing—I do not know, is it separate to this?

Mr Darby: Would it help if I explained the current process?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes. Maybe, though we might have Barry explain it from a school base perspective, and then you can explain what happens when it gets to the department from the school base.

Mr France: When a new child comes to the school, they either have a diagnosis or they do not. Often we find kids who come to the school who do not have a diagnosis. The process of gaining that diagnosis can be convoluted and long. Once they have a diagnosis, we sit down—usually with the school psychologist, our learning support coordinator, very often with me and sometimes with the parents—and we make a judgement on their level of functionality across a number of categories.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that diagnosis a state diagnosis or a national diagnosis?

Mr France: It is a state diagnosis.

The CHAIRMAN: Does it vary across the states?

Mr P. ABETZ: Who makes the diagnosis?

Ms Reid: It depends on the category. If it is an intellectual disability, it is usually the school psychologist or a psychologist from the Disability Services Commission. If it is autism, it is usually a panel decision or through the child development centre. It is unusual for the department to accept a diagnosis on autism based on the hearsay of one person.

The CHAIRMAN: If a child comes to WA —

Ms Reid: It depends which country they come from.

The CHAIRMAN: If they come to WA from Queensland or Victoria where they have received additional funding for a diagnosis, are they automatically funded in WA?

Ms Reid: No. If the diagnosis meets one of the eight criteria, then yes. But it may be, for example, that Queensland might fund foetal alcohol syndrome; but at the moment that is not one of the categories for funding in Western Australia. They may get resourcing in Queensland, but they may not get it here. If a child with foetal alcohol syndrome comes with an intellectual disability as well, then they would qualify for funding because of the intellectual disability. Depending on where they come from around the world, we accept diagnoses from the USA, Canada, New Zealand and the UK, and generally Europe., but we have had reports from some parts of Europe or some African countries that do not appear to be valid diagnoses.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you say that you accept diagnoses from other countries but not from other states?

Ms Reid: No. I will go back to what I was saying. If there was a diagnosis, say, for an intellectual disability in Queensland that will be the same as what we have in Western Australia and we accept

that; and because intellectual disability is one of our eight categories, then we provide funding. However, just because a child in Queensland had a diagnosis of foetal alcohol syndrome and that child received funding in Queensland, does not mean that they will get funding if they came to WA because foetal alcohol syndrome, at this point in time, is not one of our eight categories.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you tell me what are the eight categories? In fact, you could provide those by way of supplementary information.

Ms Reid: Do you want me to read them out again?

Mr P. ABETZ: Ms Reid has read them out before.

The CHAIRMAN: Peter would like them read out.

Mr P. ABETZ: No, I am happy.

Ms Reid: What happens after Barry has done his documentation —

Mr France: There is a bit more to it than that.

The CHAIRMAN: Maybe we will go back to Barry.

Mr France: I will pick up on the point that you were making: do we accept diagnoses from other states? Sometimes we do, and sometimes we do not. If it is autism, for example, there is a very comprehensive process of approval in Western Australia. For example, the child needs to be assessed and basically we need to tick three boxes: a paediatrician, a speech pathologist and a psychologist. Then that diagnosis is more or less a world-class standard. I understand that may not be the case in all other states.

The CHAIRMAN: Let us say that a child with autism came from another state and did not have the three boxes ticked, how long would it take before that child was able to get the three boxes ticked?

Mr France: There are two answers to that. We could make an interim application to schools and get some provisional support. It may not be the final determination because we would need to have the diagnosis and the level of functionality determined. Then, if parents had to embark on that process of complete diagnosis, it will depend on whether they go public or private.

The CHAIRMAN: That is right because the public waiting list is 12 to 18 months. That would mean an autistic child coming to WA could wait 12 months for the assessment and during that they would not get—

Ms Reid: They would get interim funding. They might get 0.2 day a week.

Mr France: A day a week.

The CHAIRMAN: It is 0.2 day a week, but what would it be after the assessment?

Mr France: It could be up to 0.6 or 0.8 something like that.

The CHAIRMAN: They could be getting one day of support. They could be missing out on 0.6 support?

Ms Reid: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: For possibly two years that child with an intellectual disability could be missing out on three days a week support in the classroom and school?

Mr P. ABETZ: It is more to the point that the teacher is missing out on the support. That is where it really tells in the school.

Ms Reid: Other funding support is available to schools. Schools Plus is not the only support that is available. Support is provided through school support program resource allocation funding, visiting teacher services and other support that is available. It is really important to say, as you are aware, that a review is under way of Schools Plus, which has been in place since 2006. We are currently reviewing the process. We have had complaints from schools about the workload issues and the

categories. At the moment we are having a full review, getting feedback from stakeholders. Neil is chairing one of our working parties and looking at simplifying the processes for schools.

It is difficult, because when Schools Plus—I am sorry to go on about Schools Plus—came into being it was based on lots of good international research and on models from around Australia. It is based, I suppose, not only on diagnoses, but also on the support that teachers and schools will need to help that child access the curriculum. The intent was always the outcomes for the students.

I suppose what we are finding—quite rightly—is that it is time for a review and it is time to get feedback from schools, and we are trying to accommodate that. As I was saying before, there has been pressure on us to provide support for foetal alcohol syndrome, for dyslexia and for a number of other areas that we do not currently fund for.

[4.20 pm]

The CHAIRMAN: Barry, as the only, I guess, hands-on person here at the moment, how many children with an intellectual or physical disability do you have at Applecross Primary School? When you provide me with that number, can you tell me also how many of those children are receiving support and how many are not receiving support? Can you also give me a bit of an explanation about how long it takes to get that support from the time the child arrives and you put in the application? Jacqueline has told us that because of the waiting lists in this state, it may take 18 months before you are given additional support for a child from another state who is autistic and who had been receiving support in that state. For how long do you have to wait before that funding comes through?

Ms Reid: As we have said, there is interim funding.

Mr France: Under the current process, we can be given interim support of one day a week. I am not quoting policy here. This is from my experience at my school. We can determine very quickly what the child's level of need is, and we can get an increase in that interim allocation. I think that is the case with one or two of our kids at the moment. We then hope to get a more accurate picture of the child's complete needs once we get the full diagnosis and once we get to know the child. Sometimes it takes time for us to understand the relative needs of the child and to complete the comprehensive set of documents that we need to complete to articulate clearly what the school needs that extra time for. So it is a combination; we do get an interim allocation, but we then need some time as well to gather the data to support the claim.

The CHAIRMAN: You did not tell us how many students you have, so we will come back to that. Once the data has been gathered, and once you have assessed the child in the classroom, and perhaps also in the playground, to see what support the child does require, what would be the minimum period before the funding comes through from the department, and what would be the maximum?

Mr France: Once the report has been received, generally there is a turnaround of one week or two weeks, at the outside. Sometimes it is even less than one week. I understand that the Schools Plus panel reviews the cases almost on a daily basis, so the turnaround time is actually very good. It is getting the information together that takes the school a while. Sometimes it takes time for the parents, too, because not all parents are providing us with the information and documentation that we need to substantiate the case that we are putting forward.

The CHAIRMAN: It sounds as though that documentation is quite time consuming. Who gathers all that information? Is that just another role that is put onto the classroom teacher, or is there someone within the school who has responsibility for the applications?

Mr Darby: The provision of resources to support Schools Plus has been through student services-disabilities, and through district support. There are visiting teachers based in district offices, plus the psychologists. They are allocated to schools. There is also an allocation of a learning support coordinator, who is usually a teacher from the school, and those officers are allocated time,

depending on the size of the school—I think it is about three days a week, maximum—to assist with Schools Plus applications. The learning support coordinator, plus the school psychologist, work with the classroom teacher, or teachers, and the principal, in drawing together the application process. Most of the concerns come to me. On the day that we met with the minister —

The CHAIRMAN: That is right. I was just thinking back to that visit. I remember that we saw a child on that day who did not meet one of the specified diagnoses, but who was unable to feed itself and was unable to visit the toilet by itself. The child had a huge range of disabilities.

Mr France: Was that at Applecross?

The CHAIRMAN: It was at Applecross. It was when I came on the visit with the minister in November. There was a child who had very —

Mr France: I think that must be our CHARGE child. Fortunately, we have been given a full-time educational interpreter for that particular child.

The CHAIRMAN: How long did it take before you got that person?

Mr France: Fortunately, we were granted 0.9 of an interpreter for that child as an interim arrangement, and once all the paperwork had been completed, it was up to full time.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have an LS coordinator and a psychologist at Applecross Primary?

Mr France: We have a learning support coordinator at our school, and thanks to the department we actually have an above-formula allocation, so we have 0.3 of a learning support coordinator. We also have access to a school psychologist for the equivalent of one day a week.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the number of students at your school with an intellectual or physical disability?

Mr France: I have one child with an intellectual disability, eight children with autism spectrum disorders, two children with cerebral palsy, one child with CHARGE, and six children with medical issues. I currently have two other children who are working their way through the diagnosis process. They have had two of the boxes ticked, and we are waiting on the third one to occur. So we are putting together their interim applications now for some educational assistant time.

The CHAIRMAN: On the review that you are doing, Neil, can you tell us some of the problems again, because we are often hearing about the lack of support for these children. Are you hoping to come up with a new formula or new model?

Mr Darby: It is a model supported by a formula. In the review—as it was when you visited with the minister at Applecross—it is about looking at workload and provision for students, and also at meeting community needs. We have looked at other state models in Australia. In terms of the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders, in New South Wales, for example—this is the difference between the states—GPs can make a diagnosis. That is linked to a significant blow-out in funding for NSW, because the GPs are feeling under pressure to make a diagnosis. Hence the diagnosis procedure and protocol in Western Australia is considered best practice. We hear that term a lot. There are three filters before a decision is made, and that is then supported by a school psychologist. There are issues about timing. That is something that we cannot fully manage, but what we can look at is a model that will support schools. Also, in terms of the data that has to be collected by the schools, what we are looking at is a checklist approach, and that will hopefully reduce the time and the requirements on staff. It will also build in rigour. The process at the moment is very rigorous, and it takes a substantial amount of time. So we are marrying through our modelling and profiling to see how we can assist schools to provide the best and most effective way of meeting both the child's needs and the school's needs, and then how we can service the school as soon as possible.

The CHAIRMAN: At the moment, how many weeks could it take for a child to get assistance?

Mr France: It is a case-by-case situation. The longest it has taken us at Applecross was nearly six months. That was for the CHARGE child, but we had an interim allocation of 0.9, so we did not have to rush.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure a checklist would be very welcome!

[4.30 pm]

Mr France: It was a huge application, and it needed a lot of supporting evidence.

For a regular autistic application, it may take us—we are getting very quick at it now—just two or three weeks to put the documentation together and, once we have got it all, to submit it.

The CHAIRMAN: I am aware of parents who have, with the school, supported the fact that their children need assistance. In this case, the school comes under your cluster, and I will not identify it, but you probably know of it. We are not going to put this case on the record, but the department has, basically, said no and the parents are now taking action under disability discrimination law—

Ms Reid: I know the case.

The CHAIRMAN: —because their child is in need of assistance but does not meet a diagnosis to get funding.

Ms Reid: In that particular case, extra education support time was provided, albeit not from Schools Plus funding but from other funding within the department—if that is the one that you are referring to. I think it is important to know that Schools Plus provides education assistant time, but that all the research says that that is not the answer; the answer is quality teaching. Schools Plus is just one resource factor. I think that we have to continue building the capacity of teachers and supporting them, and we do that also via the visiting teacher service and school psychs. The ethos of the school is really important. Really, it is a whole package, of which Schools Plus is a part, but I think that we have to provide a whole system package to schools to support and help —

The CHAIRMAN: When you refer to supporting teachers, if the department—I can only talk about my own preference; I am not sure what recommendations the committee may make—decided to in fact collect these funds on a means-tested basis, we would have, between the primary schools and the secondary schools, an additional 100 to 200 teachers coming on board and that would, given you are saying it relies on the teacher, make a big difference in our schools.

Ms Reid: It would for 457; definitely, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: That would just be for 457 students.

Ms Reid: Yes; definitely.

Mr P. ABETZ: In terms of the independent and Catholic schools, to what extent can they tap into the Schools Plus program?

Ms Reid: They cannot at all. It is for public schools only. They have their own funding systems.

Mr P. ABETZ: Yes. I was given to understand, after Thornlie Christian College in my electorate approached me late last year about some issues relating to this and I did a bit of homework, that the government seems to release a block amount of money to AISWA —

Ms Reid: Independent schools.

Mr P. ABETZ: Yes, independent schools have a bucket of money and its use depends on the needs that present. That can lead to a situation in which a child in a school may be entitled to, say, 0.9 assistance or even a full-time teacher's assistant, but the school is able to access only \$2 000 or \$3 000. I have had a school principal tell me—albeit he did not say this to the parents—that because the school would need to employ a full-time person, the school really would be better off giving the parents \$20 000 a year to keep their child out of the school. The school would be better off, which is

a crazy kind of situation to be in. Obviously, this is not the forum in which to raise this matter because it is not related to —

Ms Reid: The commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act gives the child the right to access and to have the same choices and the same experiences as able-bodied or as any other student. That act gives them the right to enrol in their local school. Independent schools have the ability to turn children away. Therefore, we have the majority, the biggest number, of students with disabilities and the biggest number of students with severe disabilities in our system. I suppose that is perhaps why the funding comes to us. We also have a lot of students who come back from the private system to the public system because of that.

Mr P. ABETZ: Sometimes I think that the independent schools would be more than happy to have the students, because the other children and the school are very supportive family-wise. However, the financial pressures make it untenable. However, that needs to be raised in a different forum.

The CHAIRMAN: I will ask you in a moment if there is anything that you wish to say in summing up, but given the statistics that you have provided the committee, I will ask: Neil, could you provide—I cannot remember the name of the centres!

Mrs Long: IEC—the intensive English centres.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes. Could you also provide details about the number of IE centres, the staffing levels and the number of students who attend those centres—again by district level? I believe Moira has responsibility in her area for ESL in primary schools, but I wonder whether Neil, who is responsible for both primary and secondary schools, could tell us whether the difficulties and problems in high schools are similar or are there additional complications for ESL students. I guess I want to hear about the ESL and 457-student needs, and if there is any difference in relation to the needs of children with intellectual or physical disabilities in high schools. We have very much covered primary schools and should now look at high schools.

Mr Darby: Certainly. Students in the compulsory years—through to year 12 now—have the same provision; that is, they can attend an IEC for three years. If they are in the limited schooling class, in other words a refugee, they can have four years of ESL support. In the secondary setting, there are IE—intensive English—centres in our district. Melville Senior High School has just over 100 students attending who fit the limited schooling category. They attend Melville senior high and go back to their home school when they have moved into stage 3. The issues in secondary schooling that I have seen present on the ground include students who come from southern Asia in year 11 who need to access calculators or whatever for calculus and physics, in Mandarin. A lot of localised support is provided for the students by the school, which is becoming very adept at doing that. The Chung Wah Association provides support as well. There is also support from IEC teachers and VTs.

In the secondary setting, adolescence comes into play of course. That brings some positive outcomes in that the children attending the Melville IEC tend to form bonds and relationships which help with their networking when they move on to their home school. Does that answer your question in general?

The CHAIRMAN: Yes; I am thinking about what Moira said before about it taking up to seven years before a student is fully integrated. What is happening to those students who arrive in years 9 and 10 who are not fully integrated? What happens?

Mr Darby: If I may, I will give an anecdotal piece of feedback. When we analysed data at the two-year level and wholly-school-assessed results, literacy certainly does affect results; however, as a generalisation, some of these students perform very well in the numeracy scales. The assistance given by our ESL teachers to these students, certainly through immersion support and also external support through other associations, is remarkable, as is how quickly these students improve. The “but” is that in terms of English, some students have difficulty in the TEE. Consequently, in senior schooling, from year 10 onwards, revision seminars are provided at school level, individual tutoring

in some cases or small group tutoring is provided at school level, and regular monitoring of student performance is completed by the student services teams in those schools. The latter is not only for the ESL kids, but for all students. But certainly, there is tracking, monitoring and support.

The CHAIRMAN: I am very hopeful—with the support you have given us today in answering our questions—that we have enough information now to put together our review. I may just ask each of you to give a final summary. There may be areas that you feel that we have missed as part of our discussions; perhaps someone else has been talking and you have wanted to join in but have not had the opportunity because we have been talking too much.

Maybe we could go around and each person could give a summary and add any particular points. Natalie, would you like to go first.

[4.40 pm]

Ms Tarr: I feel that we have covered and outlined the components of our ESL programs and the support that we have had to date. My key point is we, as a department, do understand the increasing needs of ESL students, particularly 457s, and the increasing pressure placed on classroom teachers. It is timely that we are having an ESL review. We certainly aim to address those issues. It is a very comprehensive review.

The CHAIRMAN: For next year's budget?

Ms Tarr: For next year, yes.

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure you said that earlier. Barry.

Mr France: I think we have covered the issues comprehensively. I am more or less repeating what Natalie has said. It is clear that we have a rapid intake of 457 students particularly, and we are seeing lots of those students being introduced into mainstream school. The review will be timely and hopefully we will catch up with the needs that schools are currently experiencing. Similarly, with the Schools Plus review, I am very hopeful that that will create some new resourcing opportunities for schools and allow schools' needs to be better met.

Mr Darby: There is a new landscape in front of us in relation to Treasury taking COAG funding and the negotiations required at state and department level. Schools are looking for relief for kids who are in the 457 category of families. Children in those circumstances, from K through to 12—obviously we are talking about compulsory education in terms of ESL provision—schools are looking for relief. The system is supportive of that relief and would appreciate the support. Personally, and on behalf of the department, I appreciate the agenda that this committee is putting forward.

In terms of Schools Plus in disabilities, Jacqui is the senior officer in that area. The review in this area is timely. It is about supporting the schools but, just as important, it is about supporting the families in Western Australia who require this level of care and support. Thank you.

Ms Reid: Am I allowed to say all of the above! Just to reiterate the purpose of this meeting: that the 457 students are supported by Schools Plus but obviously they have to currently meet one of the eight categories. I think, as both Barry and Neil have said, the review will further take up a lot of the points that you are saying, Janet. I know a lot of people, especially parents, can get very frustrated when they feel that there is a system that is supposed to be there to support them and their child and they feel that it is not. I am hoping that via the working party we come up with a system that reduces workload and enables schools to access the funds a lot quicker than they can at the moment. That might be another standing committee meeting! I will come along.

Mrs Long: In summary, there has been a rapid and very noticeable rise in 457 numbers. It is affecting the families in the schools and, from my point of view, the teachers tremendously. I cannot spread myself that widely. I am delighted that somebody is thinking about giving us some

support, especially in staffing—not just resources, but staffing, through more teachers to teach the children, and then they will be more successful.

Mr P. ABETZ: With the change in cohort of the year 7s going through and some of the staffing displacement issues that surround that, would that create an opportunity for some of those displaced teachers to perhaps help out in ESL; or is that not the right skill necessarily?

Ms Tarr: ESL is a specialist area. It is about quality teaching. I know that through the national partnerships we are looking at upskilling mainstream teachers because all teachers should be teachers of literacy across all classrooms.

Mrs Long: It may be a potential pot, if they are upskilled correctly.

The CHAIRMAN: In that case I would like to thank each of you for coming along today. I very much hope that we are able to complete our brief review ready for when Parliament resumes in two weeks' time. I know some of you already had the questions. Natalie, you had the questions and the minister's responses with you today but they were not provided to the other members. We will wait for your transcripts to come back and then, when we prepare the review, we will give you a copy of the review.

I would like to thank you all for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added by these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. However, we have asked for some supplementary information. If you also wish to provide, in addition to that, some additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript.

Hearing concluded at 4.45 pm