

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

NEW CLOSING THE GAP TARGETS



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
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SESSION TWO

Members

**Ms J.M. Freeman (Chair)
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup (Deputy Chair)
Mr Ian Blayney
Ms J. Farrer
Ms S.E. Winton**

Hearing commenced at 11.07 am**Mr JIM BELL****Executive Director, Strategy and Policy, Department of Education, examined:****Mr KEVIN ANDREW O'KEEFE****Principal Adviser, Department of Education, examined:**

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for attending today. As you would appreciate, we are coming to the end of a four-year parliamentary term, but we do not want to end this committee period without having some discussion about the Closing the Gap targets. Obviously, we have not had much opportunity, because they have come out recently, to do any sort of inquiry into it, but we wanted to have an open hearing for this information to come onto *Hansard* and, hopefully, instruct people in terms of the implementation and the consideration of the new Closing the Gap targets.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to discuss the new Closing the Gap targets. My name is Janine Freeman. I am the Chair of the Education and Health Standing Committee. I am going to introduce you to the other members of the committee. On my left is Ms Sabine Winton, who is the member for Wanneroo. On my right is Ms Josie Farrer, the member for Kimberley. On her right is Mr Ian Blayney, who is the member for Geraldton. Mr Zak Kirkup, who is the Deputy Chair, unfortunately had to leave, so he sends his apologies.

It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege; however, this privilege does not apply to anything you might say outside of today's proceedings. Also, we have Jovita Hogan, who is our research officer, and Hansard is here. Before we begin, do you have any questions about your attendance here today?

Mr J. Bell: I do not have any in particular.

Mr K. O'Keefe: No.

The CHAIR: Great.

[11.10 am]

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Could I just ask: you are the principal adviser to whom?

Mr K. O'Keefe: That is a very good question. My position has changed somewhat since my appointment. I originally was a principal adviser in the Aboriginal education directorate, which meant I was an adviser to all schools about the way in which they were implementing particular initiatives for Aboriginal students. Since then, the director general has invited me to join the corporate executive, so I am also an adviser to the corporate executive in matters to do with Aboriginal education.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: Thanks for that.

The CHAIR: Would you like to make a brief opening statement or shall we just head into questions?

Mr K. O'Keefe: I think we are happy to head straight into questions.

The CHAIR: That is a pretty strong responsibility that you have now been given in terms of being on the corp executive. I can imagine sometimes the capacity to be able to tell people who are at different levels in the department— but you have got that experience and that background. You have been involved in Aboriginal education for many years. Do you want to just give us an outline

of your experience and why that experience is so valuable to the Department of Education and how that is now instructive in your new role?

Mr K. O'Keefe: I started as a secondary teacher. I have been a head of department of English, have been a deputy principal and a principal of a senior high school. I have also been a principal of a district high school in Kellerberrin. I was also a principal of the western desert school at Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, which is a K–12 multi-campus school, for four years. In fact, I retired firstly in 2007 after seven years as an executive director with responsibility for schools in the south of the state, as well as for Aboriginal education and training, and then took on the job of the remote principal in the Ngaanyatjarra lands after that. I was then planning to sort of semi-retire again and then was invited to come back and really lead the department's work in the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework implementation, which I will say more to you about. After that, I have basically come back in and been working with the team assisting schools to implement the framework. Since then, I have been working with Jim and other members of the corporate executive to oversee broader strategic directions in the department. The more recent strategic directions have a greater focus on equity issues, including Aboriginal education issues, which we are happy to share with you.

I have also brought some documents. They are obviously public documents. I have the Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework itself, as well as our strategic policy statement, which you might find useful to refer to, which we are happy to talk to as well.

The CHAIR: We do. We are very privileged. We have research officers who write us a little summary of things as well. I suppose our primary interest in this hearing is around Closing the Gap. Target 3 in Closing the Gap is to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in the year before full-time schooling and early childhood education to 95 per cent. It says in this document that WA has already met that target at 97.7 per cent compared with 84 per cent nationally. Can you take us through how we have got to that point—we still note that it is less than mainstream non-Indigenous kids, which is at 98.9 per cent for that proportion of children enrolled in preschool programs—and the importance of that in terms of early childhood education in terms of meeting other aspects of Closing the Gap?

Mr J. Bell: I am happy to answer that. In Western Australia, our early childhood education structure is different from most other states, I think except Tasmania. The year before full-time schooling here is kindergarten. Our kindergarten setting is a school setting. There are a lot of advantages to having kindergarten in a school setting; in other states, it is a long day care setting. A school setting offers a number of advantages. One is that there is a school in most communities, if not all communities. There is certainly a school that services communities. The students at those schools are taught by a four-year trained teacher. That is not always the case in long day care settings, albeit there is a national conversation to look at that. I think because it is in a school setting, there is an availability and access. I know some of the federal requirements are around supporting vulnerable students, so having access to what is a relatively cheap education delivered by a four-year trained teacher in the community where people live is a significant advantage for WA students.

The other advantage is that from a literacy development point of view, the teaching of reading starts in kindergarten, so you will find that teachers teach students how to listen, how to listen for sound and rhyme and rhythm as a precursor to understanding phonics and graphemes and building a phonological awareness, which is a precursor to reading. To have those settings accessible to students with a qualified teacher does provide a strong foundation for our students.

The CHAIR: There is a lot of discussion about that in terms of language and understanding, especially if you have kids in communities. How does their own language weave into that in terms of both

giving them that overall confidence in their own culture and language, which is such a base of that? Some of those Closing the Gap measures are very much about health and mental health. That aspect of early childhood education is really critical in that.

Mr K. O'Keefe: The fact that virtually all Aboriginal students come to school speaking either an Aboriginal language or a non-standard dialect from standard Australian English is actually a challenge because it is not just their language they bring, but it is their culture and their sense of identity that they bring as well. While our role as public educators is to educate kids in standard Australian English, what we want the students to know is that you use standard Australian English in certain contexts and you use your own Aboriginal English or your own Aboriginal language in a community or family context and no one is better than the other; it is just more appropriate in the context that it is in. One of the things that it is really important for teachers to understand is that this is a progression from one dialect to another and that students come to school with a pretty significant linguistic background, already knowing how to code switch from an Aboriginal language to an Aboriginal English or to a standard Australian English.

The challenge is to actually create an environment where teachers are able to value what students bring and build on it to build standard Australian English. The department has had the benefit of some 20 years of academic research and the development of resources, which has been very beneficial to schools, and that is called English as an Additional Language or Dialect. That is essentially ESL for Aboriginal students. The government has decided to fund that recently, so there are a lot of resources around that allow teachers to identify where kids are at—that is, progress maps that enable them to identify where kids are at, much more fine-grained data than the NAPLAN data, that enables teachers to actually monitor and scaffold student progress. There is also a national capability framework that is advice for teachers about how they go about doing that, as well as an online professional learning module called the EAL/D Hub. It is a very significant part of simply not assuming that a mainstream program by itself will be sufficient for Aboriginal students because there is a lot of research around the fact that if students come to school with a non-standard dialect, they are disadvantaged unless teachers pedagogically know how to make the transition.

The CHAIR: That would not just be regional or remote. I could imagine that is also —

Mr K. O'Keefe: All through Noongar country.

The CHAIR: Yes. In terms of taking that to the other end, so early childhood education is absolutely critical, but also how do we use that and what you are doing and what you have developed through this document and what you know now in terms of language and the pedagogy around that, how are we using that and how will that help Indigenous students attain year 12 or equivalent from that 57 per cent that it currently is when we are trying to get it up to 96 per cent? What is the planning around that?

[11.20 am]

Mr K. O'Keefe: I think part of the understanding of the framework is that the dilemma we have is that in a sense we have a western middle-class school system and basically a number of people who come to our schools who do not have that background. A number of Aboriginal people in the past have had very poor experience of schools. The impact of government policies in the past often was to exclude Aboriginal people from schools, so a lot of their experiences have been really not positive ones at all. The first realisation is that schools like ours have to be much more open, much more culturally aware and much more culturally responsive to the needs of Aboriginal students, so a lot of the work around the framework is actually getting principals in particular to understand that their role is to work with the Aboriginal community and to give them a sense of the value of education

and the benefits of coming regularly, but also to step back from the schools and look at them so that they see that their operations are culturally responsive in a way that engages parents and students so that students feel like when they come to school, they are not only going to have their academic results improve, but they also have an enhanced sense of their own Aboriginal identity. A lot of it is simply making the place much more culturally responsive so that kids feel good about themselves and parents feel welcomed into the environment that they are going to.

The CHAIR: Correct me if I am wrong, but if that is the case, have we not removed some Aboriginal education assistants out of schools, and also have we not diminished those sort of lead Aboriginal educators who used to work with Aboriginal education officers, so how are we doing that when it appears to me, from the schools that I have, we have diminished resources? I am interested to know how we are delivering on this. Resources were diminished over four years ago, and my understanding is that we have increased those, but have we increased them to the same level? I am interested to know how that has changed in terms of resources on the ground to ensure that happens.

Mr K. O'Keefe: They have not been reduced in schools. In fact, there was —

The CHAIR: An increase, yes.

Mr K. O'Keefe: — a government initiative increasing AIEOs.

The CHAIR: That is right. That is true.

Mr K. O'Keefe: There has not been a reduction in —

The CHAIR: They were put back in place. They were reduced, and now they have been put back in place, have they not?

Mr K. O'Keefe: The challenge is that at regional centres, the Aboriginal staff who were there were offered redundancies. The issue is that we are working in an environment now where basically the department's interface with the Aboriginal community and with students is through every individual school. That is why the focus has been in the last four years on working with individual schools to actually promote their cultural responsiveness, and there is a sense that you cannot just outsource this to somebody else; this is the work of the principal and teachers to take this on. So do not assume that the support that Aboriginal kids get is through some supplementary program or additional Aboriginal people. The responsibility lies with teachers and with principals to understand the local history, culture, language and experiences of local people and make sure that that explicitly is used in the classroom by teachers, but also by principals in being advocates for Aboriginal people as well as allies with them to actually ensure that the school is a better place for kids to be than it previously was in the past.

The CHAIR: Okay.

Mr K. O'Keefe: I have to say that I think that is really the focus of where the new Closing the Gap has come from. The previous Closing the Gap had a strong focus on student outcomes, and in particular student outcomes that showed the gap—it was called Closing the Gap—between the achievement of Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students, so it created a very deficit-type conversation that the problem with Aboriginal kids is they are not as good as non-Aboriginal kids. The new focus of the Closing the Gap, as a result of, I think, the negotiations by government with the coalition of Aboriginal peak organisations, has enabled the focus to change to a much greater sense of there needs to be a much more culturally responsive approach in organisations and that the focus is on growth places that the Aboriginal community itself sees. I think there is a really significant shift this time around. The shift is very much in line with the work that we have been

doing for four years now about making sure that our organisation is much more culturally responsive.

The CHAIR: On that negotiation group, was there sort of a peak Aboriginal community that was education led? We have peak health councils in certain areas. One of the comments that was made in the previous hearing was that it is much more scattered and the capacity to have that philosophical debate and to frame how you want to see education delivered in Aboriginal communities has been a bit sporadic, and in your case it is led by particularly the department, but there is no sort of peak community education hub for that.

Mr K. O'Keefe: Are you talking about an Aboriginal reference group?

The CHAIR: Yes—an Aboriginal reference group more so. I come from the union movement. We have a peak union organisation where unionists can come together from different sectors and form a strategic intent of how they want to proceed with things like wages and conditions, or whatever. One that is out today that we are discussing is around working at home, so what are the principles around that for working people? I suppose what I am asking is how do you get that within education, because you do have universities that play in this field—not play; that is the wrong word—that are active in this field and do research in this field. How do you have that sort of peak organisation that drives the agenda on this sort of stuff? Where is that for you?

Mr K. O'Keefe: Obviously, the new Closing the Gap is the result of a national agreement, so in a sense we inherit what that looks like, but certainly within our own organisations—and a number of state government agencies now have Aboriginal reference groups to provide them with advice—our structure is an elders in residence. We have some Aboriginal people who meet with us to talk about what are the issues we are dealing with, advise us on policy development, and advise us on the implementation of this. Our intention is in fact to expand that so that those people who are elders in residence will be leading a broader conversation about how do we get across the state a broader and more representative Aboriginal group of people to advise us, not just centrally, but also at regional level to assist us with our policy and development and project implementation.

The CHAIR: So that it can be more community reflective.

Mr K. O'Keefe: That is right, yes.

The CHAIR: And that is in the process of happening at the moment?

Mr K. O'Keefe: That is right. As I said, we have had elders in residence in place for four years now. Their role over the coming year will be not just to continue to do the advice and guidance they have been giving us, but also to provide us with advice about what a broader and more representative group might actually look like. That is the work that we will be proceeding with over the next year.

The CHAIR: That is pretty exciting.

Mr K. O'Keefe: Yes. We are very excited about it.

The CHAIR: That is right. Good luck with that.

In terms of that group and in terms of the Closing the Gap targets, I really appreciate your comment that they were from a deficit basis. That is a really important point. Is that sort of like your opportunities have not been the same to reach potential? In terms of reaching potential, what are the sorts of strategies and discussions in the education community about having a greater number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of around 25 to 34 years of age achieving a tertiary qualification by 2031? They are talking about 70 per cent. Also, I note—because we should not just focus on tertiary education—that that is basically a certificate III and above, so that would be also other qualifications and trades, one assumes, so that post-secondary education, I think, is really that

target, and given that it is around 34 per cent, and given that it opens so many opportunities for people, what are the sorts of things that the education department is looking at to encourage that and to grow that on that community-based system?

[11.30 am]

Mr K. O'Keefe: With the year 12 attainment, basically there is still a gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. We feel that we have made good progress in that space. We are not there yet, and we are happy to talk about a number of initiatives that are operating in that space. I guess the general comment I would want to make is that with each of these particular targets, the 16 targets that are identified in the new Closing the Gap, the idea now is that every state jurisdiction is responsible for a national plan, which they now have a year to put in place after the signing of the agreement. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is now overseeing that process. There are six targets in particular that the Department of Education will be involved in, either as the lead agency or as a co-contributor. At this stage, those conversations are only just now being arranged by DPC with, for instance, agencies like Department of Training and Workforce Development, with regard to the one that you are referring to, or perhaps the Department of Communities or the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries with respect to the issue around Aboriginal languages. We are certainly participating in six of those, and at the moment the issues around who will be the lead and who will be the co-contributor have not been finalised. That is a process that DPC is putting in place at the moment. I can tell you about some of the stuff we are already doing, but the new stuff will actually come out of those further conversations with other agencies. Jim, did you want to talk about some of the initiatives like promoting attainment at the year 12 level and the various additional and supplementary programs like Follow the Dream and the other programs?

The CHAIR: The Girls Academy.

Mr K. O'Keefe: The Girls Academy, which is a thorny issue for us. Most of the supplementary support programs were for boys, in the first instance —

The CHAIR: The boys get the money and the girls do not get it.

Mr K. O'Keefe: That is exactly what the story is, and so there is —

The CHAIR: It is not a thorny issue; it is easy to sort. Just give the girls the same amount of funding, like they have to in the UN.

Mr K. O'Keefe: — a new group that has just come in, the Stars Foundation, which is actually doing that. One of the problems, of course, in the boys' space, especially with the Clontarf academies, it is one group with 120 academies across the country, so it has a critical mass, an economy of scale, that it can use. The problem is in the girls' space, because it has sort of followed the boys with piecemeal initiatives; they do not have the same economies of scale, but I can get Jim to talk to some of that. It is a problem.

Mr J. Bell: One of the things we are doing is interesting; we focus on year 12 and attainment, and if you look at our strategic directions, we have outlined six drivers. The very first driver within that strategic planning framework is meaningful pathways for kids. Our conversations internally are that if we want students to succeed in year 12, we need to start in kindergarten. The narrative to our profession is that we all have a stake in successful year 12 outcomes for students from the day kids walk into a kindergarten program and, in fact, before. We have a KindiLink program that operates in 49 locations across the state. The KindiLink program is zero-to-three wraparound support for Aboriginal families and their students. Yesterday I was at Beachlands Primary School, which is in the member for Geraldton's electorate.

Mr I.C. BLAYNEY: It is the smallest school in the electorate.

Mr J. Bell: It is the smallest but it is an outstanding operation. I think there are 52 families involved in its KindiLink program—not all at once, but over the course of time. When you listen to Kevin talk about culturally responsive schools, we understand that terminology; we look for the behaviours that that manifests into. At Beachlands yesterday we were looking at how parents are engaging PPP, for example, which is a parenting support program. At a school in this area, PPP would effectively be a lecture and a lesson for parents. At Beachlands, it is a yarnning process, where they sit down and talk to parents in a very informal yarnning scenario. That is a culturally responsive school.

We have a series of kindergarten to year 12 approaches, or narratives, that our kids need to be on a meaningful pathway from the moment they step into a school setting, and if we can influence before then, we do. As kids move through, we have things like the Kimberley schools project, in which there is a very specific focus on targeted teaching. This is not about literacy or numeracy; it is actually about quality teaching. If we want our students to have better learning experiences, it is not necessarily program-dependent, it is teaching-dependent. The focus of those sorts of programs—the sorts of programs Kevin talked about before, such as the two-way program, the competency framework—are actually about making our teachers better practitioners so that when they deliver to students, students learn. That is an unrelenting focus all the way through. The complementary programs like Clontarf, SHINE, Glass Jar and those types of programs, support not only the teaching but also the engagement of those students. From a girls' point of view, it is about wellbeing, engagement and mentoring, and from a boys' point of view, it is often a sports-based engagement. I guess the point I am trying to make is: to support positive year 12 outcomes is not just a secondary school or senior secondary school issue; it goes right back to the meaningful pathways we provide for our kids, from kindergarten to year 12.

Ms J. FARRER: I work with Indigenous languages right across the Kimberley, and I come from the Kimberley, so I am familiar with that. But I feel that the rights of the parents are being taken away, especially when kids are going to school from a young age, because that is a very important part of an Indigenous child's life. That is where they are educated with regard to their culture and with regard to their language, so putting kids in schools that teach them something other than what they should be taught, I find that over the years it has taken away a lot of the responsibility that our Indigenous parents should be shouldering or carrying. My kids go to school, but they went at around the age of six. Prior to that, they had to learn, and the only education that Indigenous kids should have before entering school is learning about who they are, their identity, where they come from, what language group they belong to, and to speak their language fluently. I have found that, over time, this right has been removed from the children themselves. I will have this fight with anyone, any day, because that is the child's right. The children grow up and do not even know where they come from and they do not understand anything about their education as Aboriginal children. We find that a lot of kids, once they enter into Western education, they tend to forget about their identity. This is why a lot of them play truant from school; they say, "School is boring." That right of the children should be carried forward under the responsibility of the parents with the support of the grandparents, and that is being taken away. I will speak on that any day because it interrupts our children's learning.

Mr K. O'Keefe: I would be happy to respond to that. The important thing, I think, for our schools to realise is that every community they work in is unique. They will not know what the expectations of the community are or what the needs of Aboriginal students are unless they engage with the community. Even if you have worked in a community before and you go to another one, do not assume that you know it. The starting point is to engage with significant people, with the people who are sending their kids to school, and depending on the environment, with the traditional

owners, with significant elders in the community, because communities vary. There are communities that say to us, “Look, Kevin, we’ll do the cultural stuff if you don’t mind. We’ll do the culture and language. That’s not your business. Your business is to teach standard Australian English so that’s what we want you to do.” There are other communities that say to us, “Look, we are very concerned that our kids, because we don’t go out and hunt or whatever as often as we do, we’ve lost a lot of language for the world around us. We want you to work with us to actually create a language and culture program.” It varies depending on the community you are in.

[11.40 am]

What we advise schools to do is to make sure that they know what the local story is, and in particular they know what the expectations of community are and the needs of students, and you need to interrogate that thoroughly and have that documented and make sure that it actually shapes a vision and the ethos of that particular school. I think it is really important, and this is a lot of the focus of your Closing the Gap. The third reform area basically says that mainstream organisations have to reform the way they do business. Do not keep working the way you have always done. Make sure that what you are doing is shaping the directions that you are going in to actually reflect the needs of that Aboriginal community, and that Aboriginal people have less experience of racism and cultural lack of safety in your environment. You can only do that by talking respectfully with people.

For instance, with our languages program, just to take the point that you were making, we have been running a successful Aboriginal language teacher training program in our system for over 20 years now. We have trained hundreds of people. More recently, we have created a structure that says that it is not just about training a local Aboriginal person to teach the language. That has got to be built into an embedded Aboriginal reference group in the community. What we are saying to schools is, “If you’re thinking about teaching an Aboriginal language, the first thing you’ve got to do is to be creating and having an Aboriginal reference group that can provide you advice about the language to be taught, how it will be taught and who will do it.” It is not just up to an individual principal to come into a school and say, “I’ve decided we’re not doing that Aboriginal language.” What they have to do is negotiate with the community group first. I think the point that you make is really a powerful one. I think that a lot of Aboriginal people have felt disempowered by their connection with schools, that schools simply come in and make their own decisions. A lot of the framework says: you cannot do your work, unless and until you have had that conversation.

Ms J. FARRER: I was asked to listen to the community of the Fitzroy Valley. I have had two interactions with them. The concern was that because Fitzroy Valley consists of five different language groups, and we have all these little kids that go to school who then become teenagers, but they come from a diverse range of language speaking groups, but also a diverse way with regard to culture, because we have a lot of kids that come in from the desert. Their culture is totally different to some of the river people. This is where teaching language and culture in one school is based on one context, and it is really disrupting a lot of the other kids because one language is being taught. At Fitzroy Valley they teach Bunuba in that school, but you have a lot of kids from Walmajarri and Wangkatjungka and Nyikina. Some of our Gidja kids are also there. The question was put as to why can the government not do something about these kids because they are truanting, they do not want to go to school, they do not want to be part of the language classes and all that. It comes back to the education of the parents and the grandparents to teach them who they are and where they come from. If that child does not feel relaxed in school because that child is being taught a different language, of course the kid will not go to school. This is why a lot of kids rebel.

I have had this thrown at me on two workshops that we had in Fitzroy, and I think this is where the western education needs to understand and look at what we are doing. We are pushing a whole

group of kids here from these different language groups and expecting them to learn just one language that is there: “Forget about your language if you come from the desert. Forget about the desert.” You don’t get taught about what is out there in the desert, how you can survive out in the desert, where to look for water or where to look for food. So the kids totally rely on what they are learning because they are living in Fitzroy. Their daily intake of food is chicken and chips, so they are not learning anything. We have parents saying, “Why can’t the government do something about this?” I think the first thing that the government and the education department should be doing is looking at the diverse range of language groups of the kids that are going to this one school. This is where it gets really sticky. People say that the kids are running amok in that school or in Fitzroy or Halls Creek or wherever. It is because of how people have been misplaced. They have been brought in, I do not know why, but this is the system that we have been looking at for the last 30 or 40 years. When I was a child, they took me to Fitzroy. I was expected to learn and understand about Bunuba ways and about Walmajarri. I did not know which one to pick. It was not doing me any good. We ran away from there as kids. You know the story about a lot of Aboriginal kids: you run away from the missions or the schools and whatever and you look for your own connection. When we are talking about this new change in Closing the Gap, that needs to be addressed. It really has to be, because what are we teaching our kids?

Mr K. O’Keefe: It is a challenging issue for principals to deal with because, as I said, our marching orders really are to understand the expectations of the community and the needs of kids and to make sure that that is what is our driving force. The challenge, as you mentioned, is that there are issues in the community which, in a sense, the school needs to take advice on from the community to resolve. Some of those issues that you raised are issues that the community has to sort out—the issue of which language or languages get taught in a school and how. I think the advice needs to come from the community about that. It is not a decision for a school to say, “We’ve decided that we’re going to teach Bunuba” or whatever it is. It is actually a conversation that I think we need the community to advise us on: “Tell us what you expect us to do and we will respond to that.”

Ms J. FARRER: I think that the community of Fitzroy Valley have spoken out about the way that they feel about their kids being taught just one, I guess, issue on that one language group and that culture, and it is depriving the other kids of knowing and understanding who they are. People have asked why is that not being challenged from up here. When the kids do not go to school, they get the police on them and DCP. This is why a lot of kids have been taken off their parents because the kids are not going to school. The police come in and talk to the parents and the parents have to front up in court. These are very simple things. It is the right of those old people, the elders, it is the right of the parents and the right of that child, even though the child does not know their right, but it is that child’s right to know where he or she comes from. This is the big muck-up we have as Aboriginal people right through the Kimberley and probably right across the state. It is the education and how our kids are being taught.

In the curriculum, there is nothing about Indigenous issues. There is even nothing there about politics, but if we are talking about Closing the Gap, we need to look at every aspect of that because our kids are not growing up to understand a lot of things. If you have a school in Broome where Yawuru is being taught, and most of the people who live in Broome are Yawuru, the kids get to learn all that. Even the white kids learn that. But if you have got families that have been moved because of various reasons—maybe domestic violence or whatever, or families that have been locked up—then you have got these little kids and they have no choice but to go to that school. They start speaking Yawuru but they do not know who they are. They go home to a place like Balgo Hills and nobody knows what this child is saying! Then that child becomes angry and the worst we hear about is that the kids have gone off, they are breaking into homes and they are smashing things. It is only

because the child does not know how they should be behaving. When we talk about Closing the Gap, we really need to look at how our kids are being taught. The rights of that child are being neglected. It has not been put on the table. Whoever the adviser is—the DGs, the principal or whoever—does not understand that. People in your position should be educating the system.

The CHAIR: Josie, I am just going to flick to Sabine, who has a question.

Ms J. FARRER: I just thought that I would bring that up because it is a big worry and people have talked about it.

[11.50 am]

Ms S.E. WINTON: I understand well, Josie, and in Fitzroy Crossing.

I just wanted to ask a quick question that got me thinking and was based on some of the discussions we had with members from the Aboriginal Advisory Council of Western Australia—we had a hearing with them just prior to meeting with you. We were talking with them about the four priority reforms that are part of the new Closing the Gap. The one I just wanted to flag with you, and perhaps if you have anything to add in that regard, was regarding sharing the data. That came out very strongly with me in terms of, overwhelmingly, I think, in the Aboriginal sphere, is this “herding the cats” and the inter-agencies, and I think that at the heart of some of these issues is data and actually sharing it in an effective way between agencies. Is the department thinking about what it might do to elevate that kind of thinking that will have been amplified in the new document?

Mr J. Bell: It is an interesting question. We do engage with other government departments on data sharing, always in the context of protocols around data sharing. As you would understand, the education data is of interest if you are looking at attendance or achievement or what have you. It is an area that we actually work in a lot. Part of our endeavour is to make sure that the data is shared in a respectful and appropriate way, hence the protocol. So we need to be very aware of identified data and if the data is shared—and we have got processes internally to make sure that the data is shared appropriately for the right purpose and in a way that does not identify students, or offer that data in a way that could be used in a manner that it was not intended for. I am not sure I am answering your question, but on every occasion when there is an inter-agency request for data, it is always in the context of an agreed protocol, if there is one, or if there is not one—we are actually dealing with that right now—to put those protocols in place just to ensure there is the responsible sharing of data.

Mr K. O'Keefe: We are in an evolving process ourselves. To some extent we have been in a place where we used to collect a lot of data from a range of different databases but had not connected them up. I mean, we have done a lot of work in recent times to actually make sure that we know at particular points in time what the critical data is, and so we are now in a position, for instance, to monitor the whole trajectory of a student throughout their schooling—about what were their results, what was their attendance, what were some of the behavioural and support issues they needed—so we have got a much more refined idea now of knowing the trajectory of students.

Some of the problems that we have had in the past are looking at just generalised data that tells you some general stuff, but it does not tell you anything about the longitudinal information about individual students. So we have done a lot of work to be much more clear about not just snapshots, but why has this student's attendance dropped off at this point when up until now they had been going to school, and what interventions have actually been flagged by that. So I think it is about us becoming much more sophisticated ourselves about our own information, but certainly I think there is a very clear idea that through this process, Aboriginal people want access to that data; they want it to be open and transparent so that they can see it and make their own judgements. But I think

that there is also an additional challenge. If what agencies are going to do is to spend more time working in ways that an Aboriginal community advises are appropriate strategies on the ground, we actually learn to gather data that tells us about stuff, that tells us about growth, and not just median levels of data that actually, in a sense, tell us very little.

The CHAIR: I am really appreciative of you being here. We are in Parliament at noon and I am sorry that I brought you in a bit late. We would have more questions for you, but time has got the better of us. So thank you so much. It has been a really interesting discussion and we really appreciate your good work. We look forward to seeing the further work in meeting the Closing the Gap targets. So thank you very much.

Hearing concluded at 11.54 am
