

Rural and Remote Education Inquiry - NSW Public Hearing in Brewarrina NSW – 2 March 1999

<p>Chris Sidoti, Human Rights Commissioner</p>	<p>Good morning everybody, both those that we met yesterday in Bourke and new ones. Just some introductions of us from the Commission first for the people we haven't met before. I'm Chris Sidoti. I'm Human Rights Commissioner at the Human Rights Commission. With me is Barbara Flick who is Co-Commissioner for this inquiry into rural education. Meredith Wilkie is the Director of the Human Rights Policy Unit. Kate Temby at the back who has been working with us for the past four months dealing particularly with the Bush Talks program and the education inquiry. I'll ask Barbara in a moment just to say a few words about herself, but perhaps if I just by way of very brief introduction, indicate a little about this inquiry that we're conducting.</p> <p>It arises out of a program of country consultations we undertook throughout 1998, where we moved around a number of rural communities. We visited about 30, ranging from fairly large provincial regional cities through to small remote communities. During the course of that work we tried to identify and have people tell us what was the thing or things most on their minds in human rights terms in their regions. Health and education came up consistently across the country as being the major issues, although of course there were many other issues of great significance as well.</p> <p>Arising from that we decided to undertake this year a number of different projects in different areas to try and respond to what we were told. One of those is this National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education, a means by which we can draw together the best information that's available from people who are doing it from all perspectives, from research that's available and other studies that we'll undertake ourselves. We'll be preparing a report at the end of this process of listening and researching. It will go to the federal parliament, it will contain our conclusions on the state of rural education and it will make recommendations. The particular concern we've got relates to the right of children to education on equal terms. Primary education, human rights law says, should be free and compulsory, secondary education, tertiary education and vocational education available without discrimination to open up opportunities for young people. There are special requirements in human rights law for providing educational opportunities for children with disability and for children of cultural and ethnic minorities and for Indigenous children. So in those areas of course we've got particular concern since they are dealt with quite specifically in the law. Our responsibility as a Human Rights Commission is to monitor Australia's compliance with those kinds of human rights promises that have been made by various Australian Governments over the years.</p> <p>The format that we'll be operating in during the course of today will be to enable people to make their views known to the Commission in a variety of different ways. We'll start off in this session listening in more detail to a couple of people who want to make and we've invited to make a formal presentation. These are more formal submissions than other parts of the day's program and they're being recorded. The format will be to ask the person to make some opening comments of whatever length the individual likes and then we'll ask a few questions to clarify that.</p> <p>Later in the day we'll have two much more informal sessions: first with students from the schools in Brewarrina, both primary and secondary level education, and then second with adults, teachers, parents and others in the community who are interested in participating in a more informal process. Tonight we'll have a public meeting in town for those who are interested in coming, which will deal more generally with some of the rural issues we worked on last year, rather than just concentrating on education as we will during the day. Barbara would you like to say a few things?</p>
<p>Barbara Flick, Director, Indigenous Social Justice Unit,</p>	<p>I want to start by acknowledging the Ngemba People, the Yawallyi and the Murrawarri people from this area. I'm Yawallyi myself. I grew up across the river with my grandmother where Barwon Four is now. I completed my primary school education in Collarenebri and did correspondence before I went away to high school at Armidale.</p>

<p>HREOC and NSW Co-Commissioner, National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education</p>	<p>I've worked in Western NSW for many years, Central Australia, the Kimberley, Darwin, and the Top End, Cape York, and the Torres Strait. I've come back to work with the Human Rights Commission in Sydney.</p> <p>I am very interested to hear what is happening with education in this area, and how it's changed, whether it's better, whether some of the issues that are difficult for you to resolve have changed from the ones we battled with. The only high school in this area when I was high school age was at Coonamble, so that is a long time ago. In the olden days as my son says. It's lovely to be back here and I look forward to hearing what you have to say.</p>
<p>Ruythe Dufty, Principal, Brewarrina Central School</p> <p>[Student population]</p> <p>[Retention rates]</p> <p>[Aboriginal Education Policy]</p> <p>[Indigenous languages]</p> <p>[Vocational education]</p>	<p>I'm Ruythe Dufty. I'm the principal at Brewarrina Central School so I think I've nearly met everyone who is here. I've got lots of notes here but it is going to be reasonably informal. I just want to tell you a little bit about the school and things that are happening in the school, and people may have questions that they'd like to ask.</p> <p>Brewarrina Central School has got 240 students at the moment, but our population is growing. We're about to have an increase in staffing this year of 0.9 so that is reflective of the student population growing. There are approximately 156 children in our primary department and about 86 in our secondary. We have 97.5% Aboriginal students enrolled in our school this year, and as I said the school numbers are gradually growing.</p> <p>The biggest increase for us this year has probably been the increase in our Year 11 students which we're really pleased about it. We've had actually seven students who had previously left the school in 1997 or before that, come back into our Year 11 preliminary course. Five of those are students of about 17 or 18 years of age and two are mature age. One is a lady who works at the school as a community liaison person and they're doing two subjects in Year 11 so far this year. So we are trying to encourage that and encourage people to go on to Year 11 and Year 12. So that's been a significant growth in that area. I've also got some information here about retention rates and how our student population does change which I'll go through with you in a moment.</p> <p>Basically the school has a very strong emphasis on Aboriginal Education, and on Aboriginal children and Aboriginal families. Last year our major initiative was to do the implementation of the Aboriginal Educational Policy so we sent people off to be trained and they came back and trained the staff and community people. We thought it was very important and valuable that that happened.</p> <p>Our next stage is that we have a committee which I am chairing and we're going to be looking at Aboriginal education across the school and looking at past policies and our existing Year 7 and Year 8 LOTE [Languages other than English] program. It is interesting, as Barbara was saying before, we're teaching Murrawarri and Ngemba languages as a part of that LOTE program and we also have a Year 9 and Year 10 Aboriginal studies class going. We tried to offer Year 11 and Year 12 Aboriginal studies this year and we didn't have any takers, but we'll work on them. We hope that gradually as students go through they will pick that course. So the retention rates have greatly improved. Eight out of our twelve Year 10 students have stayed at school. Of those four that left, some went to other schools because their families left town and two have jobs, so that is terrific too, good news for our school.</p> <p>This year we have been very well supported by the vocational education consultant into trying to get courses for vocational education and training going in the school. So this year we're running a formal careers course and we have work education up and running. We've also received an IESIP [Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program] grant for the Aboriginal Vocational Educational Program. We're looking at joining with Bourke High to get the children out on vocational excursions, so that they really can see what is on offer in the world. It's really difficult for them as they have all of us talking to them about what the possibilities are and sometimes they can't see what they could achieve. So that has been a major focus in that area. And of course</p>

	<p>we've got two Joint Secondary Schools TAFE courses running. They've only had 3 weeks and we've had a few hiccups but I think we're getting there.</p> <p>What we try to do is that we try to run taster courses, so half of the students are doing an office type course and doing word processing and the internet and things like that. The other half are doing taster courses in the areas of joint construction. They're doing a little bit of building, a little bit of welding. What we're trying to do is give them some tasters so maybe they might be able to go on and try a course later on. It gives them an idea of what is happening and they also get recognition for what they've done, prior learning if they do enrol in TAFE. So one of the reasons that we've tried to do a lot of these things is to really target our 14 and 15 year olds particularly and any other children who start dropping out of school.</p> <p>I've written some facts here about our attendance rate. I get all the staff to feel really strongly that the children must attend at our school. In fact we've actually allocated some of our own school assistant time to support the home school liaison program. I don't take children off the roll, if they've disappeared from the school. They stay on there till we can find out where they have gone, because it has been my concern in the past if children are taken off the roll or if they disappear, they are lost from everybody's sight. Consequently, that has some negative effects on our attendance figures, for example we had one student who didn't attend one day last year. She is still on the role and I spoke to her yesterday and we are trying to get her back to school.</p> <p>So we don't put them out of sight and out of mind. We try to get our children with our home school liaison people running programs. That would be a major initiative for us, to try and get children attending regularly. I have done some percentages - 37% of the students are attending more than 95% of the time. Last year was an unusual year, because of the floods. We had children stuck over at Barwon Four for a couple of weeks, and it was so wet we had people who were stuck out of town and couldn't get back in so it was a bit of an unusual year. 55% of the students attended more than 85% of the time and 81% of the students attended 80% or more during 1998.</p> <p>We aim to improve those results and I've put down that in fact Year 8 really impacted on our figures last year because they are that difficult 14 to 15 age who start dropping off from school. We had six students out of that group that attended less than 50% of that time. Some of them were transient kids coming in and out and that was another reason why a lot of these work education JSST [Joint Secondary Schools TAFE] and all those sort of programs are trying to get up and running so that we can offer some sort of alternative. We have really looked at our structure and have spoken to the children and parents to try and get things going at the school that will keep them at school, and that they feel their education is worthwhile. So they are some of the programs we're running here.</p> <p>We're involved, as are a few other schools around the place in an Aboriginal mobility project, which is being funded and is trying to track children. We've been very busy with that. We've made 90 referrals since November last year: 36 for students who are leaving the school and 54 for those arriving. So that has been a fair bit of paper work that we've shunted through to the people that are running the project.</p>
<p>[Attendance]</p>	<p>[Literacy]</p> <p>This project has a strong literacy focus. A teacher has been employed to monitor students and to monitor literacy rates, and to see after a six-month period whether a student who has stayed at one school has made an improvement. There has been a lot of liaison with parents about the necessity to stay put in one town for the students. I really hope that project is successful because obviously there will be a submission put through for it to continue if that extra literacy support and the extra liaison has been successful. So I think that is a very positive program and I hope that it continues on.</p> <p>To let you get a bit of a feel for the place, I mentioned that we had 54 students arriving and 36 students leaving. This year we've had 62 new enrolments out of 242. 22 of course are kindergarten but that means 40 new students. Some have been here in the</p>

<p>[Community liaison]</p>	<p>past but that is a great impact on the school and I think that has to be taken into account. A school like ours is different because we do have a lot of families coming in and out of the school.</p> <p>I feel the school has really strong support from the community. I have been here for 12 months, and it probably takes you longer than 12 months to settle into the feel of a community. I think we have good community support from people, we have a policy at our school to really try and get out amongst the community. We encourage staff to at least once a semester go out and see all their families and take out work and sit amongst the families and show them the work the students are doing. We go out for positive reasons not only negative ones. We tried it last year but this year are being more formal with it in our requirement for the staff to do that. We either have parents coming in or we visit people in their homes. We are aiming for at least once a semester but are hoping for once a term. It would be a positive visit, showing work, talking about the successes of the students. If anybody tries to ring me during the week often I'm out visiting parents, because I really do believe that if we're going to overcome some of the negative experiences that people have had with their education, one way to break down barriers is to get out and meet people. I think we've done that quite successfully.</p> <p>Of course it's difficult for a lot of beginning teachers to have that confidence to be able to do that, and we are trying to work with them. We are fortunate that we have a lot of wonderful Aboriginal staff working at our school and through various Aboriginal programs we are very well staffed with Aboriginal people. In fact I was talking to some people before about the fact that we've had comments from a teacher who left our school and went into a new school whether she would get any help? Here at Brewarrina they are used to having an aid for at least half of the day every day in the classroom to give them a hand. We have got really good people so we are very fortunate in that respect.</p> <p>So, the key strength, I think, that the school has is that we have really strong support in the town. I really do believe that. I have tried very much in the last 12 months to try and get out to all the organisations. We're very supported by the Shire Council now and I don't know if that was previously the case but they are being wonderful. Of course being involved in lots of organisations means lots of meetings which is not always positive for me, but we really are trying to get issues about the school across to the whole town. This is because we have 97.5% Aboriginal students.</p> <p>We have one white child in our primary school and we only have six in our secondary school. So it is important for us to publicise what our school is doing and we've done that through putting articles regularly in the Bourke paper; there is now a Brewarrina newspaper up and running. So we have tried to publicise that the school is a school like any other in school in the state. And yes the students do the HSC and yes they do the School Certificate and we study all the set curriculum, and we do try to provide special education support for our students and we try to let everybody know that.</p> <p>In fact I have just finished writing the latest article for the Brewarrina newspaper and we were talking about the gifted and talented program we have running this year so we try and cover all areas and we try and let people know what we're doing.</p>
<p>[Special education]</p>	<p>Another key strength of the school is our special education program. We are very supported. We have three special education teachers in the school but there is a problem with training in this area, as often you can't always get people who are trained. We have people who are very keen and very interested and who are primary trained people, which has helped a little bit with that methodology. I think that is a key strength and it is certainly coming through at the moment as we're writing the Annual School Report. Figures are coming through and showing that over a 6-year period for the Basic Skills Test result, those who are special education students, their results have improved greatly. We now have data to show that.</p>

<p>[School uniform]</p> <p>[Staffing]</p> <p>[Discipline]</p>	<p>I think an area for us to look at is at our high achieving students and our middle-achieving students and to ensure that their progress is the same. That is one of the reasons for the gifted and talented program. It is also the reason for some of the training development issues that we're doing with our staff this year in Behavioural Management and Cooperative Learning Strategies and things like that. As I said we are fortunate that we have got a lot of staff in the special education area.</p> <p>Another key strength is that the Aboriginal parents are being involved, and another strength is our A-week. I know it is only one week of the year but it is a very special week for us at school, and is totally organised by parents from the school, with staff and the committee as well. But they take the ownership for it and it is probably a week that people enjoy the most at our school. It has all sorts of things from Bush Camps to special Arts & Crafts days and things like that. So I think that's a real strength.</p> <p>One of the major concerns of parents in the past has been the wearing of school uniforms. It was interesting to hear on the news today about the new rules and laws coming out, that students have to wear a school uniform. We've worked on that area and it has greatly improved especially in our primary school where we would have 98% of students wearing a school uniform every day. That is a figure I've just plucked out of my head, but there has been a great improvement.</p> <p>In the secondary area we're looking at having a change of uniform so that it's something the students are comfortable wearing and we're working towards that. Another strength I think is that we have a really committed lot of teachers. They're also young. Last year we had 19 new staff out of 25 including a new principal and we had all relieving executives. It was a tough year in a lot of ways. But we got through it and I think we all learnt a lot.</p> <p>Our staff are all committed, and they are young. I think it is a great training ground for teachers in schools like these. Unfortunately there is a high turnover and a lot of training and development goes into our teachers and then other schools reap the benefits. We do put a lot of effort into training them and it's great that they end up being great teachers, and will always look back to Brewarrina with fond memories.</p> <p>We've certainly been targeting discipline this year and last year. We have been looking at a whole heap of management methods and have been getting out talking to parents about the need for children to be well behaved at school. That is proving to be very positive. I hope that it comes through that we have wonderful support in that area from parents. In fact in a year and a bit at this school I haven't had one parent come and be angry or anything about discipline issues at the school. I think that is a measure of the fact that we have pretty strong relationships here, so that's been terrific.</p> <p>I hope I've covered some of the things that you wanted to address. There is probably a lot more that I could say. I think we're fortunate in this town that we are within walking distance of one of the most wonderful assets in Australia. We have the Aboriginal fisheries, and we have the Aboriginal cultural museum. I think that is a great basis for our school to be looking at, and looking at Aboriginal culture and making that a strong focus for our school.</p>
<p>Barbara Flick</p>	<p>Tell me a little more about the languages other than English program?</p>
<p>Ruythe Dufty</p> <p>[Indigenous language programs]</p>	<p>It's been running for about three years now, since before my time. Last year we did have a few hiccups with it because the language part of it is funded through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, through the Cultural Museum. Schools work on a January to December model, but other government departments work on funding from June to July. We had an unfortunate problem last year that the money ran out at the Museum and so did our teachers. We tried to rally support amongst the town and we did find more interest and more people. We think we've overcome that by talking to the Museum about holding funding over to pay those tutors to keep that program running.</p> <p>So that was a bit of a problem. Now the problem is that what's happened in the past is</p>

	<p>a white teacher has had to teach the subject area, and she doesn't know the language and can't even pretend that she's an Aboriginal person. We're lucky that we have a very strong teacher in that area that is very interested. She went off to training last year to the state conference and they've come back all fired up with one of the Aboriginal Aides. So that program is up and running again. So it is a LOTE program that has been approved through the Board of Studies to meet the requirements. I could get a copy for you if you'd like because we have been putting in for a new round of funding.</p> <p>So it is very much based on both languages of Yawallyi and Ngemba. The local people help out and they try and get out into the environment once a fortnight and I do feel that the students actually learn more by doing things and seeing things so it is very much focused on that level. I would say it is one of the most enjoyable subjects that they have experienced. It is difficult with the level of knowledge about the language. It came through a couple of years ago that the community really wanted an Aboriginal language taught and they didn't want the children learning German or Japanese or something like that, and they felt very strongly that it should be a part of the program.</p> <p>With changes of staff and things like that hopefully what we've done now is we've really documented the program and what happened to one teacher last year wouldn't happen again. It will be documented when the new teachers come through and whoever is assisting that program will know exactly what is happening.</p>
Barbara Flick	<p>There are a lot of people who live here now that came from the Angledool Mission. My mother was born on the Angledool Mission and when they spoke in language they were belted with wire as children, which is why the old people wouldn't speak it anymore. So there has been difficulty over the long period of time.</p>
Ruythe Dufty	<p>It was actually quite exciting last year one of our Aides went off to a conference in Sydney and he came back to me and said, "I just didn't know how much language I had." His language was the Ngemba language that is very close to the Ngemba that is a coastal area, and there was someone else there who was very fluent. I think that is how this program has gained great impetus to keep going because he is excited by the fact that he actually does know a lot of his language. A lot of the words that his family used that he thought was just slang are actually Aboriginal words. That was quite exciting to hear.</p>
Barbara Flick	<p>Tell me how you discipline children in the school? Do you have detention?</p>
Ruythe Dufty [Discipline]	<p>Yes we do. What we also have is a system in the classrooms and it's K-12, where the rules and class standards are written in the class. They're decided by the class at the beginning of each term or at the beginning of the year and we have positive consequences and negative consequence that work side by side. We also have our merit system and a lot of schools would have the same as us. The children collect purple slips and five little purple slips gains them a commendation and five commendations means they go up to Ruby Level. Tomorrow we're having a Ruby Level morning tea where parents are invited in to have morning tea with the students and with me. That is the first level. It then goes on to things like taking students out and buying them a hamburger down at the cafe, to trips away.</p> <p>Diamond Level is an excursion away and that's at the end of the year. That system works with a system in the class where they have two warnings, and we try to encourage all the normal standard classroom things like say two positive things before you say a negative one. They get two warnings and then a cross on the board and then it goes on to classroom detentions which we encourage the teachers to do. Because we feel if they're having a problem with the child in their class then they are the person that has to deal with it. And we also encourage teachers to get straight out and see the parents.</p> <p>It means a world of difference to our school if Mum and Dad know that there is a problem because we have found absolute support in that method. For other infringements on breaking rules we have what we call executive detention. The other executive and myself do those detentions and they're for silliness in the playground and bullying and things like that.</p>

	<p>Moving on from there we have a suspension policy and the state discipline policy: there is a new one just coming out. We're up to draft two and I think we're just about to go to draft three of our discipline policy. I know Alison has had a lot to do with it, and in the past we've had a group of parents on that committee and we had three public meetings where all the parents had input. So we're still in the draft stage of our discipline policy and I can see us going into draft three which we trialled last year by having in school isolations with a staff member sitting with students. Having them in school instead of suspending them out of the school has positive and negatives. It's very hard to staff and that's the biggest problem with it. So we're now moving to, after one suspension if the behaviour continues and we've got parental support, that someone in the family will come and sit with the student in the classroom to help settle them.</p>
Barbara Flick	So describe to me the detention that you use now, do kids stay in at lunchtime?
Ruythe Dufty	Well not the first half of lunch. You always have a few hiccups especially with new teachers and beginning teachers. The children have their lunch and then they would come in for maybe ten minutes and finish off their work. It might be something in the playground where they have to pick up papers, traditional old things that probably happened when you were at school and certainly happened when I was at school as well.
Barbara Flick	Do they write 100 times "I will not"?
Ruythe Dufty	Well I can't say definitely that some of them haven't done that. We've all heard of teachers who say "You'll do it 100 times, you'll write it 1000 times". When we are doing our executive detentions, I have a system where the little ones have to write down what they did. Then go on with a series of boxes and draw three things that they could have done instead. I try to get through some of those positive ideas by doing that. So sometimes yes they would write lines but what we try to do is key them into what they did and why they did it and what they could have done instead.
Barbara Flick	Do you have an Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness committee that supports this group?
Ruythe Dufty [ASSPA]	Yes we do. A lot of the ASSPA people are involved in Aboriginal Aide work that we have. It is a very supportive and very involved community and I think it is running very well. In the past there were a few hiccups with it but I'm quite pleased with the 12 months that we've had with ASSPA. We've also formalised a lot more and made people put in submissions to apply for money and that was for everybody including teachers. In the past teachers would go through the back door with their project and it may not have been priority for the whole school. We try to have priorities for the whole school and work together that way. I think parents are much happier with the changes.
[ATAS]	We have a homework centre committee as well that runs independently. It's also DETYA funded of course. Our homework centre has had on average 70 students attending on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which is not bad. We try to encourage the older students to apply for individual tutoring through the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme. There has been a bit of a hold-up with DETYA this year as it normally starts running in the second week of the year and the funding has not come through yet, but hopefully we'll be able to get up and running by next week.
Barbara Flick	Has the school been affected at all by changes to Abstudy?
Ruythe Dufty	Do you mean as in the fees not coming into the school in that respect?
Barbara Flick	All of the changes, the support for the students as well as the school?
Ruythe Dufty [Abstudy]	<p>When the school had fees paid into the account, that is certainly affected because it was something like \$10,000 that used to come into the school, and we need to start looking at that again. We don't charge fees but I was discussing with my senior clerical last Tuesday that we've had about five parents who have come and asked about fees because they must get a statement saying that you have \$120 for school fees and their saying when did we pay our fees. That's wonderful, a really positive thing.</p> <p>I think it became a problem State-wide with paying fees. Do you have everybody paying them or do you have just a few people? So some schools tried to get what they could and others decided not to charge any at all.</p>

	I have a thing in the back of my mind that I would like all the families to give me their \$50 back-to-school money. Then we wouldn't have to charge for any school sport or things like that, but I am still working on that one. So in that respect I suppose it has affected the school but overall it is something I have to think about and talk to staff at the school who have been here longer.
Barbara Flick	Do you have a program for children who come to school without breakfast?
Ruythe Dufty [Nutrition]	<p>Yes we do and that has changed since last year. There was a little concern in the community that it was perhaps too much open slather and perhaps we need to be looking at a more educational approach and looking at what we could do within the classrooms. So our ASSPA funding is going through at the moment and we're about to put in proposals. We are talking very closely to the ASSPA committee, and we want to fund a nutrition program.</p> <p>I've had some talks with community health last year and we might be able to get some support actually as part of our personal development, health and physical education program. We want to also have cooking lessons as we have the facilities. We were spending about \$5 000 a year on the breakfast program and we think we can do it for \$1 000 and still make those children feel supported. We don't want to ostracise anyone. The teacher who runs it is very kind and caring. It was a bit slow for her last week as she only had three people and was a bit concerned.</p> <p>We're trying to target that other \$4 000 into classrooms and teaching children about nutrition. Hopefully instead of going out and buying hot chips instead they will go out and buy a yogurt and a banana. That might happen, I don't know whether it will, but that's going to be the aim this year. So yes we do run a breakfast program.</p>
Chris Sidoti	Can I run back through some of the things Ruythe that you mentioned earlier? Do you have kids in the school that have got disabilities or who are in wheelchairs?
Ruythe Dufty	No.
Chris Sidoti	So what areas do the special education teachers work in?
Ruythe Dufty [Special education]	We've got 3 IM [mild intellectual disability] teachers. We have got other students at the moment who are supported by Department of Education funding who are classified as IO [moderately disabled] and at the moment we have extra Aide time. Which is one of the reasons why we have so many Aides in our school, which is wonderful. They are specifically for those students but it does help having them in the classroom as well. For the people who know we could actually apply for an IO teacher but I do not want to do this at the expense of losing one of my IM teachers so at the moment we are supporting them with the funding and with Aides.
Chris Sidoti	How many IM students have you got?
Ruythe Dufty	Seven.
Chris Sidoti	How many IO?
Ruythe Dufty	<p>Well off the top of my head 32 in the primary and 21 in the secondary. And we're going through a series of testing now. A lot of schools in western areas didn't have counsellors for a number of years or had counsellors here and there so we have a counsellor in training and so we are doing a lot of testing in that area. We are very aware of the fact that the test can disadvantage Aboriginal people so we're not trying to classify kids for the sake of pigeonholing them in a box.</p> <p>We're trying to find out what is the best that we can do to support those students and their learning needs. So we are going through a series of testing are making sure that we have got absolutely accurate records. We are very well supported by the District Office in special education. There has been a change there in the last 12 months and there are now three people doing a job that one person did in the past. They work very closely with our own teachers and we do have an executive teacher support in our school. Fortunately we advertised last year and we have someone who is specially trained in special education and has had five years experience at Walgett and that is going to be wonderful. We are having regular meetings with her group of people and sharing programs.</p> <p>As I said earlier our results show a great improvement of those students than when they were in Year 6 for their Basic Skills Test to the ones that were in Year 10 last year.</p>

	With more coordination of that special education area we are going to see even more significant programs. We will run real IM programs, like cooking, and going out into the community a lot. Hopefully we will bring those children up with those sorts of skills as well as the academic skills, as they are necessary.
Chris Sidoti	Do you know if there are any kids in town who have got severe physical disabilities?
Ruythe Dufty	Not that I'm aware of no. I don't know of any coming up in the future to our kindergarten either.
Chris Sidoti	So you haven't had to confront that particular issue?
Ruythe Dufty	No not at all.
Chris Sidoti	What difficulty if any do you find dealing with the seven white kids in the school?
Ruythe Dufty [Race relations]	Well we don't find any difficulty with them at all. As I've said we have only got one in our kindergarten this year. I would think the most difficulty that would be faced by the students themselves would be because this is a small town. I'm thinking of three particular students that moved in last year. Sometimes it's hard to break into a friendship group if others have had the same friends since kindergarten and are related. I don't think that they face too many difficulties in school. They seem to be very involved in most aspects of the school. We are very lucky that our ASSPA committee do not exclude those students from any thing that happens in the school. If an excursion is funded by 50%, those students get funded by 50%. They are allowed to go to the homework centre and it is a very conscious effort on the part of the ASSPA Committee and the homework committee that they are fully involved. So I think probably that they are reaping the benefits that a lot of other students don't have in getting increased experiences.
Chris Sidoti	What about their parents?
Ruythe Dufty	We've got as I said three of our children in the secondary. One is a child of one of our teachers so she works here at the school and of course her children attend the school. The other students and I don't want to say too much as they are in small numbers and people might know them but I think they are children that have gone off and tried other schools and haven't been successful and have come back to Brewarrina. Some have learning needs too and they are supported very strongly in that area. I think to be fair they have trialed other schools and come back to Brewarrina for various reasons. I think that as we are talking about such a small group I don't feel comfortable talking about them because people would know who they are individually.
Chris Sidoti	With the teachers that you have got - you said 25 - what is the breakdown in terms of Aboriginal teachers in what levels? Do you have fully qualified teachers?
Ruythe Dufty [Aboriginal staff]	No we don't have any Aboriginal teachers at the moment. We did have one last year and he is now not with us. We did have two Aboriginal Aides and one school assistant who are doing their teacher training. I don't know whether they intend on teaching in Brewarrina. You would have to ask them that. One is in her third year and the other two are in their second year of training. But at the moment we don't have Aboriginal teachers.
Chris Sidoti	And how many Aboriginal staff out of the 25?
Ruythe Dufty [Aboriginal staff]	They are just teachers. Our full staff is 36. We have two Aboriginal school assistants in the office area, and through various Aboriginal programs we have got another six Aboriginal Aides in the classroom. Some are teachers Aides specials; we have 2 AEA's [Aboriginal Education Assistants] and others are school assistants that have been employed casually. One of the things that may come up and I'd be interested to find out about is that some groups in the community feel that there should be an Aboriginal Aid employed from each of the communities in our area. Some people feel the children would be more supported if there was an Aide. As it works out with our casual program we do have someone from each community, but they are casual and dependent on the extra funding we get through special education; so their jobs are dependent each year on that.
Chris Sidoti	Last year how many Year 12 school leavers were there?
Ruythe Dufty [Retention of Aboriginal]	We only had one and she is at university in Armidale now. We are very proud of her – she did very well. She was an excellent student who was an absolutely independent worker and she had to be. She did Pathways, so she was doing three distance education subjects, through Dubbo Distance Education and Walgett. She's done very well and we

students]	are very thrilled with her. She is doing science but is talking about changing to business so I think that she is still finding her way.
Chris Sidoti	So you had one last year how many did you have in Year 12 this year?
Ruythe Dufty	<p>We're only going to actually have one who is going to finish Year 12 this year. We try and encourage the students to do Pathways because it is a big stress for a lot of our students to try and do Pathways and try to undertake their HSC in two years. We try to encourage them to do Pathways so they can do three subjects. We have got one girl who is going to complete the HSC this year and another three that will do three subjects and do another three next year. It seems to work well. Through distance education we can offer a lot of choice and a huge range of subject areas. But we have to look at whether the students have the study skills and the independent learning to be able to go on and do that. We've made a conscious effort with our staffing this year through negotiations with the parents and the students in our Year 11 class. It has made it a decent class; a bit more competitive for them to work together on.</p> <p>We have them all doing subject areas taught by teachers at our school and we are really focussing on them having training sessions with those teachers. We had a Board of Studies evening last Wednesday to talk to them about the requirements of the HSC and we will support them along in that area. I think that it will make a big change to our school because in the past Year 11 and Year 12 has really been a tacked on part and I don't think a lot of students saw it as a real thing to aim for. It will be interesting to see how those subjects go.</p>
[Vocational education]	<p>Next year we'll apply for some JSST [Joint Secondary Schools TAFE] courses for Year 11 and Year 12. We didn't do that this year and it may have been something that we should have done. We've got it for Year 10. So we'll look at that as well. Also the possibility of vocational education. We have a hospitality trained vocational education teacher in the school so we have to get our kitchen up to speed to be able to offer that next year. That will go hand in hand if our new motel goes ahead here in town.</p> <p>The idea of the JSST course for our Year 10 students was to be able to do some of the building work on the motel but it hasn't started yet so we've jumped ahead a little.</p>
Chris Sidoti	When the kids leave do they tend to stay in town or do they tend to wander off?
Ruythe Dufty [Post-school options]	As I've said I have only been here for 12 months but I do think that they tend to stay in town. They might drift off for 6 months.
Chris Sidoti	So actually finding jobs in town is very important for the 14, 15 to 16 year olds?
Ruythe Dufty	<p>Oh yes it is, and the Shire has been terrific and I'm sure there has been a lot of money coming through with things like traineeships. I know there is going to be more coming through in the next little while and what we eventually want to try and do is set up an industry group and really plan ahead, talking to the people locally.</p> <p>I've got a thousand ideas and so does our school and if we can get them all done that would be terrific. Cotton is a booming industry here in town I can see perhaps next year if we do a cotton industries TAFE course for Year 11 and Year 12 that would be terrific. Any maybe we could run shearing courses and ultimately they will lead to real jobs that are available for kids in our town. There is a lot of different feeling about cotton in this town but I think we've got to face reality that it is here and we should try to get students up to a level where they can obtain jobs not just cotton chipping. There is nothing wrong with cotton chipping it is good money but it is seasonal. If we can get them some experience with chemical handling and cotton production that is a good way of going I think.</p> <p>This is also positive because if people aren't going to leave town then you have to provide jobs for them with what is available here. That is also the idea for the future of the hospitality course. There are restaurants, there are cafes, and hopefully eventually we'll have two motels. There will be jobs in that area and as tourism booms in this town, which I believe the town has absolute potential for and I know the Shire is working on that, we've got to be looking at training kids for those areas.</p>
Chris Sidoti	You haven't talked about technology and the schools access there?

<p>[Teacher accommodation]</p>	<p>progress.</p> <p>Suitable accommodation is not readily available for teachers. We've provided housing for our staff at Wilcannia and we have two teacher houses at Bourke. We are endeavouring to construct some houses here for our teachers. In an increasing number of towns it is quite difficult to employ casual teachers particularly in places like Balranald, Broken Hill, Hillston and Wilcannia.</p> <p>The Diocese attracts funding at Category 11. That's from last year. And that amount of money from both State and Federal governments contributes to slightly over 80% of our costs. We charge fees in most cases, not all cases. We don't charge fees to the same extent nor do we collect to the same extent in Bourke as we do in other locations.</p> <p>Our fees relative to other Catholic schools are quite low but the expectation is that running costs are paid from fundraising undertaken in the local community. And in general the local community does an outstanding job in paying for the water and the electricity and whatever else has to be paid to keep the school running.</p> <p>The school is the most obvious arm of the church in the western communities. The parish priest has been very much a part of the school enterprise. However, increasingly smaller communities are losing their resident parish priests, and teachers are expected to be the representatives of the church in these communities.</p>
<p>[Staff experience]</p>	<p>Many teachers are in the early years of teaching and most are unprepared to accept a broader community role. School administration is slightly different to other education systems. In Wilcannia – Forbes the position of assistant principal is often linked to that of the coordinators. Given the difficulty in attracting experienced qualified personnel, schools are opting to share the assistant principal position with two, sometimes three persons who are then employed as coordinators, each with responsibility for an aspect of school life.</p>
<p>[Technology]</p>	<p>Local school boards have a significant role in school management and a representative Diocesan school board oversees Diocesan policy development. Communication across the Diocese is difficult. Much money has been spent creating information technology awareness and implementing internet use, especially e-mail for administrative purposes and use of the web as an opportunity to extend research opportunities for the children.</p> <p>In that respect we have established an infrastructure across the Diocese linking the schools with money that was provided to us from the Parramatta Diocese in Sydney. But our difficulty is that we don't have the money to maintain it. And with the rapid change of technology we're not able to maintain pace with what is occurring. Many schools have local area networks and all students receive instruction in information technology. Within the Catholic Education Office there are two curriculum officers who provide professional services to schools. There are three executive officers including the Director and an accountant who coordinates staffing management, professional development and policy implementation.</p> <p>The Diocese maintains strong links with the social welfare organisation Centacare. Employment and skill training are offered to those persons of Aboriginal descent through an Aboriginal Educational Worker Program.</p>
<p>[Special education]</p>	<p>Exceptional pupils, those with learning difficulties, physical difficulties, emotional difficulties and the gifted and talented have programs developed for them by a special education consultant. That program is poorly funded. The amount of money that we have is the same as what it was ten years ago. The number of students that we are serving has increased from 20 to 60 over that period. A Diocesan initiative is the development of an Aboriginal studies program for integration into the human studies and environment curriculum.</p>
<p>[Teacher]</p>	<p>There are about 200 plus teachers, 155 full-time equivalent, the vast majority of whom</p>

<p>experience]</p> <p>[Support for teachers]</p>	<p>are female. Teachers are beginning their teaching career, returning to teaching or have been long term employees at the one school. About 40% of them are in their first 5 years of teaching. For most principals and other executive staff it is their initial appointment in these positions. Leadership succession opportunities are limited.</p> <p>Much leadership learning is done on the job while also gaining an increasing awareness and appreciation of the broader dimensions of the role so it's learning and developmental as well. The additional responsibilities for the principal of involvement in the local church and community place many and varied demands on him or her.</p> <p>Two sensitive areas that are particularly stressful for the principal are those of enrolments given the sensitivity to employment of new staff and the retention of staff and the finance for the operation of the schools. Caring for the teachers and especially for the school executive in our sparsely settled and relatively isolated system is very costly.</p> <p>Regular contact and communication are the two most vital forms of support that are offered to staff. The Diocese is divided geographically into three clusters. In each cluster a more experienced principal is appointed as cluster coordinator to be a support and mentor to colleagues. Personnel from the central office are required to visit each school at least twice annually. In practice visits are more frequent and they are staggered so that a consultant is in contact with most schools at least once a month.</p> <p>Each week the Director publishes a news bulletin. Other information in the form of newsletters are distributed on a school term basis to staff, parish priests and parents. Often teleconferences are used to discuss more immediate issues and to reduce the cost involved in canvassing opinion across the system. Induction programs are conducted for beginning teachers and principals.</p> <p>For teachers there is an initial meeting organised centrally. Thereafter consultants conduct several cluster meetings over a two-year period. The initial meeting for new principals is in the central office followed by regular advisory meetings at each of their schools one of which is a first year appraisal meeting. A teacher from each school is nominated to the teacher's forum, which discusses issues of concern with the Director or his nominee three times during the year. Members of the teacher's forum meeting clusters participate in a teleconference and come together for an annual meeting.</p> <p>An annual executive conference is held. The principals meet twice and clusters have an annual conference and a centrally held meeting. Teachers are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities; schools are required to submit an annual professional development plan to the central office. Often the most effective professional development, however, occurs within the school and community context. Principals are expected to foster these opportunities for staff.</p>
<p>[Professional development]</p>	<p>In facilitating professional development the central office allows each school to allocate two pupil-free days for professional development, provides two curriculum consultants to advise schools and pays for specialists to offer programs for individual schools and clusters. Teachers may apply to the central office to subsidise the cost of attending state or national conferences, and exemplary teachers and change agents are occasionally invited to participate in programs which are likely to be of benefit to their community.</p>
<p>[Staff evaluation]</p>	<p>Some of these teachers are appointed to senior teacher positions where they offer guidance and support to less experienced teachers. Ad hoc subject or interest meetings are sometimes held for teachers by schools. There are cycles of review and evaluation led by the principal. The community cooperatively reviews its school every six years.</p> <p>Personnel from the central office validate the review and in the third year after the review complete an evaluation exercise to monitor the implementation of the review recommendations. The review process meets the requirements for Government</p>

[Literacy]	<p>registration.</p> <p>School executives are appraised in their first, third and final year of appointment, which is usually the fifth or sixth year. Each appraisal is conducted by the schools' coordinator, or for principals in the final year of their contract by the Director of Schools.</p> <p>We are currently introducing a formative appraisal process for staff who are not in executive positions. The purpose is to provide career path guidance, more individualised professional development and an incentive to remain for a longer period in our system.</p> <p>Just to comment on the Basic Skills Tests that were conducted last year in Years 3 and 5. Our results indicate that our students compare relatively well with the State average. There are pockets of concern and I was interested to hear what Paul Loxley said about Bourke yesterday. We wouldn't claim the same results at St Ignatius at Bourke.</p> <p>We would argue that we are investing a lot of money in programs like Reading Recovery, in assisting those who do have learning difficulties. But we would suggest that there are other variables which are affecting the success of students, particularly in the literacy area.</p>
Barbara Flick	Thanks Ken. One of the lovely things that happened yesterday was the primary school children from the Catholic school when asked to draw things they like about the school drew the building and it obviously meant a lot to them.
Ken Rodwell	That building has got a rich heritage.
Barbara Flick	It was a symbol of the things that the kids enjoyed so thanks for that. I wanted to ask you whether the numbers of teachers in training in Catholic schools has increased or decreased your pool of teachers?
Ken Rodwell	We don't have a pool as such, we go to the training institutions and try and entice the young people to come our way. And what we have found is that if we can focus upon those who have done their schooling in country areas, we often have a better chance of having them come to our school. It's difficult. We moved last year before other employing bodies and so we were able to do particularly well at Signadou in Canberra. We employed seven of the graduates and we had another one take up an offer later. Often we find that young people apply for more favourable locations and if they miss out there they will apply to come to our area.
Barbara Flick	But that number has been fairly constant?
Ken Rodwell	Yes at this stage, because we are able to gain interest from Adelaide rather than Melbourne. We are able to employ teachers who train in Adelaide and are willing to go to Broken Hill. Wilcannia is extremely difficult to staff, and yet the people who go there tend to stay there for quite a long period of time. Our southern schools tend to get trainees either from Ballarat or alternatively from Adelaide. That's the way in Wentworth and then Balranald down to Barham and Deniliquin.
Barbara Flick	Is there a curriculum for Aboriginal Studies in Catholic schools?
Ken Rodwell	There is most definitely. We're very proud of that. It's been developed with a writer that we've employed from Wollongong University, Jennifer Burnley, in association with the Aboriginal Studies Department at the Australian Catholic University at Strathfield and in conjunction with an Aboriginal Advisory Group and teachers throughout our schools. We introduced that program at the beginning of this year with in-service days in each of our clusters across the system.
Barbara Flick	I've seen the curriculum developed in Victoria. It's excellent.
Ken Rodwell	Yes, well we claim that ours is pretty good too.
Barbara Flick	What is the percentage of Aboriginal children in your school population here in Brewarrina?
Ken Rodwell	Cathy will talk about that shortly. We've got the mission school at St Teresa's at Wilcannia which is kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2. Mostly Aboriginal, but there are some white students that attend that school. It's mainly Aboriginal. We have a large percentage of students of Aboriginal descent at Bourke. To a lesser extent here in Brewarrina, and then throughout our system somewhere between 3% and 10%. Certainly the majority are in Bourke, Brewarrina, Wilcannia, some in Cobar, some in

	Warren and there were a number in Narromine. We've had a very competent, enthusiastic and well liked Aboriginal Educational Worker there who moved from town and when she left we lost some of our students.
Chris Sidoti	What's your estimate of the numbers or the proportion in the Bourke school, St Ignatius?
Ken Rodwell	I think that we've got about 60-70% there. It's quite a different school. It's a school that's conducted by the Marist Brothers. It provides nutrition and health services and there is a breakfast and lunch program as well and we have a Sister of Mercy on staff who has a particular welfare role with Aboriginal students and families and we also have a counsellor who previously worked in the Kimberley. I think that we've got four Aboriginal Education Workers as well. That's of a population of 220 in the school this year.
Chris Sidoti	Do you have any idea of what the Aboriginal youth population in Bourke would be as a proportion of the town?
Ken Rodwell	No.
Chris Sidoti	The state school is 50% Aboriginal and the Catholic school is 60-70%. That would mean that the total Aboriginal proportion of the youth population at least at primary school age must be quite large.
Ken Rodwell	That doesn't surprise me.
Chris Sidoti	Given though that the Catholic network is spread through the Diocese, having 3-10% is statistically a small percentage.
Ken Rodwell	It is. It is less than what it would have been when I was at school.
Chris Sidoti	You don't know why it would be small in other areas?
Ken Rodwell [Aboriginal participation]	Well, in some of our schools it has not been traditional for those of Aboriginal descent to attend our schools. I can't tell you why.
Chris Sidoti	Is there a danger that the Catholic school in many country towns becomes the school where the white parents send their children because the state schools are predominantly Aboriginal?
Ken Rodwell	Yes, I guess so; that would be true. We have always had a very firm commitment to Aborigines in this Diocese. That commitment was made and pushed very strongly by our former Bishop, Doug Warren. Our present Director and Bishop are both very strong in their conviction that we should do all we can to assist Aborigines to attend our schools and gain from whatever services we can provide for them.
Chris Sidoti	I certainly know that both Doug Warren and Barry Collins are strongly committed in the area.
Ken Rodwell	And our Director, Victor Dunn.
Chris Sidoti	I don't know what strategically can be done?
Ken Rodwell [Fees]	Well it's interesting. At Bourke we don't charge fees. Not for the Aborigines. In Brewarrina we do, and we have a 98% collection rate in Brewarrina. So there are anomalies between each of the locations anyway. There will be difficult children, some who may have been at the Central School and we will take them on board for a little while and see what we can do with them. There are times when we can't do anything and we have to pass them onto the welfare agencies as happened on two occasions last year. We have an open policy to enrolment.
Chris Sidoti [Staff recruitment and incentives]	With the problems that you mentioned with recruiting teachers, which is also a problem in the state system, it applies equally. Do you see yourselves as disadvantaged compared to the state system because they have a statewide pool whereas you're really operating a Diocesan pool? The state system can guarantee priority placement after three years whereas Wilcannia-Forbes Diocese can't make such a guarantee of placement outside the Diocese itself.
Ken Rodwell	That is a disadvantage, but what we do find is that in the small schools we've got committed people who spend far too much time at the school. They develop a real array of skills and they are usually competitive when it comes to finding a position in more advantaged areas. We are conscious of it. Our biggest concern is really for those people who live in the area and have been teaching at the one school for a long period of time. How do we enrich them professionally? Do they want to be enriched? That's more of a concern for us.

Chris Sidoti	With your description of the spread of the schools and particularly the staff student ratios, as you say, there must be a large number of smaller Catholic schools within the Diocese?
Ken Rodwell	There are.
Chris Sidoti	Many of which, you mentioned, are economically not viable. What's the Diocese commitment to maintaining those schools, and what kinds of alternatives are being examined?
Ken Rodwell [Small schools]	We will try and keep them open as long as we possibly can. The most precariously placed school at the present time is Peak Hill, which has 40 students. We thought that we may have had to closing it this year because we anticipated that enrolments might decline to less than 35. We would discuss this with the local community and it would largely depend on their commitment to their school as to how long we retain a presence. That has a philosophical aspect as well because in a place like Peak Hill, the only Catholic institution is the school. We're optimistic about the future. We anticipated 2 600 and we've had an increase of 100 which enabled us to employ more staff this year. The 100 additional students largely spread across the Diocese is viewed quite positively. We haven't got a contingency plan at this stage to close any schools. We did consider closing the secondary section at Broken Hill given that they took very low numbers in kindergarten last year. But they doubled that number this year and the government increased our funding from Category 10 to Category 11, which made the secondary area in Broken Hill far more viable.
Chris Sidoti	Is there any exploration of shared resourcing or even shared classes between state and Catholic schools in particular localities?
Ken Rodwell	None that I'm aware of. I know that in various places there are different degrees of cooperation. In Forbes the principals of the primary schools just got together for the first time and they're starting off by having a sports day, having the kids in multi-school teams competing in that day and then they're going to extend that to cultural activities and so on. No, I'd say there's a fair gulf in most places between the Catholic primary school and the government school.
Chris Sidoti	What about secondary schools? How many secondary schools has the Diocese got?
Ken Rodwell	We've only got the two secondary schools. The secondary department of the Central School at Broken Hill and the non-systemic coeducational boarding school, at Forbes, which has got 750 students. It serves the needs of Forbes and Parkes and has something like 200 + boarders, both girls and boys.
Chris Sidoti	One of the comments that we've got already amongst the kids is the question of choice in senior years. But if the Catholic system hasn't actually got senior classes then you can't pool kids to provide more choice. It's not quite as relevant in the primary classes.
Ken Rodwell	It's a concern for us because not all of our kids go away to boarding schools. In fact the majority now don't. So we want to ensure that our kids are being well educated up to that Year 6 level so that they can take their place with their peers in Year 7 in the government schools.
Chris Sidoti	Once the Catholic school kids get to Year 6 how many would go away to boarding school and how many would stay in their town and go to the local state secondary school?
Ken Rodwell	It's less now than what it was previously because of those reasons that I heard canvassed yesterday. I think probably less than 50%. I don't know what the proportion here in Brewarrina is but I'd say less than 50% go away to boarding school now. I know that there are far less going from Brewarrina to Red Bend than what there were when I taught at Red Bend for example, 25 years ago.
Chris Sidoti	Particularly if you're looking at Brewarrina, given that there are virtually no white kids in the local high school, presumably most of the Catholic school kids would go away from here still?
Ken Rodwell	Yes.
Cathy Eppestun, Principal, St Patricks, Brewarrina	The majority do. I think that a few go to Nyngan for the week, stay, and then come home for weekends.
Chris Sidoti	There's a boarding school in Nyngan is there? A hostel?
Cathy Eppestun	No, they board with families.

Chris Sidoti	You mentioned about the support from the Parramatta Diocese for the local Diocese here. Is there other support coming to the Diocese from other parts of the church?
Ken Rodwell	Yes. We get a significant amount of funding off the top of the grants to other Catholic education systems that flows into our Diocese to enable us to fund the staff level that we have. That would be equivalent, off the top of my head, to about nine or ten teachers. That helps in our administration. For us professional development and the ongoing training of beginning teachers is probably the major priority that we have. We believe that if people are prepared to come into our system in these rather isolated places if we can support them as much as possible then we will build upon their talents and they will have sufficient capacity then to go on to other places. Other Dioceses know that. Lismore, for example, has often pillaged our Diocese, last year to the extent that they said that they were prepared to second a person who was in a position of responsibility at a lower level into a higher level in our Diocese. They were prepared to do that in recognition of the number of teachers that they have got from Wilcannia-Forbes. Notwithstanding that the enthusiasm that the younger teachers offer is a great contribution to each of our communities. Our kids benefit greatly from their enthusiasm and their recent training.
Chris Sidoti	Do you consider that there is a resource disparity between state and government schools in any particular town, comparing on the average?
Ken Rodwell	I know what Bourke Primary School has got and we can't compare anywhere near as much as that. In other places the gap wouldn't be so great.
Chris Sidoti	What about Peak Hill, where you say you've got 40 students only.
Ken Rodwell [Small schools]	If you've got 40 students and I think that we've got two point something teachers, you are actually in a position where you've got the teachers as almost an individual coach for small groups of students. And you've got a very supportive local community. So depending on your view of education, those kids are very advantaged. We may not have the hardware, we may not have those resources, but we've got the contact and support of the parents. So there are a lot of things in favour of those young people. I wouldn't argue that there is a resource disparity, even in a place like that. I'd be reluctant to argue, except in the information technology field, that there is such a disparity between government and Catholic schools. I think we all need more money, quite frankly. That is the bottom line for all of us. We need it in those areas of need that are going to be of use to our students in the 21 st century. We're tending to educate more for the 1990s, the 1980s, even than what we are for the next century.
Chris Sidoti	Are there any special programs or arrangements for kids with disability within the Catholic system?
Ken Rodwell [Special education]	They are limited because of the funding. Because there has been no increase in that funding for special education in over the past ten years, the Diocese has increasingly had to find money to supplement programs to augment whatever was going on at the local school. So that's becoming a significant part of our budgeting now, to find money for particularly those young people who are learning disabled. We've got 26 students who are learning disabled and then we've got another 34 who have emotional, behavioural and physical problems.
Chris Sidoti	Has it been necessary to adapt any school premises for wheelchairs, for example, or for other physical needs?
Ken Rodwell	Yes, we've done that, but we've done that with the support of government grants. I think that we are participating in a program in Warren at the present time to enable a severely handicapped child to attend the school. We also have a child at Forbes who is quite physically handicapped.
Chris Sidoti	That's all from me Ken.
Barbara Flick	I suppose what I wanted to ask, I don't know whether you can answer this, is how many Aboriginal staff there are at the Brewarrina school?
Ken Rodwell	One Aboriginal Education Worker. She's very much a part of our community, she's a liaison person, between us and the community and highly respected, we understand, in the local community as well. Certainly we see her that way.
Chris Sidoti	Cathy do you want to tell us a bit about Bree?
Cathy Eppelestun	I have only been here a month and I have just jotted down the main things that I have found coming from the Forbes/Parkes area to Brewarrina. St Patrick's has 102 children this year. We've gone from 89 at the end of last year, so we have large increase. We've

<p>[Isolation]</p>	<p>got 25 Aboriginal children and 77 white children. We have five full time teachers; three of them are first year out so they are wonderful, enthusiastic and dedicated. I have one part time teacher that I have just employed with extra allocation time. I have one assistant that helps throughout the classroom four days a week and our Aboriginal Education Worker who works five days a week. She also works with the Aboriginal families. She is wonderful. Because we have five new teachers at the school she has been a backbone in guiding us through our first few weeks. I have a secretary two days a week.</p> <p>The main thing that has struck me out here is the isolation of course, for the families. I have one family that has enrolled this year with three children and the mother drives them 90km every morning, she stays in town and then she drives them home each afternoon. With the wet weather we are faxing schoolwork through to them. That is such dedication. They have been doing distance education but she wanted the children to socialise with other children from the classrooms. That family is just one of many. Other families travel 70 or 80km a day. Another family comes in during the week, they bought a house out of town and they live there all week so that the children can attend school and then on weekends they return home to their property.</p> <p>One of the problems with isolation is the referring children who are experiencing difficulty. Families need to travel to Dubbo or to Orange for help when we refer them. Every year the school has a major excursion on a three-year rotation of Sydney one year, Canberra the next and then the Gold Coast. The children from Years 4, 5 and 6 over three years visit each of those major centres in Australia. The cost is quite large and that is a demand on the families. They go for a week.</p>
<p>Chris Sidoti</p>	<p>What happens to those that can't afford it?</p>
<p>Cathy Epplestun</p> <p>[Aboriginal education]</p> <p>[Options after Year 6]</p>	<p>They do a lot of fundraising to enable everyone to go, so the town and the community all around put in. This year we are also going to use the ASPPA funding to help so that no child will miss out.</p> <p>Our main aim this year really are the Aboriginal units that are to be implemented into our classrooms with our teachers and being a Catholic school, of course our sacramental program. We lost a parish priest last year. This year one of my aims will be helping the sisters that come to the town also.</p> <p>We have a homework centre. The homework centre will begin this month and we have that for Aboriginal and white children. It is open to all the Aboriginal children and we have opened it to every white child but we will choose the children who need to start.</p> <p>You mentioned the Year 6 going away next year. I've found this a real dilemma with families, what to do once their child is in Year 6. It's a big problem. I've spoken to a number of families. Some have said that they will look at leaving the town, they don't want their child to go to boarding school, and they will follow them to a town where they can attend a high school. I would say that the majority of the children will attend boarding school. Some from last year's Year 6 I heard the other day are going to Nyngan; they board there privately, go to the high school and then travel home and their parents pick them up Friday afternoon. That's all that I have jotted down.</p>
<p>Chris Sidoti</p>	<p>I am fascinated I guess, amazed, at the kids going into Nyngan and boarding in homes there. Clearly it's not a decision to go to a Catholic high school but rather than go to the high school here in Bree?</p>
<p>Cathy Epplestun</p>	<p>I can't answer that.</p>
<p>Chris Sidoti</p>	<p>Has it got a racial basis? Do they not want to send their kids to a school that is predominantly Aboriginal, and if so, how can a Catholic school try to address that?</p>
<p>Cathy Epplestun</p>	<p>I don't know, because we've got Aboriginal children throughout our classrooms. I know a lot of the parents did go to the high school, so I really can't answer that.</p>
<p>Barbara Flick</p>	<p>Relationships change after primary school.</p>
<p>Chris Sidoti</p>	<p>I wonder, this is just speculation, I wonder if there is a role that the Catholic school could play in encouraging local kids to stay locally? If there is in fact a racial basis for deciding not to go to the Brewarrina high school. This is something that I would think would be of concern to both the Catholic school and the Catholic parish.</p>

Cathy Epplestun	The parents would need to answer that.
Chris Sidoti	Maybe we will get some this afternoon. I would be interested to ask them.
Cathy Epplestun	Ask the children.
Chris Sidoti	Kids are terrific; they don't pull any punches at all. This is a bit off the track I know, but just for my church interests, there is now no priest at all in town?
Cathy Epplestun	We are being serviced from Nyngan. Bourke has two new priests, and they will be coming out to service us as well. We have a dilemma about the Catholic church here at the moment; it's been condemned. They are in the process of deciding whether they put money into upgrading the church or whether they demolish it. Only once a month we have a priest here. The other times we have a Eucharistic service run by the parishioners here.
Barbara Flick	Do they come from Bourke to do funerals?
Cathy Epplestun	I don't know. Yes I guess they will. But the sisters will be doing baptisms. Actually, no, the sisters will be doing funerals.
Chris Sidoti	You mentioned how the enrolments have gone up quite significantly this year. Has the pattern been fluctuating up and down over a period of time do you know?
Cathy Epplestun	It's been climbing over the past few years. And we've got a number of distance education children too this year which has boosted our numbers. They just felt the children needed the socialisation that comes from having friends at school.
Chris Sidoti	Is the school connected into the Diocesan computer network?
Cathy Epplestun	Bourke and Brewarrina have a breakdown at the moment, but yes we do.
Chris Sidoti	How many computers do the kids have?
Cathy Epplestun [Technology]	We have 40 older computers, but they still work. The office has a new one; there are two new ones in Year 5-6 and one in the Year 2-4 classroom.
Chris Sidoti	And through the library can you make the internet linkage?
Cathy Epplestun	We have just had new lines put in. The Year 5-6 has got the internet and the office has got the internet. The CEO [Catholic Education Office] is always available with any questions as far as problems go.
Chris Sidoti	Do you have any kids with disabilities in the school?
Cathy Epplestun [Students with disabilities]	Yes, we've got two with hearing disabilities.
Chris Sidoti	What kind of adjustment have you had to make?
Cathy Epplestun	We've got special hearing systems in the classrooms.
Chris Sidoti	The loop system, hearing loops, or is it a different type?
Ruythe Dufty	They have got for both schools a community health facility. We have had funding for both our schools.
Chris Sidoti	And any kids with intellectual disability or learning disabilities?
Cathy Epplestun	Yes, We have got two at the moment down at the Dalwood Centre at Queenscliff, the special learning centre. They will come out with special programs. There are another two children at school at the moment who have been to the Dalwood Centre. We find that funding is not available to assist those children as much as we would like when they come back on their special programs. At the moment we've got volunteers coming in to work with them and we have a wonderful teacher who is implementing their program into the whole literacy program in the classroom.
Chris Sidoti	Four in a small school is actually quite a large number.
Cathy Epplestun	It is. There is another one that's on an outreach program in another classroom, who has been referred to the Centre. It's over a year's waiting to get into Dalwood.
Barbara Flick	Is the only relationship that you have with the Aboriginal parents through the liaison officer?
Cathy Epplestun	They are at the school all the time. Dropping their children off, cooking lunches. We often stop to have a chat. I find them very open and feel that they feel very welcome here. Quite a few come in and pop into the school.
Barbara Flick	Do those families live in town?
Cathy Epplestun	Yes. There might be a few out on farms.
Barbara Flick	And your ASSPA committee is made up of those Aboriginal parents?
Cathy Epplestun	Yes.

	more an advice, training and development program?
Daryl Thompson	There are significant financial resources. It's calculated on a formula, which is based on your distance from the district office, the number of students that you have and the number of teachers. I think that one of the more important things that it does is that it creates a staffing differential, which allows the school to do some more innovative things with the way the staffing is organised. I still think that needs to go a lot further in country areas. The fact that in a city school you can say "We've got a training day, you've got this money to provide a casual teacher, we'll see you there on Wednesday" – it doesn't quite work like that in a rural area. In a school like Ivanhoe, if a teacher's going to something in Sydney, they need to be away for three, maybe four days just for one day of a training course.
Chris Sidoti	How much extra money or how many extra staff can that actually mean?
Daryl Thompson	In most cases, if you're using your funding and the differential you can probably put an extra pair of hands in the school at least. Most small schools use it that way. I've got about nine one-teacher schools and most of them employ a person for at least a couple of days a week to either drive the literacy part of their school or to help them with casual relief if they are doing something themselves.
Ruythe Dufty [Casual/relief staff]	I didn't bring up the problem of casuals, but it's a big problem, because we don't have any. We've actually used some of our money to keep a casual teacher at our school so we can release teachers from class so they can actually do some of the things that we want to do.
Daryl Thompson	I think that the most important thing from that point of view is that the school has an ownership of what's happening.
Barbara Flick	Tell me how it works. Is there a pool of money to the disadvantaged schools in the region that they apply for, or do they automatically get it? What's worked out in this formula?
Daryl Thompson	It's changed to be an automatic payment. There used to be a submission process and regional committees but now it's a centrally calculated formula. It's a pool of money, which is mostly federal government money. New South Wales is one of the few states that maintained the Disadvantaged Schools Program; most of the other states combined it into other programs. New South Wales has retained it as a separate program, which is focussed on literacy. It's using that literacy funding from the federal government.
Barbara Flick	In many schools that I've been to over the last few years it's not uncommon to find children finish primary school without being able to read and write properly. That to me has always been an indication of teacher expectation. "These kids aren't going anywhere, they're going to stay here, so I might as well not waste my time." Do you think that there's an attitude like that out here at all?
Daryl Thompson [Pre-school]	<p>In our meetings last year I must admit that probably 50% of people would have an attitude where it's a rural community. From my perspective this is one of the really important things to address. Yesterday we went down to the preschool here in Brewarrina – most of the state government's emphasis has been in the K-2 area. A large number of our DSP schools are using their funding to set up preschools as well. I think that is the place to begin and if you go down and see the work at the preschool. All the research shows that for every year a child gets behind in terms of their literacy learning it takes them a couple of years to catch up.</p> <p>One of the important things is that young teachers need to be supported early on to develop that confidence in their own ability to change. One of the things that came out in the paper that Jenny Rouge wrote is that a lot of these teachers lose their self confidence to know that they can make a difference. That's something that you have early on but it's something that's beaten out of you in the early times. If that support's provided early on... There are lots examples of people staying for four or five years rather leaving. They are obviously the ones who have set a high standard for themselves.</p>
Barbara Flick [Vocational education]	Another fear that I have is that vocational, TAFE, kind of programs that are introduced into schools to take care of the kids who really aren't interested in an academic education actually become a major part of the curriculum. In some places where I have been, children on the basis of a teacher's estimation have been denied a formal education and shunted into these classes. Is that a worry in the Far West?
Daryl Thompson	I think it depends on how people interpret it. I don't think that vocational education is

	<p>something that starts when kids get to Year 10. I think it needs to start at least when kids start their formal schooling. Jenny in her paper talks a lot about kids in schools where expectations are low being provided with lots of video material to watch and the dumbing down of the curriculum. Her argument is the kids who are given that sort of opportunity are the ones that least need it, because if they are getting behind they are the ones that need the most intensive support rather than to be continued on this downward spiral. I don't think that it's a big danger in vocational education. I think that people really need to understand that it is a balancing of the curriculum, not an alternative.</p>
<p>Michael Cavanagh, Principal, Dubbo School of Distance Education [Vocational education]</p>	<p>I'm chair of the District VET [Vocational Education and Training] Committee, and there has been an enormous change in the status, not only of vocational education but also the credentials that vocational education gives. With the introduction of the National Accreditation Standards, which is only just happening now, those courses now do not have the low status either in the school or the community that they previously did have. For instance now it is quite appropriate and quite possible to do vocational education leading to TAFE education leading to university education, all 100% transferable. That means that the Joint Secondary Schools TAFE and the vocational education subjects that kids do in school is now not a waste of time and it is certainly not a low status educational thing because of its transferability.</p>
<p>Barbara Flick</p>	<p>A lot of these parents out here are living in poverty. They are sending their children to schools that are disadvantaged schools and they live in poverty. Is there any way that your program can assist families that don't have books? Can introduce children who don't choose to or who aren't sent to preschool to at least have some resources in their own homes.</p>
<p>Daryl Thompson [Literacy]</p>	<p>Out of all the things that I have learnt, that's one of the really important things that we are trying to stress. If you ask teachers whether kids have literacy resources at home, they're expecting them to have encyclopedias and all these formal forms of literacy. One of the really big things in the research that we're working with is the power of using home literacies and community literacy resources to teach kids to read and write. A lot of our schools run home reading programs so that bought resources are school based and the kids can take them home. I know a number of schools around the Moree district have actually incorporated Murri and their languages into books that have been written. The kids have actually developed their own books that they take home. There is that problem that home reading program resources disappear. They have found that if the kids have ownership in developing their own reading resources then that's been a really powerful thing. A lot of resources have been put into having resources at home, those more traditional school literacies being taken home. I think there's also more of an emphasis in looking at the resources that people use in their own communities.</p>
<p>Ruythe Dufty</p>	<p>We get given a small amount of money, about \$2,000 a year to assist families. We advertise that and no disadvantaged student from our school is ever disadvantaged from attending anything or ostracised at all. We've got a fairly open sort of relationship if someone needs help or if they need books or whatever it is. We have supplies of pens and pencils. But we also try to get through the message that where possible these things need to be provided. Certainly we do spend all of our money each year. The home school liaison people might go out to a family and there's a problem where someone hasn't been attending because they don't have some shoes or something like that. We always try to fix it up immediately.</p>
<p>Barbara Flick</p>	<p>I was thinking of the advancement through schools. And listening to the lady speak yesterday afternoon at Bourke, remember the lady who's got two children at university. She comes from a family where's there's always been resources, where the kids have grown up with books and with high expectations and they have been supported all the way so they can attend schools in the bush and go on to university. I would suspect that a lot of these kids who live in poverty would have to struggle and be a bit brighter to find their way through the HSC.</p>
<p>Ruythe Dufty [Austudy]</p>	<p>That's why we put emphasis on these programs to take students down to the universities and the larger TAFEs so they can realise that there are Indigenous education units in all the universities and they can be supported, but I think you're right. Austudy and money like that is a problem for families, because even if you do get your child down to Newcastle Uni, for example, Austudy will not cover even their boarding fees. You have to have a relative down there or something like that. It is a</p>

	struggle for all families, and particularly for people that are disadvantaged.
Barbara Flick	It's not a matter of special treatment, it's trying to level the playing field.
Daryl Thompson [Literacy]	<p>That perception and reality thing is really important. A lot of teachers say "Those kids wouldn't have this and that at home". One of the things we've been concentrating on is finding out what resources the kids do have at home. A lot of families where people didn't expect the newspaper, for example, to be there, these kids always had the newspaper at home. Wiping those perceptions that people have out and finding out what actually is available is really important.</p> <p>A lot of work with reading now in terms of levelling books and finding out what reading level kids are at and not sending something home that is too challenging for them or of high enough interest for them to read. Dusting off books that kids don't find interesting and trying to make them read them doesn't work. A lot of the work that has been done in terms of encouraging reading through those kinds of approaches is good.</p>
Michael Cavanagh	<p>Measuring tools nowadays to make sure that the books are appropriate to the learning levels of the kids are quite sophisticated. You can narrow down the reading pattern of a child, especially in their early years of learning. You're looking mainly at the kindergarten, first class, and second class spectrum. You can aim a book down into a child's reading capacity now to within 5%. That's incredibly accurate. And the tools that we all use now as a matter of course to judge that reading accuracy and to make sure that the books are given to the kid within that 5% band are readily available through Reading Recovery programs and First Step programs. It's quite superb and its amazing the difference having a book that's not too easy and not too challenging but exactly right for the kids to take home.</p> <p>And you might think that that's just levelling the playing field, that it's available to both non-rural and rural and isolated schools. But the programs, especially DSP and CAP [Country Areas Program] and staffing pay more per capita for the isolated and remote schools in order to do this than the non isolated and remote schools.</p>
Ruythe Dufty	We do get a staffing differential. It's point two.
Barbara Flick	In New Zealand there is a society that works with Maori communities. They work with community members to teach them to coach children through preschool and primary school and I've been to graduation ceremonies where these people graduate with the students. I've always wondered why Australia hasn't picked up on ideas like that.
Daryl Thompson	Vera does a program called Pause Praise and Prompt that teaches some strategies in teaching kids to read. Once parents understand some of the processes involved they feel more comfortable with how they can help their kids I think.
Michael Cavanagh	Even though some of these aren't credentialled like the New Zealand program is, distance education for instance runs a program through Charles Sturt University where parents can participate in a formalised training of teaching kids how to learn. Not only are they credentialled for the work that they do but that also makes up one quarter of a degree. If parents want to continue with a degree in anything that is teaching and learning based then this will make up one-quarter of their degree.