

**National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education  
Public Hearing in Moree NSW continued – 5 March 1999**

Chris Sidoti	<p>Thank you and welcome to the three people sitting in the back.</p> <p>We have quite a list of people to get through during the course of the day. People will be coming and going the full time. I think many will also come at about 11.30 am which is the time we thought we would be starting. Ken thanks very much for coming on. <u>Would you like to introduce yourself and off you go.</u></p>
<p>Ken Cattanach, Principal, Moree Public School (Moree West)</p> <p>[Teacher experience]</p>	<p>My name is Ken Cattanach and I am the Principal of Moree Public School. I might begin by establishing my credentials. I am in my 35<sup>th</sup> year as an employee of the Department of Education. I have been a Principal of two other schools in my career. I was a Principal of Gravesend Public School and also the Principal of Sawtell Public School and I have been Assistant Principal of Warialda Public School. I have a range of experiences in those sort of executive roles.</p> <p>I would also like to begin by giving you some idea of what Moree Public School is like. We are a large primary school. We have approximately 610 students. We are one of three large primary schools in Moree and approximately 18% of our students are Aboriginal. We offer an extensive range of programs. These programs include five specialist education classes. We are the centre for the Heritage Teachers Program and also we are the district centre for the gifted and talented program. We receive classes for Years 5 and 6 students. We have 11 children currently enrolled who suffer from a variety of disabilities and most of these children receive support by either way of a staffing allocation or by the provision of special facility.</p> <p>The theme of the presentation I am going to make here this morning is that the quality of education services is influenced to a great extent by the quality of administrative teaching and support services that are available. I believe that the latter is compromised by remoteness and I would like to present some data to support this position. To begin with the average age of classroom teachers in Moree Public is 28. The average age of teachers across the State is over 40. The average experience of classroom teachers at our school is 3.2 years. For 85% of those classroom teachers, Moree is their first teaching appointment or experience. For all of those teachers, Moree provided them with their first experience in a school with a significant number of Aboriginal children. All of the teachers commented that their training did not prepare them for that type of situation.</p> <p>There are several other issues that I would like to explore. The first one is experience. The figures I have quoted indicate that our school is staffed by people who are relatively inexperienced and in this situation quality is compromised. It increases the need for training, but it also increases the need the amount of support that those teachers require. I accept that lots of these young people are often enthusiastic and highly motivated, but it is their relative lack of experience that affects the quality of their work. I also believe that a strong executive leadership team is essential for executive effective schooling.</p> <p>In 1995 Moree Public had a vacancy for an executive teacher position. We received two applications; both of those applications were from local people. At about the same time Fairholme College in Toowoomba received over 100 applications for a primary classroom teaching position.</p> <p>In 1996 we had a Deputy Principal and an Assistant Principal position advertised. The Deputy Principal position attracted three applications. One was local and two were non-local. The Assistant Principal position attracted two applications, both were local.</p>

<p>[Education support]</p>	<p>In 1994 I was the Principal of Sawtell Public School and I convened a selection panel for an Assistant Principal position at Sawtell. We received 20 applications. One was from within the school and some were from within the district and some were from across the State.</p> <p>In 1998 we had an executive teaching position advertised and it did not attract a single application. On re-advertisement only two applications were submitted. One was local and one was non-local.</p> <p>During that time between 1995 through to 1999 we have not received one single application for lateral transfer to any of those positions. The transfer and promotion system that exists in schools is supposed to be based on the principle of local selection. That is that schools have a choice. Clearly the choice for our local community and the appointment of teachers to executive positions is extremely limited and I believe limited by isolation. The current system does not work in schools in isolated areas.</p> <p>I think the same can be said for the support services that exist in district offices. We had a mathematics consultancy position advertised in 1997 and there were no applications. It was re-advertised in 1998 and there was one application.</p> <p>In 1995 through to 1996 teachers from our school travelled to Walgett for training in Reading Recovery. In 1997 and 1998 the training took place in Moree. The tutor stayed for two years during 1997 and 1998 and then moved to Armidale. We are now without a resident tutor within this area.</p> <p>The literacy consultancy position at our district office was advertised in 1998 and was filled from within the office personnel. Likewise for the CAP consultant. It was filled from the district office personnel. I can cite other examples where staff, district offices have merely changed positions. These people could well have won these positions from a field of highly qualified candidates but I doubt it. I believe it is more likely that there were very few applications for those positions. As a result I think that we don't get the depth and the range of applications that would attract in other areas.</p>
<p>[Support for disadvantaged students]</p>	<p>School improvement is an area that we hear a lot about. We have heard a lot about over the last couple of years and certainly our school is committed to the ideals of that process. When it first started a couple of years ago the School Improvement Officer was located here in Moree. The School Improvement Officer for our school now lives in Coffs Harbour. Last year she came and visited our school twice for about an hour each time. Last week I spoke to another Principal in this district and they told me that their School Improvement Officer for that school lives in Ballina and that officer was not able to visit that school on any occasion in 1998. Once again, I believe the effectiveness of the role of the School Improvement Officer was seriously hampered by distance.</p> <p>We have large numbers of children in this area that are severely disadvantaged and some of them have very high support needs. Since 1995 we have had three school counsellors at Moree Public. The last two have been counsellors in training. Our current counsellor has been full and part-time for maternity leave for the last year and her position has been filled by untrained staff.</p> <p>Specialist support from outside the school is not always available. Those in need often have to travel to Toowoomba, Armidale or Tamworth and that is an impossibility for some. I think that these services are restricted by location. I also believe that the Department of Education is aware of the concerns and has taken some action. However, I also believe that staffing public schools in isolated areas is a major concern and more action needs to take place.</p>

	I believe that the situation has the potential to escalate if the predictions of teacher shortages come true and further that isolated schools will be the first affected and they will be the worst affected. Thank you very much.
Chris Sidoti	Thank you very much. Can you tell us a bit more about the School Improvement Program? What does it do? What is the role of the School Improvement Officer?
Ken Cattanach	The School Improvement Program was instigated a couple of years ago and results in an annual school report being published and being available to all parents of students in public schools throughout the State. The role of the School Improvement Officer is to devise, to assist the schools in developing their plans and looking at areas that need improvement and that person has the rank, if you like, of a chief education officer.
Chris Sidoti	And this particular officer for any particular school can be located anywhere in the State obviously.
Ken Cattanach	Well, I cannot comment on that, but I know that our particular School Improvement Officer is located in Coffs Harbour.
Chris Sidoti	And does she have other schools that she is responsible for in this region?
Ken Cattanach	Quite a number in this area. Yes.
Chris Sidoti	In this area. It strikes me as being a bit odd that you bring somebody across from Coffs Harbour twice during the year and each time only spend an hour at the school.
Ken Cattanach	I think that situation compromises the process. That was my point in making those observations.
Chris Sidoti	Do you have contact with this person between these two one-hour visits?
Ken Cattanach	Usually contact is only prior to the visit or maybe following the visit over the phone. Something like that. Very limited contact though.
Chris Sidoti	Is the reason why the actual visit is so short? Allowing for the fact that the person lives in Coffs, a visit of an hour would seem to be worse than useless to be frank.
Ken Cattanach	Well if you come out for one week, for example, and you have a number of schools over large distances to cover, the first day may be spent largely travelling, the last day is spent largely travelling, so the week is reduced really to three days. Large numbers of schools to go to in those three days. Logistically you can't spend much more time in a school than an hour or two.
Chris Sidoti	Is the fact that there is, for example, only a week a result of the decision of the officer that he or she will only allocate a week or the resources made available by the Department?
Ken Cattanach	I don't know.
Chris Sidoti	I don't know. We will take that up a bit later on.
Barb Flick	Counsellors in training - how useful are they and the second question is when they are fully trained do they stay in the schools?
Ken Cattanach	Counsellors in training can do certain things but there are certain things that they cannot do. One of those is that they cannot conduct certain assessments of students that sometimes are required. Someone else has to come and do those. So they cannot do those things. They are very useful and the one we have at the moment is extremely useful and a very very good person. She has since finished her training. She is in her third year at our school, but I would think in the next couple of years she would be thinking about moving.
Barb Flick [Race relations]	We have heard quite a lot about race relations in the high schools in particular. Which seems to me, which is just my observation, is less prevalent in the primary schools. Is that a fair judgement?
Ken Cattanach	I would say so. I think that is a very fair judgement. I think race relations seem to deteriorate, if that is the word to use, as children get older.
Barb Flick	So, do you think it is just a matter of getting older that things become more difficult?
Ken Cattanach	At Moree you find that when the children are in the infants school, there does not seem to be any problem that they are playing together, associating with one another

	or those sorts of things. But as the children get older they seem to separate. So the Aboriginal children will sometimes play together and non-Aboriginal will also play together as well. The relationship that existed earlier may begin to drift apart.
Barb Flick	Well, do you think schools, primary schools play in developing race relations in the community?
Ken Cattanach [Indigenous education]	I think they play an extremely important part and we do make every effort to make sure that children are given the same access and the same activities and that there is no separation if you like on the basis of race.
Barb Flick	We have heard that primary schools run, offer, Aboriginal language programs as well as Aboriginal study programs.
Ken Cattanach	We do not offer Aboriginal language programs at Moree Primary.
Barb Flick	Do you offer Aboriginal studies?
Ken Cattanach	Aboriginal studies involve some local content. But we don't offer Aboriginal languages.
Barb Flick	So if you had to put your finger on one thing, what would you say it was a primary school offer children in developing good relationships with all people as opposed to what seems to be happening in the secondary schools. Do you think it is just children are young?
Ken Cattanach	I think that children come to school and they have preconceived ideas. That maybe older children for that reason. It does not seem to be a problem in relationships. As children get older they seem to become more aware of the differences that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and as time goes by they tend to drift apart.
Barb Flick	One last question. How do you deal with grievance or dispute amongst students in the primary schools? So if two kids are having a fight or something is happening how do you deal with it?
Ken Cattanach	Well we have a very, very structured procedure to deal with those sorts of situations. If children are involved in some sort of dispute we always make sure that we hear both sides of the story. So that we provide the opportunity for all of the parties involved in the dispute to have some say, to tell us what has happened. If it is an Aboriginal child, we usually have the Aboriginal children supported by the AEAs who work in the school. Sometimes the AEAs are the people who actually find out from the Aboriginal students what they said happened. Once we have found out all the information that we can from everybody, we then proceed and decide. We make the decision about what sort of steps we need to take then.
Barb Flick	So the school has a structured policy.
Ken Cattanach	We have a very, very structured policy.
Barb Flick	Thanks for that Ken.
Chris Sidoti [Students with disabilities]	I know Ken you are tight for time but have you got just a minute to tell us a bit more about the disability programs you have got. You mentioned you have got, I think, 11 students.
Ken Cattanach	Eleven students enrolled, that is right. All of these students have access to regular classes. There are a variety of disabilities. Two children require wheelchair access. Last year we were able to install a lift which gets the children from the ground floor to the second floor. That means those children can access the library and the computer room facilities. We do have, in our special education section and also on the first floor, special facilities for toileting of children with disabilities. All of these things have been provided at the expense of the Department of Education. There are several ramps installed so that children can get access to other parts of the school and also there are several specialist people who work with children with disabilities. That is particularly in the area of hearing. We have three children who have hearing problems and they have access to specialist teachers almost full time.
Chris Sidoti	And those people are provided above number by the formula?
Ken	Those people are provided above the normal allocation.

Cattanach	
Chris Sidoti	Thank you very much for coming along.
Michael Cavanagh, Principal, Dubbo School of Distance Education	<p>I have been asked by John Sutton to co-ordinate the Department's response to the Inquiry because of my background in rural and isolated schools and because of my background in distance education and distance education policy-making and data gathering. I am going to divide what I say into two. I will be as brief as I can because I have a paper to give to the Commission as part of my response, but I know there are questions to be asked and I would like to be given the opportunity of telling you those things at the moment.</p>
[Distance education]	<p>First of all, I will tell you a little bit about distance education in general. Decentralisation occurred in 1991 whereby the old correspondence school in Sydney, which was an enormous mammoth, was split in to one preschool, 11 primary schools and 8 secondary distance education centres and schools throughout the State. The reason that this was done was to put the distant education facilities closer to the distant education clients. Now this had very positive and also some negative spin-offs, which I am able to tell you about.</p> <p>The positive spin-off is to get the teachers close to the children so that field services and mini schools and workshops can occur at minimum cost to the parent. There is minimum cost to the parents, but also minimum time differential for the teachers.</p> <p>The negative spin-offs though, I believe, are the decentralisation created some schools that were not able to generate a critical mass in order to give an equitable service. It struck me in our last three visits, Barbara and Chris, that the service offered by the smallest of the secondary distance education centres, for instance Walgett, is not providing the equity of outcomes that the bigger centres would be able to do. I believe that if the recommendation i made by this forum that we looked at, I think that can only have positive outcomes.</p> <p>Dubbo School of Distance Education has a record of achievement that is quite unsurpassed in the old western and northwest region. We for instance had two children get first in the State in HSC subjects last year. One in Aboriginal Studies and one in Ancient History and we had 40 children of the 54 children that sat the HSC last year, we had 40 different subjects that achieved in the top 10% of the State and that is a record that stands by itself.</p> <p>Distance education on a whole had 18 children also that were actually first in the State in various subjects. Now I also know, and I will provide this data to the Commission, that the education outcomes of Walgett distance education was not able to achieve that positive result. The reasons are the same reasons you have been hearing about other staffing issues in remote and isolated areas and that is the lack of experience, the high turnover and the lack of training and development facilities. For instance, Dubbo School of Distance Education provides all the in-school training about distant education processes to Walgett High School.</p> <p>There are 2,080 full-time students in distant education throughout the State and there are 4,444 single course students throughout the State.</p> <p>There are several categories of isolation and they are not all geographically isolated children, as people might think. Indeed by far the greatest percentage of children enrolled in distant education are enrolled in Sydney and they are enrolled usually because they are in institutions such as juvenile goals. You need to be isolated in some respect in order to be schooled by distance education. I have mentioned geographically isolated children and I have mentioned children in institutions. There are also children who are residents of Papua New Guinea. There are students with disorders mainly behaviour and emotional disorders. There are students with medical</p>

	<p>conditions that simply are not able to go to school. There are students temporarily travelling or residing overseas. There are other students with special circumstances and they include things like continuation of study. For instance if a class was to fold in Moree because of a teacher leaving, then in order to continue their studies those children would be allowed to enter distance education. There is a quota system. Small schools are allowed - small schools are schools of less than 150 secondary children - they are allowed to enrol 15 children a year at distance education. Schools between 300 and 350 are allowed to enrol 12 students. Schools of greater than 350 are allowed to enrol 6. You can see there that is quite skewed in favour of rural and remote schools.</p> <p>Pregnant students and young mothers and students studying an ethnic language. There is another group of students that have been allowed by the Minister of four years ago to join distance education they are students with a religious isolation. They only make up 214 of the 5,849 effective full-time students in secondary distance education. They are only enrolled in Years 9, 10 and 11.</p> <p>Now single course students are supported both in the home school and by the distance education teacher at the Distance Education Centre. I can speak here on behalf of the whole of the distance education community. In order for a Principal to enrol students from their school in distance education there are two things must be ensured and the Principal must sign off on these two things.</p> <p>The first thing is that the student is capable of studying independently and responsible and the second thing is that the school will provide the supervision and support for that child. Now if that does not happen, then that goes against the quite specific guidelines of single course enrolment.</p> <p>The education of students with special needs Chris is a specific interest of yours I know. The distance education support unit in Sydney located in Ashfield Boys High School. It caters for students between 3.5 and 18 who have a mild, moderate or severe intellectual disability, have multiple disabilities, visual or hearing impairment and is an isolated student. The medical enrolments who have physical disabilities and are enrolled at the distance education centres and schools participate in the full range of schooling the same as any other isolation category. And I have all the facts and figures for you there.</p> <p>The perception that it was widely viewed when the old Correspondence School was in Sydney was that there was very little social interaction between the students and there was very little interaction between the students and their teachers. Lots of resources have been put into that field since decentralisation. The main things that offset the lack of socialisation and the lack of social contact with the teachers are the Field Services Program that every distance education centre has. Field services involve us going out to see the kids and the kids coming in to see us. At Dubbo there is a hostel that will cater for 30 students at a time. That hostel has 80% occupancy rate throughout the year and those children are all rural and isolated and they are there for the specific reason for seeing their teachers and for seeing the specialist subject facilities that they can access at Dubbo. Again I am speaking for Dubbo in that respect not for the other smaller schools.</p> <p>The technological support that is available now that was not available in the old Correspondence School: there is a whole list of technologies available to reduce distance or reduce isolation as far as we can. They include the radio system. Dubbo has a HF radio system, which is as old as the hills and works beautifully, and the other distance education primary centres have a VHF system which is a line-of-sight thing and it is quite vulnerable to vandalism.</p> <p>The children at Dubbo all have access to the internet. All our geographically isolated</p>
[Students with disabilities]	
[Distance education support]	
[Technological support]	

<p>[Distance education]</p> <p>[Distance education - subject choice]</p> <p>[Indigenous education]</p>	<p>children have access to the internet and that is provided by a program that was a school based program. In other words we provided the software, hardware and payment for access to the nearest provider.</p> <p>There is also a perception that there is a lack of training, lack of expertise and lack of technical support. I have been hearing over the last couple of days that there is a perception that distance education is in some way, especially secondary distance education, is in some way second quality. I have mentioned some of the results that would fly in the face of that and I will provide all the data I can get my hands on from the School Improvement Officers to give you a more complete picture..</p> <p>Indeed one of the things that you would suspect is that the more practical a subject the worse the child would do at distance education. Statistics prove that it is quite the opposite. In things like visual arts, engineering science, design and technology, all the fashion and textile courses, music and all of those subjects, distance education does quite a deal better than the State norm. Quite a deal better than the State norm. In the case of Dubbo School of Distance Education it is a full 20% better than the State norm. The reasons for that are quite obvious, I think, once they are pointed out. And that is, in order for a child to want to do a practical subject like that they need to have (1) to have a very keen interest in it and (2) have some form of support usually that lives at home. Now those two things add up to a very committed child and a very excited teacher in Dubbo willing to do all they can to help them.</p> <p>The facilities in Dubbo, the facilities for all specialist areas, are quite superb. But the question of quality in other distance education centres has to be addressed. I believe that secondary distance education could be far more effective and efficient if the larger distance education schools and centres took responsibility for, for instance, the remote northwest schools, the schools that we have been visiting over the last couple of days.</p> <p>The thing that we have been hearing in the last three schools also, and I might point out that this was not heard at Bourke High School simply because of the different provider of distance education, that there is a poor subject choice. Indeed across distance education in NSW it offers a single greatest choice of subjects in any area of NSW. We offer every subject except studies of religion and drama.</p> <p>The Aboriginal education course that I spoke about before, Barbara, was written in Dubbo. It was started in 1996 - so preliminary 1996 - our first group of students went through in 1997 and for the first time a government school achieved positions in the first 10. We achieved not only 3rd and 10th in the State, but we achieved a result of first 2 Aboriginal kids in the State were educated through Dubbo School of Distance Education. One of those was the child who came 3rd and one of those was a child who came about 11th. They don't give you the figures below 10<sup>th</sup>. And last year, which is our second year only of the course that we designed, we had a child get 1st in the State. So we are pretty proud of that.</p>
Barb Flick	Very good.
Michael Cavanagh	That is distance education. I have also been asked to wear a hat about the access programs in NSW.
Barb Flick	I just want to ask one question before you leave distance education. Children who are long stay in-patients in hospitals, do they access distance education?
Michael Cavanagh	Depends on whether they are primary school children or secondary school children, Barbara, and it also depends on where they are. For instance, in most of the large regional and city hospitals there is an education unit based at the hospital. So they don't do distance education. They access some of the material, but they have their own teachers on-site.
Barb Flick	OK. Thanks.
Michael	The material by the way is usually written in Sydney and again it is only the larger

Cavanagh	centres who can create the critical mass of staff to provide site-specific material and actually write our own material. Dubbo, for instance, is making a major contribution to the State-wide distance education literacy program, which is a video based program that is produced in the studios in our school in Dubbo. Dubbo has 120 staff and they are all on-site all the time. Which is another reason that we can offer a greater service. It is not to say that the service offered by the distance education centres is at all bad. But I am here to say that because our staff are on site all the time and they don't have any face-to-face commitments (except when our kids are in school), the children have immediate and total access to those kids [teachers] at all times. And it is almost cost-free to the children they don't make the phone calls. They make the phone call to the office and we initiate the phone call back to them immediately. So that is another perspective on the difference between a distance education centre and a distance education school. Do you want to ask any questions Chris about DE before I go on?
Chris Sidoti	Just a couple Michael. You mentioned that Dubbo offers all subjects bar studies of religion and drama. What about some of the other centres? Are there fewer subjects?
Michael Cavanagh	Necessarily fewer subjects, Chris, because the staff is given to a distance education centre because of enrolments. Now if there is only a few enrolments of course that will generate only a few staff. That will affect the ability to offer some of the more sophisticated and specific subjects such as languages and such as agriculture, some of the sciences, some of the higher levels of English, higher levels of maths and the practical subjects.
Chris Sidoti	Sorry that again languages, higher English, higher maths...
Michael Cavanagh	And the practical subjects. Languages, however, can be accessed by any school through Sydney.
Chris Sidoti	I see you can actually go straight through.
Michael Cavanagh	If you want to or need to.
Chris Sidoti	Right. Thanks.
Michael Cavanagh  [Indigenous education]	There is only 1.8% of Aboriginal children in distance education and the majority of children... There are 12 Aboriginal children in Dubbo that is excluding the children that are doing Aboriginal Studies in their senior years. We also have written and offer a quite extensive junior Aboriginal studies program. But the majority of children we get that are Aboriginal children are not from isolated areas, Barbara. Most of those are children that have been excluded from other schools and have an emotional or a behavioural disorder. And a lot of those come through our extremely positive relationship with Juvenile Justice in Dubbo. And the results of the program with those children are quite incredibly positive. Most don't successfully re-enter school, but most very successfully enter TAFE or employment.  The reasons they don't re-enter schools are quite obvious. The problems occurred at school and it is very difficult to break that cycle within the school. Very easy to break the cycle at distance education, especially if they are local kids and they can come in on a regular basis. We use control theory and reality therapy for all our counselling and anger and emotional management and the staff are quite formally trained and there is a core of 18 who have credentials in that field. We have done that ourselves as part of our training and development program.
Chris Sidoti	What is the total proportion of State students who are doing distance education?
Michael Cavanagh	Chris, I have no idea. It would probably be 1%, 2%.
Grant Hatch	We usually quote the number of 150,000 students. So you are looking at 2,280.
Michael Cavanagh	4,444 it is.
Barbara Flick	What is the male/female ratio? Is it fairly even?
Michael Cavanagh	In distance education it is exactly even, but with the Aboriginal children, I was speaking about Barbara, they are exclusively male and the people doing Aboriginal Studies believe it or not are almost exclusively female, especially the Aboriginal



	<p>girls. The success speaks for itself. And another thing I need to point out was that there was a perception when Aboriginal Studies 2-Unit was first developed that it was far to academic a course to be offered successfully to Aboriginal children. I was very offended by that and remain so now and the course we wrote at Dubbo and have proven a success in is quite substantially academic and quite substantially do able thank you very much.</p>
Chris Sidoti	Move on Michael
Michael Cavanagh  [Technological support for subject choice]	<p>Access Programs. The Access Program brings kids together from a number of schools in relatively close proximity to study senior education, only Years 11 and 12. Now they are almost exclusively central schools. Each school operates as a separate entity, but it also belongs to a cluster that uses communication technology to allow a broader curriculum in those schools. Actually the idea of access programs in a school curriculum broadening has been taken up by a lot of schools in regional and metropolitan areas. There are 21 central schools and 328 kids being educated by the access program.</p> <p>The technologies are varied and vast but they all include some form of audio-graphics and usually some sort of video-graphic communication systems depending upon the distance between the schools and the availability of ISDN lines again. For instance the cluster that includes Tottenham, Tullamore, Trundle, Trangie - the wonderful four Ts - Yeoval and Peak Hill cannot use anything more sophisticated than electronic classroom, which is a computerised whiteboard technology.</p> <p>Whereas the students in the Riverina cluster they are very close together. They are within a local telephone call and they have ISDN lines between the schools. They can operate full-time what is called picture-tell which is video, graphics, data and voice on the one line. And so that gets turned on in the morning and does not get turned off until the afternoon at the cost of a local call. So again, depending upon the accessibility of Telecom ISDN lines, the system operates better or worse.</p>
Barb Flick	Will this be affected by privatisation do you think?
Michael Cavanagh	<p>Yes. I can see improvements, Barbara, by privatisation and I think a lot of people in education in remote areas would love to have access to Optus at the moment, for instance, or some other provider. We would love there to be some sort of competition in order to provide the VHF transmission, for instance, because Telstra charges a lot of money and offers a service that is not always perfect.</p> <p>I would just like to mention that we had a counsellor in training at distance education a lovely lady who you might know called Anne Dennis and she was absolutely wonderful.</p>
Barb Flick	She is.
Michael Cavanagh	Anything else you would like to know?
Chris Sidoti	Back to the access programs. The kids actually get brought in together at particular periods as well do they?
Michael Cavanagh	<p>Yes. There is a major - they call it a camp - at the beginning of the preliminary year which is sometimes held at the end of Year 10, but usually at the beginning of the preliminary year where all study skills, the "Ten Percent on Top Program" that we heard about earlier on and those procedural mechanisms for the kids to succeed at the best of their ability are taught to them. And then throughout the year there are subject specific workshops that they need at the various locations. If, for instance, Yeoval is teaching 2 Unit General English, then once a term the 2 Unit General English kids will meet at Yeoval for a day of personalised tutoring.</p> <p>But apart from that in the school if the child, for instance, is doing 2 Unit General English at Tottenham Central School the child will receive two lessons a week on the audio-telematics system. They will receive two lessons a week where they are actually with their tutor and their teacher in Tottenham because there is a</p>

	supervisor/teacher in Tottenham to deal with them. And they will have two periods a week where they will be working on material that is designed to have them work independently.
Chris Sidoti	And you mentioned that is also starting to be used in some of the regional cities as well. That is kind of approach - the question I raised earlier when we were talking about the two high schools here - that would be available for them to use to get extra subject choices for the kids.
Michael Cavanagh	Yes. Indeed when what is called the 'super school' in Dubbo starts up, the three outlying high schools will be using a similar sort of technology to offer exactly the same thing you have just said as a matter of course.
Chris Sidoti	It makes sense. Thank you Michael.
Rob Griffiths, Principal, Moree Christian School	Thank you, Commissioners, for inviting me along. I am Rob Griffiths. I am the Principal of Moree Christian School and part of an organisation of about 300 schools across the nation, Christian Union Schools and Parent Control Christian Schools. There are two organisations that are in the process of uniting and will be complete in the next few months. They educate about 3% of the nation's children. In reading the outline you sent to me, I hope I am addressing the sort of questions that you wanted us to do. On looking at our schools where I see the strengths and the needs that I thought that you might help to address for us.
[Christian independent schools]	First of all to give you some outline. We are schools that have a strong platform on the efficacy of the family. That is not saying anything new to all schools would have but probably we express that more strongly - the rights of the family and the parents to make decisions for the education of their children. To that end these parents have opted to pay extra fees to send their children to school. And many of the schools are small and this one in this town is quite a small Christian school of only a little over 50 students enrolled at K to 7, increasing to Year 10 we trust.  In saying that our schools have this strong commitment to the efficacy of the family, but also in the context of our discussion today is also within the context of being patriotic, good citizens of Australia and seeing that a notion of equal opportunity and choice and equal opportunity to the nation's benefits through education and all of the other several benefits goes along with the opportunity and the privilege of being able to make a choice in their education. Now of course, when choices are made, there are sometimes difficulties. You cannot always make your choices without strings attached. Now those strings attached I guess are the things I wanted to talk a little about.
[Independent schools – funding]	In Australia we enjoy a very good funding level from government for independent schools. Independent schools probably, depending on the level of private fees they charge, but they are funded to the level of about 60% of what it costs to educate a government school child. That of course is not enough to raise enough to run the budget of an independent school and the rest of the funding is met by fees from parents.  The problem with that funding is that there are ties to the funding. The independent schools if they are going to accept that funding need to embrace some controls that go with the funding. Most of which would none of us would take exception to, that is equal opportunity of education to both genders, equal opportunity to education to any race. But there are some things in the Christian school movement - some values that the parents and the churches hold very strongly - that are inimical to what the government tied funding require.  In NSW Christian schools have accepted, by and large, a ruling of no corporal correction because they have chosen not to make a wave if we don't need too. But most Christian schools would not accept that as being a legitimate control on the way that children are raised. They will also seek to affirm the reality of God and all that

<p>[Home schooling]</p>	<p>implies over our lives and therefore in that sense to be able to teach Creation as a recognised understanding of how matter first came about. Of course, other areas – homosexuality and the rights of the unborn child - these sorts of areas which are made legitimate in many of the curriculum information that we receive, would not be acceptable to Christian schools. The trouble is if we too stridently push our point of view then our funding could be threatened. I am sure that you would agree that these sorts of things - where we uphold the reality of God, whether a group of Australians don't agree with that reality - is not destructive on the society in any sense. Whether one element of society does not hold legitimacy of homosexuality or legitimacy of abortion or not, it does not impact on the propriety of society. Well some groups say it does, but my concern is that independent schools, or Christian schools in particular, ought to be given a little more freedom in terms of being able to teach the curriculum that is more closely in tune with the foundational values and beliefs.</p> <p>I want to move to another area that is very much apart of the Christian school movement, but is one of the three legitimised education arms in this country – only recently legitimised - that of home schooling. Home schooling has been practised for many many years, but not really condoned publicly. Although I must say never in my experience found any difficulty in encouraging home schoolers from the education departments across the country. But lately in the review of education acts in the various States of the country, the home schooling movement has been much more greatly legitimised. However, and this same problem exists in small Christian schools too, indeed any small school I would say, mostly parents who choose to home school their children are not able to have their child to receive the School Certificate or the Higher School Certificate. For there are restrictions on the curriculum they cannot meet. And that particular one - and we are finding it difficult at our school - we are required the curriculum statement with instruction from Board of Studies says to teach LOTE, preferably in Year 7. “Preferably” is an important word: it means do it, pretty much. Do it in Year 7. In a small school as ours is and indeed in the home situation once more it becomes more difficult to do that. There are as our previous speaker spoke of distance education opportunities, but they are not available until the child is in Year 9. Though I made many overtures last year to try and see what we can do about this and we were to meet the Board of Studies requirements of teaching, their preferential requirement which on my instruction was to do it in Year 7. If we were to meet that I would do it much better if I was able to use some distance education package. But there just was not one available, although I went through superintendents and all that sort of thing to see if they could see the disparity. So my encouragement, Commissioners, if there is some influence you might bring to the sensibility of that argument - and teaching LOTE is a good exercise to do - but in small schools or home schools it is very difficult with those constraints.</p>
<p>[Financial support for travel]</p>	<p>I want to make another mention of funding or support for rural communities in the areas of assisting in transport for excursions, cultural exchanges and camps and so on. And probably the most commonly used one by many of our schools is to take the Year 6 children to Canberra every year or so. Schools in Australia that are very distant from Canberra attract a significant subsidy to take the children to Canberra. Moree is not far enough away and so to take our children down to Canberra which is more than a day's trip and to get involved in the various good activities that are down there becomes quite expensive. I am sure that the talk about equal opportunities, then an easing of those restrictions of the distance that is required before subsidies come in would be of great benefit to rural schools. But on top of that, rural schools experience a lot of time costing in terms of taking the children to sporting fixtures in other areas and other parts of the State. I had some of my students who today are down in Orange. They left yesterday morning so they could compete today and they will come back tonight. Not only has there been a time cost for that there has been a dollar cost. The time cost has an impact on other elements of the curriculum. I guess in the rural communities we can do nothing about the time costs, but certainly it would be of great assistance if there was some funding for that sort of activity that</p>

[Indigenous education]	<p>would make, therefore, a more equal access by rural students to those activities.</p> <p>The final thing I wanted to say and you may well ask some other things and I hope I am not being offensive when I say this. So I speak from my opinion. I'm not instructed to say this to you, but it has been voiced many times. In our school we have about 12% Aboriginal children. When last year I was invited to apply for some funding for some Aboriginal education initiatives, the requirement was to invite all the Aboriginal families together so they could have input to the decision of the program. Which I did. The families in our school said to me, "We don't want you to teach traditional culture. We don't want you to teach, as truth, traditional beliefs. We want you to teach Christian beliefs." I have no problem with whatever a school may want to teach, whatever their choice may be. I believe that if we are going to achieve the reconciliation that we long for - and that obviously has to be reconciliation beginning in the heart as Kim Beazley said this morning - we need to see a time, maybe it is not today or tomorrow, but soon, when we don't fund disproportionately on the basis of race, but rather fund on the basis of social need. I think in this town that might go some of the way towards the improving of very evident dysfunction that seems about the place. It is really important to fund those who have a social need and those with some unequal opportunity whoever they may be. I think when you tie it to a race, it does not help in the long term. My urging is that we might soon, in our country and I don't know how soon, but if we are talking of equality and talking equal opportunity then we ought to view this matter not in terms of race but in terms of members of the larger society.</p>
Chris Sidoti	Thanks very much. Barbara, do you have some questions first?
Barbara Flick	Tell me what your policy is on punishment and how it is implemented?
Rob Griffiths [Discipline]	<p>Well we do not have corporal correction. But we would like to. The reason we don't follow a corporal correction policy is because it is not permitted in NSW. Although from a biblical point of view we see that there is nothing wrong, in fact there is plenty right with, using a physical correction at times. It is very normal and natural. So our discipline policy, first of all, and we use a biblical view of it - discipline means disciple - which in a positive sense means moving the child in the right way to go and it does not have a negative connotation. It is meant to encourage you in the right. Now children/adults stray from the right much. So of course there needs to be some sanctions. Our sanctions are usual normal sanctions of a correcting word, applying some punishment which may be to do some extra work or stand out of some activity that the rest of the class may be doing. And then it may go further to involving parents and that sort of thing. Certainly our policy does not give much patience to a child who continues to be obdurate in his behaviour. And the reason for that - a couple of reasons - but primarily we are an independent school. It exists better if we maintain good behaviour with a child who is willing to. With a child who is not - with the usual encouragements and restraints - then we would gently say it is time to part.</p> <p>Now that is if you want to split things purely down on a commercial basis, if you don't do that then your product gets a bad name. Then you don't get your customers. That is rather a cynical approach. It is a positive cynical approach. It does not give correction. Though we see that it is quite normal.</p>
Barbara Flick	How do you teach the evolution of the species or do you not teach it at all? How do you describe how the world began?
Rob Griffiths [Curriculum]	<p>We are very clear in our understanding that God created the world and everything in it. We also teach the theory of evolution and now there is difference, and it's called theory of evolution. If you read the Darwin's the title of his treatise it is a very racial title because it speaks about the origin of the species and more favoured races. So it is actually very racially oriented document than first thought and we teach that Creation's truth and we teach the theory of evolution.</p> <p>We believe that our children understand more about the theory of evolution than</p>

	<p>those who believe it. We cannot find any facts to support the theory of evolution. There is a missing link out there. There seems to be a very easily understood notion that there is a creator. There is order. The complexity of almost anything one sees. I picked up a dragonfly at the swimming pool for our children this morning and just at close look you'd have to say it just made common sense. Somebody's had a hand in making this. It didn't just happen by chance. I think that the view of evolution actually demeans Man. It makes him equal with animals. That's entirely wrong from the biblical position. Man is made as the pinnacle of creation; not to be arrogant but to be Genesis 1-26 to fill the earth and to subdue it and have dominion, but that dominion meant caring for, taming and looking after. So a good Christian view would be a very strong environmentalist. So it would seem.</p>
Barbara Flick	<p>What sort of resources do you use in the classroom to teach the origin of the species or creation theory, practice? What resources? Is it mainly the Bible that you use?</p>
Rob Griffiths [Curriculum sources]	<p>Of course the Bible is a foundational text used throughout our schools. Well there is an organisation in Queensland that is national now called the Genesis Foundation. They have many good pieces of material. There is an organisation in America that prints books called Betta Books. The Department of Peninsula Education in the United States. There's myriads of material that we use at our own Christian Community school organisation, which we're part of. There are 120 schools in Australia which produce information. Light Education Ministries in Canberra produce lots of information.</p> <p>It is not a position that we see as abnormal. We see it as very much a common sense understanding. We see that evolution is a belief, not a science, because it is a belief that is something based on faith and faith becomes greater when there is no evidence. It is a huge religion if it does not have evidential foundation to it.</p>
Barbara Flick	<p>Is homosexuality discussed in the classroom?</p>
Rob Griffiths [Homo sexuality]	<p>Yes. It is discussed as being one of those aberrant things that humans sometimes get involved in, but not right. It is spoken of as being not the sort of behaviour that God would be pleased with. Not a behaviour that God would condemn and say that person is condemned out of hand, but a behaviour that needs to be stopped and the sin needs to be recognised and the sin from which we can be saved.</p>
Barbara Flick	<p>What class would you start talking or introducing the subject of homosexuality?</p>
Rob Griffiths	<p>Probably one would only lightly treat that in an upper primary class. You would not go into much detail. Normal sexuality or heterosexuality, not in terms of how to consummate sexual intercourse; we don't see that side of we should be encouraging our children to do. But normal healthy husband and wife relationships would be spoken of fairly naturally from about Grade 5. Again we take very strongly the view that this really is the domain of the parent at the home to be the first initiator and the privilege of a mother and father telling their child about those facts of life. Not so much a duty as a great privilege to bring their child through this part of education. Something that a school shouldn't hurry to jump into. I think that it is rather sad that schools, probably by virtue of parents handing over more and more to a welfare type of mentality, that grandfather or Big Daddy will look after us. We see that's a wrong direction to go. We want to maintain the unity and the efficacy of the family. So we would think twice about entering into those realms before parents had had the opportunity.</p>
Barbara Flick	<p>Just one last thing from me. What if the level of parent participation with the school, end of school, in the classroom?</p>
Rob Griffiths	<p>Especially with junior classes, that is from about Year 3 down to kindergarten, there will be a parent in the class almost every day on a roster basis. Probably not in the afternoons except they might assist with sporting activities and indeed that group that has just gone down to Orange, parents have driven there to assist there. So, parent involvement is very high. That does not mean to say that we recognise that teachers are particularly trained to teach maths or English and so on. So, it is not as though we hand over the teaching of maths. A parent might be asked to assist in the rehearsal of this rule that the child is having trouble with.</p>

Barbara Flick	Thank you.
Chris Sidoti	I have only got a couple of questions because I know we have someone else waiting. I think some of the issues you have raised are obviously of great interest. Although not necessarily at the heart of the inquiry dealing with remote education.
Rob Griffiths	I wandered I might have missed the point.
Barbara Flick	No
Chris Sidoti	No, many of your things I think are spot on I must say. Just a couple of perhaps issues very briefly and a broader one and then I would like to talk a bit more on the narrow one.  You seem to be implying or seem to be operating from a perspective that says that a Christian view that is creation-based is completely and absolutely inconsistent with the theory of evolution. Whereas in fact many Christians don't see them as being inconsistent. Are the children presented with that Christian perspective that says that it is possible to see consistency between evolution and a creation based approach to the establishment of the universe. Or are the two seen as being two totally non-intersecting circles?
Rob Griffiths	It is true that across the Christian community there are various beliefs.
Chris Sidoti	I think it is true to say that the vast majority of the Christian community now has no difficulty in accepting an evolution based, not necessarily what Darwin himself wrote a century ago, but an evolution based approach to the history of creation.
Rob Griffiths	I agree with you in that, but I would agree with that reality, but I do not agree with the truth of it.
Chris Sidoti	That is fine.
Rob Griffiths	That is my prerogative.
Chris Sidoti	Yes.
Rob Griffiths	Well to answer your question. Very much so at this school, and I'm the one who does most of the teaching in this area, I will say look we don't have all the answers here. Of course, we don't have the answers. We were not there in those origin times. So we can simply go on the evidence presented and I encourage them not to be arrogant about any of these matters because we don't have all the answers. There are plenty of questions to ask - adaptation of species, development of different breeds, phasing out of original breeds and so on.  There is also plenty of evidence, for example, that for Man there is one blood. There is one race, not different races as the base of Man. So I say, in humility, that is really presented to the children. The facts seem to indicate, and the Bible seems strongly to say, God created and if he said it that settles it. That is a very clear position. But on the other hand, Man with all good intent tries to find answers. And he should because that is a biblical instruction too. Fill the Earth and subdue it. Yet to know and understand, scientifically evaluate it, and that is legitimately and proper. But we want to see a balance.
Chris Sidoti	I think the question I am asking is that while obviously the school is entitled to teach its particular interpretation and does so obviously so very strongly. Are the students though advised that there are many Christians who do not see it as being inconsistent who are able to maintain a consistency between a biblical account and some form of evolutionary development?
Rob Griffiths	Yes, they are advised that there are plenty of views. This is a narrow perspective and most of those who are able to synthesise in whatever mission position of the biblical account discount Genesis chapter 1. You need to discount the literal.
Chris Sidoti	Yes the literal fact rather than the...
Rob Griffiths	You must be clear. Just because many Christians might say yes, they will have a different view of the Scripture. I am not judging that situation or interpretation. So the point of making this context though here is a school organisation, 300 schools through the centre of our schools population who are doing a legitimate job and a constructive job in the community and hold some views. But they are not destructive views. They are supportive of a good society and this government encourages that.

	But I see some of the areas DETYA should look to not tying so many constraints to the funding.
Chris Sidoti	Two very quick questions. Following up Barb's question about homosexuality where I am pleased with the answer you gave about how it is approached. I assume in that though you are saying to the students, making it clear to the students, that violence, harassment, discrimination against people on the basis of sexuality is not acceptable from a Christian perspective.
Rob Griffiths	Absolutely. I would want to stress that many times the Christian community gets labelled with things that they have not really earned. It is quite wrong in any Christian view to treat people with disdain. It does not mean to say you cannot make a judgement on behaviour or a judgement on the worthwhileness of that behaviour or change in that behaviour.
Chris Sidoti	Last question deals with interaction. You mentioned about the kids going down to Dubbo, Forbes
Rob Griffiths	No Orange today.
Chris Sidoti	Sorry Orange today. Is there a lot of interaction between the kids at your school and other young people in this area or other areas or do the Christian schools tend to operate within their own network only?
Rob Griffiths	There is a variation across the country. My view is to try and involve them as much as we can in the local community, but as well as that as much as we can with the Christian community. So, for example, this year we have been involved in a local school swimming carnival. That involved every school in this shire area. They have been involved in another inter-school Christian carnival between three of the towns around here and today they are down at a zone Christian schools carnival. So I am saying that both.
Chris Sidoti	Right. Thanks very much.
Barbara Flick	Thanks Rob.
Craig Curry, Manager, Special Education Operations, Department of Education and Training  [Students with disabilities]	<p>I am Craig Curry and I am the Manager of Special Education Operations for the Department of Education and Training. But before I came into this position I was Manager of Special Education in North-west region. So I have a general feeling for the area in some of the issues which we are covering today.</p> <p>Could I just explain that the unit that I manage is one of nine units within the student services and equity portfolio in the Department. So while my unit looks at the operation issues around special education provision, the other units look at behaviour and attendance, multicultural issues, equity issues, Aboriginal issues and so on. So for each of the designated equity areas there is a unit with a manager and basically looking at the policy, directions and guidelines.</p> <p>My brief is really with the provision of special education. I really want to make a fairly strong point that the approach we take in special education in government schools is to look at the educational support needs of the student wherever they may be. So, our focus is not on the name of the disability, not on the label, but it is on the actual educational needs as they have been identified regardless of the setting, regardless of the location. We attempt in every way to give the adequate level of support that is required, regardless of where the child may be. Currently the budget for special education in NSW is \$399million, which is an increase of \$16.8 million over the last financial year, and there are about 27,000 students in the system - students with disabilities - who receive some special education support. There are about 3,500 students in special schools. Around about 11,000 in special classes or support classes in regular schools. About 11,000 in regular classes - students have different disabilities in regular classes - who receive additional funding support whether it be additional teacher and additional teacher's aide or whatever. And then there are about another 1,500 students who receive support just from an itinerant teacher, from a specialist teacher.</p> <p>Those services are basically available across the State except perhaps for some of the</p>

special schools. We do have special schools in places like Bathurst, Tamworth, Inverell and Gunnedah and places like that. Special schools are really where we can aggregate enough students to provide that service and, interestingly enough, we are a responsive Department and we don't have a particular inclusionist agenda. We respond to the needs of parents and to the community. When we look back at the figures, the numbers of students in our special schools may have declined slightly over the last 10 years. But the number of students in support classes has slightly increased and certainly a number of students in regular classes has increased. What we try and do is look at some sort of parity, so that the support we give a student in a regular class is no different to the support we give to a student in a special school, if that is absolutely possible.

We conduct an appraisal of the educational needs. We look at what modifications need to be done in the school. We look at any specialised technology that might be needed, where we need to provide special transport services and any consultancy services. Then we look at the educational focus in terms of the curriculum and the student support needs, their mobility needs, the social skills, their personal care and then we say to the school. "What is that you need in addition to what your school can provide at present?" It is the over and above which we try to provide to our schools, regardless of wherever they might be. That is really our premise. The way we operate.

We published recently a special education handbook for schools, which is in every school in NSW, which basically gives them all the information that they require to access our services. It gives them guidance in terms of appropriate decision-making to determine educational support needs. It gives them structures that they can set up in their place to effectively provide for students and it gives them the access forms at the back of the document so that they are aware of what services are available and how to apply for them. The special education handbook is really an attempt to address the equity issues across the State.

The other thing the Department has established in the 40 districts across the State is one position called the Student Services and Equity Co-ordinator, who really has responsibility for co-ordinating all the equity provision within the district. There is one of those people at quite senior level in every district. In Moree district you will find one of those people. In Bathurst district, in Broken Hill district, in Deniliquin district, Dubbo district and all the districts. Each district has approximately the same number of schools.

We also have a special education consultant, a specially qualified and experienced person, in every district across the State. We have an Assistant Principal (Learning Difficulties) in every district to co-ordinate the learning difficulty services in every district. We have an itinerant support teacher who gives consultancy support to the teachers of regular classes who have students with disabilities in their class. We have a fairly full range of services, which follows on from that appraisal process.

It is often said that students in remote areas don't get access to some of the specialists who are available. We have a couple of hundred itinerant support teachers in our system. The majority would work in the areas of hearing impaired and vision impairment and the quality of service that they provide is really not much different to whether they are providing it to a student in Moree or to a student in Sydney. In fact, I could think of 4 students in the Moree district who have a cochlear implant and they are getting an excellent level of service from the itinerant support teachers who have that specialist training up here.

The other thing we provide to students in remote areas is a group of people called the Resource Support Unit, which are a multi-disciplinary team, an educator, a speech pathologist and a physiotherapist. Their role is to come out to schools in isolated



	<p>areas and actually provide programming support and assessment report and actually assist the school in developing appropriate programs.</p> <p>Braille services are just as accessible in remote areas as they are in Sydney. The State braille and large print service provides braille translation of all materials that are required by students across the State. In addition to that we have braille outposts which are on-line to Sydney, which provide the day-to-day work sheets and requirements of students regardless. We have had students in very small places like Coolah which have been legally and educationally blind and have gone right through schooling to Year 12 and to university receiving that sort of service through our braille centre.</p> <p>Michael spoke earlier about the Distance Education Support Unit. I can think of about 64 students in the Moree district who are supported through that service. Most of those students - about 44 I think - are in regular schools, in regular classes and the Distance Education Support Unit at Ashfield is actually developing the individual program that that student needs.</p> <p>Special education is about providing an individual educational program for a student in consultation with the parents and other professionals who are involved. We are very much advocating the parents need to be involved in all the decision-making and the goal-setting and the review processing which we require to happen on an annual basis.</p> <p>I think the big initiative that has happened in our State recently would be in terms of the State integration program, which is the funding to support students in regular classes. In the current year \$23 million dollars is actually allocated to individual students and it is targeted funding to support those students in regular classes. So students in Moree can access the same level of funding or whatever level of funding is required. It is a demand-driven program and a maintenance program. If following appraisal the student is determined that they need a particular level of support then through that program they can attract that level of support. I can think of 3 or 4 students in the Moree area who have severe physical disabilities who receive significant funding, full-time teacher's aide supporting them, etc. Building qualifications and so on to support their access to the program at the school they are enrolled in. Moree district, when I looked at my figures, had the highest average figures for students with physical disabilities than any of the other districts in the State. It is really looking at the support needs of the student, not the location.</p> <p>In terms of technology, that access is available again through the process of the schools using the handbook and we meet on a monthly basis in Sydney to process any applications for specialised technology, specialised equipment the schools might need.</p> <p>I think what I have really provided to you is a map summary. It is our perspective in NSW that we are really not trying to discriminate in any way between a child's location. We really want to focus on the individual student and their educational support needs in the particular school that they are attending.</p>
Chris Sidoti	Thank you.
Barbara Flick	<p>One question, one burning question that I have for you. We heard from a mother whose been trying to get resources, equipment and access into the school for her child who is a wheelchair child and it seems that every time something is about to happen – and we are talking about a four year cycle now - that she is moved on, through pre-school, primary school, to high school. Her mother has been very closely involved with trying to work with the Department to get what she needs when she goes into high school, which was this year. After four years, it is still not ready for her. I have been trying to work out where is the block in the process of trying to</p>

	support those children. I think she has been disadvantaged right throughout by services and facilities not being provided when she is at a time when she should be using them. Is there a block? Are you State Manager, Craig?
Craig Curry	Yes, but not for properties. The block you might be talking about – or the issue you are really referring to – may be around modifications to buildings, which of course require quite a lot of forward-planning. I can only respond by saying that we have put in place transition guidelines. We have 10 early learning program co-ordinators that cover 4 districts each and their work is to actually look at the issues of transition into school and transition into high school and make sure that forward planning is done. I think what you have picked up is obviously a glitch in the system and something we work very hard to address. If it is properties work, that sort of facilities access work, and it is major of course it requires a lot of capital work that requires a lot of broad planning. If it is minor modification work then we attempt to do things very quickly. Our big issue is to get kids into schools. You are alerting me to an issue.
Barbara Flick	It is an isolated case, but it raises many issues. It was the school gate wasn't it? The child could not even get into the ..
Chris Sidoti	Yes, but it was a bit more than that as well. It came up when we were in Bourke, Ian and the people there Julie had not heard about it apparently. This was a child where they had adapted the primary school and had done a very good job. It was known for years that the kid was going to go to high school. She was due to enter Year 7 this year, but they had to retain her at the primary school after they had put a lot of effort at the primary school into handling the transition and the high school is just not ready. Even though they have had, as Barb said, two and a half years, three years notice that she was coming.
Ian Wilson, District Superintende nt	If it is the issue I think that you are talking about, I think the only thing the high school is still looking at getting is a change table and then the process is complete.
Chris Sidoti	I got the impression that it was a bit more than that, I must say. The high school Principal simply did not know when they would be ready to accept her. I think it was both staffing and facility. Apparently for some reason it had not come to the attention of the district superintendent.
Michael Cavanagh	The staffing's there, Chris. The staffing remains at the primary school until the facilities have been got ready at the high school.
Chris Sidoti	Then it gets transferred to the high school. I see.
Barb Flick	I suppose the question was about the ability of your office to respond to those needs in a remote and isolated area.
Craig Curry	It is through the District Office initially. It is from the school to the District Office, to the special education consultant and the student services and equity co-ordinator. Then, if further advice and support is needed, we actually have 5 special education co-ordinators, which each has responsibility for 8 districts. The co-ordinator in Bathurst has responsibility to support 8 western districts. They are the people who help facilitate any of those sorts of issues and try and make sure that, if there are issues brought to their attention, that they can resolve them as quickly as possible. We are on about supporting kids and getting them into appropriate programs.
Barbara Flick	Thank you for that.
Chris Sidoti	First, on the question of technological access and the braille kids. Do you actually provide schools that have a sight-impaired child with a computer software package that will enable braille from the computer or voice-braille interaction.
Craig Curry	WE can if that is required. If that is what the itinerant support teacher ... - and often they will take someone with them perhaps from the Royal Guide Society or wherever and actually look at the needs. If that is what is required then an application can come into us for that specialised technology and we will provide it. Generally the braille is done at one of the outposts at the support teacher's direction and it is provided to the school and all the text, etc, everything the child is going to need happens in Sydney. If the student needed that sort of technology, we

	would provide it.
Chris Sidoti	Students will sometimes need it to be able to do their own notes in their own words. The translation program.
Craig Curry	We would certainly provide it in those cases.
Chris Sidoti	What is the match between demands for funds for these kinds of special needs and the availability of funds?
Craig Curry	In terms of students in the sort of maintenance areas of our Department if you like, students with sensory impairment and students with moderate and high support needs in terms of say intellectual disability or physical, we believe we have got a demand-driven program. If the assessment is there and the student needs that piece of technology or equipment, we provide it.
Chris Sidoti	Right, you are not subject to budgetary constraints such that you have more demand than the budget provided to you.
Craig Curry	Not for those particular groups of children.
Chris Sidoti	Right
Craig Curry	Our budgetary constraints come with the students with much lower support needs where we tend to have capped budgets, but not with students with very high support needs. We don't at all.
Chris Sidoti	OK. How do funding formulas apply then where you might have a small school with a child with a disability, high level need? I know that in the cities for example that it might be decided you need 0.5 of a staff person across so many students, but if you have only got one student who is going to be there full time, 0.5 is not going to help. Will you then provide a full-time person?
Craig Curry	Yes. In fact, that is really an example I was providing before. You will find many students who are isolated in that sense will have a full time teacher's aide because they will need someone basically for toileting, changing, personal care. Basically they need someone all day with them and, if that is what we have to provide, that is what we do.
Chris Sidoti	Right. What degree of difficulty is there in finding people to fill the jobs?
Craig Curry	It varies from community to community. It is usually not difficult to find someone but then our responsibility is to give them appropriate training from that point and so training and development becomes a big issue for us. We have a training development program for working as a teacher's aide special, which is the title we give to those people. We have injected quite a lot of funds into our District Offices so that our special education consultants can provide that training. The issue for us of course is there is quite often turnover of people. We are very conscious of the fact that if we are going to employ someone full-time they really need to have the skills. The skills are just as much about working with the classroom teacher as they are working with a particular student because it is another adult in the classroom at all times. We are very conscious of that training issue.
Chris Sidoti	Are there processes where those needs can be identified in advance? These are the transition people you talk about. If someone is going to have a child going to kindergarten you need to work that out a year ahead and start the recruitment and training. So that happens does it?
Craig Curry	Yes that is the transition guidelines that I told you about and we have the early learning program co-ordinators. So we have some itinerant teachers early intervention who work with pre-schools, and they may well be non-government pre-schools, but wherever the child is coming from. In fact our itinerant teachers for hearing impaired students and students with vision impairment work with families and can work from the point of identification. They don't necessarily start once the child is in the school setting. They will work in the pre-school setting and the family so that they support that transition in the school.
Chris Sidoti	To what extent do some of the behavioural problems, issues, come up through the special education system. I don't know the extent of ADHD. It seems to be the label applied to every second kid these days. Do you actually look at what the behavioural disorder things, try to decide whether it is disability related? How is that done? What are the consequences?

Craig Curry	Our process is that we have a diagnosis that says the student has a disability. Once we have that, that is the gate if you like. We don't worry about that from that point on ... the child support needs. One of those gates is emotional disturbance. There are a significant number of students out there with some sort of emotional disturbance which is demonstrated through the challenging behaviours or whatever. Of course, that might include students with schizophrenia or whatever so they won't be challenging behaviours in that sense. There are students somewhere on the autism spectrum as well. So that there is a whole range of students out there. That whole area of behaviour floats in and out of special education. Sometimes it is linked with it and sometimes it is not. It is not necessarily a disability in a pure sense and it ranges from the students who are acting out in schools to the students with serious management issues. Certainly for us in special education there are students with disabilities who have very challenging behaviours and that is really part of the educational program for the management issues that we have to address.
Chris Sidoti	With those and other children where there is a choice between, within a particular town, a special school and special class how are the decisions made about?
Craig Curry	Decisions are made through that appraisal process in consultation with the parents and we work always to get some sort of consensus. We listen very carefully to what the parents tell what they would really like and us. We give advice and guidance. We have students with very high levels of need in a regular class in a school when there is a support class in the same school that is providing specifically for those students. That is because the parents really want an education with same-age peers in a regular classroom. We really respond to all levels of choice. One of the things we have had to do in some of the more remote areas in establishing that class assistance, establishing with much lower numbers. So, if we have a class of students with a moderate intellectual disability, the maximum enrolment is 9 students. In the city we usually only establish one of those if there were 9 and above students. We look at establishing in these areas with 3 or 4 students because we can see the viability and that is what the parents are really asking for.
Barbara Flick	Is there any stigma attached to those classes, those children?
Craig Curry	I think to some parents that is the issue and that is really why they prefer the regular class placement. A special school is a segregated setting and can carry with it some sort of stigma. And that is really the issue the parents are about the level of support they feel is best for their child requires in that particular setting. It is really part of that decision making process. We are attempting wherever possible to provide the same quality and level of support regardless of setting, because it is a very good challenge for us when it comes to areas of curriculum and so on. That is really our endeavour.
Chris Sidoti	I know building is not your area but perhaps, do you know – or Michael it is perhaps something the Department might look at in the submission - the question about capital costs of adaptation of country schools for kids who have got mobility disability. I assume that that is not possible to do make that demand-driven in the same way as it is program support because the capital costs are so high. To what extent are the budgets been provided to meet demand? To what extent is there a backlog? Is there are program for the adjustment of all schools or is just dealt with on a case by case basis?
Ian Wilson	There are minor and major capital works programs which are for all schools across the State. And then there is certainly an integration program as it is called in the Properties Directorate which is really about the access issues for students in regular schools and that sort of information we can provide in terms of where that is being accessed from, what parts of the State and so on.
Chris Sidoti	Thanks. One thing I would be keen on to get, either directly from Craig or Michael with the submission, is a copy of the special education handbook.
Craig Curry	Yes.
Chris Sidoti	Thank you.