



**Australian Government**  

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**Productivity Commission**

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**PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

**INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL EDUCATION EVIDENCE BASE**

**MR J. COPPEL, Presiding Commissioner**  
**MS J. ABRAMSON, Commissioner**

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**AT SYDNEY ON THURSDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2016, AT 10.26 AM**

**Continued from 18/10/16 in Melbourne**

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**MR COPPEL:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the public hearings of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base following the release of the draft report in September. My name is Jonathan Coppel and I'm the presiding commissioner on the inquiry and my colleague, Julie Abramson is the fellow commissioner on the inquiry.

By way of background, the inquiry started with the terms of reference from the Australian government in March this year, to investigate the further development of a national education evidence base. The task is to consider the case for and specific nature of a national evidence base for use in forming policy development and improving education outcomes in early childhood and school education.

We released an issues paper in early April and we've talked to a range of stakeholders with an interest in the issues. We released a draft report in September that included our draft recommendations, draft findings and some information requests. We also held a roundtable last week to discuss governance and institutional arrangements to drive improvement in the creation and application of evidence. So far we have received over 130 submissions in response to our issues paper and draft report and we are grateful to the organisations and individuals that have taken time to prepare submissions and to appear at these hearings.

The purpose of this round of hearings is to facilitate public scrutiny of the commission's work and to get comment and feedback on the draft report. It is the second public hearing being held as part of this inquiry. The first was held in Melbourne two days ago. We are working towards submitting the final report to government in December, having considered all the evidence presented at the hearings and in submissions as well as other informal discussions. Participants and those who have registered their interest in the inquiry will automatically be advised of the final report's release by government which may be up to 25 parliamentary sitting days after completion.

In terms of the way in which we like to conduct these hearings, they will be in a relatively informal manner but I do remind participants that a full transcript is being taken and for this reason, comments from the floor cannot be taken. But at the end of the proceedings for the day, I will provide an opportunity for any persons wishing to do so to make a brief presentation. Participants are not required to take an oath but should be truthful in their remarks. Participants are also welcome to comment on the issues raised in other submissions. The transcript will be made available to participants and will be available from the commission's web site following the hearings. This usually takes about a week. Submissions are also available on the commission's web site.

I also have to say, to be in compliance with the requirements of the

Commonwealth occupational health and safety legislation, that you are advised in the unlikely event of an emergency requiring the evacuation of this building, that the exits are located through the door that you came through and then to the right onto Crown Street. If you require assistance, please speak to one of our inquiry team members here today. We have John on the left here and David at the back right. The assembly point in the unlikely event of an evacuation is Shannon Reserve, also on Crown Street behind me.

I would now like to welcome Dr Sally Howell. So if, for the purpose of the transcript, you could give your name and who you represent and then feel free to give a brief opening statement. Thank you.

**DR HOWELL:** I'm Dr Sally Howell. I put in a private submission and a little bit of background about myself is 30-plus years teaching and special education experience. I've worked as a primary school teacher, a support teacher for learning difficulties, an educational consultant, as a university lecturer in literacy instruction and effective numeracy instruction and research methods and I am currently working as a school principal. I have had the privilege, I suppose I would say, of being invited to comment on various government documents relating to literacy and numeracy at both a state level and at the ACARA level and my submission, I guess, is prompted by what I could say might be 30 years of frustration trying to see a change in the way that school systems and larger state systems respond to what the evidence base actually does tell us about what we need to do in the areas of literacy and numeracy with a particular focus on children at risk in the early years. I have never been to one of these before so I'm not familiar with where we go from here.

**MR COPPEL:** That's fine. So we would like just to ask a few questions based on what you've just said but also in your submission and I think one of the themes that came out strongly in your submission is the importance of independence of an institution that has responsibility for commissioning research that informs the evidence base. We are interested in how to design the institution in a way that provides, on the one hand independence, but on the other hand also has authority and legitimacy such that it actually is a body that has impact. So there will be some need of overseeing leadership. It may be through the way in which the institution's charter is defined, it may be through more direct involvement. There are different ways of doing this. But I would be interested in your views of how to ensure that independence and also give the body a chance to have an impact.

**DR HOWELL:** That certainly is a huge challenge, isn't it? I guess one of my reservations is whether the body would end up having a weighting in favour of people who are recommended to be on the various arms of the body from the education systems. My understanding is that clearly there are a huge number of areas and issues that this body would want to be looking at, be it prior to school and all sorts of things but I'm just basing my comments around the literacy and numeracy

areas.

So if the body is looking at evidence based practice or research to commission in those areas, my submission is that the part that makes the decisions about what the research will be cannot be weighted in favour of representatives from existing educational authorities. To explain that thinking a little bit, I'd like to draw everybody's attention to the development of the Australian curriculum and particularly - again, I'm looking and thinking about the aspects of the English curriculum to do with early reading development. State and territories, I'm sure, recommended people to work with ACARA and ACARA selected people to work on the development of that curriculum and the curriculum was signed off by all states and territories and schools were asked to start implementing that curriculum.

Certain people outside of school bodies raised major concerns that given what we know about the role of phonics instruction in beginning reading, it was not sufficiently represented in that release of the Australia curriculum. ACARA took on board those sort of comments, so that there was a review. Very shortly after the release of the ACARA curriculum there was a review and changes were made to the curriculum.

I was invited as part of a group to make comment on the first launch, so let's call it Curriculum 1 and the questions we were asked to respond to, "Are phonics and phonemic awareness evident enough?" My response to that was, "No," and I just want to make the point that in that version of the English curriculum the terms "blending" and "segmenting" did not appear. Now, we have 30-plus years of research that lets us know that the two most crucial skills for decoding and for spelling are children's ability to blend and segment.

I raise this point not because I want everyone to understand beginning reading instruction, but one has to ask the question, "How was the national curriculum released and signed off by every state and territory when one of the most fundamental, most highly researched areas where we have the most evidence, including our own 2005 National Inquiry into the teaching of literacy was not reflected in that curriculum?". That kind of progression of events is typical of my experience over the last 30 years. So, yes, it will be an incredibly complex task and there are the issues of how do you give credibility to any recommendations that must be made but it would be my fear that if the same representatives who got to write the national curriculum are the people who are put forward to sit on any subgroup or committee then you're not actually going to get the sort of research happening that actually needs to happen.

So in response to your question, I really do not have a magic answer to how you can do that. I guess in my submission I have said, "Just please make sure that it's not weighted in favour, that you have somehow a criteria perhaps - we're looking at

beginning reading, let's start with a literature search. Have clear criteria by which we look at what the existing level of research is so that the full body of research is looked at, not just the research or publications that are favoured by people with one particular viewpoint”.

**MR COPPEL:** You asked the question, why is it that there is such a gap between evidence and the application of evidence and this is a broader question that has come up in the conduct of the inquiry and I would be interested in your views on why there is such a gap between the evidence that we have and application of the evidence.

**DR HOWELL:** Just looking through some of the other submissions, some other people who have put in submissions put it quite eloquently, I think, and I'm not the only one with this view. The Australian Research Alliance for Children I thought put it quite nicely when they said, "Evidence is often dismissed even if of high quality when it challenges existing entrenched views on education." The tendency for an educational practice introduced to remain in place, regardless of whether or not the evidence supports it is very typical and sometimes charismatic high profile advocates can be more influential.

I would argue that within - and I can only talk about the New South Wales system because that is the only system I have worked in - people probably aren't familiar but I would say I worked at state office for seven years and I worked in a regional office of the Department of Education for four years, so I'm very familiar with how the department is organised. So it's best, I think, explained as silos of development, so you have performance streams. For seven years I worked for the Department of Education in the role of what was called a principal education officer, supposedly with responsibility for guiding policy and practice for students at risk with a particular focus in literacy and numeracy. At no time in that role was I included in the planning of programs that were rolled out as part of the department. The decisions were made at a high level that literacy and numeracy initiatives for at-risk students would be given to what's called the "curriculum stream".

Now, the curriculum stream of the Department of New South Wales Education for an extended period of time - and I would say still now - has what can better be described as a whole language slant. I'm not familiar if either of you are aware of the kind of debates around the teaching of reading, but professional learning that is offered within the department is very much what they call the balanced approach to literacy where the evidence base isn't necessarily part of professional learning.

Some examples of how difficult it can be to move away from existing practice, I can see it in what the department calls its literacy and numeracy continuums or continua, and now at a national level, a similar model is being adopted in what's called a literacy and numeracy progression. In terms of the department with its continuums, a huge amount of money has been spent on training teachers on how to

use these. A huge amount of amount has been invested now for digital applications of them. Now, from stage 1, we've got to say they've never been evaluated. Many people would seriously challenge whether they are capable of doing what the department claims they're capable of doing, which the department says that they provide teachers with the information that they need to plan exactly where children need to move next. The descriptors are so subjective. How anyone can suggest that you can use a continuum or a learning progression with descriptors such as "connects with familiar text" - what does "connects" mean? What's a measure of a familiar text? That's the kind of jargon that's in these things.

With the massive amount of resources the department has invested in these things, plus the public claims that they make about them, how are you going to get a department to shift away from things like that? So it is things like that that make it very, very difficult for evidence-based practice to be put in place. Another highly relevant barrier is actually the charismatic nature of certain people who hold certain beliefs. If you have in charge of literacy at a state office level someone whose total education career has been dedicated to what is essentially a whole language approach - which we now have changed the wording to "balanced approach" - then that person actually has some control over the entire team that is employed, that person has control over what professional learning is offered and that person has control about what the state minister gets to read and gets to hear.

In New South Wales we have a case in point right at the moment. We had a \$261 million Early Action for Success or Early Action initiative. Yes, we applaud the minister for recognising that early intervention is what is needed. The department's literacy component of that intervention is a program called Literacy, Learning and Language - it's called L3, I might have got the order wrong, sorry about that. That professional learning program for teachers does not include systematic and explicit instruction in phonics. People look at me and wonder, "How can that happen?" It can happen because the person who is in a senior level at the department - and I'm not saying her intentions aren't entirely sincere - but the entire program reflects a philosophical viewpoint, not the research that we actually know.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Can I just pick you up on that in a broader sense, Sally. You've been talking about current practices in the department. We're also interested in professional development and how teachers are trained, so why is it on the evidence that you've given us that there's a disconnect between an approach which might be taken within a bureaucratic institution and the way we're training our teachers?

**DR HOWELL:** There isn't actually. I would say that there's quite a severe knowledge gap and it has been identified that teacher training at our universities very much reflects the professional learning that I'm saying exists in the department. The gap in teacher training has been a focus of a number of reports and has been identified at a federal level and has also been identified in New South Wales by our

Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards. There are moves under way at the moment to actually try and make a difference to initial education training.

Part of I think the reason that we are where we are 30 years on from when we first started learning about the role of phonics and phonemic awareness is that there is actually quite a severe knowledge gap because our training institutions have not been providing teachers with training in what we would call evidence-based practice about beginning reading or the amount of time dedicated to it is so small that it is not sufficient for our teachers to actually have a grip of what actually is quite complex. I know people can sort of interpret, "Phonics is easy, it's just letters and sounds." Actually, effectively teaching it, particularly to children at risk, is a highly skilled practice and our teachers have been short changed.

Typically, teachers will get that training if they go on to do a masters in special education and typically in the department, again we have this silo effect, so within the disability programs aspect of the department, there is a training course available once children have failed to learn to read, but wouldn't it be great if we actually put in the evidence-based teaching practices from kindergarten so that we had fewer children failing to learn to read.

**MS ABRAMSON:** So would you see, given the institutional arrangements that we're proposing, a role for that institution in teacher development, at least with the development of the evidence base, because there seems from what you've said to be a disconnect from the evidence and then the application.

**DR HOWELL:** Absolutely. In terms of professional learning for teachers - another role I've had there, I have had a role with what was initially called the Institute of Teachers which was around when New South Wales introduced that teachers had to do a certain amount of professional learning - and I was absolutely amazed when I submitted the first course that I'd developed as part of my role. I said, "And who checks the content?" "No, well, no-one checks the content. We assume you're the expert." Things might have moved on, and I am going back, because it's no longer called the Institute of Teachers, but again if we are requiring teachers to do 100 hours of professional learning, somebody should be actually checking that the content of what we are rolling out to them, yes, reflects some kind of evidence base. I think that would be hugely beneficial both at the initial preparation level and at the ongoing professional learning level, if it was actually resourced that subcommittees could look at the content and does it reflect the evidence base, and if not, maybe we shouldn't be accrediting it. At the moment, teachers can get accreditation for going to courses that are absolutely not evidence based.

**MR COPPEL:** One of the other parts of our proposal for the institutional and governance arrangements that wrap around it recognises that research is almost



always contestable and that may be one of the explanations why there are always these debates, whatever the particular issue is. The role of the institution would be to also support more rigorous research techniques, greater external review of the research so that there is greater authority in terms of the results that are put forward. We think that may reduce that level of contestability but one of the points that's come up in our consultations is this relationship between the educator and the researcher and trying to narrow that separation. Specifically it has been raised also in terms of the connection with the teaching institutions and the teaching of teachers which is an area that hasn't been dealt with greatly in the draft report. I'm wondering if you have any views on how you can harness that connection between teaching institutes and researchers, teachers and researchers and maybe even parents and their engagement with the schools.

**DR HOWELL:** Yes. I read just that the other day and I thought, "Now, there's an idea that possibly worth exploration," in this context and that was just something on the web site of the Education Endowment Foundation. That was about new research schools will become regional hubs for education and research and I thought, yes, if schools were able to nominate themselves and work really closely, that that might be a far more effective way to actually bring your teaching force with you. But again I would say that schools must be allowed to independently nominate. It should not be a case of the New South Wales Department of Education thinking, "Now, that school there does everything we like. We'll nominate them." This independence to me is absolutely crucial. But again you would need to obviously work out some parameters and criteria by which a school would be deemed appropriate and that could feed into, "Well, where are the real issues here?"

Obviously my bent is towards children at risk. I started my teaching career in what was called in the old days a "disadvantaged school". When I think back on it now, I had a child arrive in my classroom on a Monday who had arrived as a Vietnamese refugee on a boat; times change and times don't change. A school that has a broad range of students - I mean, for me, my passion is the children who are most at risk. I know obviously the institution would be much, much broader than that. But in terms of outcomes for our country, surely if we can start there and get some schools on the board, it just struck me as being one way that you could actually progress the work and get the translation because that's what we're all talking about, the translation of the research into the practice. So put the mentoring into those schools to say, "This is what the translation of research into practice looks like and these are the measures that we can use." That's all really long-term stuff. There are no quick fixes but that is one idea.

**MR COPPEL:** One final point which comes up in your submission, is the data or the metrics that sort of sit, before you even work to establish evidence on teaching practices, for instance. You made the comment that the measures that are developed or being proposed for year 1 are subjective and I guess that then leads again to

contestability as to how they can be interpreted or misinterpreted. I'm interested in what you would see then as measures of performance that could be used to give an assessment of how well schools are performing.

**DR HOWELL:** A useful measurement of student performance and, by moving up the chain, then school performance, the measure has got to be objective and measurable. You can't have teacher judgment around clusters of indicators that are written in totally subjective terms, and that's what we're doing at the moment. The New South Wales independent evaluation of any of its programs stipulates that the evaluations are done against the continuums. At a year 1 level, things like a phonics check, it is possible to develop something like that that is entirely objective, validated. If you're going to make teachers do assessments of children, they've got to be meaningful and they've got to actually be specific enough to measure performance. So it's not an impossible task. You cannot measure everything that is included in the existing continuums or the learning progressions. How many indicators would there be? I suspect at each year level there would be hundreds. So you need to actually look at, "What does the evidence tell us?" that is really typical and predictive of future success for a child in year 1. What is the standard that we actually need to have children at year 2 performing if they're going to be successful further on? We've never assessed our children that way in the early years, and despite whatever departments might say in all their glossy brochures, the Best Start assessments are incapable of identifying exactly where children are.

Again just to give you a little example, Best Start assesses children's letter-sound knowledge. I would have thought if you wanted to assess children's letter-sound knowledge, you'd need to look at 26 letters. "No, we'll look at about five." I mean, how is that useful information for a teacher?

**MR COPPEL:** There are cognitive skills and there are also non-cognitive skills and the nature of something which is non-cognitive must almost by definition be very difficult to have a clear metric, and some people will contest that as well. They will say there are various measures and some of these measures are being developed. But do you think then that it's also possible to develop metrics for these non-cognitive skills in the same way as you're suggesting for phonics?

**DR HOWELL:** I could not pretend that I have the expertise about assessments in other areas that I could say definitively one way or another but I would certainly agree with you, in terms of a child's educational development, simply assessing their literacy and numeracy skills does not give the entire picture of what support that child might need. If you were to introduce a phonics assessment, that would tell you which children are at risk and which children need more instruction in those areas, but there's much more about the child you would need to know to be feeding into how you would be supporting that child. I certainly do acknowledge that and from having scanned many of the submissions, there are many, many people who are

doing work around various wellbeing, family relationships, lots and lots of other areas which we do know all feed into a child's success at school. We can try and address all those issues but if we don't get the instruction right, what chance have we got? I still say that beginning literacy and numeracy instruction, we have the evidence, we have the reports and as you have identified, actually getting the translation of that into practice is the most significant challenge for our country, I think, and possibly a way to do that is to set up some research-based schools where you go with, "Okay, we have got the evidence here, let's see how we go."

**MR COPPEL:** Okay, good. Thank you very much, Sally.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Thank you very much, Sally.

**DR HOWELL:** Thank you for the opportunity. I do appreciate the opportunity to speak.

**MR COPPEL:** Our next participant is from the Australian Council of TESOL Associations, Mr Michael Michell. When you are settled if you could, for the purpose of the transcript give your name and, again, who you represent and then a brief opening statement.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Thank you. I am Michael Michell, I'm the president of ACTA, that is the Australian Council of TESOL Associations. ACTA is the peak national group for ESL or EALD teachers in Australia, both in the school setting and also in adult settings and part of our brief and our charter is to advocate for the interests of the second language learners in schools and adult settings and also on behalf of their families who are unable to present themselves in these policy forums.

My personal background is I was an ESL teacher for 40 years, secondary intensive context as well as high school, English and history and mainstream curriculum, language across the curriculum. I was a consultant also and a policy adviser within the Department of Education for some 18 years. With that I will pass to Margaret.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Good morning. My name is Margaret Turnbull. I have also worked in the field of English as an additional language or dialect or ESL education for more than 30 years. I have worked in primary schools and high schools and work context teaching English as an additional language. I have worked also collaboratively across Australia with teachers of indigenous students. I have worked as an education consultant supporting schools, primary and secondary, worked in the tertiary sector at ESL. I am now working in the - I've worked as a leader just for the last two years in a south-western Sydney primary school. Just this year I've started working back with the New South Wales Department of Education in the Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation doing research, not just with EALD students but more broadly as well, with a particular focus on data.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Margaret is secretary of ACTA at the same time.

Yes. Just in terms of an opening statement I just want to emphasise a couple of points. Australia has an estimated 300,000 school students who are in the process of learning English as their second or other additional language while learning in the school curriculum, that is, they're students with English language proficiency needs. Despite this Australia has no national data information structure to identify these students, monitor them or report on their progress or even to resource them in the appropriate needs base way. So Australia basically has not only got an information gap in this area but really an information black hole.

So our submission to the Productivity Commission is to alert the commission to the work that is already under way around this area and to indicate our support for this process and urge the commission that it support this process when it is

completed and the adoption of this English language proficiency assessment framework which will enable the identification, reporting, monitoring, and we would also argue, the necessary information for resourcing for this target group of students. Perhaps just by way of clarification you might wonder how can this be in 2016, Australia being such multicultural society and all. Well, the reason is because the problem is LBOTE category, the language background other than English category, which has effectively become a kind of a substitute for the English as an additional language learner.

So in becoming a substitute it encourages misrecognition and it actually hides this subgroup of the LBOTE category in NAPLAN and other data collections and reporting processes. So the only way that we can actually drill down to the English language proficiency needs is to be able to identify these students in terms of the English language proficiency framework that is being developed at the moment. I am happy to elaborate and there are a whole lot of further things we could talk about.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Michael, I'm quite interested and I have read your submission. Just so that I'm understanding clearly, the difference between the LBOTE and the subgroup that you're talking about and how they fit together.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Right. LBOTE is just a background characteristic, so it's based on your parents' background, whether they speak English at home or not. So it's a very, very broad group, it includes many kinds of students.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Your children, my children.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Well, it includes my children actually, yes. It used to include Paul Keating's children we used to be told. So it's a very broad category.

**MS ABRAMSON:** It's a quite broad.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** It is a very broad group. You've got high-flyers, you've got low flyers but we don't know who those low flyers are.

**MS ABRAMSON:** It's not a measure so a child in that category could be extremely fluent in English but might speak French at home as well.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Yes.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Yes, yes.

**MS ABRAMSON:** But then on the other hand you could have people in that category whose only home language was the native language.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Yes.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** So they start school with limited English and that's critical.

**MS ABRAMSON:** We do measure that broad group.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Yes.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Yes. The problem is that often what gets reported is succeeding students are coming from language backgrounds other than English.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Yes.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** So the system at large can think, "Oh, there's no problem." Right. On the other hand we have the flat-lining of NAPLAN and yet we're not able to say, "Why is this happening?" One of the possible reasons why it might be happening is because the subgroup within LBOTE. We don't know what's happening with it because we can't disaggregate that English language learner subgroup within LBOTE to see what's going on.

**MS ABRAMSON:** What happens in the school because presumably at the school where the interface is they know exactly what you're talking about.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Not necessarily.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Having taught in an ESL school myself early this year, in New South Wales we have been identifying ESL learners for some time using ESL scales or the English. Now, the learning progression and teachers do report on that systematically. But that's not the case in all states and territories and all states and territories have their own tool. There are also many situations where if you're not a qualified EALD teacher, then you might not be familiar with that tool and the students may slip through the net.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** But even so, these are state-based processes, there's nothing at the national level to identify these students.

**MR COPPEL:** But when you enrol in a school - in Victoria you enrol in a school, you have to fill in a form and it will ask a question about what language is spoken at the home. I presume that is similar in New South Wales.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Yes.

**MR COPPEL:** I presume it's also common in other states. Your issue is that you

want something more consistent?

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Something more detailed that relates to the potential disadvantage of those students if their English language learning is not supported.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Yes, all states - and there was a national agreement about the collection of that data "about your language background". But that defines LBOTE, the broader characteristic of LBOTE. But what you need to then do is identify the subset of that group which is students who have limited English language proficiency and the only way of collecting that data is through a measure of language proficiency rather than just language background. Language background in itself just points to linguistic diversity, not the language proficiency.

So each state and territory has its own scale, so in South Australia there's a scale of, say, 10 levels of language proficiency; in New South Wales we record it over four levels of language proficiency. What's been done with this framework that Michael is talking about is an alignment of each of those states and territory tools to one measure. So we have got the tool to collect the data but it's not being done and not being analysed and not being used to develop policy.

**MS ABRAMSON:** I understand what you say there. We've talked a lot about evidence and the application of evidence. Is there an evidence gap as well? There's a view about how things could be improved for these students, and it's difficult for people at the coalface to know what they can apply?

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Again, yes, absolutely. There's plenty of research that New South Wales has done that shows what effective pedagogy looks like in any EAL/D classroom and we have analysed the data. I'm still involved in a project at the moment with the department that is connecting evidence of work samples which shows what's effective and how they're being judged and tracking their progress against our New South Wales progression. So, yes, there is evidence that shows what works. But that's not collected systematically at the national level and the issue that we have is that the tools that are being used and recognised by the system like Best Start that Sally referred to, that on-arrival assessment or the NAPLAN data, is not being analysed for EAL/D students so that you can look systematically and make those recommendations at a policy level across Australia about what works.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** There's an interaction between the bottom up and the top down. All of the assessment instruments for EAL/D that the state systems have is part of their bottom-up process and it feeds back into teaching, informs teaching. The problem is when you've got so-called mainstream or literacy-type instruments continua or whatever they may be. The assumption is always that they're mother-tongue speakers, and the whole notion that perhaps language might be the underlying issue here in terms of literacy issues and problems is not even on the

radar because it's not even signified in these documents.

This is where a national English language proficiency framework would actually have an important signalling effect, both at the bottom-up level as well as the national and statewide level. That really feeds into the whole notion of the evidence and looking for the evidence at the school level.

**MS ABRAMSON:** We've been talking a little bit about individual students, so do you have a view on the utility of a unique student identifier?

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Yes, I thought you might ask me that. We don't have a position. I understand there are issues in terms of privacy that have got to be worked through. Obviously there's great benefits of that in terms of being able to link data and so on. Our view would be that whether or not the commission proceeds in that direction, it shouldn't affect the importance and the necessity of moving towards an assessment framework for English language proficiency. So even a group of identifiers, if you like, is a vast improvement on what we've got at the moment, which is nothing.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** I'll just add to that that the ESL student population, particular the refugee student population, is highly mobile. Often the students may enter into the independent system and come across to the Catholic system, come across to the government system. In the current position that I'm in, we are very aware of those tracking issues and the need for the data if we're going to accurately report the data from preschool through to the HSC, and with an account for that mobility, I think a student identifier is actually fairly critical for our student population to track their needs effectively, particularly in that early childhood context, going into school. We're currently involved in some data collection and there's lots of issues there, as you're probably aware of.

**MR COPPEL:** I'll just come back to the use of the framework. Are you proposing that to be adopted for those with an LBOTE background or is it across the student population?

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** The EAL/D population is made up of, comes from, new arrivals, the migration program, refugees, migrants. They're coming in at any year of schooling, not just at kindergarten. You've also got kindergarten children who are born in Australia but coming from homes where English is not spoken. You've got international students and you also have indigenous students who are learning standard Australian English and have minimal exposure to standard Australian English and are learning standard English in school, standard Australian English. So remind me of the question again?

**MR COPPEL:** Whether the adoption or the use of the framework you envisage



would be one where all students are tested or are you targeting a particular group?

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** The EAL/D group is basically a subgroup of the LBOTE. As I understand it, indigenous students fall into that category of language background other than English in some cases. Whether or not that's the case, there would need to be that process happening within Aboriginal indigenous students as well. That is already happening in the Northern Territory, for example, and Western Australia.

But what doesn't get recognised in this process is the importance and the role of language in terms of learning and barriers to learning. At this time when we're sort of casting around and trying to explain why achievement is not progressing as we hope it might, there is actually no kind of consideration of these language uses, and that's where an English language proficiency framework will actually put much more of a spotlight on this kind of area, as it should.

**MR COPPEL:** It's been agreed, the framework. The barrier is funding or the process?

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** No, I think there's support for the process because it's happening under the auspices of the Education Council. I think there's some concern by some states because they're very wedded to their own assessment tools and they're a little bit nervous about it being articulated or connected to a national tool. I should say that the framework is actually the application of the ACARA, English language EAL/D learning progression. That was developed two or three years ago and it was drawing on actually two national ESL proficiency scales at the time, ESL scales developed in 1994 under the CURASS process, and the ESL band scales which was another one developed about that time. It was also drawing on states, so it's actually reflective of a lot of these tools that are actually in existence in the state jurisdictions.

So the beauty of this, when we think about costs and administrative burdens, is that if it works and if it gets adopted, there's no need for states and territory systems to do different or additional assessments and reporting because what they're doing already is articulated within its framework. So it avoids that whole issue of compliance burden in that way. So that's not a barrier. I think possibly the main barrier would be, as I understand it, the application of this framework to inform resourcing, and states don't like to lose their freedom of movement in this area. But the reality is the English language proficiency funding that funds these students is allocated on the LBOTE measure or a disadvantaged LBOTE measure and I just draw your attention to one of the research modelling that was done by the New South Wales Department of Education about how inaccurate that LBOTE measure is in terms of how much it aligns with the ESL/EAL/D population, to the extent of being misaligned by something like 70 per cent.

So if a funding allocation that's earmarked for these students is being allocated to the states and territories on this inadequate formula, there are major issues about how needs based that allocation of funding is to states and territories. So that's why ACTA also takes this extra recommendation that it be applied to and inform the resourcing process at the Commonwealth level and that's where the states are not quite on board on that one. But it seems to me from an equity point of view and from a needs base point of view that's just a natural next step.

**MS ABRAMSON:** You've got a figure of more than 300,000 students but I'm assuming from what you're saying that you've had to work through what that figure might look like because you don't actually have reported numbers.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** We have to guess it because there's no national reporting of these students.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Yes.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** This is a crazy situation. There used to be national reporting when the Commonwealth had responsibility for the English Second Language program and New Arrivals program. That ceased when those programs ceased with the exception of the independent school sector. So we don't know, we just don't know. What we do is cast around among our members from the different states to say, "Well, how many?" Sometimes there might be a figure on the web site of the department or not - most cases not. It's a very unsystematic and haphazard kind of approach to something that's a major component of our migration program and we are so ill equipped. We have actually gone backwards in this area. So that's why we are here to really draw people's attention to this.

The consequences are really quite profound in terms of silence and policy and lack of policy, lack of planning. There is a policy vacuum. None of the other submissions have mentioned the words "English second language learners" or "EAL/D learners", they're just invisible. Yet, go to any school in Sydney and many of them are the majority of the students in that school. So there is a real disconnect between the representation of these students in policy consciousness at the national level and the linguistic and social reality on the ground in schools and that's why Australia has to take this step to support this process.

**MS ABRAMSON:** The framework will give, I think you said, a consistency of definition as well.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Yes.

**MS ABRAMSON:** We've seen that in other areas that there are issues of different definitions being used.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** That's right. It took something like 10 years to get a national definition on LBOTE and that came about in 1997 and I think probably people were so exhausted after that they didn't want to do anything further about the subgroup within LBOTE. So in that policy vacuum and inertia is where we're kind of stuck. So it's unfinished business, it really is unfinished business of that agenda from years ago. It's yet to be completed and we just urge the commission to urge the government to complete it.

**MR COPPEL:** We're still trying to tease out what are the advantages of a national approach over the diversity of different state and territory approaches.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** It's about, I think at the national level, an improved understanding of the national profile and the number of ESL EAL/D students which we don't have, we don't know. It's about transparency of that and reporting of that. It's about improved data for policy development at the national level and program evaluation at the national level and I think it's a much more of a meaningful representation of the English language proficiency needs for resourcing purposes.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** I was just going to think of an example of the way that we in New South Wales identify EALD students for funding purposes is very different from the way Western Australia identifies EALD students for funding purposes. So in New South Wales we would have a graded weighting according to their level of English language proficiency. In other states and territories it's simply based on the number of years that they have been learning English at school. In Western Australia and South Australia and Northern Territory it includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in New South Wales it doesn't. So coming up with a consistent definition is probably the first step for policy consistency as well and funding consistency.

**MR COPPEL:** Are there risks of misdiagnosis?

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Yes, there are costs of not doing it actually, of not proceeding in this way and they basically relate to the costs on the ground of misrecognition, of not diagnosing and identifying needs and then those needs are not being met over a period of - particularly in the early learning years and then that becoming a literacy problem as opposed to an early intervention language support issue.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Yes, coming back to what I was saying before, you have that different definition of what an EALD student is across states and territories and in some states and territories, as I said, it's based on length of time, not on English language proficiency and the research that the New South Wales Department of Education did showed that the most effective use of the resource - it was really

critical - I can't remember the way they worded it, you might be able to jump in there - but it was about language proficiency need. They identified that need has to relate to English language proficiency. If you've got states and territories that are allocating not according to English language proficiency then I think it's problematic because it's a misuse of resources, if you like.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Misdirection.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Misdirection of resources, yes.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Maybe another point that really needs to be made and I just draw your attention to the research in the submission about what's called BICS and CALPS, the basic interpersonal communication skills as opposed to cognitive academic language proficiency. The research around this has been around for about 40 years and it's been confirmed by successive studies that students who migrate to other countries and then go into the school system of those countries and learn the language, for example, Canada, US, Australia and England, learning English as second language, for learners in those countries, there are two kinds of proficiencies that need to be developed if they're going to be successful at school. The first is BICS which is oral fluency in the language and, if you like, that's playground language, it's about being able to interact with people socially.

But that's necessary but not sufficient for school success. School success requires the mastery of academic language, the language of the curriculum, language of subject areas, abstract ideas expressed through writing and encountered in reading and so on. The research consistently shows that the basic conversational fluency takes about two years to get going, get on top of it. But when it comes to CALPS which is literacy-oriented language proficiency it takes about seven years to reach age-grade norms. If you're talking about students with disrupted schooling, refugees and so on, it can be up to 10 years.

So the English language learning in school is not just a one-day or one-year affair, it needs to be tracked and we need to be able to get the thinking of teachers and systems to be tracking this through to the point where students are participating in the mainstream curriculum with full effect.

**MS ABRAMSON:** So you can have proficiency in language like in your everyday interactions with people but that masks whether or not you actually understand the language.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** That's right, necessary but not specific and this is what came about with this research was that initially teachers were finding the kids can speak okay but they're not doing well in school and then they thought, "Well, it's a learning difficulty issue, it's a special education issue." No, it's not, it's breaking

through into higher orders of language learning and that requires a very knowing kind of support in schools. Yet this is an area - the language base is an issue for all students, mother-tongue speakers as well, but the whole language base for learning is going out consciousness in the policy mind and yet this is a key factor in how students thrive in the school and how students and progress within it.

So there will be spill-over effects of this as well, not only for EAL/D learners but I think a greater consciousness of the importance of language for all students and we certainly find this where ESL teachers are working with other teachers in the school, that that knowledge is really, really valuable and really important. So that needs to be kind of recognised at the apex of our data collection and reporting and evidence processes and it needs to be recognised for what it is and the importance of what it is.

**MR COPPEL:** Thank you very much.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Thank you very much.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Thank you for the opportunity, we appreciate it.

**MS TURNBULL (ACTA):** Yes.

**MR MICHELL (ACTA):** Could I just say one more thing, sorry. It wasn't mentioned in our submission but I would like to put on the record our support for the AARE submission where they talk about the importance of not narrowing down or getting dependent on a naive view of what research is and what research evidence is. The reason for that is if we really want to understand what works, we have to understand how it works and why it works. It's been mentioned we also need to understand where it works. We need to understand more than that. When we know where it works, we need to understand why it works and how it works and you cannot gain that understanding without recourse to qualitative research methodology. I think this is really important if we're going to be wise and knowledgeable in this evidence base process. We need to be able to explain why things work.

**MR COPPEL:** Thank you.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Thank you.

**MR COPPEL:** Our next participant is Dr Gillian Considine from The Smith Family. If you can make your way to the table and when you're comfortable, again for the transcript, if you could give your name and who you represent and then a brief opening statement. Thank you.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** Good morning. I'm Anne Hampshire, I'm Head of Research and Advocacy at the Smith Family.

**DR CONSIDINE (SF):** I'm Gillian Considine, I'm the Senior Research and Advocacy Officer at The Smith Family.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** The Smith Family very much welcomes the opportunity to speak to this inquiry on the national education evidence base. So thank you for that opportunity. The Smith Family is Australia's largest non-government provider of educational support and our mission is to support disadvantaged young Australians' long-term participation in education. For us, a, perhaps the, central question is what data, research and evaluation does Australia need to ensure we are better placed to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young people.

As the commission would be well aware, there is currently a significant gap in educational performance between different groups of young Australians, despite significant investment over many years. This includes, for example, by indigeneity, by SES and location. We don't see this as acceptable or inevitable. The Smith Family is currently supporting around 100,000 disadvantaged children and young people a year to improve their educational outcomes and particularly through a long-term educational scholarship program called Learning For Life. This program supports 34,000 young people a year and we have built the systems, processes and analytical capability to track their key educational outcomes.

As a result of that, the systems, the processes and analytical capability, we've seen year on year improvements in the school attendance, school completion and post-school engagement of the young people we're supporting and the outcomes their achieving are better than those of similar students not on the program. So for us the core aim of furthering the national education evidence base must be to drive improved student achievement through monitoring of performance, evaluation of what works, dissemination of evidence and application of that evidence by educators and policy-makers as your draft report notes on page 5. We would particularly emphasise the need for evidence to influence and guide policy and practice. Simply having the data and analysing it is not sufficient. It must be usefully, thoughtfully and extensively applied if we are to have any chance of improving educational outcomes, particularly for those students who are currently not doing well.

In your deliberations we would urge the commission to note the potential range of relevant data and evidence that has been gathered by organisations beyond the

education sectors and consider how these can help inform a national education evidence base. This includes, for example, the data and evidence to be found in the non-government sector. We would argue that a unique student identifier is one of the foundations of efforts aimed at improving the national education evidence base, given the high level of student mobility, particularly amongst disadvantaged students and its well-known impact on educational outcomes. The value of such an identifier would undoubtedly be enhanced if it was to apply across the early childhood, schooling and tertiary systems providing a comprehensive longitudinal database. The power and value of such a database for policy and practice and investment decisions cannot be underestimated.

Nor do we underestimate the work involved in developing a unique student identifier, particularly given our federated system, but we see it as critical. While beyond the scope perhaps of this inquiry, we also see the need to better understand young people's transitions post-school, particularly given the high rates of young Australians who are not in employment, education or training and the strong link between that and educational attainment. We would also suggest that current administrative data collections could be used to greater effect than they currently are. Recent developments in the Social Services portfolio regarding the investment approach reflect this.

Our submission argues the importance of gaining a nuanced understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances. We would suggest that the principle of "fit for purpose" methodologies is an important part of seeking to gain this more sophisticated understanding. Over a number of years the Smith Family has noted that Australia has no systemic way of sharing evaluation and research efforts in education. Other efforts in other areas of policy have developed clearing houses for sharing knowledge and good practice in what works and ideally what doesn't work. These clearing houses often and, importantly, should have a strong focus on implementation, and implementation science which is seeking to ensure that there is an integration of evidence into policy and practice. Having the evidence is not enough. Significant support needs to be provided to help people to use the evidence in ways appropriate to their settings.

The Smith Family would, therefore, very much welcome efforts aimed at enhancing the sharing and implementation of research and evaluation efforts in education. Ensuring that dissemination is timely, targeted and occurs in formats appropriate for a diversity of users is particularly important. This includes but is not limited to ensuring teaching staff, principals, policy-makers and non-government organisations are supported to access and use research and evaluation findings. We would note the good work of the New South Wales Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation in this regard.

While we see a clear need for collaborative national leadership in this area,

we're less clear on the value of a significant new institution which is extensively commissioning new research given the potential costs and the untapped value that can be gained from existing data, research and evaluation efforts. We would suggest the priority first be given to leveraging existing efforts before commissioning new research. From our perspective the work of this inquiry is very important. We must as a nation better understand the particular circumstances which contribute to educational success for different groups of students. This is complex and painstaking work.

Young people are highly diverse, live in a wide variety of circumstances and are involved in education over many years. There is no one silver bullet for ensuring long-term educational success, however, the personal and national stakes of education failure are enormous and demand that Australia does significantly better in building a national evidence base that contributes to improving the educational outcomes of all young Australians, particularly those who are currently not realising their educational potential.

**MR COPPEL:** Thank you. Can I start with unique student identifiers. You raised many issues and this is one specific one.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** You'd like to hone in on that.

**MR COPPEL:** I'm interested in what you mean by unique student identifier and I am also interested in what your experience has been with the introduction of a USI for the work that you've done at the Smith Family and whether those sorts of experiences could be perhaps helpful in informing a broader scheme that adopts a unique student identifier.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** So I might start with what the Smith Family does in terms of its program and I appreciate 34,000 in the scheme of things is relatively small numbers but let me talk about the unique student identifier that we have for our Learning For Life program and why that's been particularly important. We work in 94 communities and we have partnerships with 500 schools. So our recruitment is through 500 schools, quite intensive. However, our students are highly mobile so we now have students in 4000 schools across Australia. So we have students in 40 per cent of all schools.

The only way we know how those students are travelling is if we have a unique student identifier. So we have developed a unique student identifier for those students which travels with them so we know if they're moving from New South Wales to WA and are then able to do some detailed analysis on that. So from our perspective it's the fundamental piece that is required and we know, for example, in WA there is good work done and similarly in Tasmania, but there is no consistency across the country.



**MS ABRAMSON:** Anne, how does the number travel with the student?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** So we assign to every student who comes in a unique identifier. They remain on the program. So they start in one of our 500 partner schools, they then move but they stay on the program. So in our longitudinal database of 34,000 students we're able to track their progress from school to school, from year to year, their school attendance, their school completion rates, their post-school engagement because we've assigned to them a number which is our own. Does that make sense?

**MS ABRAMSON:** It does. I'm very interested in the consent issue because - I don't mean to put words in your mouth - I assume that with some of these students their home circumstances are quite difficult so it may be a situation where they're with a non-custodial parent. So how do you manage the consent process because I assume that's also part of the identifier?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** So the way the Smith Family - let me describe the families first because that will give you a sense. They are absolutely highly disadvantaged. So they're all low income but, in addition, half of our families would have parents who have a disability, 18 per cent of our families are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 71 per cent of our families are not in employment. They're highly mobile. So they're very disadvantaged families.

However, what we do is from the beginning we enter into a partnership with those families and it's in entering into those partnerships that we enter into an agreement that we will mutually support their child's education and as part of that we ask them to provide to us, for example, their student school report each year which allows us to track school attendance. So it's part of that unique student identifier, that building up the relationship is actually inherent to the program and it builds off the fact that the families we work with, highly disadvantaged though they are, absolutely want the best for their children. So it's about establishing a partnership. Now, not all of them would say that they were comfortable about the school knowing that they were on our program. That's a different thing, that's a very different thing. But they're very comfortable about us knowing about their circumstances and entering into that arrangement because what's at the core of that is they want to work with us to help their child. Does that help?

**MS ABRAMSON:** Absolutely.

**MR COPPEL:** This work then is continued through to later stages in life or is it to the school years?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** Yes, so the families can begin or students can begin on

the program in the first year of school and they can continue all the way through to the completion of tertiary. Not all of them stay that long but there's a potential 17-year engagement with families and it's all around establish foundations early and then on a continuous basis that partnership relationship around that child. It can be quite different from the school perspective with the family. Some families would be very comfortable about the school knowing that they're on the program but others less so.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Do you use or seek consent for data linkage to other records?

**DR CONSIDINE (SF):** We are just starting to explore that option. At the moment our privacy and consent issues revolve around working with the school, so we're looking into now data linkage more at a state level but that's new work that we're starting with.

**MS ABRAMSON:** I have a view about what you might ask but it would be very helpful if you could perhaps say what type of data you'd be looking to link.

**DR CONSIDINE (SF):** So the student outcome data in particular, student attendance. So while we get that at the moment from the individual families, the amount of effort that is involved in us doing that one on one with families, of course, would be much more reduced if we were get it at a state level. So it's student achievement outcomes, year 12 completion outcomes, possibly NAPLAN data.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Are you looking for a dataset outside for education, so health or maternal welfare or other datasets?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** Not at the moment. I think the work of Social Services in that investment space is interesting but at the moment we're starting with the education data and in particular we're focusing on the three COAG outcomes, as Gillian mentioned, of attendance, year 12 completion, post-schooling engagement, employment education and training. We do, as Gillian mentioned also, through the school report have access to achievement data and in our longitudinal dataset that I spoke about we record achievement year on year in English and maths. So what we're trying to use that data for is to obviously inform our own program, but it's a unique national longitudinal dataset and we're also trying to use to influence public policy.

**MR COPPEL:** So there are researchers that are using this data to extract the value from an evidence point of view?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** So we as an organisation have a small team of four that have developed and used this dataset. We also have research partnerships with a number of universities. Around this particular dataset we have a strong partnership,

for example, with the Institute of Social Science Research at the University of Queensland. But the organisation absolutely has it embedded in its DNA that we want to know what difference we're making. So over the last five years in particular we've invested in the systems, the processes, the capability to allow us to track these educational outcomes and we've seen year-on-year improvement since to school attendance, year 12 completion and post-school engagement because we've actually used the data and not because we've got a team but how that data is then used by our staff on the ground.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Your consents are for the identified data to be made available to the researchers, I presume. So you have a consent at one level which is for the collection of the data with the family and then you have another series of consents that deal with the use of that data.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** Yes.

**MR COPPEL:** Is it a dataset that any research institute could approach you and reach a similar sort of outcome as the University of Queensland?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** There is potentially a lot of interest in doing that. At the moment we're using and analysing the data ourselves in a large way, particularly in partnership with the Institute of Social Science Research. There would be quite a lot of onus on us - resources that would be required from us to open that up more extensively and we haven't sought consent from our families to do that. So what we've done in terms of research partnerships is really establishing a strong partnership with the Institute of Social Science Research.

**MR COPPEL:** Are you aware of any other non-for-profit organisations that are adopting a similar practice both in terms of the program evaluation side or the information but also the evidence?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** There is an absolutely growing focus on evidence across the not-for-profit organisations and various organisations would be establishing - so we use, for example, Outcomes Based Accountability. It's a framework which asks three key questions: how much, how well, what difference did we make? So many organisations are starting to build this in. I think we're certainly the largest organisation in the education space that is doing this work. Part of what is unique for us is the scale. So the 34,000 young people in particular - the scale, but also the longitudinal nature. So many not-for-profits' work delivering education programs, most of them wouldn't be a potential 17 years. But I think it would be useful for the commission to acknowledge perhaps somewhere in its final report about these other data sources and how they might potentially be used.

**MR COPPEL:** You made the point about - and it came up in earlier participants in

this hearing - about the importance of not just the evidence on what works and what circumstances but the application and that's identified as quite a significant gap. Do you have any views on how to build that bridge between the evidence and the application of the evidence?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** I would be very happy to send some links to some organisations perhaps that might be of use. I do think the whole implementation science area which has developed might be a useful lens. I think the question about what works for whom and under what circumstances, sometimes it's the first question that's asked but not the other two and then there is a whole body of work around how you then need to implement in the particular circumstances. What Australia has not done particularly well is to implement at scale. So sometimes what has happened is we have done an evaluation and it works for 50 or 100 people and then we've tried to scale it in microcosms across the country but we've not done it well at scale. But I think the implementation science approach, the prevention science approach offers some frameworks and we can send you some, if that would be of use.

**MR COPPEL:** Thank you. Given this program now functions in 40 per cent of Australian schools, are you able to identify from the student progress the schools that are maybe doing better, you don't necessarily know what it is that they're doing better, but an ability then to say, "Well, here is a pattern and let's have a look at what's going on here in more detail to try and figure it out" - more through a case study approach I guess, "what is making that difference potentially."

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** So the 40 per cent of Australian schools means that in some schools we have one student. We would love them to all stay in the same school obviously. It would make like a whole lot easier for us. But they don't and so what we're increasingly doing is analysing year-on-year changes without too much reference to the school but we are comparing where there are a reasonable number of students, so 30 or more students is the cell size that we tend to take, and comparing those students with their peers as well as comparing year-on-year improvement. So, "Gillian's attendance was this this year, what was it the following year?" and that, I think, is leading us towards some useful, but as yet not fully formed thoughts.

In particular what we're trying to influence - and I think this is the piece of research that very much underpins our work, our work is very much underpinned by the work of James Heckman who says essentially two things in simplification, "Start early but have a balanced support over the long term for disadvantaged students." So that is our approach and the other piece which is absolutely influencing our work is the work of John Hattie which is - and it's the bit that's usually not referred to. So John Hattie's work is often referenced in terms of the importance of teachers. That's unequivocal. I'm a former teacher, I know how important that is. John Hattie's work says that's 30 per cent of the difference. It's the home-learning environment and it's

what young people bring to the learning table that makes up the difference. So where our focus is on is influencing the home learning environment, influencing the parental engagement that happens between a child and its parent around education and learning and that's what we're particularly trying to influence.

Some of what we've found to date, for example, from our analysis which is not so much about what's working but what needs to happen is the trajectory of young people who leave school in year 11 as compared to leaving in year 12 or year 10. Young people who leave in year 12 have the best post-school outcomes, then followed by young people who leave in year 10, then followed by young people who leave in year 11. It's that's more nuanced understanding that we think we're able to, over time, contribute to. But we've got a long way to go in terms of what our data might eventually tell us.

**MS ABRAMSON:** You start, I think, with your program in the schools. Do you have a view about starting earlier in early childhood?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** Yes, so in the early years space we have two programs which focus on early literacy and early mathematics and that's very much around influencing the home-learning environment around early mathematics and early literacy so that by the time young people start school they actually have the foundations for that but more particularly they have an appetite and an interest in learning and that was off the back off AEDC data. So we have found the AEDC a very useful tool for identifying a problem and then leading us to develop a program, for example, called Let's Count which has helped children in the early years develop early mathematics. So, yes, we do work in that space. The scholarship doesn't start there but we then pick up those students and go forward.

**MS ABRAMSON:** How do you identify students in that early cohort because there is a partnership obviously with the family and the school when you said, "We work with a number of schools." So how did you identify, is it the same determinants that you spoke about earlier?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** Yes. So we work in 94 communities, we identify those through a whole range of measures, you know, AEDC data was particularly helpful et cetera.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Yes.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** That then led us to say we developed a program in partnership with a number of academics, to help early mathematics. We then used that program in a range of early learning settings within those disadvantaged communities, did a three-year longitudinal evaluation, showed that the children who were on the program were better skilled in mathematics, that's how we work.

**MR COPPEL:** You mentioned the importance of parent engagement; that you work with parents. Another area that has been identified as one of the impediments to the application of evidence is to build that bridge between the school and parents. How have you worked on that? Are you like a brokerage role or facilitator?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** A really good question. I think the literature on parental engagement is not yet well understood and I think from a school's perspective sometimes - not always - the manifestation of parental engagement is, "Do you turn up at the school tuck shop?" simplistically put. The research is really very clear about the sorts of parental engagement which makes a difference. It surrounds conversations you have, the expectations, the aspirations, all of those sorts of things, reading to your children, those sorts of things.

So what our program coordinators do with our families is help them to understand their important role in their child's education. Some will come from a cultural background where the teacher is the expert and you hand over your children to the teacher and so some of it's working with that. Some of our families parents would definitely have come from a really poor experience of education, so the distance between home and school is enormous. In those situations our program coordinators will work as a bridge. We think of it as a bridge rather than a broker. I think a bridge between supporting the family to engage with the school and supporting the school to engage with the family. We're often - not always - located, our program coordinators, in the school so you get that ideally quite seamless interaction between the home and the school but we very much focus on working on that partnership.

**MR COPPEL:** Is that a dimension where in the database it comes with the Learning for Life program where there are metrics that sort of inform the evaluation of the program or that are used for the evaluation of programs: metrics on parent engagement.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** What we're now collecting - correct me if I'm wrong, Gillian - is the number of engagements that our staff might have with family and the number of referrals to other services and programs in the community. We haven't done much analysis with that yet, but we will over time.

**MR COPPEL:** The last point I wanted to bring up is the point that you made about being wary of a new institution that has the functions of setting research priorities, the quality of the research dissemination and so forth which is an area that we had asked for feedback in the report and I think it's a view that has been expressed by a number of others, better work with something that you have. Can you elaborate a bit more then on what you would think would be an institution or what we have that could be developed to encompass the functions that we envisage?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** As researchers we did take a deep breath when we said, "We don't think we need to commission new research and we don't need a research institution." Sometimes that's often what we do want to do. But in this particular case a couple of things influence those comments: first, we're very cognisant of the fiscal environment in which all governments are operating, particularly in the education space and, secondly, there is a lot of data and a lot of potential institutions that could perhaps take on this additional role. I think for us embedding some national leadership in an agreement between the states and territories and the Commonwealth around the importance of this space, about the importance of getting consistent definitions would be very important and then trying to think about how we leverage what exists. You know, is it a network of organisations, for example, rather than a big new institution.

I think the place for us which is the "no-one's doing it well enough" piece is the clearing house dissemination, helping people to understand how do you use this in your setting in this school, in this place. So it's that bit in particular that we think there's no-one doing it at a national level well enough, rather than seeking to set up a whole new institution which would commission a whole lot of new research.

**MR COPPEL:** But there are clearing houses - maybe they're called something slightly different.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** In the education space in Australia?

**MR COPPEL:** I think one is partly through Social Ventures Australia, ACER put out - so portals might be the word that they use. It's not quite what we have in mind by a clearing house, a clearing house goes a bit further than that.

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** I think the ACER is probably less about the space where we might operate. I think the SVA is using the UK model. I think there is absolutely still a gap between "Here's some research, how do you translate this from what's happening to practice and to policy?" That's a clear gap for us.

**MR COPPEL:** Is that something AITSL has responsibility for?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** I'm not sure. We're not educators - I'm not sure.

**MS ABRAMSON:** I just wanted to ask a question about research priorities because we've been having a conversation. Do you see a role for setting national research priorities?

**MS HAMPSHIRE (SF):** I think there's a value in having some shared agreement between the Commonwealth and the states around research priorities and the things

that I mentioned previously, like consistency of definitions, the fact that we don't have - disability looks different. I heard our other colleagues talk about that difference in simple definitions. It means that we can't even get to an absolute starting point. The specificity of those research priorities I think you could keep them quite broad and quite global. From our perspective it's pretty obvious what some of them might be in terms of the disadvantaged students but I think there is - we're a national organisation, we understand the vagaries and the challenges of a federation but we do absolutely believe in some consistency, including around research priorities.

**MR COPPEL:** Great. Thank you very much both.

**MS ABRAMSON:** Thank you so much.

**MR COPPEL:** Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes today's scheduled proceedings. For the record, is there anyone else who wants to appear today before the commission? If not, that now concludes our hearings for this inquiry and I thank you all and thank you all for your submissions as well into both the draft report and the final report. Thank you.

AT 12.05 PM THE INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED ACCORDINGLY