

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 18 June 1996

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B**Chairman:**

Mr H. Becker

Members:

Mr M.K. Brindal
 Mr M.R. DeLaine
 Mr G. Scalzi
 Ms L. Stevens
 Mr D.E. Wade
 Ms P.L. White

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

 Education and Children's Services \$997 293 000
Witness:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas, Minister for Education and Children's Services.

Departmental Advisers:

Mr D. Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, Department for Education and Children's Services.

Mr G. Mulhearn, Director, Planning and Service Development.

Ms D. Davis, Executive Director, Children's Services.

The CHAIRMAN: I have a few opening remarks to make. As in previous years, a relatively informal procedure will be adopted. The committee will determine an approximate time for consideration of proposed payments, to facilitate the changeover of departmental advisers. Have the Minister and the Opposition spokesperson agreed on such a program?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The agreed timetable I understand is that this morning prior to lunch we will address the Children's Services section of the general payment made to the Department for Education and Children's Services. We will then move to all other questions in relation to the main line for Education and Children's Services until about dinner time. After dinner we will move to Other Payments, which takes in agencies such as the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia, which is an independent statutory authority, and officers from that authority will be with us after the dinner break.

The CHAIRMAN: Changes to the committee will be notified as they occur. Members should ensure that they have provided the Chair with a completed request to be discharged form. If the Minister undertakes to supply information at a later date it must be in a form suitable for insertion in *Hansard* and two copies submitted no later than Friday 5 July to the Clerk of the House of Assembly. I propose to allow the lead speaker for the Opposition and the Minister to make opening statements of about 10 minutes but no longer than 15 minutes.

There will be a flexible approach to questions, based on about three questions per member, alternating sides. Members will also be allowed to ask a brief supplementary question to conclude a line of questioning, but supplementary questions will be the exception rather than the rule; in other words, I will not allow one person to have three or four supplementary questions. There will be three questions and then perhaps one supplementary question. Subject to the agreement of the committee, members outside the committee who desire to ask a question on a line of questioning currently being undertaken by the committee will be permitted to do so once the line of questioning on an item has been exhausted by other members of the committee. An indication to the Chair in advance from the member outside the committee wishing to ask a question is necessary.

Questions must be based on lines of expenditure as revealed in the Estimates of Receipts and Payments, Printed Paper No. 2. Reference may be made to other documents, including Program Estimates and Information. Members must identify a page number or the program in the relevant financial papers from which their question is derived. Questions not asked at the end of the day may be placed on the next sitting day's parliamentary Notice Paper. In other words, the practice of asking a whole lot of questions at the end of the day will no longer be possible.

I remind the Minister that there is no formal facility for the tabling of documents before the Committee. However, documents can be supplied to the Chair for distribution to the Committee. The incorporation of material in *Hansard* is permitted on the same basis as applies in the House; that is, that it is purely statistical and limited to one page in length. All questions are to be directed to the Minister, not to the Minister's advisers. The Minister may refer questions to advisers for a response. I also advise that for the purposes of the Committee there will be some freedom allowed for television coverage by allowing a short period of filming from the northern gallery. I now invite the Minister to detail any agreed program, introduce his advisers and make a brief opening statement if he wishes.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I have indicated on the last two occasions, I am here to serve the wishes of the Committee. I do not have a 10 or 15 minute opening statement. I am happy to allow the Opposition to have that opportunity and then to move into what I hope will be informal but productive questions and answers.

The CHAIRMAN: I now invite the lead speaker for the Opposition to make a brief statement if she wishes.

Ms WHITE: This year's budget has done nothing to restore the \$47 million cut from the education budget over the last two years. The Premier's glossy budget pamphlet boasted a '\$150 million boost to education and health,' '\$60 million more for a smarter South Australia' and 'more than \$100 million for new schools.' Sadly, none of those claims is true. The Premier's claims about additional resources for education are as phoney as the rest of the budget. After allowing for inflation the real increase in the recurrent budget is just \$2 million, and this does nothing to address the cuts of \$47 million made to the recurrent budget over the last two years.

In spite of the announcement by the Prime Minister that he intended to cut Commonwealth expenditure by \$8 billion, the budget forecast an increase in special purpose education grants of \$2.3 million from the Commonwealth from \$125.9 million to \$128.2 million. I wonder whether the Minister seriously believed that an increase was likely. While

the deal brokered in Canberra by the Premier quarantined education from an across the board 3 per cent cut to special purpose grants, it seems clear that grants will not be increased. We also have a question in relation to the effect that South Australia's share of the cut of \$619 million to general grants this year, followed by \$640 million next year and \$300 million the year after, will have on education in this State.

Assuming that our share of the total is 8 per cent, this represents a cut of \$125 million over three years—in addition to the cost of sales tax on some vehicles, estimated to cost the States \$100 million a year—and a cut of 3 per cent this year to specific purpose grants excluding education. The Premier was quoted in last Saturday's *Australian* as saying that the shortfall will be \$83 million this year. As the education budget represents 20 per cent of expenditure from the State's Consolidated Account, it seems most unlikely that cuts in Commonwealth funding will not seriously impact on education outlays. We look forward to the Minister's advice today on the likely outcome.

The Premier's glossy brochure also claimed that the Government was spending more than \$100 million for new schools, redevelopment, maintenance and other capital projects. The glossy failed to point out that the increase in capital works amounts to \$14 million and that this follows shortfalls in the spending capital budget over the past two years. In 1994-95 the shortfall was \$22 million, and in 1995-96 it was \$2.7 million.

The Premier also failed to point out that almost a quarter of this year's budget consists of re-announcements of projects which were supposed to commence last year but did not do so. No fewer than 14 of the supposedly new works in this year's budget were previously announced in last year's budget as new works, and two of those projects were announced in all three Brown budgets as new works. This certainly gives a new meaning to recycling good news. I guess it would have been too much to expect the Minister to announce that he and his department failed to get 14 major projects off the ground.

One of the initiatives in this budget is the provision of \$15 million to improve student access to information technology. The Opposition supports new programs for information technology in our schools, and today we will seek more details of the Government's proposals to implement its 'Technology Plan to the year 2001', released by the Chief Executive of DECS in November 1995, and the future of the Commonwealth program EDNA. An associated issue is the continuing introduction and development of EDSAS in our schools, and the Opposition will seek details of EDS's involvement in this system.

The Opposition continues to be concerned with the fall in retention rates to a position below the national average and the prospect that cuts to Austudy could result in even fewer students completing year 12. This trend has very serious ramifications for our children and for the State. Again, we will seek information from the Minister on what he has done to reverse this fall.

The CHAIRMAN: I declare the proposed payments open for examination and refer members to pages 132 to 138 of the Estimates of Receipts and Payments and to pages 125 to 146 of the Program Estimates.

Ms WHITE: The estimate for the Commonwealth's specific purpose grant to services for 1995-96 was \$25.5 million and actual receipts are shown as \$27.95 million. The budget for this year anticipates a grant of \$29.8 million,

an increase of \$4.3 million over last year's budget. What is the basis for the forecast increase in the Commonwealth grant? Has the Minister had any advice from the Commonwealth Government on this matter and will programs be cut if the grant is less than that?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In relation to specific purpose payments from the Commonwealth, the basis for the information in the program estimates was the most recent information available to State Treasury, and therefore departmental officers, at the time of the construction of the program estimates—late April and May. On Thursday and Friday of last week some additional information, but not the detail of the specific programs, became available.

Broad information was made available by the Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister indicated that the detail of specific purpose payments and cuts was not to be revealed until the August Commonwealth budget. So, the Prime Minister has put in the broad parameters. He has said, I believe, that there will be no more than a 3 per cent cut and that the detail will be provided in the August budget. Evidently, he has quarantined education. Other than that, the member for Taylor would know as much as I as Minister regarding the Commonwealth Government's intentions in relation to specific payments. We will have to await further information from the Commonwealth, and when we receive that information we can make a judgment.

Ms WHITE: In 1996-97, an amount of \$1.408 million is budgeted for preschool services. How much of this amount comprises the general grant, and how much will be available for social justice supplements to centres with high needs?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that question on notice and provide a reply.

Ms WHITE: How much of that grant will be made available for assistance to affiliated kindergartens, Catholic education kindergartens and child parent centres, and how does this compare with last year's allocations?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that question on notice.

Ms STEVENS: You mentioned that the Prime Minister has indicated that specific purpose grants will be cut by no more than 3 per cent and that tied grants will be quarantined. Will you clarify that for me?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: My understanding from press reports is that the Prime Minister has indicated that specific purpose payments will be cut by no more than 3 per cent across the board and that education will be quarantined.

Ms STEVENS: Your budget is predicated on an increase of Commonwealth funding. In my view, quarantining means that it will stay the same, which suggests that there must be a decrease in the education budget. If that is so, are you prepared to make up the deficit so that the State budget will remain as it stands?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I do not understand the honourable member's logic. Quarantining has been interpreted by the honourable member in a particular way, whereas it might be interpreted by the Prime Minister as, in effect, quarantining the existing arrangements, as he has done in one or two other areas. From what the Prime Minister has said, I do not think there is anything which, as yet, justifies the honourable member's interpretation. We will have to wait until closer to the August budget to get the information from the Prime Minister and Commonwealth officers.

Ms WHITE: What percentage of operating costs of individual kindergartens are represented in the grants for preschools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Preschools are kindergartens and kindergartens are preschools. I ask the honourable member to explain her question more clearly than she has, and then I will endeavour to provide a response straightaway or to take it on notice. The honourable member will need to explain her question more clearly so that I can understand what it is that she is seeking.

Ms WHITE: Where will the costs outlined in the Minister's budget be directed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In her previous question, the member for Taylor referred to the 'Grants for preschool services' line (Program Estimates, page 126) which is laid out before her and other members. In that page the third line is 'Preschool education', which is recommended to be \$37.8 million. For the benefit of the member for Taylor, the information is on the page to which she referred in her earlier question.

Ms WHITE: What are the current fees for preschools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: On average they would be between \$25 and \$35 a term. They are decisions taken by individual management committees.

Ms WHITE: Has the Minister received any advice concerning the increases from the parents of children attending kindergartens, because of cost pressures on the budget, such as council rents? Is the Minister aware of statements by kindergarten operators that they will need funding from the Department of Education and Children's Services?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Clearly, centres will require assistance from the Government. We already provide assistance to preschools. In relation to pressures on budgets—whether they involve schools or preschools—it is fair to say that on a number of occasions we have received letters of concern or submissions in terms of funding. In a typical year, I receive thousands of letters about preschools. My recollection is reasonable, and I can recall very few letters specifically in relation that issue. I am not saying that it is not an issue for some preschool management committees but, clearly, it has not reached the stage where they are flooding the Minister with letters of complaint. In a number of other areas in our big portfolio we occasionally get a large number of letters on a particular issue, but this has not been one of them.

Ms STEVENS: What funding will be available during 1996-97 for out of hours care, including vocation care programs for children with disabilities? How much is to be funded by the State, and how much by the Commonwealth under the national child care strategy? Is this program dependent on Federal funding being maintained?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Budget Estimates (page 126) indicates that outside school hours care is budgeted to receive \$4.5 million in terms of the State budget next year, compared to \$4.2 million in 1995-96. It is an increase of some \$300 000. In 1995-96, there has been an expansion of 165 outside school hours care places. Obviously, there are some ongoing discussions with the Commonwealth in relation to its continued support for the program. I understand some discussions are occurring regarding the Commonwealth's attitude to assisting children with additional needs and with specific or special needs. However, at this stage we are not in a position to indicate the Commonwealth's position on that proposition.

Ms STEVENS: Last year the Minister intimated that Children's Services would be holding seminars in conjunction with business on the issue of work-based child care. How

many seminars were held, how many employers participated, and what were the results?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take some advice on the number of seminars, but I am delighted to report that the first employer-sponsored child care centre of a significant nature is operating within the Westpac Mortgaging and Processing Centre—I am not sure whether that is the correct title. That new centre has been attracted to South Australia by the Government. I am sure the honourable member will agree that the Government should be congratulated on attracting that centre to South Australia. It is not part of this budget, obviously, but I believe that new centre has created between 300 to 600 jobs already, and intends to build that figure to between 600 and 900, providing South Australians with jobs.

Children's Services has worked very closely with Westpac. This new centre was opened only in the last month or so and is providing child care facilities. I will investigate whether any information is available on the number of seminars and discussions that have taken place. More importantly, Children's Services has got on with the task and worked with this major employer to bring a child care centre on stream.

I am not sure, because we do not have the detail at hand, but one other major employer might be involved in work-based child care but, at this stage, I am not in a position to confirm that. We will endeavour to provide information on seminars and the number of people attending. As I said, more importantly it is a question of doing something rather than holding seminars. I am delighted to say that there are tangible signs of progress and success.

Ms STEVENS: How many TAFE institutes provide care arrangements?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that question on notice. Certainly a number do. I am advised that the number is 14. That figure might relate to campuses because institutes have been reduced significantly in number. We will confirm that figure, but an early estimate is 14. If the figure is anything different, we will advise the honourable member. I know that, in relation to the University of South Australia and the Adelaide College of TAFE, some advanced discussions are taking place about the provision of combined child care in relation to students who will be attending the new City West campus and the Adelaide College campus.

Mr BRINDAL: My question relates to the disposal of assets in terms of kindergartens. As the Minister would know, some kindergartens began as part of the Kindergarten Union, and the money for the sale and direction of a kindergarten was raised by the local community. In some cases those community kindergartens became Kindergarten Union kindergartens, which then became part of DECS. I believe that perhaps one or two properties are now surplus to requirements. Has the Minister received any legal advice about the status of the land and properties, whether they are the property of the Crown and the Minister, or whether, in some cases, they will revert to community ownership and title?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will need to confirm it, but certainly my recollection is that when the previous Government arranged the new legislation for Children's Services all property that had previously vested in the Kindergarten Union became the property of the Minister for Education and Children's Services. In effect, the previous Labor Government legislation vested all of those assets—real property and otherwise—in the former Minister for Education and Children's Services. I understand that that is the legal

position and, if it is any different, I shall be happy to provide a clarification.

Mr BRINDAL: I understand the legal position, but we now have a compassionate Minister and it may well be that some of those properties also have trust deeds over them. Are you looking at this matter? There may be a legal and also a moral position?

The CHAIRMAN: What line does the question relate to?

Mr BRINDAL: Capital works for the Department for Education and Children's Services.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As the Minister of the Crown I must work within the legal strictures. Sometimes there are other issues, and whether they are designated as moral, ethical or compassionate is left to the discretion of people. There has been no general position that I am adopting in that regard. There has been one case of which I think the member might be aware where this issue has been raised with the department and with me as Minister. It is a complicated one and we are having to take ongoing legal advice. Today, I am not in a position to indicate the detail of that but it is an example where we are looking not only at the legal position but at other issues as well.

A general comment about assets is that a number of our assets in relation to children's services are not assets that we have: we may well use other people's premises such as those of councils or whatever and so, it is unlike school education, where, if we do close down a school, there is a significant capital asset that might be sold with a benefit, but preschools and children's services tend to be smaller assets and not as financially attractive in terms of potential resale value. Some of them we do not actually own ourselves.

Mr De LAINE: I refer to the Program Estimates at page 136 regarding Aboriginal language programs. In 1994 you as Minister said that Aboriginal language programs were being established in 10 preschools. What progress has been made with the introduction of these language courses and how many preschools are now participating?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am advised that children's services secured funding via the Aboriginal Language Education Strategy program (ALES) to develop an Aboriginal program for two years. The funding comes within goal 17 of the National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP) through the Aboriginal Education and Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP). Funding for the program has since been extended to the end of 1996. The Aboriginal language program commenced in 1994 and now operates at 10 preschools and three CPCs. In term 4, 1995 there were 273 Aboriginal children participating in the program, an increase of 88 over 1994.

Mr De LAINE: I refer the Minister to page 137 of the Estimates concerning a matter close to my heart, closures and amalgamations. Which preschools were closed, amalgamated or relocated onto primary school grounds during 1995-96? What is the program for closure or relocation for 1996-97?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will have to take the question on notice. The answer is that there is not a large number, although certainly in a number of country areas at the moment there have been discussions about trying to relocate stand-alone preschools which are apart from the local primary schools. A number of communities are asking whether they can move their preschool that might be in substandard accommodation to the primary school site. There is one in the South-East. There is one at Millicent. There is discussion about McArthur Park Kindergarten. I am aware of that because it was raised with me. This has also been raised

regarding Melrose Kindergarten. I am told that one has occurred at Whyalla Stuart, the Early Childhood Centre, as it is now called, which was an amalgamation of Koolangara Kindergarten and Devon Crescent CPC. Building work I am told is about to commence or has just commenced. That is an example of one that has occurred. There are these discussions at Melrose and Millicent.

Mr De LAINE: What is the current situation with the suggested or proposed relocation of the Woodville Gardens Preschool onto the Ridley Grove Primary School campus?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am told that preliminary discussions for a possible relocation onto Ridley Grove have commenced. It has gone no further than that. It is at the concept stage only. No costings have been done on what might be the potential cost. The supporters of the argument for relocation are arguing in terms of education and care for the children as there would be advantages in the relocation, but at this stage we have not gone beyond the preliminary discussion stage and have not done any costings of what it might cost to move it onto the site.

Mr De LAINE: I refer to page 136 of the Program Estimates under 'Quality assurance'. How has the quality assurance framework been applied to preschools and what is the program for 1996-97?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: If I can provide further information later, I will. The advice I have is that the quality assurance framework is being implemented into schools and preschools over a two year time frame. I was clarifying that because originally we were talking of doing it over a three year time frame, but I understand that they are trying to implement it over a two year time frame now. Preschools negotiate when they begin implementation with the regional coordinator. Our latest estimate is that about 50 per cent of preschools will begin their involvement in 1996, with the remainder beginning in 1997. It may be less than 50 per cent. I am told that there is a high level of interest in engaging in the quality assurance framework, certainly this year and no later than next year. Ongoing support is provided by the quality assurance unit and one officer has a great degree of expertise and background in the children's services area and is an important part of that quality assurance unit.

Mr BRINDAL: My question is based on page 126, relating to the provision of children's services, in particular outside school hours care. I note in the budget that there is an increase of something like \$4 million this year, which I calculate is more than inflation and the Minister is to be congratulated on that. I similarly note that the provision of preschool education is something just over half of the total amount and that must put a strain on the resources of the department. The Chairman has asked me to ask about the outside school hours care program, as there is a particular school in his electorate which has a new business facility just opened down the end of the street. They appear not to have got additional outside school hours care. I refer to Lockleys and the Westpac Centre that has opened just down the road. The Chairman is interested to know whether they will be getting any additional support and whether the program at the Lockleys school may be expanded to cope with this significant new development in the area.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We are always interested in submissions made by the local members, wherever they might happen to be. If a submission is coming from the school, we will give it due consideration. It will, in part, depend on the amount of funding available from both the Commonwealth and the State for the further expansion of the

program and on what other outside school hours care exists in the area. The other point I make is that, if a significant new employer moves into a district, it depends on the employees being employed there whether a significant potential new demand for long day care for pre-preschoolers exists in particular.

In terms of outside school hours care, the big question is whether that new employer will have lots of people living in that area and will lots of their children start going to the particular local school just down the road. If they do, the outside school hours care program is generally there for students attending that school to go before school and after school whilst their parents are working. The member may be able to provide information to me as Minister and to the department as to how many employees of that big new employer will attend the local school and increase the numbers at that local school and I can take up that issue with Children's Services in terms of what might be a new demand. I am told that there have been preliminary discussions but any additional information that could be provided along the lines I have suggested will certainly assist those preliminary discussions.

Mr BRINDAL: Will the Minister care to comment on the increasing pressure as just over half the budget goes to preschool education and every year the amount for respite care, occasional care and all sorts of care seems to increase. I see in the press the Minister is constantly under pressure for his budget and this is an additional pressure. Would the Minister care to comment?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is additional pressure, but a most important one and most consistent with the Government's overall number one priority, namely, the early years' strategy. The Government has indicated that in our \$1.2 billion dollar budget we see our number one priority being the early years of education and care and see preschool education as being a very important part of that. If we can identify, during that important period of preschool education, children with learning difficulties and give speech pathology help and other specialist assistance in order to correct some of those problems, some of the issues and concerns that teachers and schools experience in primary and secondary school might be alleviated in the long term. It is placing pressure on our budget.

Most people accept that we have the best preschool education system in Australia. Certainly the coverage of eligible preschoolers is well over 90 per cent of eligible four year olds, who attend some form of preschool program in South Australia. In some other States it is much less than that. It is an important part of our early years' strategy. It is placing pressure on our budget, but we believe it to be a priority and do not see this as an area where significant further savings can be made.

Mr BRINDAL: In line with that policy, for which the Minister is to be commended, is he aware of any educational advantage to which those programs are directly being put or any linking in? I will give the Minister an example. I was at Massada College yesterday and was impressed by its preschool, which identifies children who show early development. By integration with the school they then seek to further that development so they have children in the preschool who are learning to read and do other activities. It seems to be an excellent school. Is the Minister aware of any other examples like that, or is there a plan to integrate the services so that education becomes almost continuous rather than compartmentalised little bits?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I should be delighted if the member had the time to organise a number of similar examples within the Government school system where children in preschool are similarly being extended, enriched and challenged. I referred earlier to the importance of identifying all children with learning difficulties. That is at one end of the continuum. A lot of work is going on with speech pathology and specialist services.

Equally, with the Government's gifted and talented policy, which was released last year, for the first time we have looked at the acceleration and progression of children within the education and care system. We are able to have early entry into preschools in certain circumstances and we are also now able to have early entry into school. If, for example, a child is so far ahead of everybody else and is socially able to progress, we have agreed processes and guidelines which allow that child to enter school up to six months early. Then we have a range of other policies to allow progression which we can look at when we address the education sector later this afternoon. There are examples of the sort of thing that the member saw yesterday at Massada. If his time commitments allow, at some time in the near future we would be happy to try to organise something.

Ms WHITE: I am interested in any negotiations that the Government might be having with the Commonwealth regarding before and after school care for children with disabilities.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I indicated earlier that we are having discussions with the Commonwealth about outside school hours care for students with special needs. We have not been able to conclude an agreement with the Commonwealth and I cannot say at this stage any more than that, except that we acknowledge the needs and we are having discussions with the Commonwealth to see what may or may not be possible.

Ms WHITE: I wish to return to a question that I asked earlier about the percentage of operating costs that the grants to preschools pick up. How much of operating costs do the grants to individual kindergartens pick up?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take advice on that. I understand that will vary depending on the operating costs of the preschools. These decisions are taken by independent management committees. It may be that the management committee will decide to do this or that in a particular year, which will increase the operating costs. They may have a special function or a whole range of other costs which might increase in the year. Therefore, the percentage of total costs provided by the preschool grant will vary depending on the level of the operating costs. I understand that we increased grants in the last budget and we are increasing them in this budget by 3 per cent. There is an increase in grants going to those centres, but their level of operating costs will vary according to their priorities.

Ms WHITE: As a supplementary question, is the Minister aware of recent increases in fees at some of those kindergartens? I refer to media and press articles in the *Advertiser* on 22 May which talk about child-care fees going up by \$10 a week and headlines in the local press protesting over kindergarten fees increases. Is the Minister aware of those cost pressures on the community?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am aware of the cost pressures, but in the thousands of letters that I get each year this has not so far been one of the significant issues. As I said before, and I repeat, I am not suggesting that there are not concerns about cost pressures, because clearly there are. For as long as we

have had preschools we have had increases in fees and charges. I am sure that will continue over the coming years as well. There have been, and will continue to be, increases in preschool fees, but it has not so far been an issue which has figured large in the correspondence that I get from Education and Children's Services generally.

Mr SCALZI: The Minister will be aware that there are good programs for kindergartens, especially in my area, with inclusive language and cultural aspects in children's education. Are there any plans to extend the introduction of languages and culture inclusive programs in kindergartens?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The bilingual assistance program helps our preschool services to provide for the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families of non-English-speaking backgrounds. There is a budget of almost \$250 000 this coming year for that program. The program employs 99 part-time bilingual assistants working with preschoolers. Demand for support has increased with the number of new arrivals from non-English-speaking backgrounds increasing in recent years. There is a continuing program going on with regard to the cultural and linguistic needs of preschoolers.

Additional Departmental Adviser:

Mr Bronte Treloar, Director, Corporate Services, Department of Education and Children's Services.

Ms WHITE: I refer to page 125 of the Estimates of Receipts and Payments. Will the Minister guarantee that cuts to general purpose grants to South Australia will not result in cuts to the education budget?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Individual Ministers cannot give guarantees in relation to financial matters. The Premier and the Treasurer will do that in relation to their discussions with the Prime Minister and the Federal Treasurer. Ministers such as I have approved budgets which are being considered by this Parliament through the Estimates Committee and the Appropriation Bill debate. We know that the Prime Minister has given some commitments in relation to quarantining education. I am not sure how that will affect general purpose grants, but in relation to the State Government the Premier has indicated on a number of occasions that, in terms of this budget, health and education are the two key priorities for the State Government and that in terms of our funding and any funding over which we have control (which obviously relates to general purpose grants) education and health will be the priorities. So, there will be increases.

Ms WHITE: Minister, that did not sound as though it was a guarantee. Given that South Australia's share of the cut of the \$619 million to general purpose grants will be about 8 per cent or \$20 million and that education outlays represent 20 per cent of the Consolidated Account, will the education budget be required to absorb a *pro rata* cut of around \$10 million?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The mathematical logic given to the member for Taylor is deeply flawed. The information provided to her refers to a three-year budget cycle when we are considering only the 1996-97 budget. Perhaps the honourable member, with her mathematical background, would like to rework the figures and instead ask me whether we are facing a possible cut of \$10 million in a budget of \$1.1 billion or \$1.2 billion. The sort of logic that the member tries to bring to bear to the question might be whether we are facing a cut of some \$2 million to \$3 million out of \$1.1 or \$1.2 billion in this budget as a result. The answer to this question is the same as the answer to the first question: I am

not in a position to guarantee anything. I do not believe that we will have a \$1 million or \$2 million cut in our total position, because of the priority that the Prime Minister and the Premier have given to education.

As the Minister, I am not in a position to guarantee that until the Commonwealth budget comes down and we know exactly what the implications of the Commonwealth-State agreement will be. However, in the worst possible case, we might see a pressure on the budget of about \$2 million—perhaps up to \$3 million—if the honourable member's calculations are correct. I have not worked through the calculations but, if the honourable member's \$10 million was based on a three-year scenario, I am working on the basis that it might be around a third of that for the one year about which we are talking. Only time will tell in relation to that, but if the pressure is of that order it is much more easily managed and handled when we have a budget as big as ours. If it were a \$50 million pressure on our education budget it would create considerable pressures.

Ms WHITE: Will Commonwealth special purpose education grants increase by \$2.3 million as shown in the budget? Will the Minister give any guarantees to maintain programs funded either wholly or jointly with the Commonwealth, or say whether they will be cut? For example, will the programs for English as a second language, which includes the new arrivals program, be maintained or cut?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We addressed this, in part, this morning. The Prime Minister has given a commitment that education will be quarantined from the specific purpose cuts that have been discussed. Therefore, the English as a second language program and the others are Commonwealth specific purpose programs. If one accepts what the Prime Minister announced as a result of the intense negotiations last week, the answer to the question, based on what the Prime Minister said, is that there will not be cuts.

Ms WHITE: Is the Minister saying that those programs will not be cut?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I can only repeat what I said: if the Prime Minister's statements are to be accepted by all of us—and I have no reason to disbelieve him—in terms of education being quarantined from the specific purpose cuts, the answer to the member for Taylor's questions in relation to English as a second language and the other specific programs is that they will not be cut, because the Prime Minister has stated that he will not cut those programs. We can work only on the basis of what we understand the Prime Minister indicated to the Premiers last Friday, and that is our understanding.

Mr Chairman, this is an opportune time, while referring to this overall issue, to refer to an issue which the honourable member raised on behalf of the Opposition and which I want to correct and place on the record. The matter arose with the Institute of Teachers, and I can therefore understand why the member for Taylor has been misled. I refer to the furphy that in some way a \$60 million increase in the education budget is not a \$60 million increase but is in fact a \$2 million increase. In fact, the institute originally said that it was only a \$3 million increase, but it has become worse and it is now saying that it is only a \$2 million increase. The longer we discuss this it will probably disappear and become a net reduction in some way. It is an absolute nonsense to suggest that a \$60 million increase in the budget is in any way a \$2 million or \$3 million real increase.

If we accept that the Commonwealth and State Treasurers are using a rate of inflation of about 3 per cent, even if we discount that \$60 million by that figure it means a real

increase to education of about \$30 million. It is certainly not \$2 million or \$3 million if one wants to apply a consumer price index deflator or any other such measure to try to reduce the \$60 million figure in some way.

I issue a challenge to the member for Taylor to produce a breakdown of how she or the Institute of Teachers has calculated this \$2 million real increase figure. I have put that challenge to the Institute of Teachers on a number of occasions, but it has been conspicuous in its absence in terms of providing a response. I can only suspect that the institute has made up this figure to use for public purposes. I am sure that the member for Taylor would not want to be in that position. So, I issue a challenge to the honourable member by the end of the day to provide for me justification of the claim that she makes on behalf of the Opposition that this \$60 million increase is just a \$2 million increase.

Mr BRINDAL: I refer to page 125 of the Program Estimates and, in particular, the overall strategy related to the employment of people, especially those in promotion positions. During a number of years, especially while he was shadow Minister, the Minister was most critical of the panel selection process, especially regarding promotion positions within the Education Department. The Minister would also be aware of continued allegations regarding the use of equal opportunity officers on panels. It was alleged that the use of these officers was unfair to all members of the panel and advantaged certain people, perhaps those who won the jobs.

When the system was introduced in 1988, the Minister will recall that the use of equal opportunity nominees on panels was a temporary measure while education personnel were educated in equal opportunity matters. The Education Department has been fully in-serviced regarding equal opportunity, and I presume that every officer of the department is fully conversant with equal opportunity practices and needs. I therefore ask the Minister whether he plans to do anything about these panels which have attracted so much criticism and of which the Minister himself has been repeatedly critical.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is true that, as shadow Minister for Education, I was critical of aspects of the panel process. I spoke on that issue on a number of occasions based on the fact that a lot of criticism had been put to me by principals, applicants for principal positions, teachers and some parents. I must say that most of the comments regarding that issue came from employees of the old department with not as many from parents. I understand that, because obviously it is an issue of concern for potential applicants.

This issue has been part of a long consultation process which started in 1993 under the previous Government in terms of how the process was operating. As Minister, I have had a good look at how the process operates, and I have made some changes, which I will indicate, but I also would like to indicate that during the next week or so we will put out a preferred Government position regarding a major overhaul of the whole selection process of the department. So, there will be a significant overhaul of the total system. It is based on a long period of consultation regarding the system, which as I said was commenced in 1993. The union, the Principals Association, parents' associations and others have been consulted.

Over the past two years, my officers and I have considered a range of options regarding the process. In 1994 and the early part of 1995 there was ongoing discussion between officers and the Principals Association about what needed to be done and what changes might occur. We are now in a

position to indicate the Government's preferred policy and the fact that we believe there should be a major overhaul of the whole process. The Government's preferred position regarding selection panels for principals is that the designated equal opportunity representative will be replaced by principals nominated by the Principals Association. So, in effect, there will be a peer representative. In the case of a deputy principal's position, there will be a deputy principal level representative, someone who has had experience in that area and is therefore able to bring that expertise to bear in relation to the selection process.

As an equal opportunity employer—and the department has done and will continue to do much more than most employers regarding equal opportunity processes—we will ensure that appropriate equal opportunity processes are followed under the new panel procedure. Virtually all our employees, as the honourable member has indicated, have undertaken or been exposed to the important issues regarding equal opportunity processes. A large number of people have been specifically trained in this area. Certainly, the expectation is that the chairpersons of selection panels, who are usually district superintendents, will have all been through the training process. Therefore, the Government does not believe that the department needs to continue to have a designated equal opportunity representative on the selection panel. The Government believes that equal opportunity processes should be followed by all members of the panel process and that there is no further need, eight or nine years after its implementation, for that temporary policy to continue.

I have had much discussion with other Ministers and agencies over the past two years. It is my understanding that this is probably the only agency that has required the presence of a designated equal opportunity representative on the panel. I think it fair to say that, recently, I have not been aware of as many examples of abuse as I was when in Opposition. It may well be that the system has been better developed and the whole process mainstreamed. As shadow Minister, I became aware of a number of significant examples of abuse of the system in the past, and that formed an important part of my early thinking in relation to this issue. We will implement a number of other significant changes during the overhaul of the whole selection panel process. We will continue to require in respect of positions of principal the presence of a parent representative on the panel, and a new requirement is that there will be a principal on the panel. All applicants will have to supply referee statements from current line managers, and special provisions will be implemented regarding those who do not have a current line manager. In the past, a referee statement from a line manager was not required. When I have discussed that matter with human resource managers in the private sector, they have been quite intrigued regarding that particular aspect of our selection panel process.

A number of protections will be in this system and, if they have a significant personal problem with their current line manager, people will be able to make that known to the panel, and there will be processes to make allowances for that. We are certainly not oblivious to some of the issues that might be raised in relation to some of these changes. Nevertheless, in general we believe that there ought to be a requirement of the selection panel process that the current line manager provide a referee statement. Another new requirement will be that all referees be contacted by the selection panel. I am told that in the past that has not always been the practice. If the honourable member and others discussed this issue with human

resource managers from the private sector, they would express some surprise at that circumstance.

Under the policy, short-term appointments up to six months will be filled by managerial appointment. I am advised that the current process is such that if there is a short-term appointment within the school—a four or five month vacancy—you have to advertise, select a panel and go through a panel process. Sometimes, by the time you have done all that, the vacancy has been filled. Frankly, the processes within our department are so cumbersome. We have highly competent principals—education leaders. As Minister, I believe that, with appropriate guidelines, we ought to trust our principals with some slightly greater powers in a number of areas. If they cannot be given the responsibility of making a short term acting appointment to a position for six months within some guidelines, there is something wrong with our selection panel process regarding principals. So, there will be a significant change in relation to less than six month acting appointments.

We are trying to make appointment to positions for six to 12 months less cumbersome. We are actually reducing the panels. Instead of panels of three people, only two people will be on the panels—a staff representative and the principal or the manager, whatever the position might be. We will put in a restriction on written information. I am told that many people spend much time—and maybe are even paying people to spend lots of time—filling out applications of up to 35 pages for principal positions. In the past, it has been up to 35 pages. We will now limit to five pages the length of application and information provided to selection panels to try to shorten up that process again. The position—and it is a natural product of our system with principals—is that, as you near the end of your tenure, you may well apply for five, 10 or 15 positions, because you cannot be guaranteed a placement. In days gone by, you might have been placed somewhere and guaranteed a position. These days you have to win a position, and principals and applicants for principal positions have to spend much of their time applying for these positions.

Again, a number of small things can be done which will shorten the process and make it more efficient. Obviously, the end objective for the Government is to try to better guarantee that high quality candidates are selected for our important positions of educational leaders in our schools. In conclusion, as I said, for over two years there has been consultation about this matter, so we are not going out to a general consultation discussion paper—a green or a white paper—but we have determined a preferred policy position, and we will circulate to schools that preferred policy position of the Government for final comment. However, it will be on that basis. It is not on the question of rewriting the whole thing again. Here is a last opportunity for the field to make some final comment in relation to the preferred policy position of the Government, and then we will proceed to speedy implementation of the policy.

Mr BRINDAL: I recall that, prior to election, part of the policy of the Minister's Government was some consideration of a banding of promotion positions so that, as was the case at that time, any teacher could apply for a principal A position; you could basically apply for any promotion position you wanted within the department. Has anything yet been done about that or is that matter still under consideration of the Minister or his department?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Possible banding and reclassification is being discussed in industrial negotiations with the

Institute of Teachers. Teachers and principals have industrial conditions; therefore, we have to negotiate a process. I am not in a position to give much more detail about the payment for banding and classification, and other issues; they are part of the current negotiations.

Mr BRINDAL: In relation to expenditure on capital, (Program Estimates, page 125), when I was member for Hayward, I got a brand new high school at Brighton. I note from this year's estimates that I will get \$4.5 million for a redevelopment of Unley High School. While Unley High School is grateful for that, it is a very old school. It was built in the 1950s, and it is very tired. Over the next few years, I would hope to see considerably more than \$4.5 million go to Unley High School. Is this just the first stage of a complete rebuilding, or will I have to lobby the Minister to see that I get a new high school in Unley?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I give full credit to the member for Unley for trying, but the budget papers allocate to Unley High School only \$2.5 million, not \$4.5 million. I do not know whether that was meant to be a trick question. With regard to this being the first stage, I cannot give a commitment to anything more than the \$2.5 million in relation to the needs of Unley High School. Certainly, officers have indicated that it is one of the few remaining metropolitan high schools with a timber spine, as they refer to it, in much need of an upgrade. There are only three or four left in the metropolitan area, and Unley High School evidently happens to be one of those. Therefore, it has been a candidate for the capital works program for a number of years. Even under the previous Government, it has not been able to get on the program. The only other point I make to the honourable member is that I understand the Unley High School is actually in the member for Waite's electorate rather than the member for Unley's electorate. I know he takes a close interest in the needs of the Unley High School, as a good number of students from his electorate attend the Unley High School.

Mr BRINDAL: The members for Kaurna and Reynell are similarly concerned about the Christies Beach High School. I note in the budget papers there are some allocations of moneys for that area. The Minister would be aware that there is a major and significant social justice problem in that area. I know the Minister is aware how hard those two members have lobbied him and his colleagues about the redevelopment of that school. Can the Minister shed any further light on that matter other than that which is shed by the budget papers? Are there any medium to long term plans for that school? I am sure the members for Kaurna and Reynell would be most interested in the answer.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is correct to say that the members for Kaurna and Reynell have been active in terms of the needs of all the schools in their area. Christies Beach High School is an important issue. Again, this is a school that was always almost going to get on the capital works program under the previous Government and never quite made it. It is not just a social justice issue, but it obviously has important social justice implications, so I was delighted to be able to indicate that the Government would agree to a program of redevelopment. There are some difficult issues down in that area. One of the issues that is being held up in relation to Christies Beach is that its community is keen to get as much value as it can for the \$4 million. It is fair to say that they are trying to get more dollar value for the \$4 million than exists in the budget. That has been one of the reasons for the delay in the Christies Beach High School.

I guess the Government and I as Minister could have ignored the position of the local community and said, 'That's it; we will proceed in the fashion we want to, and we will not listen to the issues you are raising,' or we could have been conciliatory and sat down with them, as we have done, to try to work through a process of seeing how we can squeeze what they want out of the \$4 million allocation. We are continuing those discussions with the local community but, as Minister, certainly I would like to see some short-term urgent progress made with respect to the overall redevelopment. Issues relating to additional moneys from minor works or perhaps back-to-school moneys held by the school are being investigated to see whether or not that \$4 million is able to be slightly extended in terms of the scope of works they want.

Ms WHITE: In response to my previous set of questions, the Minister indicated that he would wait to see what the Federal budget brought. The cut this year we know will be \$619 million. South Australia's share of that total is about 8 per cent, which is \$50 million—not the \$2 million or \$3 million the Minister previously indicated. What is the Minister doing to ensure that education does not cop a cut of that amount on a *pro rata* basis—that is, \$10 million?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: With due respect to the member for Taylor, the \$2 million figure to which I referred earlier was not the figure in relation to the overall cut to the State: it was the honourable member's calculation, working back to what the effect might be on the education budget. The member for Taylor asked what I intended to do about the \$10 million effect on the education budget. The honourable member did not say \$50 million, she said \$10 million. I said to the member for Taylor that I presumed that was a three-year figure, if one was working back from—

Ms WHITE: I am talking about 8 per cent of the total.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not saying that the cut to the State is only \$2 million. I agree with the figure: it is \$50 million, or something. The ball park figure is of the order of \$50 million. I do not have any quibble with the \$50 million figure, and I am not suggesting that it is \$2 million. If that is what the honourable member thought I was suggesting, that is certainly not the case. I accept that if it is 8 per cent then that is the ball park figure we will be talking about for South Australia. The honourable member then asked me about the implications of that on the education budget. My response now is the same as it was earlier: I am not in a position to indicate to the honourable member, other than to say—

Ms WHITE: I asked what action is being taken.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I cannot take any action because I am not able to change the Prime Minister's decision-making processes as Minister for Education and Children's Services in South Australia. The South Australian Government is represented by the Premier and Treasurer in these negotiations, and they have and will continue to fight hard for South Australia. Within the South Australian Cabinet process I will fight hard for education. Within our processes I will fight hard for our fair share—and some might say more than our fair share—of the available State and Commonwealth moneys for South Australia's education budget. That is my responsibility as Minister for Education and Children's Services. I will do that, but certainly I will not be conducting those Cabinet discussions during the Estimates Committees and making the member for Taylor privy to those soon to be interesting discussions within the South Australian budget process.

Ms STEVENS: I turn to the Government's pay offer to teachers (page 125). The Minister's media release of 20 February states:

The total full year cost of the agreement will eventually be \$93.6 million with about \$70 million now provided by Treasury as extra supplementation to the education budget. Most of the remaining \$23.6 million will be funded by savings measures already announced in the 1995 State budget such as the reduction in SSO numbers and above formula teacher positions.

Can the Minister confirm that \$9.1 million of the \$23.6 million has remained unfunded, and can he further confirm that the Government is now considering offering a further \$18.6 million as part of the teachers' wage claim, which means that \$27.7 million is still required to be found? Will this money—and this might change with further discussion—be provided by Treasury to education to meet that wage rise claim, or are we looking at further cuts to services in order to make the figures match?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: First, the figure of \$9.1 million has been publicly announced by me on a number of occasions, that is, the majority of the \$23.6 million the department had to fund eventually was to come from the budget announcements we made last year, namely, SSO and tier two level numbers. The \$9.1 million was part of the offer that we made to the teachers earlier this year. We indicated how that \$9.1 million might be provided. We said that we were obviously prepared to negotiate.

The other aspect of the honourable member's question could have come only from the Institute of Teachers negotiators, because one particular aspect of her question has only been discussed in confidential negotiations between the department and the Institute of Teachers, in confidential session. I must express my disappointment that, whilst there is meant to be confidential negotiation ongoing, the honourable member—and I am not suggesting the honourable member directly but other members of the Labor Party—has obviously been provided with information from the Institute of Teachers about those confidential negotiations. As Minister I have steadfastly refused to comment on the confidential discussions within the commission. Indeed, the union and the Minister have been ordered so to do by Deputy President Hampton, and I have refused to discuss the confidential negotiations.

One small figure is involved—it is not a big figure—and that is the difference between \$18 million and \$18.6 million, but that is one of those things one includes in offers so that, in correspondence, one knows where things come from. That \$.6 figure has been involved only in those particular discussions. I express my disappointment; clearly, it is not a criticism of the honourable member involved here and I do not seek to do that. She is not a party to those negotiations and I do not want her to believe I am being critical of her in that respect. However, I want to place on the public record how awfully difficult it is for a Government that is prepared to abide by the rules and to make sure that the confidentiality of the negotiating process is followed when negotiators representing the union are clearly breaching those confidentiality processes in providing that sort of information.

In relation to the full-year costs and what will happen with Treasury, it is clear that, in terms of the 12 per cent Government offer for the two year agreement, the total cost is \$93.6 million. Our department will have to find \$23.6 million, and the honourable member has acknowledged that fact in her question, so that is part of the public record. The \$70 million will be a net addition to the Department for

Education and Children's Services eventually from Treasury to pay for that agreement. The simple answer to the question is that if, by some miracle, the union was to recommend acceptance of the agreement in terms of the offer that the Government has made, then we would have to find no more than I have already publicly indicated. Treasury will pay for the rest.

We will have to find only the \$9.1 million of additional offsets. Almost half of that \$9 million relates to one relatively simple Government recommendation that Government schools end their school year closer to the end of the school year for non-government schools and that, as an offset, teachers undertake up to five days of training and development in their own time. That measure will save the Government almost \$4 million. I would argue that that is a relatively painless offset in terms of curriculum and subject offerings in its effect on students. We are saying that we would finish our school year at about the same time as non-government schools in South Australia and there would be a requirement that teachers will spend that extra five days on training and development in their own time. That accounts for about \$4 million of the \$9.1 million.

Ms STEVENS: That would be \$4 million of the \$9.1 million, but what about the \$5.1 million?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It has all been outlined publicly. There are other offsets. There are savings in relation to workers compensation costs and there are savings in relation to a proposal to make cost neutral the conversion of key teachers to coordinators. Originally, schools were told that they could convert X number of key teachers to a coordinator position. It was meant to be a revenue neutral option for the department. What has occurred is that they are converting three key teachers to a coordinator and the total cost of that to the department is \$1 million. We are saying we should implement what was the original intention: there ought to be a revenue neutral conversion. If you want to convert key teachers to coordinators, you should do so but it should not mean an additional cost to the system. There is \$1 million.

We have put a proposition in terms of reducing the number of coordinator level positions, particularly in relation to the larger secondary schools, because some of our big secondary schools have up to 20 coordinators. I know that many things require coordination in a complex secondary school, but you could probably coordinate all those complex issues with 16 coordinators rather than perhaps 19 coordinators in such schools. Those options are not new. They were part of the original agreement. We circulated 20 000 or 30 000 copies of those options to every employee in the department. They have been tabled in the House. There are one or two smaller examples, but they are the details of the \$9.1 million offsets that we have suggested. At the same time we have said to the union, 'If you don't like a particular aspect of it, come back to us with a different suggestion.' However, we still have to find the \$9.1 million.

Ms STEVENS: I would like to make a final comment and ask a question. My concern and that of the schools in my electorate is that, if the Government agrees to the terms of the wage increase, it will be faced with further expenditure, but from where will the funds come?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I suggest to the member that she speak to teachers, principals and parents in her area suggesting that they accept the Government's very generous offer of \$90 a week and up to \$150 a week for some principals. If that is accepted, we will not have to worry about her question or about finding additional money.

Ms STEVENS: What if it is not accepted?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: If it is not accepted, South Australian taxpayers will have to pay. As the Premier indicated to a number of groups, either there will be increased taxes, which might be designated as a teacher pay tax, or we have to reduce expenditure in some other Government departments or agencies. I am sure the member will not recommend that we cut back further in health but basically there are no other options. I do not have a magic money tree. We either increase taxes to pay for the pay rise or we reduce expenditure somewhere else. It is as simple and as blunt as that. If the member understands that and does not find any of those options palatable, she might like to put her shoulder to the wheel and recommend acceptance.

Ms STEVENS: You are the one who makes the decisions this time around.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I gather that, but I am seeking an indication of the Opposition's position. The Opposition's position seems to be that it will not support increased taxes, it will not support other cutbacks but it will support a magic money tree. The position that the member is putting to the committee is ludicrous. The member is a senior member of the Labor Party and she is saying on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, I presume, that the Labor Party will not support increases in taxes or support cuts in—

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Therefore, the member does leave open the option of increasing taxes on behalf of the Opposition to pay for a salary increase. The Labor Party's position is to leave open those options. That might be a press release that someone might want to take up. The Labor Party has now indicated through this member its broad position that it is leaving open those sorts of options. If in the end there is an increased teacher salary cost, the member has indicated that the Labor Party will leave open the options of increased taxes or reductions in expenditure elsewhere. The member has conceded that there is no other option.

Ms STEVENS: I wish to make a final comment about what the Minister has just said. That was an astonishing statement from the Minister about what I or the Labor Party was supposed to have said or agreed to.

Mr BRINDAL: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I thought we were supposed to ask questions and not make speeches.

Ms WHITE: The Minister is supposed to answer them and not question the Opposition.

The CHAIRMAN: The opportunity to make statements was given at the beginning of the session. The Minister had the opportunity to do so but did not. The lead speaker for the Opposition read out a statement. Accordingly, I would prefer the committee to come back to questions.

Ms STEVENS: As to the question and comment I was making—

Mr BRINDAL: Mr Chairman, you have just made a ruling and the member says she wants to restate something. Obviously, she is flouting your authority.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The member for Elizabeth is framing a question.

Ms STEVENS: Minister, if in fact the final outcome of your negotiations with the Institute of Teachers results in a greater amount of funds being required, from where will these funds come?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I gave the member an answer. It will have to come from either reductions in expenditure elsewhere or an increase in taxation revenue.

Mr SCALZI: In recent years there has been a decrease in the number of students studying community languages. What is the Government doing to address this problem (Program Estimates, page 127)?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I acknowledge the member's longstanding interest in multicultural education and language instruction in our schools. It is certainly true to say that, whilst we have had great success in terms of the breadth of our language programs within primary schooling, the number of students who continue with secondary language study and go through to year 12 has been declining for the past 15 years. In the early 1980s the figure was about 16 per cent of year 12 students who undertook a study in a language other than English. The most recent figures are in the order of 8 per cent. There has been a steady decline and, in part, it is because of the perceived degree of difficulty of language study by students in the struggle to maximise their point score to get into university courses where the degree of perceived difficulty of a subject is an important issue and many students have dropped language study as a result of that.

As the member will know, in late last year or early this year we just completed the J. Lo Bianco report into language development programs. We have just completed the 1986 to 1995 language development 10 year program and we are looking at developing the next 10 year development program. We are looking at the recommendations of the Lo Bianco report and have been doing so for over a term. I hope in the not too distant future to indicate the Government's response to the recommendations. Of course, in part that depends on resources and, in part, the issues of this budget and the Commonwealth budget will be important issues. In particular, the National Asian Languages Program is an important program and I am heartened by the Prime Minister's commitment to the specific purpose programs. It will be an important program in this area.

[Sitting suspended from 1.1 to 2 p.m.]

Ms WHITE: I return to estimates of receipts and expenditure, page 125. Why were 14 school projects that were announced as new works last year announced as new works again this year and, as these 14 schools were earmarked for the expenditure of \$11.5 million last year and no work was started, what happened to the funds, where were they spent and who approved the changes to the budget?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In the document before me called 'DECS Budget 1996-97', the department highlights the significant capital works and has listed most of those projects to which the honourable member has referred under the line, 'Some significant capital works will begin or continue at'. This is the document that we supply to all schools and preschools and is available to teachers and parents.

The document to which the honourable member referred is the Treasury document, 'Capital Works'. Treasury refers, in its capital works document (part of the budget papers), as new works and works in progress, and Treasury has the view, as Treasury sometimes does, that until bricks and mortar work is going on it is not a work in progress. Irrespective of whether we announced it the previous year and started planning for it or whatever, until the bricks and mortar are starting, it is not a work in progress but is listed as a new work. For that reason, we do not, as we believe it is misleading to schools, circulate the Treasury document to schools, teachers and parents.

In an honest fashion we list the works and say that some significant capital works will begin or continue, and that is the information which we circulate to schools. We do not circulate dry old budget and Treasury documents to schools. We indicate through our DECS budget document what will be the effect to schools. For that reason, this new works issue is something in the budget paper that the Treasury has produced. In the information we provide we do not claim it to be new work as clearly some of them were announced in the last budget.

Why have some been delayed? There are a number of reasons for that. I will give three examples quickly: Tanunda Primary School, about which I talked last year, has been an ongoing problem for a couple of years. The local council is still fighting the Government, the department and the school council in seeking to oppose the construction of Tanunda Primary School on the site that the Government has selected, so we have an on going issue there that we have to try to resolve as best we can.

The second example is one I highlighted last year, namely, Seaton High School. At least 12 months or two years ago the Government was prepared to go ahead and undertake what we would call a sensitive but traditional redevelopment of the school for a ball park figure of \$1.3 million, but the Principal of the school and the school community have said, 'No, we do not want you to go ahead.' It has looked at least three or four different options, some under the broad heading of 'ecologically sustainable developments' in preference to the Government's proposition.

So, we have some communities saying to us, 'Do not spend the money, do not go ahead and do it (in the case of Seaton High School) because we would prefer to do it in a different way.' They have been trying to convince us to do it in a different way or to spend more money than we have allocated. For all those reasons, a number of programs and projects have been delayed. However, on the other hand some projects have proceeded smoothly and more quickly. We have spent additional moneys in some areas. The net effect for the 1995-96 budget of almost \$90 million in capital works is such that we will have spent, by the end of the financial year, nearly all the amount allocated for capital works. Whilst some have been delayed, others have cost more or proceeded more quickly, or we have undertaken other works as part of the capital works program.

Ms WHITE: Your comments sound very reasonable. However, you still did not answer my question, which was that the budget was underspent by \$2.7 million. For the work that was not started, what happened to the funds and who approved the changes to the budget?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Are you talking about a \$2 million underspend in the \$90 million budget for this year?

Ms WHITE: That indicates that out of last year's capital budget significant money must have been redirected somewhere. Where did it go?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I just explained. When you go out to tender, maybe \$1 million may have to be spent on a redevelopment. You go to tender and that is on the basis of the best information Services SA can provide to us, and then six builders come back and say, 'We will not do it for anything less than \$1.4 million.' The Government can then do one of two things: either it does not do the redevelopment or it has to find an extra \$400 000.

On some programs and projects you have to spend more than budget. In some areas we have had to take some initiatives; for example, because of problems in the northern

suburbs we have had to put in additional money for security issues in schools because of the school fires issue. Believe me, we have spent the money. It is not sitting in my back pocket somewhere. If money is left over at the end of the year, it carries over to the following year to be spent. We will be spending virtually all of our budget.

The other point is that our \$90 million budget was predicated on getting about \$14 million from land sales. We have not got the \$14 million from land sales and we will not know until 30 June what is the final sum. Our income is predicted to be \$12.5 million, although we will have to wait until 30 June in terms of some of the sales that are still ensuing. As the money has not come in, we have not had it to spend. Part of our budget is predicated on selling land and getting money. If we have not sold much land, we do not have much money to spend. Therefore, we do not have to worry about what we have done with the spare money, because we do not have it.

Ms WHITE: How much has been budgeted this year for the removal of asbestos from school buildings; which schools will be repaired; and how many schools have asbestos contamination which requires attention?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The details regarding the schools I shall have to take on notice. The ball park figure that we traditionally spend is \$600 000 a year, and that is in this budget.

Ms WHITE: The Opposition has been provided with papers which show that the Salisbury Downs Primary School has an asbestos roof which is deteriorating and depositing fibres in the gutters. The estimated cost of reroofing the school is \$120 000. When will this work be carried out; can the Minister give an assurance that students and teachers are not at risk; and what advice has he taken on this issue?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I shall have to obtain the detailed information for the particular school, but I shall be happy to do so. The department, our officers and Services SA officers, if there is any prospect of a significant health problem for staff and children, try to ensure that the work is done expeditiously. In relation to the particular school, I shall have to take advice and provide a response.

Mr SCALZI: My question follows an earlier one with regard to languages. The study of languages is best achieved when it is in conjunction with the study of culture. Has the Government any plans to promote this concept?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As the member indicated in his earlier question regarding preschool services, the Government has a number of initiatives in the area to which he refers. They are too numerous for me to mention today, but I might be able to provide him with further information. For example, my Multicultural Education Coordinating Committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Smolicz, does a lot of work in this area by way of small grants, research and papers and cultural inclusive education. I am sure that the member has had many discussions with Professor Smolicz about culturally inclusive education and related issues. That committee has certainly been very active in terms of what has been done, and the department's curriculum division has done a lot of work on the production of materials and programs in this area.

Again, the member will know that the officers of the department at Newton and also centrally have been very active in this area as well. I shall be happy to get some information and provide further details. As I indicated this morning, the National Asian Languages Strategy is another program in which the Commonwealth and State are working

together. There is a whole range of programs which work in the broad area about which the member is talking. I will see whether I can get more information.

Mr WADE: I refer to the main road corridor project, page 142, dealing with the disposal of unwanted assets. The main road corridor project was the vehicle which brought to a head years of rumour and speculation about the fate of Marion High School. The decision has been taken to close Marion High School. My question relates not so much to the closure as to the Ashford Annexe situated at Marion High School. What is the intention of the Government and DECS regarding the future location of that annexe?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I acknowledge the member's interest and concern. He has lobbied me consistently on a whole range of issues in relation to managing this major restructuring program. In relation to the Ashford Annexe, he has provided me with his views on this issue on a number of occasions. In the announcement that we made we indicated that the future of the program was assured and that we would establish a new base for the Ashford Annexe so that the students could transfer for the start of the 1997 school year. We gave that commitment, and we will keep it.

To that end, a task group has been established to look at recommendations for relocation of the program. I am advised that the task group has prepared recommendations, which will be assessed by the Community Options Facilities and Services Committee. The recommendation on the location of the annexe will be forwarded to me by the end of term 2, or soon thereafter, and we hope to be in a position in term 3 to announce a decision on a prospective new site.

Mr WADE: The Centre for Hearing Impaired Children (CHIC) is also situated at Marion High School. I am sure that residents, constituents and children attending CHIC and their parents would like to know what the Government has in store for that program.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: At the time of the announcement, the Government indicated that it would assure the future of the Centre for Hearing Impaired Children for 1997 so that the children at that centre at Marion High School would have a new school base for the start of 1997. Discussions are going on at the moment, but it will be relocated to another secondary school site for the start of 1997. A task group, including the CHIC coordinator, parent representatives and programs division representatives, will be consulting parents and students.

The criteria have been established and a number of secondary schools have been visited by the task group. Recommendations will be forwarded to me before the end of term 2, or soon afterwards, and I anticipate a decision being announced in term 3 in relation to its future home. I also understand that an extensive transition program will be provided to the CHIC students to ensure a smooth transition.

Mr De LAINE: The recent review of the secondary education needs of The Parks area, which was set up by the Minister, found that The Parks High School was providing a wonderful service to families in that area by delivering services which are urgently needed and that The Parks High School should continue to provide these services to the disadvantaged families in The Parks and surrounding areas. In the face of these review findings, the Minister made the outrageous decision to close the school at the end of 1996. Why was taxpayers' money wasted on school reviews and the findings of the reviews completely ignored?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I make no apology for this Government's being prepared to consult parents, teachers and

principals. It was a commitment that I gave as shadow Minister for Education and Children's Services and it is a commitment that I followed as Minister. In relation to all restructures, possible closures and amalgamations, there will be consultation to allow people to put their views to me. However, what I have said as shadow Minister and consistently as Minister is that, whilst there will be consultation, in the end it will not be a local community decision that determines the future structure or existence of a school. That decision will be made by me as Minister for Education and Children's Services. I will look at and listen to the community's point of view. I will then take advice from the department and in the end make a judgment as Minister for Education and Children's Services.

What I have said today is no different from what I have said consistently for 2½ years as Minister for Education and Children's Services and what I said as the shadow Minister. It is a nonsense for the proposition to be put that in some way these difficult decisions should be determined solely by the local community. There have been examples in the past of schools in the country where five students were left in one school and the community voted to keep the school open. Clearly, for educational reasons, I did not accept that proposition.

If we were to adopt a policy, as is being implied by the honourable member, whereby if the community says it wants the school to stay open it should say open, that is and always has been unacceptable to me as Minister. There will be consultation. I do not see it as a waste of time or effort. That is a judgment in the end for local communities to take: do they want an opportunity to put a point of view to me as Minister which most times I expect would be that their local school should not close. However, the Marion corridor is a perfect example where the local parents and principals said, 'We have seven schools; we believe there should be only four sites.' They did not nominate which three sites should close: they left that decision with me. But they did make that recommendation.

Many of the local school reviews recommend that their school stay open, even if they have only five students, because they do not want to be part of a process of recommending a local school closure. I do not see it as a waste of money, time or effort: I see it as an opportunity given by a Government committed to allowing people to put a point of view. But they have to accept in the end that it is not their decision: it is up to the person elected as Minister for Education and Children's Services to take the final decision as to whether or not a restructure will go ahead or whether or not a school will close.

Mr De LAINE: Irrespective of what the Minister says, the school community did not see the review as representing consultation. As far as they were concerned and as far as I was concerned as the local member, there was no consultation whatsoever. We saw the review purely as a review. The Minister should have said that he was thinking about closing the school. He should have asked what we could do by community consultation in terms of examining other options such as amalgamation or whatever. Why was there no consultation in this regard?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I have indicated, I do not accept the premise of the question—it is as simple as that. We engaged in a long period of consultation. Whether the honourable member chooses to accept that it was or was not consultation is for him to determine. I cannot determine the

honourable member's perspective on issues. The reality is that there was consultation and a review process. People were able to put a point of view about their school. As the honourable member has indicated through the quotes he has provided today and on previous occasions, they very broadly supported the continued operation of the school—I acknowledge that. That is their view and it remains their view. It does not happen to be a view that I share as Minister for Education and Children's Services. I do not accept the premise of the question: that there was no consultation. I must admit that I am a bit surprised: I thought that the local member had been involved in a reference group or a discussion—

Mr De LAINE: I was.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I thought you said you had not been involved in the consultation.

Mr De LAINE: I did not say I was or I was not. I was on the reference group, but I suggest that your agenda was not known. There was no consultation with the review.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I think the *Hansard* record will show words to the effect that you were not consulted. As I said, my understanding—and you have confirmed it—is that you were part of the consultation process; you were a member of the group. There was no agenda. It was a review committee to examine the future of the school. The agenda was quite clear: what is the future of the school? Does it continue or does it not continue? The community knew that, because from the start a range of submissions were put to me that the school should remain open and that there should be no change to arrangements. It is no surprise that the review was established to examine the future of the school. One cannot be any more open about it than that: nothing was hidden. I accept that you might not like it, but I do not think anyone can reasonably argue that there was a hidden agenda. A hidden agenda would have involved my sneaking around in the middle of the night and closing the school without a review. Technically, a Minister can do that. But we announced the review and went through a process. You were part of the process; you put a point of view. In the end the Government, through me as Minister, did not agree with your point of view. The school will close at the end of the year.

Mr De LAINE: The Minister is the only person who saw the process as consultation. One of the Minister's prime reasons for closing the school was the high cost of education, which amounts to just under \$8 000 per student. This is based on a stupid cost-charging set-up that has been in place for many years. This arrangement has taken on a new perspective now that the Government has moved to shift the Parks Community Centre, including the school (if it stays open), to the Port Adelaide-Enfield council. Since the announcement of the closure of the school the Port Adelaide-Enfield council has contacted the Minister and made public its willingness to negotiate tenancy costs and arrangements. These overtures have met with disinterest from the Minister such that he has not agreed to meet the council until later this month. During the Parks review it was extremely difficult to get the Department of Education and Children's Services Corporate Services' support to investigate other tenancy options and costs—more disinterest. The Minister said that it cost too much to rent The Parks, and yet last year he sold the Hallett Cove East school so that the Government could rent it back. It seems a funny argument. The economic argument is seen as a convenient rather than a real argument. Will the Minister enter into negotiations with the Port Adelaide-Enfield council to explore the possibility of reducing the rental charges and,

if successful in this operation, reverse his decision to close the school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The answer is 'No.' In the statements I made on a number of occasions at the time of the announcement and since, the principal reasons for closing The Parks High School were the educational ones that I indicated in the press statement. It is not correct to say that the Minister and the Government gave financial reasons as the major reason. The departmental documentation, which has subsequently been reviewed by FOI, demonstrates that the decision I took and the notation I put at the bottom of the decision indicated that the decision had been taken for educational reasons. It is true to say that in the press statement the financial considerations were also a factor in my determination. One reason for that was that we are paying in terms of total charges about \$800 000.

I am aware that there is also a total Government subsidy for the operation of The Parks Community Centre of a considerable sum which, in terms of potentially handing over ownership to Port Adelaide-Enfield council, may or may not be continued. I am not aware of the state of those negotiations. If it was not, the new owners would have to meet the cost of that substantial Government or taxpayer subsidy for the overall operation of the centre. If that is the case, the major tenant (the Education Department) is facing not a reduction in costs but a potential significant increase. I am advised that significant upgrading of the centre was potentially on the cards in terms of costs also. So, it was a factor, but the major factor, as indicated in the documentation, was educational reasons.

I understand the passion of the local member for his school, but the brutal reality, as I have said to him previously, is that his families in The Parks area were voting with their feet and sending their children to every school other than The Parks. In the past two years, only 32 and 35 of year eight students from local feeder primary schools have gone to The Parks. Over 100 year 7 students leaving local feeder primary schools, who reside in The Parks zone, are being sent by their families to every school they can think of other than The Parks. That is not a decision that I, as Minister, have taken; it is one that the honourable member's constituents have taken over the past few years. It is their freedom of choice. I suppose that I could force them to go to The Parks, but I choose not to.

I have made those decisions. The local member needs to think for himself. He must defend the school, but on what basis? It cannot be resources, because it is one of the most generously resourced schools in South Australia. I think there is one teacher for about nine students in the school. If you asked other members whether they would like to have one teacher for every nine students in their local high school, they would kill for it. So, the honourable member cannot say that it is because the Government has starved this school of resources when it has poured massive resources into this school over recent years—and on most counts I understand the justification for that. The families in the honourable member's area knew that, but in spite of the fact that there was one teacher for every nine students they walked, rode bikes or sent their children in cars to every school other than The Parks.

That is one of the reasons why I took this difficult decision. I knew it would be a difficult decision. It was a political icon of the Labor Party (both State and Federal). It was seen as a significant development by the Labor Party and the Don Dunstons of this world as one of their significant

achievements in South Australia, but I cannot force families to go to The Parks High School. If, for their own reasons, they are saying to me that they do not want one teacher for every nine students, that they prefer to go to a different school in the next suburb, that is their decision.

Mr BRINDAL: I refer to pages 138 and 139 of the Program Estimates and Information, which cover education for remote and isolated students and the socioeconomic disadvantaged. The Minister would be aware that in the early 1970s money started to be poured into schools via the then Schools Commission through two lighthouse programs: the disadvantaged schools program, which in South Australia is called priority education, and a bit later under the Fraser Government the country areas program. Both those programs sought to address and redress educational disadvantage which accrued through isolation, remoteness and poverty. We are now 25 years down the track. Conservatively, probably \$100 million has been poured into the disadvantaged schools program. I am concerned to read here issues and trends which were written 20 years ago.

I ask the Minister what he intends to do to address the fact that, while the Parliament continues to talk about social justice, are we pouring money down the drain and achieving nothing? Two complete generations of schoolchildren have gone through the educational process. Either that money is of some benefit or we should look at it with a view to redirecting it into avenues where it is useful. I conclude by saying that, for years, at places like The Parks and Mansfield Park it was fine to use disadvantaged schools money to build brick huts and take children on excursions but not for core curriculum areas. If we are not achieving results, I suggest that we look at reapplying that money to real areas of need for the education of the disadvantaged so that it is not wasted in the future.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I acknowledge the honourable member's interest and longstanding expertise in this area. I think the true social justice and equity issue that we need to address in education and in relation to a number of these schools in particular is whether we are able to assist them to provide the basics in terms of literacy and numeracy upon which they can then build their participation in all the other important elements of schooling: primary, secondary and, hopefully, tertiary. Schools have to have those basics. The real social justice issue for me is tied up with the overall commitment by the Government to the early year strategy, particularly in relation to literacy and the acquisition of literacy skills. I think, as a system, we are kidding ourselves unless we are prepared to do all we can to orientate the funding, the resources and the priorities of Government in that area. The Government is doing that through the early years strategy. A review of the disadvantaged schools program is currently being undertaken. Through the Executive Director of Curriculum, I have asked that that committee look at a number of options, which include designating a specific proportion of the total DSP funds to literacy programs, particularly in relation to early intervention.

It is fair to say that in recent years an increasing percentage of the DSP programs has been used for literacy programs. I have attended a number of cluster group staff development meetings, the focus of which has been to improve literacy skills. We are giving cash grants to schools so that, if they want to, they can employ an SSO, purchase curriculum material such as 'The First Steps' or undertake more training and development to tackle the issues of children with learning difficulties in the early years as soon as possible. I am keen

to see an increasing percentage of the moneys within our equity programs being aimed directly at service delivery to students in schools and, as much as we can—there are other issues that must be addressed by the program—in the important areas of literacy acquisition. Early literacy is another component of the national equity program called the Early Literacy Component (ELC) program, under which funding of \$400 000 or \$500 000 a year is made available. This year, we will direct about \$375 000 of that money, almost three quarters of it, in terms of cash grants to schools to assist children with learning difficulties. I ask this review committee to look at what we are doing with the DSP program and acknowledge that we are moving in the direction about which the member speaks. I want to look at some options to hasten that process so that, wherever we can, we spend more money on what I see as the critical social justice issue for schools in terms of early intervention and literacy intervention.

We also have another program that was previously called the social justice curriculum development. A range of options are being considered in relation to orienting that to the poverty and literacy curriculum program, again trying to direct that funding to over \$1.2 million a year. I am still having discussions with Jim Dellit and Dennis Ralph, who is the CEO, in relation to the focus of that program for the future, and perhaps for this year as well, to ensure to the greatest extent we can that we address the sorts of issues that I have just talked about. There is a lot we can do. In terms of the information we eventually will be able to gather from basic skills testing, maybe from statements and profiles and from other areas as well, we will need to look at how we can evaluate the success of some of these programs. I know that the department is already looking at some of these issues so that, over five years, with money being targeted in the DSP program, or whatever it might be called, in terms of literacy we might be able to see whether or not we are making identifiable quantifiable improvements in terms of literacy outcomes.

If we accept for a moment—and we know this for a fact—that schoolcard students have performed not as well in terms of literacy as non-schoolcard students throughout the State (and obviously that involves schoolcards spread over all the schools not just in the DSP schools) clearly information will be available to us in the not too distant future or is available to us now which, over a period of time, will be able to measure whether we are making improvements through the millions we continue to spend. I have said this in relation to Aboriginal education programs about which these difficult questions equally need to be asked. We have spent and will continue to spend a lot of money on Aboriginal education, and clearly we are not making significant improvements. We are making some improvements, but we are not making the sorts of significant improvements in terms of literacy and numeracy acquisition schools for Aboriginal students. We in South Australia will have to look at the direction of some of that funding to see whether we cannot, as with the DSP, better target it as to what I see as the key social justice issue.

Mr BRINDAL: I hope that the member for Elizabeth and other officers sitting behind the Minister who have had experience in disadvantaged schools will back me up in saying that it is very frustrating when you do not have money for basics but you can get it for things that you do not quite need it for. The Minister said that he was looking at some basis of knowledge. Will he explore that further? One of the problems has been that if you lived in, say, Mansfield Park

you inherently had a label on you saying 'disadvantaged', because some statistics said that you could not do well at education. Yesterday, I also learnt that some of the Education Department's calculations as to school entitlement remain predicated on postcodes. Not every child who lives in the area of The Parks is necessarily disadvantaged or an underachiever. For 20 years, we have suffered from a lack of a database and any empirically measured knowledge about where people come from and their attainment levels. The country areas program is another good example. The child who leaves Ceduna to go to St Peters is not counted as a country student. Their attainment might be very high, yet they are removed from the country statistics. What is the Minister's department doing to monitor the parameters of the problem and then come to grips with it?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: One of the key aspects of that would be the information that we in South Australia have available for the first time through the basic skills test. For the first time, a Government in South Australia will have objective information on literacy and numeracy achievement levels for our students in terms of the basic skills in year three and in year five. I have already answered many questions in relation to the country areas program—and I will not repeat the responses to them. We will be able to look at breakdowns in relation to those sorts of issues involving the country areas program. The issue of a student at Ceduna who goes to a college in town is a difficult one. It is an issue that the Senior Secondary Assessment Board has considered, because clearly it is the sort of issue which impacts upon their figures in terms of years 11 and 12 achievement in the city or in the country. It is a difficult issue, because some students come only for the last two or three years, and others come for ten years. All I can do is acknowledge that the issues that are of concern to the honourable member are of concern to me as Minister, and we are certainly addressing those. The basic skills test, amongst other measures, will be one important way of providing us with the sort of information we never had previously.

Mr SCALZI: What funds are allocated to teachers' exchange programs, and what are the benefits to the South Australian education system?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We have general reciprocal teaching exchanges which are organised with a number of countries—the United States, Canada, the U.K. and New Zealand—requiring 50 TRT days to support the exchange, teacher training and development. Some language exchange is provided in Japanese, German, Greek and Indonesian languages. The level of support there in terms of accommodation, salary and salary supplements looks to be about \$250 000. Scholarships have been provided by the French Government and the Goethe Institute in relation to release time support from the department. We have French and German assistants based in our schools to support language programs, which cost us another \$100 000 in salaries, accommodation and grants. The total is some \$454 000 in 1995-96, in terms of teacher exchange. Many important little things are occurring in the area. I know the honourable member has been an avid supporter of the overseas teacher exchange group, attending their barbecues and dinners, welcoming the teachers from overseas to South Australia, and I thank him for that. On occasions, he has farewellled South Australian teachers to other climes.

Ms WHITE: I refer to Program Estimates (page 126). What has been the reduction in the number of SSOs employed since the announcement that 250 positions would be

cut, and will additional positions be cut this year as a result of falling enrolments?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: About 200 out of the 250 have been able to be freed from the system. There is obviously a need to complete the 1995 budget decision in relation to 250. In a number of areas, due to industrial conditions that apply to school service officers—for example, if someone is not voluntarily moving or prepared to take a TVSP or resign—because of our non-retrenchment policy the Government cannot, and does not, retrench school service officers to meet the budget announcement. So, over a period of time, that reduction will be implemented within our schools. In relation to enrolments for next year, the prediction we have for them is somewhere near the *status quo*, so we are not anticipating any enrolment related reductions for teachers or SSOs.

Ms WHITE: Has the department been monitoring which activities schools have cut or reduced as a result of the decision to cut SSOs and, if so, what have been those findings?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, we have been monitoring the sorts of reductions; for example, a number of schools now are distributing newsletters only once every two weeks instead of once a week, and we have observed reductions in other administrative loads. Sometimes, during the lunch break, a telephone answering machine might be used rather than having a school services officer in attendance. If the import of the honourable member's question is, has there been one reduction common to all the answer is 'No.' Generally a variety of options have been decided upon by the communities. One interesting issue is that this year we gave \$2 million in cash grants to schools to enable them to purchase or maintain SSO hours to assist students with learning difficulties in the classroom.

To date, I think, only \$40 000 of the \$2 million has been spent by schools on assisting students with learning difficulties and maintaining SSO hours. I admit that I am surprised because one of the common criticisms of the decision to which I, as Minister, am sensitive, was that the reduction in SSOs would mean less time helping students in the classroom, and that is why, under the early years strategy, rather than spending the money on training and development for teachers, as we did in 1995, we gave \$2 million in cash grants to schools. We said to principals, 'Here is \$2 million; if you want you can spend all of that money on retaining SSO hours assisting students in the classroom with learning difficulties.'

As I said, to date across the State, only about \$40 000 has been spent on retaining SSO hours. The Government nevertheless accepts that this is a decision that principals and local communities take. Certainly I am saying to school councils and parents in relation to any concerns they might have about lack of support in the classroom, 'Please speak to your principal or local SAIT rep and find out how much of the grant that has been given to you to retain SSO hours in the classroom to help children with learning difficulties is being spent in your school and, if it is not being spent, find out for what other purposes that grant is being used.'

Ms WHITE: How much was saved in the 1995-96 budget as a result of those SSO cuts, and what will be the full year saving?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The full year saving is budgeted to be \$7.5 million.

Ms WHITE: As a supplementary question, by what method will the \$3 million be allocated for the early assistance action plan announced in the budget to provide grants for schools to employ additional SSOs?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It already has been allocated. Schools have got the money and that is the money that I have just been talking about, the \$2 million in early assistance action plan grants. The money was allocated; there was a base grant and this year it was *pro rata*. We have indicated that, next year, some of the \$3 million will be allocated for early assistance action and other amounts will be allocated to basic skills testing. We are also looking at how we might use the money to target those students with problems identified through the basic skills test.

We are also looking at a range of options that would certainly encourage schools to be participants in the basic skills tests. Qualification for funding or part funding will depend on the number of students who are identified as having problems under the basic skills test. All of those options are possible at this stage. No final decision has been made. Certainly the Government has a strong view that it should implement and support the basic skills test. There will be obvious benefits, which is a major reason for looking at these options, in terms of assisting students. Certainly an indirect benefit might be to encourage some school communities to ensure that their students participate in the basic skills test.

Mr WADE: Minister, as a result of decisions made by you following recommendations of the Marion Road Corridor Project Group (page 142), I understand that \$5 million will be made available to other local schools in the area to assist in the integration of students who would no longer be attending at least two primary schools that are closing in the area. Will this money be restricted to only those schools I include as part of the Marion Road Corridor Project Group, or will it be extended to other schools outside that immediate group?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Government has indicated that \$5 million will be spent on the four remaining Marion Road Corridor schools and other schools in the broader south-western suburbs, which would incorporate some of the schools to which the honourable member refers. This budget commits \$1.2 million to Hamilton Secondary School, \$1.8 million to Daws Road High School, \$600 000 to Clovelly Park, and a smaller commitment to Marion in relation to work that might need to be done. We have also indicated that other schools, such as Edwardstown, Ascot Park, Forbes and Colonel Light Gardens in the near vicinity—

Mr Brindal interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, Goodwood is a bit too far away. Good try. Certainly those four schools and perhaps others will be considered. We are already having discussions with schools. We are not talking about major redevelopments; we are talking about minor works redevelopments. I know that principals have been in contact with the facility section of the department to discuss some of the options as a result of the statement that I made. Not only will the four Marion Road Corridor schools benefit but also schools in the broader south-west, as well as some of those schools that will pick up students from the closed schools. One message from all previous amalgamations and closures is that it is not necessarily where we would like students to go but where families choose to send their children. That lesson has been learnt on a number of occasions in recent times, and I am sure that will be the case in relation to these closures.

Mr WADE: The Marion Road Corridor Group also embraced the concept of middle schooling in a number of recommendations it presented to you, Minister. What is the

Government's attitude to the middle schooling concept in relation to that Marion Road Corridor and other local schools, and could any of that \$5 million be allocated towards making that concept a reality in the future?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: This is likely to be an issue of increasing debate within our system. It is an important issue. The Government's view is that middle schooling is all about a way of teaching, the sort of offerings we provide and how we approach the teaching of students through those year levels of 6, 7, 8 and 9, or where ever one wants to draw the boundaries. It is not necessarily just about structures and so, whilst in the Marion Corridor we have taken the decision that year 7 students will be a part of a middle school-senior school concept at Daws Road and Hamilton, it is not sufficient just to dump the year 7 students on those secondary sites and say, 'All right, we now have middle schooling at the location because we have made a structural change.'

There must be a change in approach, in teaching methodology and how classes and subjects are structured. Some very important educational issues will have to be tackled by Daws Road and Hamilton—not just tacking year 7 students onto a secondary school, but a genuine middle schooling and senior secondary option. The amounts of \$1.2 million and \$1.8 million, to which I have already referred, at least in part will be directed to assisting those schools and developing the structures within the schools that will support the changes in teaching methodology and approach for genuine middle schooling.

The Government does not have a position that we want to carve off year 6 or year 7 from all primary schools in the State and put them into secondary schools. Even if we had that position, South Australian taxpayers could not afford it. It is an enormously costly option in a number of areas to seek to do that. We are prepared to be flexible and to look at a range of options. The Seaford community is supporting a year 6 to 12 school, with middle schooling and senior secondary schooling. In other areas we are retaining year 8 to 12 in secondary schooling, sometimes split into subschools of years 8 to 10 and then years 11 to 13 as senior secondary. In the Marion corridor we will be looking at a subschool of maybe years 7 to 9 or 7 to 10 with a senior school of years 10 to 13 probably.

Mr WADE: I refer to pages 138 and 142 relating to computers and computer literacy. Over the past few years constituents have stated that their children know about computers and are computer literate and many of them in primary schools and some high schools have been actually teaching the teachers how to run the programs because the teachers did not seem to be computer literate. I was advised by a principal that the average age of primary teachers is about 43 or 44 years, so they grew up just before computers got anywhere. Is there any definite program to bring teachers up to scratch with modern computer software programs and approaches to computerisation?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The answer is 'Yes.' This is an important issue. The DECStech 2001 five year strategy has been announced and first year funding has been provided, and we will provide in the first year funding for training and development for teachers and staff within our schools. This is an important issue and teachers will be the first ones to acknowledge that one of the dilemmas resulting from the lack of Government support for technology and computer acquisitions in schools over past years has been that the skill level of some but not all of our teachers could do with improving in this area. Certainly, the teachers' union is at one

with the Government in this issue, anyway, in terms of acknowledging the need for additional training and development opportunities for teachers and staff in this area. It will be part of the DECStech 2001 strategy.

Ms STEVENS: As to the basic skill tests program at page 126, a review of the 1995 basic skills test was commissioned by DECS, as the Minister knows. I quote from the general findings, as follows:

1. Teachers and school principals underestimated the interest and concern of parents to obtain more specific information on their child's performance at school.
2. Principals and teachers have a generally low opinion of the usefulness of the tests.
3. Teachers and school principals need support in the interpretation of the information provided in the basic skills test report and of how that information might be used to advance the teaching and learning that takes place in South Australian schools.

As 11 recommendations resulted from the report, what specific action have you taken or intend to take and what time line have you adopted to address those 11 specific recommendations?

Members interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I welcome the honourable member's support for it. In general (and I do not intend to go through all 11 recommendations), the majority of the recommendations are being actioned or supported by officers in the department already. There are one or two recommendations about which we still have questions, particularly recommendation 11, which involves giving schools data on computer disc. Evidently there are issues about that recommendation and there are one or two other recommendations in relation to which questions have been raised and which we will have to consider further.

The member referred to the study and highlighted some of the critical issues about the skills test. I must admit that I was concerned to see that a significant number of teachers had not even looked at the reports provided about their school. Some had not looked at the reports in relation to the students in their class, and the department, through the Curriculum Division, has already produced a very good publication about how one might use and interpret the results of the basic skills test which is information that relates to one of these recommendations about providing information to teachers.

I believe that a vast majority of teachers have not yet taken the opportunity to look at that publication to see how they can interpret the results and determine how they might use the information provided therein. It is a product of the industrial action that was conducted through last year. Obviously, the union has steadfastly opposed it. Until we get to a stage where the union itself is prepared, as the union in New South Wales has done, to register its opposition but nevertheless let the task proceed without there being a world war every time a program is mounted, we will not be able to get to a situation where teachers, some of whom are union members, will feel more comfortable about participating and engaging in the basic skills test and looking at the information that can be provided to assist students in their class.

There is no doubt already that information being provided by principals who have assiduously poured over the results but who have not been supporters of the basic skills test in the past have already taken action in their schools to change in some way the delivery of the programs as a result of the basic skills test results. They may still be opponents of the basic skills test but they are trying to use the information for the benefit of students. My message as Minister to teachers and

principals is, 'You may not agree with it but nevertheless the Government has implemented it and 80 per cent of parents are implementing it.' An interesting result is that 60 per cent of parents said that the basic skills test results gave them information that was not being replicated in school and teacher reports, or words to that effect.

The union's view is that this information is already provided to parents by school and teacher reports. The honourable member made that comment earlier, in terms of the result: that teachers and principals had underestimated the degree of parent interest and engagement in the program. This other result demonstrates that 60 per cent—more than that said they were interested—said, 'It gave us information that was different from the sort of information that we were or are getting from teachers.' That is not to say that either is wrong or right. It is just saying that we are getting information from the school and we also want to get information from the independent basic skills test.

Ms STEVENS: As to the recommendations, what resources will you be making available for their implementation? A number of recommendations refer to inservicing for teachers and principals to advance teaching and learning. They talk about preservice and inservice programs for various people, and that obviously has a resourcing implication. How much is involved, and from where are the resources coming?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: To answer in two parts, in relation to the inservicing, I am advised that a school based development project with five schools has already been established and these schools will document best practice: develop and document their management and outline how they have engaged the analysis of the basic skills test data and the action taken, and we would then build upon that to share that information amongst all schools in terms of best practice.

As I said earlier, we have already provided to all schools a very good document from the Curriculum Division in relation to how we use basic skills test information. The basic skills budget is of the order of \$500 000—not just the tests but the officers, training, production of materials, and so on. Some of that money will be directed to this sort of program. In terms of how we use the information, the other aspect relates to what we do with the information we get. As I indicated earlier, the Government will be providing \$3 million in cash grants next year to schools, part of which will be used to address the particular learning needs of students with learning difficulties identified by the program. We need to look at two ends.

The member has rightly addressed questions of teacher training and as a Government we are critically interested in what additional support we can provide to students with learning difficulties. We are also providing, through the learning difficulties support team (to which about \$140 000 has been provided) a hotline service for classroom teachers in terms of coping with children with learning difficulties in their classroom, and teachers who may, from the basic tests results or any other results, seek further assistance from experts in the area will be able to use that hotline.

Secondly, the learning difficulties support team is undertaking training development seminars in terms of practical classroom hints from the viewpoint of how a classroom teacher can cope with students with learning difficulties within his or her classroom. This department and Government are doing a whole range of things as part of the broad umbrella of the early years' strategy in terms of additional expenditure to provide assistance.

Ms STEVENS: I want to focus on what will happen with the results because when I speak to school communities in my electorate they ask what will happen as a result of this and what will happen in relation to helping those students who are on the lower end. As a result of the 1995 tests we know that 34 per cent of all year five students and 39 per cent of all year three students are not in the top two bands in relation to literacy and, in relation to numeracy, 33 per cent of all year three and 35 per cent of all year five students are not in the top two bands. I would be interested to know the actual numbers of students about whom we are talking. The Minister has mentioned \$3 million, but my people are saying that they have the test but that it is telling them things they already know. We want to see some action in redressing the results.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The honourable member should be delighted, as a result of participating in the Estimates Committees, that, when people ask that question, instead of saying, 'I don't know what they are going to do and this Government is always cutting,' you will be able to go back and say, 'No, I have been to the Estimates Committees and the Minister has said that there will be \$3 million in cash grants going to schools, together with support from the learning difficulties support team, six additional speech pathologists, and another \$300 000 for reading recovery (of which I know the honourable member is a strong supporter, with a number of schools in her district supporting it)'. I can give the honourable member, to assist her with these constituents, a long list of additional moneys that the Government is spending in terms of targeting and providing additional assistance for students with learning difficulties. I would be happy to provide that information for the honourable member.

Ms STEVENS: Will the Minister provide exact numbers of 34 per cent of all year five students, 39 per cent of all year three, 33 per cent of all year three and 35 per cent of all year five? I would like to know the number of students that those percentages represent.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not sure why the honourable member is referring to both band levels. Certainly my attention as Minister has been more directed to those in skill band level one, which is a smaller percentage—about half—and therefore numbers of students. There is no problem with providing the numbers in skill band levels one and two. It is not confidential and we would be happy to provide that information.

Mr BRINDAL: It is interesting to hear how successful basic skills testing has been and how this Government is now building upon it to provide targeted education for children. It is also interesting to hear the member for Elizabeth supporting the project: it would be the first time. I want to ask the Minister about another success story and I refer to page 127 of the Program Estimates and Information, specifically services for Aboriginal children. The Minister would be aware of the continuing and increasing success of the Wiltja program—a program between DECS and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara people. In the budget I believe the Minister has made some capital provision. Will he explain what that capital provision is?

Will the Minister also tell the Committee whether he is addressing the difficult question that the Anangu Pitjantjatjara people do not recognise a State border but straddle the Northern Territory, Western Australia and the top corner of South Australia. One of the inherent problems for the program is the incapacity of the Commonwealth to under-

stand that the program is about a people and not about a State border. Is this matter being addressed or can it be addressed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am delighted to respond. It is an impressive program, as the honourable member indicated. The Government and I as Minister are strong supporters of what is being provided through Wiltja. This program is a perfect example of one of the responses to a question by the member for Taylor earlier, namely, if you have not spent money on some projects where else will the money go?

The original budget provision for Wiltja was \$800 000. We bent over backwards to ensure that we could stick with the \$800 000 budget cost. In the end we significantly increased the capital budget cost to almost \$1.3 million for Wiltja because in the end to do justice to the program and to the provision of facilities we were not able to do it for \$800 000. It took a long time and has therefore been delayed as a result, and the delay meant an increase of \$500 000 in that budget.

The new facilities will be developed at Wiltja rather than at Woodville and at Millswood where they are now. It will be developed in an identified portion of the vacated Morris Hospital site and will include the provision of both short and long-term residential accommodation. When the new residential accommodation is up and going we propose to declare the current accommodation at Millswood surplus to requirements and arrange for disposal in accordance with the current Government guidelines. I can only acknowledge the importance of the program and the fact that the Government has given due consideration to that by increasing significantly the budget for this capital works project.

In relation to the last issue, in which I know the honourable member has from year to year maintained an ongoing interest, namely, the fact that we have students from Western Australia and Northern Territory being accommodated and educated at the South Australian taxpayers' expense through the Wiltja program, the Chief Executive Officer, who may be able to provide additional information on this, tells me that the ministerial council discussed this issue last year and all chief executive officers discussed this issue then or early this year via teleconference. He may be able to provide a more detailed response in terms of what is occurring there.

Mr Ralph: The member for Unley referred to several aspects with respect to Aboriginal education and the Minister referred to decisions taken by a national group through the Ministerial Council. In my capacity as Chair of the Directors-General of Education of Australia, I can say that one of our highest priorities is the need to bring about significant differences and improvements for Aboriginal children. We have set about cooperative programs between those States with people who are educated in the Anangu lands and who move across that territory and to whom State borders mean nothing. Anyone who has visited that area will know why that is the case. As Directors-General, we have decided to give the highest priority to cooperation and joint projects with regard to people not only in those lands but right across Australia. We are sharing information about the achievements of Aboriginal children and finding those areas where such children are achieving better than in other places.

The basic skills test was mentioned earlier. One interesting thing that we have been looking at in New South Wales and South Australia is the fact that some Aboriginal students are scoring in the top band with far too many scoring in the bottom two bands. We are concerned about the bottom two bands, but we are finding that there are lessons for us

regarding the places where Aboriginal children are being more successful and the impact of that on teaching programs.

The department has also put in place an Aboriginal education plan. We will measure the performance of all Aboriginal children in the State. Indeed, I have a personal commitment to look at the development of every one of those Aboriginal children to ensure that they achieve their potential. In my capacity as Chief Executive, I am also working as a member of the South Australian Reconciliation Council to bring together all the people of this nation. I am encouraging all our schools to take action with respect to reconciliation.

Mr BRINDAL: My question is based on page 127 relating to support for children and students with disabilities. The Minister will be aware that this Government has continued the previous Government's program, wherever possible, of mainstreaming students with intellectual disabilities and physical impairment. I know that the Minister is aware of repeated criticism by schools of the difficulty, given the range of students that teachers now have. They may have 21 or 22 children with varying abilities and they might also have Down syndrome children and sometimes a child with a special need. Teachers are claiming that some of these children have not and never have been adequately supported since they were mainstreamed. I commend the Minister for the increase in budget in this area. Is any thought being given to this difficult problem in view of the stress that it is obviously causing teachers in classrooms, and will any consideration be given to not going helter-skelter down a road which may disadvantage the people we are trying to help?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member raises a very important question. We have competing pressures in our schools system. Whether we come from within the system or whether we are observers, we all acknowledge that in many areas there are competing pressures. This area is a perfect example. I am the first to acknowledge the increased strain on teachers and staff and education leaders within schools in coping with the extra pressures that students with significant disabilities impose on them by being mainstreamed. However, we have to acknowledge that there is increasing pressure from parents who want to ensure as normal, using that word advisedly, an education as possible for their children. Some of them will go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that their child is able to be educated within the local neighbourhood school. We have those competing pressures, and I acknowledge them. All we can seek to do is to get the balance as nearly right as possible.

There are some within the broader education community who believe that we should have no special schools at all and that all students should be mainstreamed. At the other end of the continuum, there are others who believe that many students with significant disabilities within neighbourhood schools ought to be put back into institutions or special schools. The Government's position is somewhere in between: that we should provide a continuum of services ranging from a continued operation and commitment to the importance of special schools through to mainstreaming with options like collocated units at a number of school facilities, such as Devitt Avenue and Salisbury Park in the north where we also have special class options. All those options ought to be provided as a system.

In relation to students with significant disabilities who have been mainstreamed, we have quarantined the special education tier 2 salaries. We inherited 406 salaries in that area and there has been a significant enrolment decline. On the basis of the agreement that we have with the union, we could

have used that as an excuse to reduce that number to about 370 or 380, but we have not used that excuse. We have deliberately maintained the 406 salaries to assist students with disabilities because we see it as a critical area for support. In addition, in the recent changes we have quarantined our special schools from cuts.

As regards the SSO formula for assistance to students with disabilities, we have quarantined that area from the reduction. Whilst there is a reduction in the overall formula, the formula for providing assistance to students with disabilities has been quarantined. We have quarantined this area from any budget reductions as much as we can.

I am the first to acknowledge that there are still pressures in the system. We have had a massive expansion under the student disability policy regarding language and communication disorder students. In that category there has been an increase of about 1 500 students in two years because of a more relaxed assessment attitude by some guidance officers in accepting students within that policy net. That has now been addressed. There are new consistent criteria which all guidance officers have to apply. Therefore, we do not have the situation which was occurring for a couple of years of principals and parents saying, 'This student has been assessed by that guidance officer in that area as eligible for support, yet another student with exactly the same type of problem and a different guidance officer has been assessed as being ineligible.' We have tried to address that inequity in the delivery of the service.

There is no easy solution to the issue that the member has raised. We have protected and maintained funding, and, wherever possible, we will try to increase the support, acknowledging the pressures that exist for teachers and staff in our schools.

Mr BRINDAL: Will the Minister explain at what stage the proposal in respect of the orphanage on Goodwood Road is at? I believe that the Unley council may have submitted an offer. I am sure that all the electors in Unley would like to know where that proposal is at. I believe the Minister might be able to shed some light on when the Unley council was first informed of the proposal, because I was given some information that suggests it may have been somewhat earlier than was first indicated.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The proposal for the Goodwood Orphanage is still subject of discussions among officers of the Unley council, officers for the Department for Education and Children's Services and other interested parties. It is fair to say that the Unley council maintains its position in relation to opposing the redevelopment. The Government has terminated the 12-month lease agreement it had with Unley council in relation to management of the open space at the orphanage. The 12-month period finishes in April next year. Until then, there are some restrictions on progress with the redevelopment of the orphanage. I understand that the Unley council—I am not part of its council meetings; the local member may know better than I—recently passed a resolution in support of purchasing the land other than the portions occupied by our buildings. We have indicated, as we have before, that we are not in a position to sell that part of the orphanage site which is the subject of the discussions with an agreement with Tabor College.

However, I know that the honourable member is interested in the north-eastern oval portion of the orphanage site. To my knowledge, we have no specific dollar offer from Unley council in relation to its intention or otherwise to purchase the north-eastern oval to protect it for open space for local

residents. I will not be locked in as Minister to anything, because in previous discussions with the council when it talked about purchasing various parts of the orphanage it wanted the Government either to give it or sell the land to it at a substantially reduced price lower than the Valuer-General's valuation for the site. I indicated that I was not prepared to do that. To my knowledge, at this stage we have not received an offer from the Unley council in relation to the north-eastern oval. That is an issue which the Unley council with its due processes will need to address as to whether or not it wants to make an offer to the Government. If we receive one we will obviously be prepared to consider it.

In relation to the honourable member's second question, I can give an initial response at this stage but I would like to check some documentation and provide a more detailed response later today. What the honourable member has indicated in relation to his question is correct. There was a meeting some time in June 1995 that I understand the member for Unley, representatives of the council, Tabor College and the Department of Education and Children's Services' officers attended. My recollection of the advice I have seen in the past about that—and that is why I need to check the documentation—is that the position the department put at that meeting was that a public meeting ought to be organised to allow public discussion and exposure of the proposal. My recollection—again I would need to clarify this—is that the Unley council at that stage said that it did not want that to occur because of impending local council elections. The only reason I need to clarify the dates is because I thought local council elections were held earlier than that; so, I am wondering whether my sequence of events is correct or whether the meeting was held earlier than that. I have seen advice somewhere in the department over the past 12 months which indicates that our proposals for a public consultation discussion were not proceeded with at that stage because representatives of the Unley council indicated to our officers that they did not want to proceed until after the council elections for Unley.

In respect of the other issue, I need to clarify my recollection of the events. The local member is in a position to better explain this than I. I understand that there may be something in the departmental records which indicates a position that the member for Unley put to the local council in respect of what its attitude might be in relation to the open space at the orphanage. I need to check that aspect of my recollection together with the timing of the events and the local council elections to ensure that my recollection of events is accurate. I would not want in any way to mislead members or the Committee.

Mr BRINDAL: I understand that under freedom of information a party asked for records. I have obtained a copy of those records. If the Minister checks DECS docket 1446/1/37 he will find that there was an in-confidence meeting on 6 May 1995 between the local council and Ron Danvers.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That makes more sense in terms of the sequence, because I suspect that local council elections are held in May. If my recollection is correct, that there is something in the documentation which indicates that we were asked not to proceed with a public consultation, meeting or exposure to the council of this issue, it must have been at that May meeting which was conducted rather than at the June meeting.

Mr BRINDAL: The documentation I have been given clearly shows that the Department of Education and

Children's Services and Tabor College were most anxious to have an open day as soon as possible to discuss the proposal with residents. The council asked that that not be done because it wanted to do it. That is critical, because when the council eventually held a discussion evening it was on the basis of attacking the Minister, the department and Tabor College for not discussing this and for conducting it in secret. If this documentation shows that the department was ready to do it from day 1, the public deserves to know that it was the Corporation of the City of Unley and not the Minister for Education and Children's Services which obfuscated on this matter.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Obviously I would be much happier if the Minister for Education and Children's Services comes out in a good light rather than anyone else. My recollection of the documentation is in accordance with what the member said in that it clearly indicated that the department and the associated parties, whether that be Ron Danvers, who was the architect, or Tabor College representatives, wanted at one stage to construct a model of the development at the orphanage for people to look at and ask questions about. Certainly, the documentation will support that proposition.

Ms WHITE: I am aware that on 17 May 1995 the Minister wrote to the House of Tabor and agreed to a payment plan for 34 per cent of the orphanage site; \$125 000 was to be paid by 30 June 1995 and \$1.125 million by 31 January 1996. Have these payments been received and, if not, why not?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am advised that the deposit has been received but that the final payment has not been made. I think, in part, that has depended upon the legal advice in relation to this agreement that we had with the Unley council. Under that agreement, the Unley council and the department jointly managed the open space. The Unley council argues that that gives it an ongoing interest of some sort in The Orphanage and that, until we give the council due notice, which is 12 months, and that 12 month period has expired, we are not able to do certain things. So, as a result of complicated legal manoeuvring, my understanding is that we have not been able to receive the subsequent payment.

Of all the companies, organisations and individuals that I have had to deal with, I have never known an organisation as accommodating as the Tabor College. It has been keen to pay the remaining approximately \$1 million to the department even though it knew that there were ongoing issues that needed to be resolved, because I had indicated that we expected to receive payments at certain periods and that those payments had been factored into our budget. This item is one of those that we talked about earlier regarding expected land sale revenue items. There was an expectation that we would receive that \$1 million, the Tabor College wants to pay it, but there is this problem of legal advice regarding when we can actually take the money from the college.

Ms WHITE: How often will the department use the new facilities built by Tabor; have agreements been reached concerning community access to the site, maintenance of the grounds and car parking, etc.; and will the Minister table copies of those documents?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There is no site documentation at this stage, so we cannot table anything, but in relation to the rate of usage, I think there is contemplated a figure up to a certain number of uses of the lecture theatres. It will really depend on a range of issues relating to the Tabor College's program and that of the Department for Education and

Children's Services. We have been guaranteed a number of uses, but my recollection is that there is the possibility of increased usage depending on whether or not the college happens to be using the facilities. In terms of access to the new facilities, the lecture theatres, etc., one of the problems that we have with The Orphanage is that we are restricted as to the number of people who can fit into the rooms and facilities. For example, when we have an enterprise bargaining meeting with the Chief Executive Officer and more than expected turn up, they have to hang from the ceiling and sit on the window ledges because of the smallness of the facility. These new facilities which we need are being provided at no capital cost and will provide additional benefit to the department, teachers and staff.

The other option might have been the Government having to spend some of its money to provide additional facilities at The Orphanage. That is one of the issues that has been missed in this whole debate. That is one of the options that the Government had: if it decided that it would have to provide these additional lecture-style facilities to accommodate bigger groups, it would have had to pay for that out of the capital works budget, and some schools would have missed out. In this way, we are getting the best of both worlds. We have certainly contemplated guaranteeing in some way extended periods of access to the open areas of the site.

Ms WHITE: You said there has been no capital cost to the department. Will the department pay the House of Tabor for that use; and, if so, how much?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am advised that one of the benefits of this deal is that we will get a guaranteed level of access to the facilities at no cost to the department. We are not clear about utilities and things like that: there might be a small cost, but we will need to check that. Regarding whether we will have to pay an ongoing annual rental charge, I am advised that we will not. That is one of the attractions for the department, teachers and staff.

Ms STEVENS: I wish to return to the subject of students with special needs. A few weeks ago, I attended a council meeting of the Elizabeth Grove Primary School. The notes I made at that meeting are as follows:

The guidance officer allocated to our school as part of a cluster of schools has been able to attend only four times to the beginning of June. Four assessments have been able to be done during that time. Four reports from outsourced psychologists have been reviewed and reinterpreted. The whole process ended up taking three months. We are waiting for assessments to be done after initial testing of the whole school by our own student review team and prioritising. There were 47 students receiving support from the school, and they were three years plus behind their chronological age; 16 of those students were currently on negotiated curriculum plans. Assessments on the waiting list, having received parental approval, are 13, including one from 1995.

Yesterday, I was provided with a final update, as follows:

As at 17 June 1996, at the current rate, we will never catch up. We have transient students and changing enrolments requiring constant reprioritisation.

Following the meeting last night, the school council wrote a letter which was faxed to me this morning. It states:

We believe that the students who are most disadvantaged at our school are the students with learning difficulties. As a result of the SSO cuts last year and earlier this year, the students with literacy difficulties are not receiving the same amount of support as they could. Our schools have effective student review teams and early intervention programs, but these are only possible due to the DSP (disadvantaged schools program) funding that we receive. If the DSP funding ceases, so will these very much needed support programs.

It has come to our attention that in the primary school there is no access to a speech pathologist and in the junior primary school only

students who have severe speech difficulties can be assessed. We have students who have moderate speech difficulties whose speech is affecting their literacy development, and those children cannot access a speech pathologist's support. We are also concerned by the waiting list our schools have for students to be assessed by the guidance officer and then the change in the criteria for negotiated curriculum plan support. Our council would like to know: why is the Government making it so difficult for students with learning needs to get extra help?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I understand the concerns that the parents are expressing, but I believe they need to be provided with all the information about what the Government is doing to try to address those needs. Let me say at the outset that, while the Government acknowledges that it is actually spending more, doing more and providing more resources to assist, it is still not in a position to be able to meet the great need that exists in schools in terms of students with learning difficulties. As I said earlier, this Government has given \$2 million in cash grants to schools. It will give \$3 million in cash grants to schools next year. This school has access to DSP funding. It may well have access to schoolcard funding also.

That was one of the schools I visited in relation to the additional assistance the Government is providing for the reading recovery program in this budget. With the additional funding we have provided in this budget, this Government has also provided an additional 12 speech pathologists' salaries in the three budgets. Under the previous Government, about 25 speech pathologists were allocated for school education in South Australia for the total of this State, and we will increase that to 34. Some of these positions potentially will be working across school education and children's services, so I am using that comparison advisedly. It gives you an idea of the order of magnitude of the significant increase in speech pathologists that this Government has provided.

In terms of school education, it is 25 up to 34, which is an increase of 30 per cent or so, at a time when we have been reducing expenditure in other areas. The total allocation for Education and Children's Services in speech pathology has been—or will be, with this budget increase—12 additional speech pathology positions. As we lose speech pathologists—they leave us or go interstate—one of the problems we have in areas such as the north-east and others is finding people who are prepared to replace them. That is an ongoing problem. It is not because the money is not there; we have the money. It is a question of getting people who are prepared to work for us as speech pathologists and to stay with us for an extended period.

We have increased the number of guidance officers by six over the substantive level of guidance officers that existed prior to the last election. I acknowledge that pressures remain in the system; I am not decrying or denying that. I am saying that parents ought to be told—and, as a result, honourable member's question, they will be, because she will obviously contact them—that, whilst we cannot resolve their problems overnight, we are trying to help with speech pathology, guidance officers, protecting special education salaries and \$3 million in cash grants to schools. As Mr Brindal indicated earlier, we are talking about trying to re-orient DSP programs, although in the case of Elizabeth Grove already they are targeting most of the money to literacy support. We are doing as much as we humanly can to try to target additional assistance and resources to schools.

I presume that Elizabeth Grove used whatever early assistance grant to provide additional SSO support for their

students in the classroom. I will be able to check that when I get the department to look at it. Clearly, there is an additional cash allocation that would allow them to purchase SSO hours and to provide support. When we contact the parents and the school council, eventually, we want to highlight to the school council all those things which we have done and which I am sure the principal and the staff continue to do. I hope also that they have taken up the option of using that grant to purchase SSO hours to provide extra assistance in the classroom to students with learning difficulties.

Ms STEVENS: The Minister said that he had increased the number of speech pathologists, but I refer to the fact that the Lyell McEwin Health Service and the Modbury Hospital do not offer speech pathology. So while the Minister may have increased the number of speech pathologists, the health system has pulled them back. The net result for people in the community, who do not actually see that education does this and health does that, is that there is a huge shortage out there for children with speech difficulties. For my people, you may have increased speech pathology, but the fact remains that—

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: You should congratulate me for that.

Ms STEVENS: I do congratulate you, but what I am saying is that the need is way outstripping what you have put in. I am saying that it is a huge social justice issue, and that is what my people are saying—that children with just moderate difficulties that only a small amount of input could fix get cast aside. That just compounds all the way up.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I sympathise, as I have already done, with the parents and teachers who have concerns about these sorts of issues and who want to see more assistance. As Minister for Education and Children's Services and being in charge of this department, I can unashamedly say that we have given absolute priority to the early years strategy, and the Chief Executive Officer and other senior officers will know the lengths to which we go to try to free up additional resources in terms of the early years strategy, trying to find additional assistance for children with learning difficulties. As I have said on a number of occasions, we have increased that cash grant from nothing to \$2 million. Next year it will be \$3 million. I can assure the honourable member that, if we remain a Government, I remain a Minister and this remains my portfolio, in our next Parliament the direction will be clear—that we continue to try to provide additional assistance through cash grants and other help for schools to enable them to provide additional assistance for children with learning difficulties.

Ms WHITE: I refer to Program Estimates (page 126). Last year, the Minister said that 104 500 children were receiving schoolcard in 1994. On 2 January 1996, the Minister announced that the 1995 number was 96 000 children. How many children have been granted schoolcards so far in 1996? What was the actual cost, and what is the budget for this year?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The latest estimate is 93 900. We would have to take on notice the total cost, but it is obviously significantly less than the total cost when it was at 104 000. I will take that question on notice.

Ms WHITE: On 2 January 1996, the Minister announced new criteria for schoolcard to eliminate rorts. What are these new criteria? How many people were rorting the system and, of those, how many were sole parent pensioners?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There has been another reduction in the number of students on schoolcard in 1996 when compared to 1995. We made a range of changes in the criteria

for 1996; for example, medium and high level income earners who could use negative gearing to reduce the level of their declared income. Again, we have endeavoured to wipe out the schoolcard rort so that that did not remain an option for some people. I am sure the honourable member will be aware of the claims that are made by families that someone who has just come back from an interstate holiday or bought a car or something has waltzed up to the school the next week and qualified for schoolcard. Some of these were doing so on the basis of negative gearing. It is hard to tell what are the individual categories. There has been a significant reduction in the number of schoolcard recipients for 1996 compared to 1995.

Whether they were the negative gearers or others, I do not know. We do not have a breakdown as to why they no longer qualify, but all those changes that we implemented have resulted in reductions, savings and cutting out of rorts that existed within the system. It was said that over 90 000 children in South Australia qualified for schoolcard, whereas the latest figure is about 45 per cent. The figure for all families in Government schools qualifying for schoolcard will probably be between 43 per cent and 44 per cent.

I accept that we have been through a relatively difficult economic time, but no-one in South Australia, other than perhaps members of the Labor Party, would argue that almost half of all families with children in Government schools in South Australia are so badly off that the taxpayers of South Australia should be obliged to pay for their free schoolcards. I just do not accept that—

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: A lot of my own research. One can look at the income data and all the ABS data. What research has the member for Elizabeth done to demonstrate—

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Exactly. I have done exactly the same sort of research but probably in more detail than the honourable member. As I said, virtually everyone—other than some members of the Labor Party, because some members of the Labor Party have acknowledged this privately to me—believed that this was an area in which the Government had to crack down. But there is no doubt that one cannot accept that almost half of all families with children in Government schools in South Australia experience such difficult financial circumstances that the taxpayers must pay for the free schoolcard for them. I can accept that members of the Labor Party disagree with that proposition; that is their right, but I will never be convinced that the number is as high as that. It is a significant percentage. We are continuing to provide a significant number of students and families with free schoolcards. This budget increases the schoolcard rate for next year.

Ms WHITE: Will that increase in schoolcard meet inflation and higher school fees; will it meet the level of compulsory fees announced by the Minister; and, if not, why not?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It certainly meets inflation. It is a 3 per cent increase, going as it does from 103 to 106 for primary education and 160 to 165 for secondary education, and that is the projected inflation rate. So, yes, it does meet the inflation rate. The level of schoolcard has never met, even under the Labor Government, the level of school fees in all schools because that varies, obviously. It has never been the case that the level of schoolcard meets the level of the fee or charge that has been levied by a school.

Mr BRINDAL: Under the previous Government's social justice strategy the Minister issued a directive to school principals that where school fees were outstanding no action was being taken to recoup the debt, and that meant that a number of families who unfortunately were not on schoolcard had to bear the entire costs of running the school, not for those families who were on schoolcard but for those who simply chose not to pay. I know that you, Minister, were going down the road of making some changes to this arrangement. What changes have been made and have they been successful?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The honourable member is correct: a lot of criticism came from parents. As I said last year, a number of the parents and parent communities who were strongest in their criticisms came from the northern suburbs through to the farther southern suburbs, rather than the near southern suburbs. Those parent communities seemed to be the strongest in their criticism of the failure of those parents who could afford to pay but who had deliberately chosen not to. I think everyone conceded that the system and the Government needed to make provision for those families who could not afford to pay.

However, families were angry when they saw other families that could pay the school fee and make their contribution persistently refusing to do so. I know that, under the previous Government, I received complaints as shadow Minister from some of the big secondary schools that they had bad debts or unpaid charges and fees up to \$30 000, and that is a significant sum of money for those schools and school communities in terms of organising their finances.

The Government, as the honourable member would know, has implemented a policy of materials and services charges up to a certain level and payment from those who can afford to pay can be enforced. So, potentially, legal action can be taken to enforce payment.

Every year the department tables a statistical summary which supports the program estimates and which includes a range of statistics on enrolments, schoolcards, school sizes, student-teacher ratios and school cost data. I know that we cannot table material but through you, Sir, and your officers, I provide members with a copy of the statistical summary supporting the estimates for 1996-97.

Mr BRINDAL: Minister, you said that some schools had bad debts totalling \$30 000. We know that the Minister of the day instructed that schools could not recoup that from the parents, but I need to be clear: did the Education Department then provide the shortfall in the money, or did the last Government insist that other parents pay the shortfall in the money, and would the Minister consider this to be a socially just arrangement, especially in schools that are socio-economically disadvantaged?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Government did not pick up the tab of unpaid debts, so that the burden rested with those parents who complied and paid the school charge or levy. That is why there was so many complaints from those parents because, for every parent who refused to pay, even though they could afford to pay, it meant an increased impost on those parents who were paying. So, in essence, some parents were paying a higher fee or charge because some others who could pay had refused to do so.

Mr Brindal: Does this mean that if, for example, 50 per cent of some of those schools that were already on schoolcard had a doubtful debt provision of \$30 000, and given that what the Minister will pay for schoolcard fees is fixed, the provision for bad and doubtful debt might have been divided

by something like 20 per cent of the parent population of a disadvantaged school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is certainly correct to say that a small percentage of parents would have accepted the final burden because of the analysis that the honourable member has done; that is, you would have to exclude those who were on schoolcard, and, if you then had a certain percentage that did not pay, the remaining parents would be the people who had to—

Mr Brindal interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The remaining parents—and some of the schools in the electorate of the member for Elizabeth would be 80 per cent and plus—would have to pay a correspondingly increased burden for the operation of the school.

Mr Brindal interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As always.

Membership:

Mr Venning substituted for Mr Scalzi.

Ms STEVENS: I return to the subject of students with special needs and put more information on the record about schools in my area and the issues they are facing in trying to provide education for students. The first issue that people raise with me is that, because the Minister has contracted the criteria to qualify for negotiated curriculum plans, there is an ever-decreasing number of students who can get into the assistance bracket and that students with ever more severe learning difficulties are the only ones who can be dealt with. I refer to Greenwith Primary School, which in one term has had nine hours allocation. It did five assessments and four of the children were knocked back for speech pathology. They were referred to Lyell McEwin and Modbury Hospitals but they could get nothing. Those kids are significantly behind their age level.

I refer also to Elizabeth Downs Junior Primary School where 20 out of 160 students are on negotiated curriculum plans, but over 50 per cent of students there could benefit from help in basic literacy and learning. At Elizabeth East Primary School 12 per cent of the student population are on negotiated curriculum plans, yet it has been stated that 4 per cent of students across the State will be supported. I am saying that in the schools in my electorate huge numbers are not being accommodated and are being set back in their early years. This will have devastating effects on them throughout their school life.

The Minister mentioned cash grants of \$2 million and \$3 million. He also mentioned that last year \$2 million was allocated on a per capita basis, but will he ensure that the \$3 million this year takes into account some of the complexities faced by students in these categories? We need to distribute this money on the basis of need so that schools such as mine and schools in other electorates across our State with this great need can at least look forward to some services?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have already indicated that the Government is looking at new criteria for the allocation of the \$3 million. We are considering the basis of need, that is, education need identified potentially by the use of the basic skills test. The member would have a view that many of her schools (although she did not mention it) probably have a significant number of students who have been identified under the basic skills test as falling within skill band 1. If that is the case and if the Government does proceed down the path that I have indicated might be an option, I am sure the member will be delighted to see that some of her schools

could, on a relative basis, gain additional support because they might well have additional education need. Certainly, as Minister I am keen to look at indicators of education need, such as the basic skills test, as opposed just to income or schoolcard measurements, which has been the traditional way for allocating or determining need in the system. That will be one good message the member can take back to her schools.

I can only repeat that the Government has put in additional assistance, that is, \$3 million for speech pathology, reading recovery and all the sorts of areas to which I referred earlier in terms of trying to cope with some of the problems that the member and her constituents have identified.

Another important point to make is that I am advised that there has been no change to the criteria for the negotiated curriculum plans. I talked earlier about the language and communication disability criteria. I am advised that the interpretation of that has been made consistent by all guidance officers. In some areas we had guidance officers who were interpreting it freely or loosely and ensuring that lots and lots of students and children were being accepted into the student disability policy, whereas in other areas it was being interpreted as it was meant to be interpreted. Therefore, some students in that area were being excluded and not deemed to be eligible, and they and their families were complaining about the inequity of all this when the guidance officer in another area was allowing students into the policy.

With the support and endorsement of principals' representatives, the Government has made it as consistent an application as we can. We have not made any reduction in salaries, but there has been an explosion of about 1 500 students in this category.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The need is there in relation to providing assistance, but we are saying that they should not all be herded into the student with disability policy.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: My point is that we are providing that assistance through cash grants to schools, because they are students with learning difficulties. They are behind in terms of their literacy performance. That is the measure that the honourable member used: that they are up to three years behind their chronological reading age, so they are students with poor literary performance. However, they are not students as defined by the student with disability policy, which I do not think has been changed since I have been Minister. It is a policy that the previous Labor Government was implementing within schools with the same allocation of salaries. We have not changed the criteria in any way.

Between 1993 to 1995 there has been this explosion in the number in that category. They are not being taken out of the policy at the moment but, if you put an extra 1 500 people into the bucket of salaries of 406, it means that those who should be in the policy are the ones who will get less because others have been placed into that category when, frankly, the criteria would not have allowed it.

There are a couple of options. The department and the principals' association representatives agreed that the best option was to ensure that that category was interpreted as it should be. We have left in the policy those students who have already been allowed to get in, although some people may have complained about that. We have left those students in but, in terms of additional students, we have made sure as much as we can that that particular language and disorder category is interpreted as consistently as it can be across the State.

Even the member would agree that, whatever the category and however it is implemented, it should be as consistent as possible and not be that, simply because someone is in a particular area and they happen to know a particular guidance officer who allows them to get into the policy and get an allocation, such a person should be advantaged when compared to others, in relation to whom the guidance officer interprets it as it is meant to be interpreted.

Ms STEVENS: I have no problem with that at all. It is obviously the way things need to run. My point, however, is that, whether students should be in that category or whether they require help with their literacy, there is a huge need in our schools and it is not being addressed to the extent required.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I acknowledge that we are doing as much as we can, within the budget we have, to address the need. We are providing additional resources. There have been no cutbacks in relation to speech pathology, guidance officers, special ed salaries, reading recovery and all those areas about which we have spoken. In fact, there have been increases in most of those areas as we try to meet the need. I acknowledge that we are not able to meet the needs of all those students, and we will have to do more with the classroom teachers and the way in which we approach these sorts of issues within the classroom as well.

We cannot accept that the only response has got to be all the time that students have to be taken out of the classroom and provided with one on one assistance. There is a range of options and that will be required for some but, with others—that is what the learning difficulties support team is all about—we must try to provide additional assistance to classroom teachers in terms of how they can cope with children with learning difficulties within their classroom environment.

A number of educators will argue passionately against reading recovery. Some of the principals from the member's electorate that I met with her know the people who argue against reading recovery. They argue from a education ideology which says that the classroom teacher should own the issues in relation to their classroom and that withdrawing into reading and recovery, one on one, is part but not all of the way to go. Certainly, that is part of the argument that has been put to me as Minister by those who oppose programs like reading recovery. There are still people who oppose reading recovery within our broader education community.

Ms STEVENS: I will refer now to schoolcard. I noticed that in the press release the Minister talked about schoolcard rorts being eliminated and I listened to the answer given to my colleague the member for Taylor. To quote one statement in the press release, the Minister mentioned that schoolcard was originally intended to provide financial assistance to those families in difficult financial circumstances. I will raise some issues raised with me by people in my electorate in relation to this issue. Through some of the changes made, the Minister may have removed from some of the people in that catchment group the ability to have access to schoolcard.

To give an example, one of the things that happened this year was a cut off point for applying for schoolcard (I think that it was by 15 March that people had to have their forms in). It has been raised with me that in schools where you have a high transient population people are missed—they come and go from schools and move from place to place. I certainly have schools like that in my electorate and no doubt there are other schools in the State where that is a concern. Those students miss out as they move from one school to another

and the money does not follow them. People who are made unemployed part way through a year have no access to a schoolcard. Schools such as Para West Adult Campus, where students come in and begin courses midway through the year, are also in that targeted group. Has the Minister any evidence that suggests that he may have unintentionally reduced the accessibility to schoolcard for people who deserve it? Could that have been a result of some of the things implemented this year?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have not seen any evidence of that, but if the honourable member has examples of such I will investigate it. We have a hardships provision in relation to the administration of the schoolcard policy. I have a recollection that a lot more than a handful of people have been accepted under the hardship provision. In the administration of it we have sought, within reason, to be as compassionate as possible. The honourable member talks of someone paying a school fee at the start of the year in January or February and perhaps in October or November becomes unemployed. They have already made the payment and have been employed throughout the year. They have made the payment, have adjusted their budget accordingly to make their payment at the start of the school year and in October they become unemployed. The honourable member is suggesting that because of that the department and the Government ought to in effect repay the schoolcard for those families by making a payment. That is the suggestion she has made. That can be a position she adopts, but it is not a position that I am adopting.

The honourable member talked about people moving from school to school. There are issues in relation to that. In relation to schoolcard, the students in the family are able to have free schoolcard at the first school from where they came. When they move to another school later in the year—

Ms STEVENS: Or three or four schools.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: To take the example of one school, I would have thought that they might be the sort of cases considered under the hardship provisions of the department. If they can demonstrate that they do not have any money, those cases might be considered under the hardship provisions. It is not a case of missing out. They would have had free schoolcard at taxpayers' expense at the first school they were at.

Ms STEVENS: To explain further, schools have had to go out and chase people in the community to get them to sign the forms by 15 March. In some areas there are many families in crisis and the routine of going to school each day, filling out the forms and doing all those sort of things is not there. Schools had to go out chasing. The transient families do not attend very often and move from school to school. There are significant numbers of them. That category is being overlooked and they get lost in the process.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I would need to take advice as to whether they are being accommodated under the hardship provisions. We have hardship provisions and my recollection of the figures is that there may have been up to 3 000 cases accepted under the hardship provisions and the department has demonstrated that it is prepared to look at a number of examples of hardship. Whether that includes some of the examples about which the honourable member is talking I am not sure and, if she has examples of difficult areas not currently being catered for, certainly the department and the Government is prepared to consider them. With a number of these changes we have prevented a number of families getting

access to the schoolcard system at taxpayers' expense when, frankly, their financial circumstances did not merit it.

Ms STEVENS: My last question is in relation to schoolcard but from another angle, namely, the issues of managing schoolcard for schools with high proportions of students on schoolcard. I refer to the Freemont Elizabeth City High School where 580 out of its 880 students are on schoolcard. Every form has to be checked and verified. With the EDSAS data package all the information has to be entered every year. State Supply do not print the cards that have to be used for the noting down of these details and schools have to print their own. The school raised with me the fact that when they questioned this with State Supply its officers were surprised that they had so many students to deal with. That school has said that no account is taken of the extra work involved with a school with a lot of students on schoolcard and that we ought to add to that the point I made before that, when there is a 15 March deadline, officers from the school and other schools in my electorate went out into the community to try to chase up families to get them to fill out the form to qualify. Officers of the school had to sit down and fill out the form for people. The point I make in relation to schoolcard and managing it in schools where a high proportion of students are on it is that there is no real understanding or resourcing given to those schools acknowledging the extra time and extra amount of effort that that requires.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In relation to the query with State Supply, we will take up that issue in relation to the cards. I have no knowledge of that here. Some other agencies' officers are surprised at the extent of the need that exists in many of our schools, so it does not surprise me to hear that that might have been the response from another agency as they are not working with our schools all the time. That is not an excuse: I am acknowledging that may well have been the case. As to why State Supply (Services SA) does not print the cards and schools are required to do it, I am prepared to pursue that issue and see what we can do to remedy the dilemma. If the member is suggesting that the Government should make some cash allocation to schools to assist them in collecting the schoolcard, given the priorities of spending money on speech pathology and early years assistance and providing extra administrative support, whilst I understand her argument, I would always come down on the basis of putting extra money into speech pathology and such areas rather than the area that the member has identified on behalf of schools.

Ms STEVENS: I hear what you are saying. However, schools with high proportions of students on schoolcard not only have speech pathology and basic skills tests which are lower than others, but they have other complexities in administration, and it is all part of the social justice issues in those schools.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The complexities are one of the reasons why we provide additional assistance to schools. Schoolcard salaries, DSP program funding and all that additional assistance is provided because of the complexities of the schools about which you are talking. I do not think that the avid readers of *Hansard* ought to leave their reading of the Estimates Committee today with the notion that the Government is not doing anything to acknowledge the complexities of schools in the member's electorate. We are spending millions of dollars endeavouring to address the complexities. One issue correctly addressed by the member for Unley is whether the targeting of the assistance that we are providing is achieving the educational improvements that

we want in our schools. That is a critical issue in judging the effectiveness of the millions of dollars of additional assistance that is going into many of our schools.

Mr VENNING: I refer to page 127 of the Program Estimates—'Services for Aboriginal Children'. Can the Minister explain the meaning of the description and the figures: classroom instruction in schools, 140.2; administration and instructional support, 179.5; curriculum development and advisory services, 15.2; and Aboriginal services in children's services, 15.6? Are there more administration and instructional support staff than actual teachers?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That is a good question. I will ask the Chief Executive Officer to respond.

Mr Ralph: In Aboriginal schools as well as teachers we have Aboriginal education workers. They work in support of the classroom teacher with people of their own culture. In the main they support Anglo-Saxon teachers who are working with Aboriginal children. We believe it is important that those teachers should be accompanied by Aboriginal workers who are often not just there for support, but to provide for the welfare of the children and guidance to the classroom teacher on Aboriginal cultural matters. That is why that line is a higher line. It is because with one teacher there may be two Aboriginal education workers.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There is another brief note here which says that we have 165 AEWs employed at various fractions of times. They are not necessarily full-time equivalents.

Mr Ralph: Besides Aboriginal education workers, there are Aboriginal resource teachers. There is a range of special support for the classroom teacher in Aboriginal schools.

Mr VENNING: What is the teacher-adult student ratio in Aboriginal education?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: If one defines it as being in the Anangu schools, it is 1:12, but there are Aboriginal students in a number of schools throughout the rest of South Australia and they will be part of the normal classroom formulae which apply to all schools and there is tier 2 support to provide additional assistance.

Mr VENNING: I refer to page 136 of the Program Estimates. Under '1996/97 Specific Targets/Objectives,' it states:

The DECS plan for Aboriginal education for 1997-1999 will be completed and negotiations for the 1997-99 Commonwealth-State Aboriginal resources agreement in accordance with the national Aboriginal education policy will be undertaken.

What is the expected timetable for this objective?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The department's Aboriginal education plan will respond to the priorities outlined in the Ministerial Council task force report on the national strategy for the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 1996 to the year 2001. That is the timeframe over which we anticipate working.

Mr VENNING: I should like to ask a general question about the Tanunda Primary School. I understand that earlier today the Minister mentioned the figure of \$3.5 million for the capital works program, and I am very pleased about that. What is the current timetable for the beginning of the construction and when will we see the first bricks being laid?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I indicated earlier, we have had some ongoing problems with regard to the attitude of the local council in opposing the location of the Tanunda Primary School at the new recreation centre site. The latest estimate in the capital works budget paper is that we are hoping to commence work in October 1996 and that completion will be

in November 1997. I hasten to add that that will be on the basis that everything goes smoothly with Services SA and the local council. I understand that there have been productive discussions with the local school council and the community. In that area we are getting tremendous cooperation.

As I said to members of the local council—and it is not something I have not said to their face—I really think now that they have lost their argument in terms of the location. It is important for the council to now move behind the Government, the department and the school council and support the location of the school facility in the new site, to expedite matters for the benefit of students at Tanunda.

Mr VENNING: Are we having success with those negotiations, or is the Government locked into a position where more negotiations are necessary?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I understand that the council still opposes the location of the school at the new site. As the member knows (because he is better versed in planning matters than I) that will mean that the department will have to go through some more complicated planning and legal procedures to commence the project. Hopefully, the local member's influence can be brought to bear, as the newly preselected candidate for Schubert—considerably enhanced as a result of last night's discussion. So, he may well bring that new found long term power and influence to bear with the local council. The issue has now been lost and this is now a question of whether every hurdle can be placed in our way to delay the project, to the detriment of the students and families in Tanunda, or whether the local member and others can put some pressure on the local council to say, 'All right, we know where you have been; you have lost that argument, how about removing the hurdles now and putting your shoulder to the wheel with the department, the local member and with everyone else and try to get the school up and running within the time frame we have.'

Ms WHITE: Minister, I have perused the recently tabled blue folder entitled 'Department for Education and Children's Services Statistical Summary'. I refer to page 7 where there is a table: 'Percentage apparent retention rates mid-year to year 12 full-time students'. The 1995 retention rate is 62.9 per cent. Turning to page 8, when the figure is broken down for male and female participation retention, the figure for male retention is somewhere in the mid 50s. I am sure that you will agree, Minister, that this is an indictment. Will you comment on what is happening here and what action you will take to reverse this trend?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I have often referred the shadow Minister to these issues, let me refer the member for Taylor to the proviso at the bottom of page 7. These figures are for full-time students only. It should be noted that of all the mainland States South Australia has the largest percentage of part-time students in year 12. These students are not included in the apparent retention rates, as the calculation includes only full-time year 12 students. One of the dilemmas in relation to these figures and the way the Bureau of Statistics calculates them is that there are almost 3 000 real people in schools doing year 12 part-time whom the Bureau of Statistics ignores. The Bureau of Statistics uses the 7 000 or so full-time year 12 students and calculates the retention rate on that basis. I do not understand why the Bureau of Statistics chooses to do that. I would have thought that the full-time equivalents of the part-time students would be a sensible proposition. But there are 3 000 real people doing year 12 that these figures ignore.

As I said, I have highlighted to the shadow Minister, the union and many others that, because we in South Australia, together with Tasmania, have by far and away the highest percentage of part-time students, this calculation disadvantages South Australia if done in this way without including in some way the part-time students. As a result of decisions the previous Government took, we have engaged a policy of deliberately encouraging students to undertake part-time year 12 studies. The member for Elizabeth referred earlier to the Para West campus. Most of the students at that campus are doing year 12 on a part-time basis. In terms of the retention rate figures, it does not make too much sense to me to seek to ignore these students who are there. The figures have increased markedly. The figure for part-time students in 1990 before the introduction of SACE was only about 1 300 students. The number of part-time students has more than doubled in the last five or six years, through a conscious policy of encouraging part-time completion of SACE or year 12.

The second issue which has not been addressed is that between 1994 and 1995 there was a very significant reduction in the number of year 12 repeaters. The figures I have seen from the department show that in 1994 there were 1 400 students who were year 12 repeaters. In other words, they did year 12 and were repeating it because they could not get into university or TAFE or could not get a job. In 1995 we had only 700 year 12 repeaters. In 1994 large numbers of people re-entered school to repeat year 12, because they could not get into university or TAFE or get jobs. We had 700 fewer students repeat in 1995 because the university scores in some areas dropped by up to five or six aggregate points. I have heard some unfavourable descriptions of what the universities were doing in 1995. I will not use those in Parliament, but in 1995, in essence, there were some courses where the universities accepted entrants with a score of 38 out of 70, which was way down on the 1994 figure. We had large numbers of students who did not repeat year 12 because they got into university or TAFE or obtained jobs as a result of the improved economic conditions. Whatever it was, they did not return to school to repeat year 12 because of those factors.

Again, that is only an argument in relation to the comparison between 1994 and 1995, which is the most significant example of the decrease. There was a very significant decrease between 1994 and 1995: 75 per cent to 63 per cent in Government schools, because the retention rate was actually 71 per cent for the whole of South Australia when you include non-government schools which have a much higher retention rate figure to year 12. So, those two factors need to be taken into consideration.

The Government shares the concerns in relation to this. Anecdotally, some argue that the perceived difficulty of the South Australian Certificate of Education is one of the reasons why boys, in particular, are dropping out and not completing years 11 and 12. This evening we will hear from Dr Jan Keightley that the Senior Secondary Assessment Board, as part of its improvement process, will consider these issues as part of its review over the next year. There is also a suggestion for a long term research project in collaboration with Flinders University and a Commonwealth ARC grant (if they get it) to examine why young people drop out. We will then be able to test whether our anecdotal evidence from some schools is correct in that some young people, boys in particular, perceive that year 11 and year 12 SACE is too hard, difficult and onerous in terms of lodging assessments of projects on a continuing basis.

They have established very early that the requirements will not be met for their particular subject. They know that they will not meet that particular requirement. Anecdotally, some are suggesting that that is one of the reasons. We want to look at that. Our officers will be part of any investigation. The Senior Secondary Assessment Board is taking a very close look at this in terms of whether or not there will be something about the structure and the degree of complexity of SACE that might be one of the contributing factors. We have to look at what has been different in South Australia over the past three or four years. We argue passionately that we spend more dollars per head on education than any other State of Australia. We have more teachers per student than any other State of Australia. We have more SSOs per student than the national average by up to 12 per cent. So, when compared with the other States we cannot be below the national average because of resources, because we are putting in more than the other States. So, that cannot be the explanation, although simplistically the unions and others may seek to argue that that is the case. We are putting in more dollars, we have more teachers, lower class sizes and more SSOs than the other States, so other factors must be brought to bear in relation to this, and we have to look at those. Together with the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia we will try to do that in both the short and the long term.

Ms STEVENS: Why has the number of students in years 12 and 13 fallen by 3 915 during the past two years when ABS statistics show that the number of people aged 15 to 19 in employment in South Australia also fell from 44 000 in December 1994 to 43 800 in December 1995?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: If they have gone to university, they will not be unemployed or in the work force. In 1995, we had a significant drop in the quota levels for enrolments at some of the universities. Some courses accepted students with marks of 38 out of 70 to try to increase numbers in universities, whereas in 1994 for the same courses you had to have 42 or 43 marks out of 70. I am not sure what the TAFE figure is. Anecdotally, someone has suggested that there might have been an increase in TAFE numbers, but I do not have those figures at hand. Certainly, in relation to universities there was a significant change.

I would like my officers to have a close look at the figures to which the honourable member refers, because it depends on when you actually quote the employment and unemployment figures. Are they actually taken at the time when people chose to enrol or not enrol? If they are being done in January and February and are compared with January and February, you are comparing like with like, but if you are dragging out figures at some other time of the year it is not a valid comparison. We will look at the figures provided by the honourable member and see what sort of an analysis we can come up with.

Ms STEVENS: How many students, including adult re-entry students, attending secondary schools and colleges in South Australia are recipients of Austudy; what advice has the Minister sought on the effect of potential cuts to Austudy students on enrolments in senior secondary education in South Australia; and what submission has the Minister made to the Federal Minister (Senator Amanda Vanstone) about the effect of any cut in Austudy on enrolments in South Australian senior secondary education?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We have been in contact with the Minister's office, and the advice that we have received is that no decision has been made regarding a cut in Austudy and that the Minister is not in a position to make any other

comment. So, we know nothing more than that. Obviously we will have to wait with interest regarding the Commonwealth budget. There has been a lot of speculation which has caused unnecessary alarm in respect of many other areas of Commonwealth Government expenditure which, in the end, have not come to fruition. Some may, but others have already been put to rest as being unnecessary scaremongering. Only the Minister has been quoted regarding Austudy, and she was certainly quoted regarding higher education. In relation to Austudy, a purported leak from a purported newspaper which purportedly went to a meeting of the Expenditure Review Committee was leaked to the media, and the Minister refused to comment.

Regarding higher education, I think you can say that the Minister did speak to Vice-Chancellors, and some of the press publicity that ensued resulted from comments that she allegedly made at a dinner meeting, which I did not attend. However, I am advised regarding Austudy that that is not the case, and the Minister has steadfastly refused to say anything other than she is not prepared to comment one way or another on these sorts of issues. The union claims—as does, I think, the shadow Minister—that there are 40 000 secondary students receiving Austudy. I might be doing the shadow Minister an injustice, but I am certain that the union has made this claim, because I met with the union recently at one of our regular meetings to discuss a range of issues, and this was one of the issues that we discussed.

One of the Vice-Presidents of the union mentioned this figure of 40 000 or 50 000, and I know that the Australian Democrat Senator has used that figure as well. I am happy to check that figure. Obviously, it is an important issue from our point of view. We do not take the view that we want to see Austudy for senior secondary students disappear. As shadow Minister, I remember putting the public position with the then Commonwealth Minister that the implementation in relation to age levels, as it was then a 15 to 16 cut-off as opposed to year levels, was disadvantaging our students in South Australia compared with Eastern States. It is an important initiative. It was mentioned in a report in either the *Melbourne Age* or *The Sydney Morning Herald* that the purported leaked document stated that Austudy would be replaced by some other form of assistance. So, the purported leaked document referred not just to the abolition of Austudy but to the operation of a different scheme to provide assistance for students and families in need.

Mr BRINDAL: I refer to the statistical summary on Aboriginal schools and to subprogram resources on page 127 under 'Services for aboriginal children'. According to documentation, in those schools that are declared Aboriginal schools there are 97.6 teachers with a total enrolment of 854 full-time students, which means that the ratio of teachers to student on a rough average is less than one in 10 or about one in eight. I do not know of many teachers who are receiving \$70 000—I think that is their claim—so the wages bill must include ancillary and support staff. I would be interested to know what are the true staffing levels in some of those schools. I do not mean just the teacher student ratio but the ratio of human resources to students in those schools. I draw the Minister's attention to Nepabunna School which has an enrolment of 17 students and 3.2 teachers and a primary school which, I believe, still works with Leigh Creek for the secondary component. At an equivalent distance up the road is Marree Aboriginal School which has 21 students and two additional teachers for four students. It has a teaching component of 5.2.

That is not counting these 42.6 teachers who are missing—presumably they are Aboriginal teachers who are not in Aboriginal schools but teaching in other places within the system—and, according to my calculation, the whole 179.5 administrative and support staff. Quite frankly, the member for Custance raised this issue, and I have been looking at it. It alarms me. What money is being spent in Aboriginal education? How many people are working in there and for what benefit? Most of the Aboriginal communities do not believe that they are making quantum leaps forward in education. If this is the investment we are putting in, perhaps we are not getting good return.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As Minister, I acknowledge the especially difficult circumstances that exist in a number of these areas. There is no doubting that, as a system, we must provide significant additional resources to the Aboriginal schools and to Aboriginal education generally. In response to the honourable member's question on the disadvantaged schools program, I mentioned that the rigour and the accountability that we will have to bring to bear in terms of the millions of dollars we spend on that schools program equally should be brought to bear on the Aboriginal education programs. We all acknowledge, and I as Minister acknowledge, that we have to spend considerable resources on Aboriginal education with the sorts of plans we are talking about over five and six years to try to lift the literacy, numeracy and general education level of Aboriginal students. I know the member for Unley, with his support for Wiltja and other programs, would strongly agree.

However, in five years, in 1999 or 2000, I would hate to be the Minister who reports that we had spent millions of dollars but that our basic skills test results for Aboriginal students compared to those of everybody else still demonstrated that we had made no quantifiable improvement at all in the basic skill areas. The Chief Executive Officer mentioned to me earlier that there are other measures as well. We have other measures involving the Aboriginal education plan and measures as simple as attendance at schools to evaluate the effectiveness of our programs. Ultimately, it is a question of the basic skills with which we can provide them so that they can engage in further education study or in work in their future life.

With regard to the comments I made earlier today in relation to the disadvantaged schools programs, I indicated that the same sort of accountability and preparedness to look frankly at what we are doing needs to be brought to bear in relation to Aboriginal education programs, both Commonwealth and State.

With all these programs, we cannot go on patting ourselves on the back saying, 'We are doing good deeds, because we are spending lots of money' if we cannot quantify the fact that we are improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and Aboriginal students. If we can quantify it and if the programs are working, I as Minister will be the first at the national level to argue for continuation of these programs in this way.

However, if we demonstrate that these programs are not proving to be effective, then I will be the first still to argue for the additional resources but on the condition that they are changed, targeted and highlighted in the particular areas of the basic skills, early intervention and literacy programs that Aboriginal students and children will need in terms of being able to engage in further study and work.

I will take advice as to why one school has five teachers for 21 students and another school three for 17. I understand

there is a set formula. It may well be that there was a decline in the number of students at the time the census was taken and the number increased after that because, as the honourable member would know, Aboriginal families can and do move around. I will take some advice on that matter and provide a response.

Mr Ralph: When we are looking at the education of Aboriginal children, we are in many ways looking at a range of aggregated disadvantages. We are looking not just at children who are disadvantaged because of their location but also at the compounding factors relating to health matters. In these schools that are now working with the advancement of Aboriginal children, we are working closely with the other Government agencies. Unless we are able to raise the health standard for young Aboriginal children, it will be very hard for them to come along to school and be able to sustain the energy and to concentrate through the normal rigours of a school day. If they are suffering from *otitis media* and ailments of that kind, Australia has failed Aboriginal people.

Our staff do much more than teach children when they are in these very remote communities. These teachers are also working around the clock, seven days a week, as community leaders and support people across not just education but working with health and welfare people as well.

Mr BRINDAL: I acknowledge all that the Minister and the Chief Executive Officer have said. I am sure the Minister and the Chief Executive Officer would acknowledge that there are places such as Cook which have all the same problems. The children might not be Aboriginal, but the member for Elizabeth adequately highlighted the need for itinerant children's specific educational needs in those sorts of schools as well. I see it as a system problem.

No member in this Chamber would deny the need for social justice moneys nor the need for children to be healthy in order to receive a good education. We are examining the education line, and it brings me to this question: why is it that so much money has to be taken from education and applied to social justice measures when surely the Minister for Family and Community Services should be addressing things such as poverty and should be paying for schoolcard. We are examining the education line; surely the social justice measures belong in Government absolutely.

However, the health of Aborigines belongs to the Health Minister. The poverty needs of Aborigines belong to the Minister for Family and Community Services. Yet we are here with not enough teachers, school assistants or anything, arguing and all acknowledging that some of these needs must be met. Why are they met from the education budget? Why do some of these other Ministers not pick up some of their portfolio responsibilities?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In the ideal world, what the member for Unley has suggested may well be the case. The practical reality of what is out there is that if we in education do not address these issues, with all the additional pressures it places on us and the fact that it means there is less money, as the honourable member has indicated, to spend on the number of classroom teachers, class sizes and all those sorts of issues, then those needs would not be addressed by other agencies. I am not making any criticism of my ministerial colleagues in relation to that, because this situation has existed for many years. It is not something which is recent or which has occurred in the past two years. The honourable member has privately made the same comment over the past 10 years when we have been discussing these sorts of issues. I know his views in this area.

I cannot add much more other than to say that, in the ideal world, perhaps it might be as the honourable member has indicated, but we must provide this additional assistance. Many of our teachers and staff (and I am not just talking about Aboriginal education) in many of our schools are doing lots of things that might otherwise be more technically described as being provided by the Department for Family and Community Services or health agencies. The reality is that unless we do them those families and children will suffer whilst departments argue about who should spend the money on the families and students.

I do not see that as being a productive way to spend our time. We have a task to perform, and I do not think we can pick up huge additional responsibilities from other agencies, but we must work as best we can with what exists at the moment. We cannot afford to leave families and children in no-person's land between our agency and some other agency.

Mr BRINDAL: I understand and accept that it is an inherent problem of the system rather than of this ministry or of you, as Minister, but it brings us to the issue just touched on, that is, the increasing problem, as you are aware, Minister, of teacher stress in schools. As the Chief Executive Officer said, increasingly it is the teachers who are called on to confront and address very real social issues in our society. Are you, as Minister, aware of the problems of teacher stress in schools, and what is the department currently doing to monitor stress levels and to help teachers in difficult situations?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: A number of programs are in place to monitor the health and welfare levels of teachers and staff within our schools. I am certainly aware of increasing pressures on our teachers and staff within our schools. The increasingly complex nature of society in the 1980s and 1990s has meant that lots of pressures have descended upon our schools and consequently our teachers and staff that might not have been there 20, 30 and 40 years ago. Many letters to the editor talk about teachers who coped with 40 or 50 students in a class, but students in those days, for a variety of reasons, were prepared to sit at a desk, be relatively quiet and get on with their tasks.

Our education system and our life today is remarkably different. Young people from a very young age are exposed to influences such as television and family breakdowns to a much greater extent, I suspect, than 20, 30 or 40 years ago. I do not need to go through the litany of social problems which exist now but which might not have existed 20, 30 or 40 years ago. We have an increasingly complex society and therefore increasingly complex problems in schools. That is one of the reasons why class sizes in our schools now are markedly lower than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Only 4 per cent of classes in South Australia have more than 30 students. A significant number of classes within our schools have between 20 and 25 students.

Compared to 20 to 30 years ago, class sizes are smaller. They are not as small as the union might like or, indeed, as we might like if we had unlimited finances. However, the bottom line is that we do not have unlimited finances and we cannot afford to reduce significantly class sizes in South Australia with the sort of existing levels of budget funding that are available to all agencies.

So, I acknowledge the stresses and pressures. We are trying to reduce the levels of stress wherever we can. The whole Curriculum Directorate now is focused on trying to produce quality support materials so that the thousands of teachers every week who duplicate and replicate work of

other teachers, in terms of after hours work and preparation, might be reduced.

The department gathers and produces quality support materials and shares it with all teachers in order to try to reduce the amount of time that teachers must currently spend in the production of support materials. I give credit to Jim Dellit and the Curriculum Division for their work in producing material for classroom teachers. It is a lot more than they have to do and we acknowledge that, but that is certainly the focus of the Curriculum Division during this parliamentary term.

In relation to some of the other areas, obviously, ongoing conflict between an employer and the union places additional stresses on employees. It does not matter in what circumstance that occurs, whether it be an ongoing brawl within a family, a work environment or, in this case, a school, it obviously places additional stress on people.

Clearly, the Government wants to see an early resolution to the current teachers' dispute, and when that occurs I think we will see some reduction in the current levels of stress. The honourable member raised other issues earlier today, such as mainstreaming of students with disabilities. Those other issues provide additional stress on teachers. I have said to the member for Unley in the past that I believe generally teachers and staff in South Australia cope remarkably well with the levels of stress and tension that exist within the community and within our school system.

Ms WHITE: I refer to the statistical summary information that was provided earlier this afternoon and to the fact that it shows that enrolments continue to fall. Why are these enrolments continuing to fall and what age group is responsible therefor?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: One reason is that families are not having as many children at the appropriate times and, as that age bubble comes through the system, we therefore have fewer students available generally within the South Australian system from reception right through to secondary schools. That is not something about which this Government will be able to do much in the short term.

Ms WHITE: Is that the only reason?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, I do not believe that is the only reason but it is certainly one factor. Certainly for the past 15 years, if one is looking at the net transfer between Government and non-government schools, since about the early 1980s there has been a gradual increase in non-government school enrolments and a gradual reduction in Government school enrolments as a percentage of the total number of school enrolments in South Australia. That has been a feature of enrolments over the past 15 years.

Traditionally South Australia has had the lowest percentage of students in non-government schools, but certainly over the past 15 years we have been incrementally increasing towards the national average. South Australia's percentage might now be of the order of about 27 per cent. In some of the other States, particularly Victoria and New South Wales, the figure is as high as the low 30s—30 per cent of the total number of students who are in non-government school education.

Mr Ralph: Victoria and New South Wales have, for a long period, been closer to the 30 per cent mark for students attending non-government schools. An interesting point is that the movement has not been as some people expected from State schools into the large traditional non-government schools: there has been a movement as well from other non-government schools and some State schools into smaller non-

government schools, such as more Christian fundamentalist schools and small neighbourhood Christian schools. That has been one of the indicators in the statistics.

Ms WHITE: Is there a link between falling enrolments and falling retention rates?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Clearly in relation to years 11 and 12 that is a factor. If one is talking overall, the fact that South Australia has about 177 000 enrolments in Government schools means that other factors are brought to bear, but in relation to the number of students in years 11 and 12 the retention rate is obviously an important issue. I am advised that primary enrolments are predicted over the next two or three years to fall slightly and secondary enrolments over the next three years or so are predicted to increase slightly. The mix is changing.

The other issue is that last year saw a very significant fall in enrolments because we instituted a very new and rigorous enrolment audit procedure. We instituted a new system last year in terms of principals' estimates of the number of students within their schools. Last year we had a procedure where we relied on the principals' estimates and we had a check after that. We had a significant drop after the first figures last year when we indicated that we were about to conduct full enrolment audits for all schools or a large number of schools. Within the space of a week and a half we had a significant reduction in the number of students in Government schools. Tighter enrolment audits are a factor of the last year anyway in what was a significant reduction in the number of Government school enrolments.

Ms WHITE: The estimates document says that the budget is predicated on falling enrolments. What savings arise from those falling enrolments?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: They are not significant. Which budget document are you referring to? I do not think that is referred to in the Program Estimates. Can you refer me to the page?

Ms WHITE: The Program Estimates, but I do not have the page number in front of me.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Perhaps you could consult your advisers and advise where in the Program Estimates that is stated. There are about 177 000 enrolments and it seems to be at a plateau. I cannot add more than that. If somewhere in the budget or Treasury documents there is reference to falling enrolments, there has been a fall from 1995 to 1996 and perhaps that is what they are talking about. As to next year, at this stage our estimate is that it is going to be about the same level.

Mr De LAINE: For my next three questions I refer to page 139 of the Program Estimates and the questions relate to the announced closure of The Parks High School. In the case of some school closures students often benefit educationally in the longer term by access to better curriculum and resources. However, for The Parks students will be significantly disadvantaged in both the short and long term. Local schools such as Croydon High and LeFevre High do not provide the same level of senior secondary curriculum choice and specialist courses such as Accelerated Vietnamese at SACE Stage 1 are not available at other sites. Further, The Parks has facilities that are far superior to the older and limited resources provided at other sites such as classrooms, art rooms and computer facilities.

The Parks High School contains the best computer technology resources of any school probably in the State, having three separate computer facilities. At every opportunity the Premier makes much in claiming how important

computer technology is in South Australia. As to the educational role provided by the Minister, I quote from his media release of 15 March about the closure of The Parks High School. The Minister said:

There had been significant reductions to curriculum options.

That is both untrue and invalid. Why were these factors ignored by you in the decision?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We had a long discussion about the closure of The Parks High School earlier today and the member will have to accept that he has a different view from mine as Minister. It will not be productive for me to place on record again all the reasons why I as Minister took the decision to close The Parks High School. The member will have to accept that I have taken a decision with which he disagrees. It is probably not the first or the last decision he has disagreed with, but the decision will be implemented. As to the special needs of students, we will be looking at where the students go and whether or not we need to provide additional facilities. In terms of computer resources, we need to investigate that. In some other closures or amalgamations if the facilities are good and owned by the department they can go to where most of the students go. If there are three classrooms of computers of good quality, the majority of those computers may go to where the majority of the students go. The member ought not lock himself into a mindset where, because he is opposed to the overall decision, he believes that every aspect cannot be investigated to look at what benefit can continue to be provided to the students for whom he is fighting. If the majority transfer to Croydon or Woodville, the majority of computers may be transferred to those locations and students can continue to have access to those wonderful computer facilities.

Mr De LAINE: And the staff?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Wherever the students go there will be increasing staff. We have a formula so that for X students there will be an extra teacher. Additional staff will be provided to the new school or schools to which the students attend. If they have particular needs, if they are schoolcard students or students who currently attract additional tier 2 formula assistance, in the new school under the same formula potentially they will be able to qualify for additional assistance.

Mr De LAINE: I wish to make several observations before asking my next question. First, the Minister has never formally visited The Parks High School in his capacity as Minister. Secondly, the Minister has never met or spoken formally with either the Chairperson of the school council or the Principal. Thirdly, there have been letters to the Premier and the Minister from the school council which have not received responses and the only contact from the DECS CEO to the school has been a telephone call to the Principal at the end of term 1, almost a full month after the closure was announced on 15 March. Why is there little ongoing communication with the school to look at options for keeping the school open or to assist the school with the process of closure?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The premise of that question is just not correct and the member knows that. He continues to come before the Estimates Committee and make these claims. We have a senior and hardworking officer, Mr Allan Young, the District Superintendent, spending half his waking moments, together with other senior officers in the department, trying to manage the transition process from this year to next year. For the member to claim that there is no or little ongoing

contact with the school to assist in this process is extraordinary.

I am told that members of our Personnel Division have already made five separate trips to discuss the situation with the staff—the Personnel Division—as opposed to the District Superintendent. I note that the Facilities Branch has already had discussions with Mr Allan Young in terms of facility needs of students. It is just not correct to say that the Government has made a decision and just jettisoned the students and the community of The Parks or that we are not providing assistance in managing the transition. We have given a commitment, together with the staff, to look at individual counselling for students in terms of where they might need to go. We have given a commitment to look at what resource needs might be required in other schools when we know which schools they are going to attend. We have given a number of commitments about what we are prepared to do to try to work through this process. I understand how important the support of the local member and others is. We mentioned Don Dunstan earlier. He seems to have taken the role of rent-a-protester: if there is any protest in South Australia, Don Dunstan materialises. I can understand that. The community is angry and wants to oppose the closure. That is fine, because that is their prerogative.

But, in the end, we want the community to accept that the Government will not change its decision and the sooner the member accepts that the decision will not be changed the easier it will be to get on with working with some of these students and families in terms of managing the transition process. I cannot dictate to the honourable member. That is his decision. He can tell the Minister to go and jump in the lake; that is up to the honourable member. We will have to work with the families, students and staff in terms of managing the transition process. It will be assisted if people are not given a false hope that in some way the decision can be reversed. It is as simple as that. We can then get on with the process and students and families can say, 'All right, we hate this decision, we hate the Minister and hate the Government, but the decision will not be reversed and we now need to do the best we can for the students at the Parks.' That is what we are intent on doing and our officers are also intent on providing as much assistance as they can in terms of managing the transition.

I thought I was meeting with the honourable member and a delegation from The Parks in the next couple of weeks in terms of their wanting to put another proposition to me and to protest at the closure. Within a week I met with a representative group of the students and staff—well publicised not by me but by the students, staff and others.

Mr De LAINE: Within the school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, in my office. I met with them and discussed it. It is not true to say that I have never visited The Parks High School—I have done so on a number of occasions. If the honourable member is talking about a formal visit to present prizes or whatever, the answer is that I have not because I have not been invited to present prizes or open something, speak to the students or whatever else. I have not received an invitation during my two years as Minister. Physically I cannot attend all 650 schools either. I have not visited the Brinkworth Rural School, but had to make a decision in relation to its closure. I cannot physically as Minister visit all our institutions in the space of two years. I do the best I can in the time available.

Mr De LAINE: Where does the Minister intend to send the disabled wheelchair students at the school? I have been

on the school council for many years and I know of the infrastructure work done there to accommodate these students. I have been reliably informed that it will cost in the vicinity of \$1 million to set up facilities for these students to attend another school. I asked the question in the Lower House about two months ago but have not received an answer. Where will these wheelchair students go next year?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not sure where the honourable member got his estimate of \$1 million: it will not cost \$1 million for new facilities for what I am advised will be 10 students with significant disabilities continuing next year. There are 16 this year but a number of them are completing the modified SACE at the end of the year. Some are going to supportive employment, others are going to community corrections for voluntary work and one is returning home due to a medical condition. I am told that about 10 students are currently engaged in the process of trying to find a new location. As I have said publicly and privately to a number of members, and say to the member for Price today, my advice is that there is no figure of \$1 million to provide the facility for these 10 students and I am not sure from where the figure has come.

In terms of what is being done, a planning team has been meeting to look at this and I am told that it comprises the Principal of Regency Park, a parent, a teacher, the district superintendent and a departmental specialist officer. That planning team has been meeting and looking at the options and hopes to conclude its work by the end of term two. Sometime in term three as Minister I will see some recommendations. I have given a commitment that we will do what we have to in terms of necessary services and ensuring that these students transfer as smoothly as possible to another schooling option for 1997.

Mr WADE: I refer to enrolment in primary and secondary schools as referred to on pages 2 and 4 of the statistical summary. The statistics show that over the past 14 or 15 years Government enrolments have remained stable while enrolments in non-government primary schools have increased over that period. However, enrolments in Government secondary schools have been declining (as shown on page 4) and the enrolments in non-government secondary schools have remained stable. You wonder where all the primary school kids are going. One would expect that non-government secondary schools would be increasing enrolments if the secondary Government schools are decreasing in their enrolments. Overall the pattern would indicate that the non-government schools are gaining more of our secondary school students. It did not seem right as primary school students do not appear to be going anywhere, unless they are going to the Government secondary schools and no extra ones appear to be going to the private schools. How is the Government reacting to an obvious trend over the past 14 or 15 years of parents choosing to send their children to non-government primary schools and, more so, to non-government secondary schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: My position as Minister in relation to Government and non-government schools was similar to the position the Liberal Party put in terms of its education policy document prior to the last election, namely, the Government believes that there should be freedom of choice for families but that it ought to be freedom of choice between quality non-government school education and quality Government school education. The only available independent figures in South Australia show that we have in our Government schools in South Australia a better student-

teacher ratio than for the non-government schools in South Australia.

That is not the perception out there in the community and one reason for that is that every day of the week the union in the public arena engages in strike action highlighting in a negative way our Government schools in South Australia. One concern I have is that this ongoing industrial action will be to the detriment of our Government schools in South Australia, certainly harming the public image of our Government schools, and we will see a situation where these actions of the union leadership in South Australia (and I make no criticism of the teachers generally as they are being misled by the union leadership) are doing great harm to our Government schools and will further potentially drive away families from the Government school system. That is a shame because they have been driven away not by facts but by distortions and misleading information by the union leadership for their own industrial purposes. At a meeting of principals on Sunday, which the Chief Executive Officer and I attended, when one of the principals said something which included the phrase, 'Better private school education', I said that as Minister I do not accept that. If we had a system in South Australia that allowed a comparison of our basic skills tests results for Government schools at years three and five with non-government schools, I say students in our Government schools would at least match or more than match the performance levels of students in years three and five in non-government schools.

The problem we have is that the union continues to run down our Government schools system in terms of what occurs. It portrays a negative image and parents have this distorted view that there are smaller class sizes in non-government schools when it is not the fact. It may be the case in some of the wealthy colleges. However, when we are talking of the Catholic parish schools, the small Christian fundamentalist schools and the Lutheran schools, it is not the case. Parents have the perception that there are more SSOs and support staff in non-government schools and the perception that standards are much better in terms of what is offered in non-government schools. I have a great concern that what we have seen as a gradual trend over the past 15 years may increase in the next year or so solely as a result of the actions of the leadership of the union movement in South Australia over the past 12 months.

[Sitting suspended from 6 to 7.30 p.m.]

Minister for Education and Children's Services—Other Payments \$220 569 000.

Mr CAUDELL: My question relates to the closure of Sturt Primary School in the Marion Road-South Road corridor (page 125). A newsletter was put out in the electorate which stated:

I am a member of the Hamilton Secondary College School Council so I know that it will be under pressure if it does not get adequate funds to cope with an influx of extra students.

What is being put in place to cater for the changes in the Marion Road corridor?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There is a preliminary budget allocation of \$1.2 million for Hamilton Secondary College. It is a significant commitment as part of the restructuring process in the Marion corridor. The additional students who will come to the school in 1997 will need to be accommodated in the existing facilities, and obviously some transportable accommodation will be required as it will not be possible in

the next six months to construct the new facilities which will be required at Hamilton Secondary College. We will commence that process as soon as we can. It is hoped that the commencement date will be April 1997 and that completion will be in December 1997. That is the rough estimate of the program of works. The department will be doing all it can to ensure that for the start of the 1998 school year the additional year 7 students who will be coming to Hamilton Secondary College together with any additional year 8 to year 12 students will be accommodated in the existing accommodation and the new facilities that we hope to provide.

Mr CAUDELL: My next question on the same program relates to the special school at Minda. There has been a lot of publicity in the past about its future home. What is proposed with regard to the special school that was previously located at Minda?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Minda School was originally intended to go to the Brighton Secondary College campus. In the end, for a variety of reasons, it was not possible to continue with that option. Over the last few months—I am not sure how long—we have been looking around for an alternative location for Minda School. The Marion Road corridor restructure review has meant that we now have the opportunity, through the decision announced by the Government, to locate the Minda School at the Hamilton Secondary College. My advice is that the Minda School community has responded positively to this decision. I am also advised that the Hamilton Secondary College has extended a positive prospective welcome to the Minda School community. A task group has been established to progress the development of the new facility. It comprises the principals of both schools and representatives from the facilities and programs division of the Department for Education and Children's Services. Plans are being developed to ensure a smooth transition together with appropriate resourcing, staffing levels and maintenance of and access to current services.

Mr BRINDAL: How will they get from Minda to Hamilton, which is about three miles and is not on a bus route?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: These children do not live at Minda; they live with their families in their homes all over the place. They are coming from all parts of the south-west and perhaps even beyond to the present location. They will have to do the same in respect of getting to the Hamilton Secondary College. We provide travel assistance to those families which require such assistance.

Mr BRINDAL: What are the age cohorts?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I understand that they are mainly secondary age students. If there is anything different from that I will let the member know.

Ms STEVENS: My question relates to the EDS contract and EDSAS, Program Estimates, page 129, 'Facilities.' The Opposition now has a copy of the 60-page service agreement between EDS and DECS under the whole of Government agreement for EDS to run the Government's IT functions, including EDSAS. This is a schedule to some other agreement. The Minister will recall that recently he said that he would have to seek legal advice on whether this document could be released. What equipment has been transferred to EDS ownership; how much will EDS pay for all IT infrastructure in schools; how has the value of the equipment been calculated; and will these funds return to DECS or the Treasury?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The equipment transferred to EDS has an estimated replacement value of about \$3 million; but,

of course, that is not the current depreciated value of the equipment. There is a significant difference between the replacement value and the depreciated value of a computer or piece of hardware. I am not sure what the depreciated value is. The amount represents the total for the whole department, not just schools. It is important to point out that, if you have bought a computer for \$2000 or \$3000, we are talking about the replacement value. It may well be that the computer is three or four years old and worth only \$300. I would not get too carried in press releases about the \$3 million figure. Reimbursement based on a depreciated value is still being negotiated between EDS and DII (Department of Information Industries). Broadly, what has been transferred to EDS are the administrative file servers and network hubs in schools. Basically, the administrative hardware in schools has been transferred to EDS and the curriculum hardware has not been transferred.

One of the issues we are raising with EDS is that, whilst on a number of occasions we can clearly distinguish between administrative and curriculum, increasingly in the future that will become difficult, particularly as we use, for example, our hardware and EDSAS in particular with new profile modules. When that occurs it will become increasingly difficult to make this sort of distinction between administrative and curriculum. At the moment it is a bit easier, but in the future we see it as being much harder.

Another issue that has been raised is that there have been some examples where school communities have purchased administrative hardware, file servers, out of money that they have raised. We are currently engaged in discussions with EDS, DII and everyone else in terms of how those school communities might be reimbursed for the depreciated value of what they originally paid. So, it would not be replacement value but some version of depreciated value. Those discussions have not been concluded as yet.

Those principles have been approved by the Cabinet budget subcommittee in relation to asset sales, I am told. The market value of assets provided to agencies by bequests, donations or fundraising activities, for example some school assets, will be considered for retention by the respective organisations. So, those negotiations are continuing at the moment. Out of 650-odd schools there are about 30 that might be in that circumstance. We are talking about a small number of schools. Nevertheless, it is an important issue for them. We accept that and we are having those discussions.

Ms STEVENS: Essentially, that means that the money used to purchase general computing equipment will return to DECS rather than Treasury?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The money that schools have spent may well go back to the schools. In relation to the hardware and equipment that has been purchased by the departments, I understand that sale proceeds will be returned to Consolidated Account and the Government will decide how that money is to be allocated. It may well be that Government decides to return some of the money to various agencies in relation to some of the IT initiatives. Agencies are being asked to undertake a number of whole of Government information technology initiatives. With respect to the use of Masterpiece, Microsoft Office and a range of other IT whole of Government initiatives, one of the options the Government has (no decisions have been made) is that the money returned or recouped as part of the EDS sale of assets may be allocated to agencies to assist them to meet additional costs. Again, it would not be correct at this stage to say that agencies will lose the money. That decision has not been taken as yet. It

may well be that it goes into Consolidated Account, and it may well be that Government decides to offset some of the other costs of Government agencies in relation to whole of Government IT initiatives.

Ms STEVENS: Will EDS be required to pay for the work done by school-based staff in operating and maintaining this equipment?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is a two stage process. The introduction of EDS arrangements in schools will be cost neutral. I will need to clarify the detail of that. My understanding is that the Department for Education and Children's Services may undertake some tasks along the lines that the honourable member suggests and that we will then negotiate with EDS a reimbursement for that. We will look to ensure that we are not undertaking tasks for EDS for which eventually we do not receive lump sum reimbursement.

Ms STEVENS: I refer to the *DECS Press* of 2 May which states that breaches of the EDS contract by schools may result in schools being penalised. What penalties can be applied to schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that question on notice and get some advice on that.

Ms WHITE: I refer to page 129 of the Program Estimates and page 137 of the Estimates of Receipts and Payments. This year's capital budget includes \$15 million for improved student access to computers. The Opposition agrees with this initiative but it is worth putting it into some context by noting that the capital budget for major building projects has been cut by \$17.5 million. It could hardly be claimed as new or additional money for education. What does 'improved student access' mean? What is the overall plan? What work will be funded by the \$15 million and will the program be ongoing?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I do not see how anyone can argue that a budget or an actual expenditure of about \$87 million or \$88 million this year and a budget of about \$102 million next year is not an increase. The member for Taylor cannot argue that the capital works program is not really an increase. We will spend about \$87 million or \$88 million this year, and we have budgeted to spend \$102 million next year. Even if you take out the DECStech 2001 strategy, which is an increase of \$14 million or \$15 million, we have still projected to spend \$87 million or \$88 million on existing minor works, program maintenance, major works and capital works within the department. The line to which the honourable member refers relates to major projects, but she does not refer to the minor works program maintenance line which will increase by \$13 million or \$14 million.

DECStech 2001 represents the first time that any Government of any political persuasion in South Australia has been prepared basically to put its money where its mouth is. This Government inherited a budget line of \$360 000 in total for computer and technology purchases for schools in South Australia. That was the inheritance left to us by the previous Minister and Government. For too long we have relied on parents to purchase all computers and technology for schools. It is now time for the taxpayer through the Government to share that load. That is the essential reason for the allocation of \$15 million in the first year.

The eventual goal is to have one computer for every five students and to link all school and preschool centres with agencies or part of the Department for Education and Children's Services in one education network. The eventual goal is to have our schools and classrooms connected to information that is available on the Internet and other databases. Obviously, the eventual goal is to widen the

subject choice for many of our students, particularly senior secondary students.

For example, a teacher of physics with two students at Jamestown High School will be able to teach three physics students at Peterborough at the same time with the teacher and the students being able to see each other, with verbal as well as visual communication and information and data exchange taking place at the same time.

The eventual goal is to provide in primary years subjects such as languages in some of our isolated rural communities, again through similar technology where, for example, a teacher in one location might be able to teach Chinese to 20 students at the isolated school in the middle of the Eyre Peninsula. The eventual goal is also to have specialist services such as speech pathology available to many country communities where currently we cannot get speech pathologists and other specialists to live and work.

We are working on models such as telemedicine, which have proved to be fairly successful in the health area at the moment. For instance, a specialist at one end of a video conference link might be able to consult with, talk to and provide advice and assistance for a student accompanied by a parent or teacher in another location, or a special education teacher might be able to provide assistance to a classroom teacher. The eventual goal in city areas is to be able to broaden subject choice, not by moving school sites and locations but by offering face-to-face tuition for all students in all subjects.

The opportunities are limitless in terms of our eventual goals. For as long as we want to talk about it, we could think of other opportunities to improve student access and subject choice. What is occurring in America and some other countries at the moment is the huge use of software programs for students who have certain literacy problems or who need to catch up in areas related to numeracy. Much work is being done internationally. Some of our schools at present have students working on software programs to assist them to improve their skills in a number of areas. The opportunities are limitless in terms of what we can do.

That is the goal for DECStech 2001. We will try to go as far down that path as we can. If we are able to achieve much of what I have outlined and many other things that I have not had the opportunity to outline, there will be huge potential benefits for students.

I have not mentioned the other huge benefit for staff in terms of training and development. Country teachers are at an enormous disadvantage because of isolation and the huge cost of travelling to Adelaide for training and development. The education network has the potential to offer great opportunities for teachers and staff to be provided with up-to-date training in a whole range of areas at a much reduced cost. It will certainly reduce the level of inconvenience presently suffered by teachers and their families in relation to programs.

In the early stages of this year, we will seek to get up and running a training and development program for teachers in the use of technology, which I mentioned earlier. The other thing that we hope to get up and running sooner rather than later is a subsidised purchase scheme for computers in schools. We have allocated, notionally at this stage, up to about \$4 million this year to work together with school communities to use the money they generate together with a subsidy from the Government to purchase computers for schools.

I could talk for the remainder of the evening about the opportunities for DECStech 2001. I think all members would see it as being enormously exciting. There are ahead many issues and problems of equity which I am the first to acknowledge, but there is a commitment from the Government and the department to work with the union, the principals' association and parents' associations to make DECStech 2001 work.

Ms WHITE: How will the \$15 million and the subsidy of \$4 million that you just mentioned be allocated to individual schools? Will this be done on a *per capita* basis?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: A decision regarding the \$4 million has not been taken yet. The department has provided me with half a dozen options. I decided not to make a decision on those options as part of this budget announcement. We will now engage in consultation with the union, the principals' association, parents' associations and others before I finally determine how the subsidy scheme will operate. There is a range of equity issues.

I have indicated to the union and the principals' association that, as an indication of the Government's commitment to equity issues, it will ensure that the scheme provides greater levels of assistance for those communities that experience more difficulty in raising funds than do other communities.

We are aware of a whole range of other issues, but whether we can actually address them in the scheme is problematic at this stage. Some school communities have gone a long way down the track in that they already have quality technology and computers in their schools. Some of those communities argue that just because they have it they should not be penalised and that we should give them a cash grant so that they can use the money for something else. However, others will argue that we should have some sort of a goal of one computer for every five students and seek with Government assistance to bring our system up to that goal for everyone. If some communities can afford to do more, that is great, but they feel that we should aim for this goal of 1:5 for all communities and that, if some school communities happen to be there already because they have had access to other funding, we should not provide them with additional assistance so that they can end up with one computer for every two students under the Government's subsidy scheme.

There are some difficult issues in relation to how the subsidy scheme might operate. We are certainly committed to addressing the equity issues in relation to income inequality, and we will do so. Whether we can address the equity issues in relation to how far down the track we are and how well we are equipped is problematic. I am not sure whether we will be able to, but we are certainly prepared to listen to all suggestions.

Ms WHITE: Did that needs basis not apply to the \$15 million?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The \$4 million and the training and development is part of the rest of the \$15 million. In relation to the rest, we have to make a decision on whether, for example, we enter into a contract with a major private sector operator such as EDS, who would already be responsible for the operation and upkeep of our administrative hardware in schools. I have already highlighted the fact that this distinction that EDS and the Government have with administrative as opposed to curriculum will be a hard distinction to maintain in the future. Whether we engage in a contract with an EDS or, indeed, an IBM offshoot such as IFFC—or some other private sector operator, for that matter—is one option

where you would contract to have them provide the cabling, file servers and other parts of the infrastructure, and they would be responsible for the servicing and maintenance of the network that we have. Clearly, one of the issues is not just plonking the hardware in schools; somehow with schools we will have to try to maintain the quality of our network. It will be a big and costly issue, and we realise that.

The other option being considered is that, for example, the department employ large numbers of its own technology technicians in some way, such that we are responsible for maintaining those people, upgrading their training and having them upgrade the network. A range of options such as that have to be discussed now that we have announced the allocation. Frankly, I do not see those decisions being able to be resolved in the short term. It will take us some time. Given the length of time it has taken for the whole of Government contracts with EDS, United Water and other big agencies, if we were to go down that path, it will take us some time to resolve those aspects.

It may well be that parts of the \$15 million might not be able to be expended in the first year but it will be added to whatever allocation we make for year 2. That has not been decided yet; it is not our goal. Obviously, our wish is to agree on a contract or to undertake it all ourselves and get on with the task as soon as we can. We will work from that basis and from that goal.

Ms WHITE: The Minister talked briefly about the need to address the problem of maintaining the system. What about training programs to be put in place to train the teachers to use the system?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I refer the honourable member to my answer to an earlier question this afternoon, when I said that the Government has given that commitment previously. I referred to that in response to an earlier question today. We acknowledge that, and we will be doing it.

Mr BRINDAL: I refer to page 129 of the Program Estimates, relating to transport. I note that the cost of buses is rising. The interesting thing is that the cost of the Education Department's buses has risen only by \$100 000 in \$6.1 million whereas the cost of private bus services is rising by considerably more than the level of inflation. Is the Minister aware of any valuable work being done in the Education Department to look at buses?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: A lot of valuable work is being done on the area of buses. As my parliamentary secretary, the honourable member certainly would be aware of that, as he is involved in some of the work. It is a difficult issue in relation to country communities. The member for Custance, soon to be the member for Schubert, certainly has an interest, as do most country members. As part of its overall budget saving strategy, the Government indicated over a three year period, through the implementation of the existing school bus transport policy without changing it, that we could see savings of up to \$1.7 million. I have been advised that we have already instituted changes which have seen savings of up to \$1.07 million in a full year.

Mr Brindal interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will have to take advice on the reason for the contractor's price. I can assure the honourable member that there has not been a significant increase in the contract price of buses.

Mr BRINDAL: There might have been an increase in the number of private bus services.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It may well be that there has been a slight increase in the number of privately contracted bus

services; therefore, the total cost of that part of the budget has increased, and that is perhaps why the cost of department operated buses has stayed roughly the same. There may be fewer of those and a slight increase in the number of privately contracted services. We would have to check that. My recollection of briefing notes is that there has been a slight but not significant increase in the number of privately contracted services. We can check that for the honourable member and provide him with advice on that.

Mr BRINDAL: I refer to Program Estimates (page 127), under 'Personnel Services'. I note that the assistance for teacher housing is running at approximately \$4.5 million a year. Is that based on the cost of the housing, or is it based on some notion of where the housing is? How does the subsidy work? Is there greater subsidy for a house in Cook than there would be for one at Cooke Plains? In that context, is fringe benefits tax payable, and how does the subsidy that teachers get compare to the subsidies that police receive?

Also, workers compensation is running at \$12.68 million a year. Is that in line with other Government departments? Is it about normal for a work force of the size of the Education Department, or is it high or low?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Traditionally the Department for Education and Children's Services has been at the high end of the scale with regard to workers compensation. Certainly, I know the Chief Executive Officer and the department have been working hard in terms of reducing the total costs of workers compensation. I will ask the Chief Executive Officer to highlight some of the things that are being done. The Auditor-General's last report showed that in 1993, the last year of the previous Government, the total cost of claims in the department was \$18.3 million. In 1995, that had been reduced to \$14.6 million. So, there has been an extraordinary drop in the two years since the change of Government.

In relation to the first part of the member's question, most of the housing is controlled by what used to be called the Office of Government Employee Housing, but it has had a name change. My understanding of that—and I will correct myself if my understanding is wrong—is that it is market-based rents, so it does vary, depending on where you are and the market based rent in the various country localities. It is certainly different from the subsidy the police get. The police can get houses for \$25 or \$30 a week. I can assure members that teachers and our staff are paying significantly higher rental costs than that. We would have to take the issue of fringe benefits tax on notice.

Mr Ralph: Workers compensation has been targeted for reduction in our organisation. We have now moved to be regarded as a low-risk group. We have set a target to reduce by 30 per cent our expenditure in this area of workers compensation claims, and we are now well ahead of target in that regard in the three year period that we set. In two years, we have almost reached the savings we had set for a three year target. As the Minister said, that has been due to a number of initiatives that we have taken within the department. One of the things we have found is that many of the injuries were suffered by our school staff with sprains and strains.

We found that, although we had the most experienced and well-qualified staff, many were aged in their late 40s and early 50s and could not do the required lifting in the classroom. A teacher is required to do a lot of physical activity and a lot of lifting and moving, which activity is not appreciated by the general public. We found that many staff were not using proper techniques and putting themselves at risk. For

example, I have seen junior primary teachers who, at the age of 25, were very good at hanging netting from the ceilings of their classrooms, but at age 50—as I found myself on occasions when standing on ladders—are not quite as steady.

We found that people needed to modify the way in which they carried out various practices. We have had concerns with regard to special education areas, where teachers have been lifting children over long periods of time. We have introduced special programs, and Modbury West has some exemplary cases that have shown a significant injury reduction to our workers. We have conducted special training programs for our staff. We have undertaken a range of initiatives in this regard. We have also given special support to training development programs for teachers relative to student behaviour management, and matters of that nature which produce other forms of stress claims, because teaching is a stressful activity in that sense.

We have introduced training programs to increase teacher skills when handling difficult situations with students, which has meant they have not then needed to take leave for illness caused through stress. We have introduced a number of reduction strategies which we are still working on. We want to surpass the target; we want to be the best in this regard because the most productive workers are healthy workers and we do not want loss of time through injury.

Mr BRINDAL: I know that you, Minister, through the department, have a commitment to special interest high schools, and I note today that Tennis SA announced two new focus schools for tennis. We seem to have come a long way in music, sport and a range of other areas, but we do not seem to have been as quick in developing special interest schools in academic areas, such as mathematics, physics and in some of the more traditional disciplines. I know that was a matter about which you were keen. Is that matter being progressed and, if not, what is the department doing to encourage some of the schools to look at the more academic areas as special interest areas for a school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: This budget provides an allocation for our first special interest high school for students with high intellectual potential. We will announce the name of the successful school site—if I can put it that way, because a number of schools are very anxious to be the first such designated school in South Australia—in term three. We are about to go through a process of seeking formal expressions of interest. For the past 12 months people have been expressing interest. Members have schools in their electorates and have expressed interest in their being the first designated school.

Mr Caudell interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: You will have to join the queue; a range of other schools have been suggested as well. The Government has also indicated that it will be looking to include a second and third school in 1998 and 1999 so that, over the next three years, we will have three special interest high schools in this area. We would see the schools being broadly modelled on the special interest music high school model which would continue to provide schooling for young people in the neighbourhood but which would include a special program for about 30 students a year, eventually building to about 150 students. Those 30 students would be selected from a rigorous form of testing. We are looking at ACR developed tests from which to select potential students for next year, as well as an assessment mechanism, such as an interview process. We are looking for the potential school to offer something to country students, perhaps boarding

accommodation with local families associated with the school. We are looking at accelerating what potentially might be a one year level, that is, some students moving through secondary school in one year less than all other students. We are looking at the option of students from years 6 and 7 being eligible to seek entry into the program for year 8 next year, so that some very advanced year 6 students might be accepted, miss year 7 and move into year 8 at the start of the school year.

All options are being considered at the moment and the naming of the school, as I said, will be announced some time in term three in the hope of getting things up and going. The Government is committed to the introduction of these options. We see it as one way our Government school system can compete for talented young people with non-government schools. We are aware already that some non-government schools have expressed an interest informally in the tennis programs at Seaview and Marryatville and have said, 'Can't you put this specialised tennis training on after school hours so that students from the colleges can attend college and then attend the special tennis program?'

The Chief Executive Officer and I have the same view on that: it is 'No'. Some private colleges are concerned that young people who otherwise might have attended a private college will be attracted to this sort of specialist option which is being provided within the Government school system. It is a small matter at the moment, but some of the private colleges are concerned about the direction in which the Government school system is heading, in terms of competing with some of the students they might otherwise have seen as being naturally part of their catchment group, if I can put it that way.

The Government's position is that it is determined to have a quality Government school system; it is determined to provide a wide variety of choices, and not a sort of sameness across our whole system. We want to provide a variety of choices for families in South Australia and compete with non-government schools in some of these areas with respect to the offering of special programs. Philosophically we do not have a problem with identifying excellence in academic achievement, and being prepared to acknowledge and provide for it through a special interest high school or schools.

Mr BRINDAL: Will you get the credit you deserve from the Opposition?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am sure we will.

Ms STEVENS: Minister, will you give an estimate of what you see as the total cost of the DECStech 2001 program, so that you actually achieve your aim of one computer for every five students by the end of five years, plus the other aspects that were mentioned? What will be the total cost?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, we cannot give that figure at the moment. It will depend on a number of issues: one has been resolved today, that is, the whole-of-Government telecommunications contract, which I believe was announced by the Premier today; secondly, conducting negotiations with that telecommunications provider to determine what our costs of telecommunications will be; thirdly, negotiating with major contractors, such as EDS and others; and, fourthly, whether we go down the path of providing the service ourselves, that is, servicing, maintenance, the provision of cabling, etc. Until we have determined which of those paths we will take, we will not be in a position to know.

The other issue that is problematic at this stage is what the major telecommunication providers—other than the one we have just signed the contract with—such as Optus and Telstra

offer. How wide will be the roll out of their cable and what will they provide at no cost or subsidised cost to the education system? Optus is saying that in its definition of the metropolitan area it is prepared to link its trunk line with the front of the school on a standard connection at no cost to schools. Previously, in some of the preliminary work we believed we might have to pay for that at some substantial cost in terms of linking the front of the school with the telecommunications provider. They are substantial costs when you are talking about the number of schools we have in the Optus definition of the metropolitan area. Is Optus the best option? Perhaps while it does that its other costs may be higher than those of Telstra or someone else. Until we are in a position to negotiate with some of these big providers we are not going to be able to get a handle on what the total cost is. That is why it was announced that in the first year it would be a \$15 million allocation. That is why we have indicated a couple of areas where we can progress relatively quickly, that is, the T and D program for teachers and staff and finalising the subsidy scheme in terms of purchasing computers. Even though we may not have the whole network linked, because it will take us a number of years to link our schools in a network, obviously the schools can get the benefit of computer purchases and the use of computers in schools.

Ms STEVENS: I must admit that I was impressed with the announcement of one computer for every five students by the end of the five year plan, but it seems that this is nebulous. When I asked for details regarding the obstacles and problems that you have to solve in order to meet that commitment, you have not even got a ballpark figure at which you are aiming over those five years. As to your comments about the \$15 million, you have \$4 million for the subsidy purchaser program and you have indicated that some of this money would be used for recurrent expenditure for training and development. I understand and applaud that you may be considering additional help for the servicing and maintenance of computers in schools, because that has been a huge issue in schools. Again, as to the \$15 million, if we take the T and D for teachers, the maintenance of school computers and the \$4 million subsidy purchaser agreement, is anything left from the \$15 million? Will there be one off grants to schools or will everything that schools get from you depend on schools putting in money? Are we looking at an extra increment on the Medicare levy for computers as well?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It would be nice if we could, but we do not have that power. Certainly, we have calculations about what the total cost might be, but there are a number of issues that need to be resolved. That is one reason why I am not prepared to share publicly that sort of information at this stage. Let me drag a figure out of the air. If the Government said that to get to the goal it would cost \$15 million in the first year and \$10 million a year for the next four years, if a major contractor like EDS knows that the Government has said it has \$10 million to spend on the contract and it is then negotiating with the Government on the contract price, then I can only suggest that EDS will say, 'Thank you very much. This is the cost of what we are suggesting.' There are good reasons—both the reasons I gave earlier and the reasons given now—why we have said at this stage, 'Here is an indication of how fair dinkum we are. We have allocated \$15 million in the first year compared with \$360 000.' We will now sit down with the major players and seek to negotiate this so that the Government will be in a position in the next budget or perhaps earlier to indicate what our commitment for the remaining four years of the five year

strategy might be. We would not see this as a one year on one year on one year commitment. This is the first commitment, which we have done, and now we will sit down with hard negotiations and discussions and decide what processes we will follow and then the Government will make a commitment about the remaining four years of the five year strategy.

Ms STEVENS: The Minister did not answer my question about how the \$15 million stacks up with the \$4 million subsidy purchaser scheme, the training and development for teachers and the school maintenance provisions. Does it mean that anything schools will get in buying computers will involve a contribution from them?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The \$4 million subsidy scheme is about buying computers.

Ms STEVENS: Schools have to also put money in to that?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes.

Ms STEVENS: When I heard your announcement I thought you were saying that there would be the provision of computers to schools.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is a subsidy scheme.

Ms STEVENS: I want to be clear about that. The Government will commit \$15 million from the capital works budget which will help to provide computers and the emphasis is on the word 'help'.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Exactly. At the moment we have a significant parent and school effort. If we are going to maximise the provision of computers in schools, we need a true partnership between parents, school communities, taxpayers and the Government. We are not seeking to create a system whereby all of that effort going into school communities disappears and the Government picks up the whole lot. If we do that, we will not have the eventual goal of one computer for every five students. We might end up with one computer for every seven or eight students. We need a partnership. I have visited many schools in the last decade and most parents and school communities will welcome the fact that for the first time there is commitment to share the cost with them. They have put in the hard work and will continue to do so, but they want to see some assistance from the Government and taxpayers, which is why we have said we will help. It will be a partnership. As to the earlier question, the \$15 million is about developing the network. We see the provision of infrastructure, connections and all of the issues hopefully being delivered within the notional allocations we have in the back of our mind for the five year period.

Ms STEVENS: What about schools that cannot afford the same type of partnership? The partnerships that schools will enter into with you will vary.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I indicated earlier that I have given a commitment as Minister that the income inequity issue in terms of the ability of some communities to raise more money than others would be a factor in the sort of subsidy scheme we operate. So, if it is a subsidy scheme (I am not saying it would operate this way), if it were a richer community the subsidy may be at a lower level than if it were a poorer community. Other options are being flagged within the department currently on how the scheme would operate, but we are committed to trying to address those issues which relate to the relative ability of school communities to provide funding.

Mr De LAINE: I refer to the Program Estimates page 127 under the heading 'Aboriginal Education'. What is the reason for the reduction in the budget for classroom instruction in

Aboriginal schools of \$678 000 from \$8.209 million to \$7.531 million?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The honourable member will note that it is actually increased from what is to be spent this year. The revised estimate for 1995-96 is only \$7.2 million, which will increase to \$7.5 million. For some reason this year we did not spend as much money as originally intended and part of that reason was budget reductions that I announced last year in relation to the 1995 budgets. The Government has given an increased commitment to the Wiltja program out of the capital works program, but that does not offset this line. In last year's budget we announced a reduction of 100 year two salary positions and part of that reduction announced last year was in this area and that would account for the reduction of about seven, or eventually 10, staff in this area.

Mr CAUDELL: I refer to the provision of general secondary education in schools. The Minister mentioned to the member for Unley the special interest schools in sport, in particular, tennis. I understand that there was an announcement or release today. Would the Minister advise what was involved?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The honourable member will be delighted as he has argued for this in support of Seaview High School. It was announced today that Seaview High School and Marryatville High School will be the sport program focus schools in tennis. A number of schools support programs in netball, baseball and volleyball. We are extending that program with these two schools in tennis. There are connections with Tennis SA and, again, young people with talent in tennis will be able to engage in or have specialised tennis coaching to improve their skills in tennis whilst at the same time being able to maintain their academic studies within the two good schools of Seaview and Marryatville. The honourable member has been a long time lobbyist for this program to be at Seaview High School and I am sure that he will be delighted that today the formal announcement of that program was made at Memorial Drive.

Mr CAUDELL: Following on from the question of the members for Taylor and Elizabeth in dealing with DECStech 2001, part of the Marion Road-South Road corridor project announcement included the provision of improved technology and communications for those remaining schools within the corridor. Is that intended to come out of the capital funds allocated in the budget for DECStech 2001 or is it to come from the proceeds of the sale of the schools that are closed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The announcement I made in the press statement, of which the honourable member will be aware, is that the upgrading in technology infrastructure would come from the \$5 million that was to be eventually released by the sale of the assets. If we are talking about total amounts of money to be spent on technology, we are talking not just about the \$15 million but about other parts of the capital works program. At the moment we are putting in our major works the cabling and requirements for DECStech 2001 eventually in some of our new schools and redevelopments. So we will be doing a lot of major work at Daws Road and at Hamilton Secondary College and we may even provide assistance if we can for some computer purchase. However, we will need to sit down with those schools, look at what they have and at how far down the track they are towards the Government's objectives and, out of the total bucket of money, see what assistance can be provided. It is a commitment for those four schools—not just the two secondary schools but the two primary schools as well—as

part of the benefits that those communities will enjoy. It will be part of the decisions we take in relation to the \$5 million.

Mr CAUDELL: I refer to a time span with regard to technological and communication improvements for those two remaining primary schools. Do you envisage a time frame of, say, five years for improvement of those facilities?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No; the sort of things that I announced in the press statement, which will still need to be negotiated with the schools, are to ensure that we resolve it some time next year. As to exactly when next year I am not sure, but the local member can rest assured that the Minister has given a commitment that the longest period that we are talking about is 18 months. If it can be done earlier than that, fine. Whatever we eventually negotiate in relation to technology, infrastructure and computer assistance will be implemented within 18 months.

Ms WHITE: I refer to Program Estimates, page 130. How many times has the Parliamentary Secretary for Education represented the Minister; what sort of work does the parliamentary secretary undertake on behalf of the Minister; has the parliamentary secretary incurred any expenses on travel or other items (for example, does he use the ministerial car); and is there any provision in the budget for such expenditure?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I think the parliamentary secretary has answered that. Unfortunately, there is no allocation in this budget for expenditure for the parliamentary secretary, consistent with the guidelines announced by the Premier at the time of the announcement. The parliamentary secretary has thus far not used the ministerial car, although that is permissible. As I am sure most members would know, when members, in particular the parliamentary secretaries, represent Ministers, if the car is available the member is able to access the car. Certainly my recollection is that it has not been the case yet—the parliamentary secretary has driven himself to the various functions he has attended. I do not think it will be a productive use of my time to count the number of occasions the parliamentary secretary has represented me. There have been a number of occasions formally and informally. There are occasions when informally I ask the parliamentary secretary to speak to some people. It is not a formal representation at a school.

The parliamentary secretary does a good degree of work for me, for which I am indebted. To be fair, he has been the chairperson or convenor of my backbench committee for two years anyway, so he has continued in a similar role, but he now has the formal title of parliamentary secretary. We meet and discuss a whole range of issues in the role that he undertakes, which is to provide advice and feedback to me. On occasions he represents me at functions at schools or other places when I am unable to be present. The parliamentary secretary is looking at policy issues for me at the moment. It is an informal, comfortable relationship which works to the benefit of students, staff, teachers and officers within the Department for Education and Children's Services. As Minister, I am eternally grateful for the assistance that the parliamentary secretary provides.

Ms WHITE: Can the Minister provide a list of all staff in his office showing their positions and salaries?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I can. I am delighted to say that it is about five staff less than the previous Minister for Education (Susan Lenehan) had. She had 19 and we have five and a half less. It is two or three less than the previous Minister for Education who did not have TAFE. Consistent with all parts of the organisation, we are showing frugality in the

ministerial office. I shall be pleased to provide the information that has been requested.

Ms WHITE: Were the five executives in the Minister's department who are subject to performance reviews under their contracts—the Director of Programs, the Director of Curricula, the Director of School Operations, the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive Officer—reviewed this year; who conducted those reviews; what were the criteria; what were the outcomes; and what, if any, bonuses were paid under contracts with those executives or what bonuses were withheld?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We do not pay bonuses in the Department for Education and Children's Services. The reviews in relation to senior officers are conducted by the Chief Executive Officer. I will take advice on what information I might be able to provide on notice in relation to that part of the question. I know that all the officers to whom the member referred have performed at an extraordinarily high level for the department and the schools by the quality of services that they have provided. Discussions are taking place between the Chief Executive Officer and me. I will take on notice what, if any, information I am able to provide in relation to the question. The key bit is that no performance bonus is paid to the Chief Executive Officer or other executive officers within the department.

Mr BRINDAL: Given that the executive staff is so pared down, does the Minister have sufficient people to assist him? The Department for Education and Children's Services is one of the biggest and most significant areas of Government expenditure. Are you sure that you have sufficient staff to assist you and that you are not being unnecessarily frugal in the appointment of executive staff?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: When any Government comes in and makes the changes that this Government has made in education and managing the budget and also implementing basic skills testing, curriculum reforms and major changes in staffing, the amount of work generated for administrative staff is extremely significant. I know that the administrative staff in my office work very hard and they long for the days of the previous Labor Administration when they had significantly larger numbers of staff within the Minister's office. We cannot expect school principals to do more with less if the Minister's office is not prepared to do the same. I am grateful for the work that the administrative staff in my office do, which is above and beyond the call of duty in terms of processing correspondence and queries as quickly and efficiently as they do.

Mr BRINDAL: When I started teaching over 20 years ago your building was an Education Department building, but I understand that it might have shifted to a different ministry and you might now be paying rent. If so, did the Education Department receive any payout for the building; was it the property of the Minister; and, if so, why is the department now paying rent on a building which it actually owned?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is one of the questions that I was intrigued about when I was shadow Minister. This happened some years ago. As shadow Minister I recall trying to get to the bottom of this. It is an intriguing question. We are paying rent. Originally we owned the building, but it is now owned by Services SA, I think. Someone owns it, but it is not us, and we are paying rent for it. We will take the question on notice and perhaps revisit the decisions that were taken previously in relation to this matter. I do not have any direct information.

Ms STEVENS: My question relates to school sponsorship on page 126 of the Program Estimates. What are the guide-

lines for industry-school partnerships, such as the deal between Salisbury High School and the former AWA Defence Industries (now British Aerospace)?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I can provide the member with a copy of the broad guidelines that all education departments use. The former Labor Government and Minister, in about 1992, endorsed a national sponsorship code on what sponsorships could be accepted. We have not changed that code of sponsorship. They are the broad guidelines that apply in relation to that aspect. If there are any questions within those broad guidelines, principals or local communities should raise them with the CEO or me. We are not philosophically opposed to the notion of sensible reasonable sponsorship of education activities. We start from the basis not that it is inherently wrong, but that if it is reasonable we should encourage it. If we can get dollars from the private sector, such as AWADI in relation to the partnership with Salisbury High School and there is mutual benefit to the students of Salisbury and the employees and management of AWADI (now British Aerospace), that is terrific, and we see that as a win-win situation.

There is a range of other sponsorship opportunities within the department which have existed for some time. Streets Paddle Pop sponsored our junior journalists competitions; Satisfac has sponsored the teacher excellence awards; Hyundai has donated a car for school watch; some companies such as MacDonaldis, Coca-Cola and Hungry Jacks have in the past sponsored football and sporting competitions. For years there has been reasonable, sensible levels of sponsorship. We seek to encourage that in terms of maximising the number of dollars that can be provided for schools and for education.

Ms STEVENS: On 2 August 1996 the following fax was issued:

Attention: All Principals. Today your school will receive 20 packets of complimentary Maltesers from Mars Fundraising Company. Please do not feel obligated to accept the chocolates. This is a good gesture from the company. Please use your own discretion on how the chocolates are utilised. You may also wish to ignore all correspondence inside the large box. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. Kind Regards. Donata Puccio, Operations Manager.

How much would it have cost to send a fax to every principal in this State to tell them that Mars fundraisers was sending them 23 packets of Maltesers? Does the distribution of free sweets fit the school sponsorship policy?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am appalled that I did not get that offer in the ministerial office. I want to know why the schools received the offer and the Minister's office did not. I will take advice as to what the specific guidelines in the national sponsorship code provide. My recollection of the sponsorship guidelines agreed to by the previous Labor Government is that it would not have prevented that circumstance. I will certainly check that for the honourable member, and if she has some concerns her schools can send the Mars Bars back to me.

Ms STEVENS: How much did it cost to send the fax?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The fax would not have cost very much at all. I will have officers of the department turn the place upside down tomorrow to determine the cost.

Ms STEVENS: Is Norwood-Morialta introducing a support sponsorship scheme offering gold, silver and bronze membership, and what are the details of the scheme?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The answer is 'I do not know.' We will undertake some inquiries for the member and provide her with a response.

Mr CAUDELL: I refer to the EDSAS finance package in schools. As you are aware, Minister, there were a number of problems last year in implementing that package at Hamilton school. Have those problems been overcome, and what is the future with regard to the EDSAS financial packages that are being implemented at the high schools and primary schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The honourable member has raised over a considerable period of time some of the issues and concerns that Hamilton Secondary College was having. It was in fact one of the trial schools. One of the reasons for having trial schools is that they help to de-bug the system. A natural corollary of being a trial school is that that school, and therefore you as local member, would become aware very early and very often of the particular problems that might be experienced.

Secondly, we have established that the fewest number of problems have been experienced by junior primary schools, primary schools and small secondary schools. The greatest number of problems have been experienced by the middle and larger sized schools such as Hamilton. Hamilton is the perfect example of one of the sites, together with sites such as Norwood-Morialta, where there have been significant issues of concern.

As a result, the department and the Secondary Principals Association jointly funded a consultancy, Alan Miller Consulting Pty Ltd, to undertake a review of the implementation of EDSAS—both the Triple S modules (the three S modules) and finance within the secondary schools. The Alan Miller review established that there were some issues that could have been better addressed right back through the formative stages with the private contractor and the department. There were a number of issues which the department was addressing and which it was well down the path to addressing. There were a small number of issues we needed to examine as well.

For example, in relation to the problems that Norwood-Morialta was experiencing, we converted to a Borland data base engine. I am told that they have been successfully operating for a number of weeks now without the problems that Norwood-Morialta had been experiencing. It is a big site of almost 1 500 students on two campuses with all sorts of complex issues. I am told that that change as a result of this consultancy has meant that, fingers crossed, things are working pretty smoothly at Norwood-Morialta.

It is fair to say that there have been issues of concern. This project has been going since 1991-92, when it was first conceived. We are now five or six years down the track in terms of this project. Everyone, including secondary school principals and the consultant, have agreed that there is a huge potential in schools for undertaking tasks more efficiently in terms of savings for both the department and for schools when we get the system up and operating well. As I understand, that was the recommendation from the consultant. I met recently with representatives of the Secondary Principals Association and, similarly, they put those issues to me.

It is true to say that some members of the Secondary Principals Association still have some issues of concern in relation to the finance module. I am not sure whether that includes Hamilton Secondary College, because it was not part of the discussion I had. I asked the Secondary Principals Association to sit down with my officers in the department and officers within Mr Treloar's department to work through those issues in relation to the finance module.

Again, primary schools are saying in relation to the finance module that it is terrific. Those pilot schools using the module are undertaking tasks much more quickly than previously and are getting lots of important, valuable information back quickly and efficiently. But there are still some secondary schools which have some issues of concern that we must address. We have indicated to the Secondary Principals Association that we will sit down with them and try to address those as soon as possible.

Mr BRINDAL: I refer to page 128 of the Program Estimates. The original provision of assistance for isolated children and the secondary assistance scheme, which I now believe is part of Austudy, is very important to secondary students, especially those who are impoverished and who live in isolated areas. Has the Minister received any indication of any variation from current policy with the Federal Government? Will the Minister make representations on the grounds of the profound effect that it could have on students in need if those schemes were to be cut out at secondary level?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will ask the Chief Executive Officer to provide some information, but the State Government has increased the allowance for assistance from \$730 to, I think, \$1 080 in the space of three budgets—a significant increase. I am not aware of any suggestion that the Commonwealth Government's program will be cut. I believe it sees the importance of this program. I will ask the Chief Executive Officer to comment on the issue of trying to get access to the allowance and some of the interesting interpretations of the guidelines that the Commonwealth Department has used to deny access in the past.

Mr Ralph: With respect to the isolated children's allowance, during the past 12 months changes in the Commonwealth guidelines and criteria for eligibility of applicants to access that allowance have caused people in rural areas of South Australia, the Minister and I serious concern because this meant that families that we considered should receive this allowance were ruled ineligible by the then Commonwealth department (DEET) and the Commonwealth Government. At that time, I made a statement regarding DEET guidelines that, if senior secondary education of sufficient standard was not available in that location where a young person's family resided, that young person could not satisfy SACE requirements to the standard that I considered appropriate.

Eventually, we decided to change 11 area schools that had provided R-12 education to a formal classification of R-10. Families who resided in those localities found that it was inappropriate for their young people to do five subjects in year 12 by distance education. It is very difficult to do year 12 chemistry in that sort of a way. We found that doing two subjects, or at the most three, in the senior years was satisfactory but that, in the main, five subjects were too many, apart from one or two exceptions that I have known, in particular a couple near Streaky Bay, who have done very well with five.

These families need that allowance. We met with the Commonwealth Government, which agreed to be much more flexible in the application of this rule. We believe that the Commonwealth needs to become still more flexible, and we are working on that. We have also increased the State allowance for each of the past three years. The Government agreed to increase the allowance to \$830 in 1995, \$930 in 1996 and \$1 030 in 1997.

The Minister has just announced that the allowance of \$1 030 will be increased to \$1 080 as a token of his personal

commitment to students in country locations. The Minister drew the attention of the Federal Minister (Senator Vanstone) to this matter by letter of 19 March this year, asking for her full cooperation in ensuring that the Commonwealth Government and the new DEETYA organisation applied their criteria in a way that was fair to the young people of South Australia who reside in distant and isolated rural communities and who need to access education from centres such as Port Augusta, Port Lincoln, Cleve or Adelaide. I thank the Chief Executive Officer and other officers of the department.

Additional Departmental Advisers:

Dr J. Keightley, Chief Executive Officer, SSABSA.
 Ms J. Riedstra, Deputy Director, Corporate Services.
 Mr G. Benger, Manager, Information Services.
 Mr A. Mercurio, Manager, Curriculum.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: SSABSA is an independent statutory authority over which the Minister has no direct power or authority. Members obviously have to direct questions to me, but generally I will ask the Chief Executive Officer to respond. If I have any additional comment, I will make it after the Chief Executive Officer has spoken.

Ms WHITE: I refer to Program Estimates (page 130). Earlier we referred to the review of SACE. On 31 May last year, the Minister told the House that there was to be a review, either in 1995 or early in 1996, of some or all aspects of SACE. How is that review going? By whom is it being conducted specifically? What are the terms of reference? What findings have been made?

Dr Keightley: In December 1995, the SSABSA board resolved to view the SACE review in a broader context, and that is one of continuous improvement. In the last Estimates Committee, I mentioned a number of times that we were trying to move to a concept of continuous improvement. Based on that, the broad resolve was that we would commence a rolling, three year SACE improvement strategy. The SACE improvement strategy would have three approaches—a research approach, an operational approach and a workshop approach. For the want of a better word, we used ‘workshop’, although it did not mean that it would be a one only short time meeting. The research and operational approaches were projects that we believed related to the SACE and for which we in the schools could sort out an easy answer—hence operational issues—or issues for which there was no set data but a lot of anecdotal information or a lot of non-information. We needed to find out the actual issues underpinning that matter. The workshop approach involved projects that were more of a pedagogical or philosophical issue.

Let me explain the kinds of categories. Under the research approach, there is the issue of SACE completion (for example, who completes and the profiles of the students who complete) and the profiles of the students who commence, who do not commence, and so on. We do not have adequate information on those issues, so that was formulated as a research project. The operational approach involved things such as our moderation models, evenness of demand across the subject areas—the things that SSABSA could look at individually. The kinds of workshop approaches were topics related to things such as group 3 classification of subjects, the role of languages in the SACE pattern, the assessment of key competencies and the language richness requirement across SACE. At the moment, the research and operational projects are at the stage where we have developed the format for project briefs and the SACE completion project brief which

is looking at students within SACE who commence at the beginning of stage 1 and do not graduate at the end of stage 2.

That project has terms of reference and a set of likely tasks. Some early data analysis has been provided as a basis for that project, which will then be followed up with a series of research interviews with students, parents, teachers and anyone else the reference group suggests might have some inside information about students who commence the SACE but do not finish it. We hope that the first report will be available in about September or October this year. The report will be an analysis of the current data base to provide some kind of profile of students who have started but who have not finished with us, and I believe that will lead to other issues. That project is already well completed.

The terms of reference for the articulation between stages 1 and 2 and across subjects have been approved by the board. The likely tasks have been identified, the time frame for those likely tasks is identified and we expect that project to be completed in September or October this year. The third project brief is entitled VET (Vocational Education and Training) in SACE. That is again an operational approach, looking at the models for the incorporation of vocational education into the SACE. That project brief has a set of likely tasks with a reporting time frame of about October this year.

The other operational project brief relates to how we might include key competencies into the SACE—as opposed to how we might report and assess them, which is a workshop approach—and has similar terms of reference approved by the board. The likely tasks have been identified and work on the first pedagogical paper covering the principles underpinning the inclusion of vetting SACE has commenced. The final operational project brief to go before the board for approval at the next board meeting covers the relationship of languages in the SACE in relation to the NFSSL (National Framework for Senior Secondary Languages).

The role of languages in the SACE was a workshop approach but the role of the NFSSL is an operational approach. The NFSSL is a nationally collaborative exercise whereby a State hosts a particular language and all students in Australia will do the assessment hosted by that State. I need also to inform the committee that the workshop approaches will be conducted by an external consultant. The topics identified for the 1996-97 calendar year for the workshop approaches include group 3 classification, languages and the use and impact of technology on the curriculum.

We have received a special grant from the Minister to commence that workshop and we will commence that project as soon as possible. Those workshop approaches will be conducted by an external consultant. The criteria for selecting the Executive Coordinator of these workshop approaches requires that the person be approved by the board; that they have high credibility with the school sectors; that they have an appropriate education background; that they have credibility with the higher education sector and TAFE; that they preferably be South Australian based; that they have a good understanding of curriculum assessment; that they have recent education experience but perceive independence from the content of the review; and that they have an understanding of teaching, learning and school management issues. Based on those criteria, we have yet to identify our consultant, but we were informed that we had the finance to commence this project only within the last week.

Ms WHITE: That was very interesting. We heard a lot about procedures and processes, etc., but this small voice within me was saying, ‘What about the kids?’ I take it that

my question about the terms of reference will be taken on notice?

Dr Keightley: It would be more convenient, given the time, to provide you with a copy of the terms of reference, but they are all here.

Ms WHITE: I did not hear anything about terms of reference covering the fall in retention rates. What has been discovered?

Dr Keightley: The first research project that I referred to in relation to SACE completion is involved with the issue associated with retention rates. Clearly, SSABSA's involvement is by measuring participation and at the moment our research database has students who commenced year 11 or stage 1 and who are not there or graduating at the end of stage 2. That SACE completion project is specific and its terms of reference are to determine the SACE completion trends since the introduction of SACE. At this stage the preparatory paper for that brief includes an analysis of the data that we have on the database of the students who have or who have not completed SACE. It is analysed by location, gender, socio-economic status, by CAP school, by DSP school, by metropolitan, by country, by non-English-speaking background, by Aboriginal status self declared and several other factors. At that stage we have now looked at the cross-section of people who are completing or not completing SACE by those factors. That is the first term of reference.

The second term of reference is to identify factors which influence or inhibit students from completing SACE studies and therefore achieving SACE. We will use that to identify those parameters. The next one is to identify characteristics of students who are potentially at risk of not completing SACE and to make recommendations for improvements with SACE which do not compromise its quality or standard. Those are the terms of reference. After identification of the characteristics of the students who commenced SACE study but did not complete it, we will then go on to identify a group of students and select a proportional sample who can be interviewed about whether SACE or aspects of it contributed to their leaving SACE, why they left school and factors as to why they did not complete SACE.

In addition to that the tasks include an interview of a sample of school counsellors, teachers and parents to investigate the reasons why they believe their students left school without completing SACE. We will then conduct a review of the literature to see whether internationally there are more issues that can illuminate us. I believe we will have more than one attempt at this, but that will be our first indication. In collaboration with DECS and the Flinders Institute of Studies of Teaching, SSABSA submitted for a grant for a project that is part of the SACE improvement strategy called 'SACE Inclusivity', which is to focus on year 10 students and discover why they have not moved into year 11; to find out what aspects of SACE may be inhibiting them from even commencing the year 11.

At this stage we have only captured them once they are into stage 1. We have applied for that funding grant this year with a hope to help us supplement our research funds and do a collaborative research project because, clearly, there are a complex combination of reasons why students may not be staying on in senior secondary years. We believe the triple partnership in this research partnership has been such a happy partnership because we want to explore whether there are SACE-related issues. We want to explore whether they are delivery-related issues or issues relating to youth culture,

other values and society values. That is why the three partners have their own interests being met in this project.

Ms WHITE: You mentioned the school linkages with TAFE. On the review so far what can Dr Keightley say in that respect generally? What can you contribute to this committee as to what these linkages should be?

Dr Keightley: SSABSA, in terms of its policy, is at the stage of formulating a policy based on experience and, unlike other States where they have established the policy and implemented it, we have allowed schools to work collectively and collaboratively with vocation education and training providers to work out the appropriate models. We have also carried out a database to determine what form or structures the incorporation of vocational curriculum into the SACE has taken.

We have a series of data to show that an increasing number of schools are now offering a vocational oriented curriculum in stages one and two. In addition, this year 115 schools, which is 58 per cent of schools in the State, are offering VET modules in SSABSA accredited subjects. The kinds of SSABSA accredited subjects which we now know are being used to incorporate vocational education and training curriculum is wide ranging. At stage one they range from accounting, agriculture, business studies, computing, home economics, mathematics, physics, technology and work education. Agriculture, applied maths, aviation, community studies, English, home economics, information technology, maritime studies, physical science, small business management, technical drawing, work education and technology is a collection of stage 2 subjects for which there are national vocational accredited modules embedded in the SSABSA subjects.

There is a significant amount of information that we now have that tells us the ways that vocational modules are being incorporated into SACE. Essentially, the model most predominant within SSABSA is taking a nationally accredited module which has VET status and embedding it within the SSABSA structure. We have now arranged mutual agreement in terms of assessment plans. We have a joint program called the VISA program which allows us to develop an assessment plan that will meet the needs of the VET sector accrediting agency, which will give students status for the VET module but also meet SSABSA's need and it allows us to assess the students in relation to the SACE requirements. That is by far the most common model. A small number of students are undertaking a collection of VET subjects in a particular pattern and those collections are being installed in place of a SSABSA unit. That is a model that may well expand, but SSABSA is currently looking at some quality assurance issues associated with that model.

Ms WHITE: As SSABSA was part of the EDS due diligence process, has EDS now taken over the computing process and, if so, how many EDS employees are involved and how is security guaranteed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will ask the Chief Executive officer of SSABSA, who has been involved in those discussions, to inform the member and the committee.

Dr Keightley: We have been part of the due diligence process and not part of the first wave of transfer. We have not yet been transferred to EDS. We are expecting to be involved in the 18 July deadline transfer procedures and so discussions are being taken with EDS.

Ms WHITE: How much does SSABSA pay EDS? Is there a service agreement and, if so, what does it cover? Can a copy be tabled?

Dr Keightley: At this stage we do not have a service level agreement and that is part of the transfer being negotiated. We have certainly identified the kind of service that an organisation like ours needs, especially at certain times of the year, so we are now in the process of negotiating that.

Ms WHITE: How is the development of the computing system managed?

Dr Keightley: Within SSABSA we have an information services branch which has a manager. Within that structure we have an information system section, an officer who is responsible for the physical hardware maintenance, a series of officers who are responsible for the program development of our software systems and a database manager. There is a formal management structure.

Ms WHITE: I was thinking more along the lines of your interaction with EDS. How is that managed?

Dr Keightley: Our manager (information services) is responsible at the moment for the negotiations with EDS. Within that structure we will eventually identify a person who will have responsibility for managing the service level agreement. At the moment the responsibility for the negotiations and discussions lies with the manager (information services) and me.

Ms WHITE: What guarantees has EDS given concerning the processing of results to a certain deadline?

Dr Keightley: At this stage that is part of the discussions and negotiations. As I said earlier, SSABSA has been careful about identifying the kinds and levels of services that we require, especially between December and late January. We have documented our expectation that we can manage within our own structure, and we are in the process of negotiating that as part of the transfer.

Ms WHITE: What work is being done overseas and can you give details of receipts and expenditure?

Dr Keightley: SSABSA has continued to maintain its very long history in Malaysia. We have now more than 12 years' experience, primarily in Kuala Lumpur, with a series of colleges. Our participation in 1995 was 1 300 students offshore in our program. In 1996 our estimated enrolment is of that order, although the registrations are still coming in and final numbers are not confirmed. The colleges involved in Kuala Lumpur are Taylor's College, Stamford Sarjana, the Institut of Teknologi, Mara, which is a Government institution, and Disted College in Penang.

In April of this year I was pleased to be at the opening of the new Sepang Institute of Technology, which is coming on board with SSABSA for the first time. We offer 13 subjects in the SAM (South Australian Matriculation) program. At this stage we have students who are returning to Malaysia having succeeded in the SAM program in Kuala Lumpur, gained access to universities around the world and graduated with high distinctions. They are now returning to Kuala Lumpur as models of the outstanding success of being part of the SAM program. In terms of marketing, we have to do very little as it is now standing on its own merit. While we maintain a fairly stringent set of entrance criteria, we have a minimum level of performance in the local examination. We also have an English language requirement, which is not unreasonable but which is stringent in that students move straight from a non-English language medium of instruction into the SAM program, which is an English language instruction program.

As a result of that, those students who actually commence the SAM usually do very well in it. The actual income for surplus in 1994-95 was \$115 000.40. We project a surplus for

1995-96 of \$182 500. That surplus is used to support SSABSA research and SSABSA curriculum development programs. So, in effect, South Australian curriculum quality benefits from the income we make from that offshore activity.

Ms WHITE: Apart from the review of SACE, what other research programs is SSABSA undertaking?

Dr Keightley: In 1992 we produced a very comprehensive set of statistics on participation and performance. Because of other activities associated with the introduction of SACE that document was not continued on an annual basis. However, I am pleased to say that this afternoon on my desk was delivered the 1995 participation and performance statistics, which means that we are now able to produce 1993, 1994 and 1995 in one complete volume. That will be made available once it has been edited and checked. It will be made available both on disk and in hard copy. We have spent an extremely extensive period of time organising that information. I believe last year I made available a copy of the 1992 statistics. Very shortly, you will be able to get the 1993, 1994 and 1995 statistics. The 1993 and 1994 statistics will be accompanied by an interpretive text that picks up the trends between 1993 and 1994 and in some cases relates back to 1992 figures. So, it will be not just a compilation of figures but an interpretation of the emerging trends.

In addition, we plan to release the statistics on one year and then, the next year, we will release the next year's statistics with some interpretive comment on the trends. So, it will not be an annual interpretive comment: it will be a biannual interpretive comment. That has been by far the biggest task in the research section, because we have had to establish the entire programs to pull off the information in the format from the data bases for each of them. The individual publications are of a significant size.

In addition, we are examining gender equity in the curriculum assessment project, which will eventually end up in some guidelines for inclusive curriculum development and inclusive assessment practices.

Ms WHITE: Given that you now have extensive statistics up to 1995 of the participation and performance, what are the main findings in terms of trends over recent years?

Dr Keightley: At this stage, given that there are about 22 variables by which we have analysed it, I would be pleased to make the publication available to you.

Mr BRINDAL: You would know that a couple of years ago SSABSA had a number of criticisms directed at it because of the processes that did or did not occur over the notification period for results. I note with interest that, in the last year at least, and in the last couple of years, that has been dramatically improved. SSABSA was criticised for getting it wrong and it should be congratulated on getting it right. Are you satisfied that the processes are now as good as they can be or is there still further room for improvement?

Dr Keightley: I commented earlier that the board is committed to the continuous improvement of the project, and I think that ethos is going right through the authority. We have adopted an extremely diligent approach to the results processing, and I believe that has paid off. In fact, we need only look at the results release figures for January 1996 to discover that there were in total only 1 583 calls whereas in January 1995 there were 5 131 and in the previous years there were too many to document. If you still think that 1 500 calls is a lot of calls, the inquiries included 322 address changes of students whose certificate had gone to the wrong address because they had changed their address or were on holiday. It is also interesting to note that 390 of this year's

calls related to the university aggregate, a service that SSABSA provides for the university sector. There were 64 calls related specifically to the scaling process, which again is a university process that SSABSA processes. The largest number of calls relating directly to SSABSA business were 492 for clerical checks or checks on credit and status.

We are keen to continue to improve the number of calls. The number of integrity checks was increased significantly. In February, we did a critical review of all aspects of the process and came up with a series of issues that we would like to fine-tune. Some people gave us feedback that was not entirely clear, so we will rewrite that. In addition, there were small pieces in relation to the clerical checking area to which we will attend. We will continue to work collaboratively with SATAC and the universities to promote further an understanding of the scaling and aggregation processes. To that extent there have not only been more recent publications from the university sector but we have also prepared a presentation pack for people to explain the scaling and aggregation processes. So, we will continue to improve.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I wish to thank Dr Keightley and her staff for the superb work that the agency has undertaken

in relation to the results release process and all the other issues to which Dr Keightley has referred briefly tonight. We have a formula in the Minister's office that the degree of success and competence of SSABSA is in inverse proportion to the number of complaints we get in January from the results release process. I assure Dr Keightley that we received no more than a handful this year. It was an outstanding effort by SSABSA, Dr Keightley and all her staff. As Minister, I congratulate her and her staff on behalf of all members, because in previous years many members have received many complaints regarding various problems. I congratulate them for the work they have done.

Mr BRINDAL: Members on this side of the House would like to congratulate the Minister and his officers for their excellent answers and the excellent way in which the Minister is handling his department.

The CHAIRMAN: There being no further questions, I declare the examination of the votes completed.

ADJOURNMENT

At 10 p.m. the Committee adjourned until Wednesday 19 June at 11 a.m.