

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 17 June 1997

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B**Chairman:**

The Hon. W.A. Matthew

Members:

Mr M.J. Atkinson
 Mr M.K. Brindal
 Mr S.R. Leggett
 Mr G. Scalzi
 Ms L. Stevens
 Ms P.L. White

The Committee met at 11 a.m.

Department for Education and Children's Services, \$1 084 803 000

Minister for Education and Children's Services—Other Payments, \$232 474 000.

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.

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

Ms B. Treloar, Director, Corporate Services.

The CHAIRMAN: As all members would be aware, these committee hearings are relatively informal and there is no need for members to rise when they ask or answer questions. The committee will determine an approximate time for consideration of proposed payments, to facilitate the changeover of departmental advisers. Changes to the composition of 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 4 July to the Clerk of the House of Assembly.

I propose to allow the Minister and the lead speaker for the Opposition to make opening statements, if desired, of about 10 minutes but no longer than 15 minutes. There will be a flexible approach in relation to giving the call for the asking of questions, based on three questions per member, alternating sides. Members will also be allowed to ask a brief supplementary question to conclude a line of questioning, but I stress that supplementary questions will be the exception rather than the rule; in fact, if the Minister answers the full question there should be no need for a supplementary question.

Subject to the convenience of the committee, members outside the committee who desire to ask questions 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 budget documentation, including Program Estimates and Information, Capital Works Program, and Financial Statement. 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 House of Assembly Notice Paper.

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 through the Chair, not directly to the Minister's advisers. The Minister may refer questions to advisers for a response if he so desires. I also advise that for the purposes of the Committee some freedom will be allowed for television coverage by allowing a short period of filming from the northern gallery.

I declare the proposed payments open for examination and refer members to pages 28 and 29 in the Estimates of Receipts and Payments and to pages 123 to 145 in the Program Estimates and Information. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, Mr Chairman, I think I will get enough opportunity through the day to respond to comments from the Opposition or from other members. I am happy to proceed directly to questions on both recurrent and capital expenditures within the broad categories of the Department for Education and Children's Services and the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the spokesperson for the Opposition wish to make an opening statement?

Ms WHITE: Yes, Mr Chairman. This is an election budget and I would like to give the committee a brief analysis of the Liberal Government's financial commitment to Education and Children's Services over the last four years, compared with the 1993-94 budget. The following figures are taken from the Estimates of Receipts and Payments and relate to expenditure from the State's Consolidated Account. In 1993-94 the last Labor Government appropriated \$916 million for education. In 1994-95, the first Liberal budget cut this to \$913 million, a cut of \$21 million in real terms after allowing for inflation. In 1995-96, State spending on education was again cut to \$907 million, a cut of \$55 million in real terms. In 1996-97, the third Liberal budget, the appropriation increased in cash terms by \$26 million, but still represented a cut in real terms of \$56 million. Finally, in this election year, the appropriation from the Consolidated Account increased by \$104 million to \$1.02 billion, and after allowing for the Government's inflation forecast of 2.25 per cent is just \$1 million short of the figure required to match expenditure in 1993-94.

These cuts to State expenditure total \$133 million in real terms compared with 1993-94 and bear out the Minister's announcement in 1994 that the Government would cut \$40 million a year from education. The Committee will be interested to compare these cuts with claims made in the Government's last three budget pamphlets. In 1995-96, the

pamphlet heralded, 'We are coming into the home straight.' It claimed, 'This year we will spend an extra \$29.4 million on education.' The truth is that in 1995-96 the Government had actually cut State expenditure on education in real terms by \$55 million. In 1996-97 the budget pamphlet carried the headline, '\$150 million boost to education and health', and announced, '\$60 million for a smarter South Australia.'

The truth is that in 1996-97 the Government cut State spending on education in real terms by \$56 million. This year the pamphlet claims an increase of \$72 million, and the truth is that for the first time the budget almost matches 1993-94. The increase in this year's budget is a direct result of the terms of settlement of the long, drawn-out, disruptive and, at times, acrimonious dispute between the Minister and the teachers.

This year's increased budget relates to salary increases flowing from the enterprise agreement and other commitments, such as \$3 million for early assistance plans, \$80 million for flexible staffing resources and \$9.25 million for children with disabilities and learning difficulties—initiatives which will be welcomed by everyone but which, nevertheless, will be seen by the community as being taken reluctantly under pressure from the teachers and the community.

Members will recall that last year the Minister told the Committee that if the Government's \$93.6 million pay offer was not accepted 'taxpayers will have to pay'. The Minister even went so far as to threaten a teachers' pay tax. Given the Minister's long opposition to the teachers' claim, it will not be lost on the public that the Government is now trying to sell the outcomes of the agreement, opposed for so long by the Minister, as a new found commitment to education.

Members will also be interested in the number of staff that have been cut from the education budget since this Government came to office. In 1993-94 the budget funded 18 357 full-time equivalents; in 1994-95 this fell to 17 831; in 1995-96 the number fell again to 17 287; and in 1996-97 again fell to 16 901—a total reduction of 1 456 full-time jobs.

This year there is a welcome increase in the number of funded jobs to 17 431, and during the Estimates Committee deliberations the Opposition will be interested to learn when and where these additional jobs will be placed and how they will be recruited. The increase in jobs is crucial both to improve educational outcomes and because of the need to address South Australia's unacceptably high rate of unemployment. I point out to the Committee, however, that the number of jobs funded in this budget is still 926 fewer than in 1993-94.

There are many challenges facing education in South Australia. These include cuts to Federal funding, very low retention rates, pathways to employment, programs for children with disabilities and the cost of introducing information technology to schools—to mention just a few. The Opposition looks forward to the opportunity today to examine these important issues with the Minister and senior executives from the Department of Education and Children's Services.

The CHAIRMAN: I call on the member for Taylor to ask the first question.

Ms WHITE: My question is drawn from pages 126 to 137 of Program Estimates—Allocation of Resources. On page 132 of the Program Estimates, one of the issues listed is the impact of the Commonwealth budget. How will the 1997 Federal budget affect the delivery of preschool services in this State and, if the implication is a cut in service delivery, will the State be picking up any shortfall?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Our information—and if any contrary information comes to light I will share it with the honourable member later in the proceedings—is that it is unlikely that the Federal Budget will have any effect at all on preschool services in South Australia. I am not sure whether the member has confused preschool services and child-care services. If she has, perhaps she might like to clarify her question.

Ms WHITE: What proportion, if any, of the \$9.25 million promised in the 1996 teachers enterprise bargaining agreement to assist students with disabilities and learning difficulties will be available for preschool children?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Our understanding is that approximately \$250 000 of the \$9.25 million will be available for preschool services. There is a separate component to which the honourable member has not referred of about \$500 000 which is specifically targeted at early intervention for preschool services as well. So, the ballpark figure would be about \$750 000 additional funding to go into much needed additional services for preschools.

Ms WHITE: On page 132 of the Program Estimates there is a reference to extra speech and language pilot programs and to additional sources for children with learning difficulties. On what basis will these additional resources be distributed to particular regions and schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The funding, broadly, will be done on a formula basis. We currently have six speech and language programs available. There is no doubt that there is tremendous demand to get into those programs, and up until now we have been unable to meet that demand. That is why the Government announced in the budget an expansion of two new speech and language centres. We will pilot some new models. We have had a review carried out by Debbie James from Flinders University on the success of the speech and language programs.

We will be looking at two models, one of them perhaps based on the model used in the Riverland preschool. That will allow some additional places in speech and language programs in the metropolitan area. As yet, we do not know when they will start. We have not yet identified the two centres. Obviously, we try to get a good geographic spread of the speech and language programs, particularly for four year old children: we do not want families, and parents, in particular, having to travel inordinate distances to get to the location where the program might be offered. So, that will obviously be a factor. But clearly, we would also want support and willingness from the preschool director and management committee to run the program at the centre. I am advised that we are having discussions along those lines at the moment. As soon as we are in a position to announce where those two centres might be we will do so, and as soon as we can establish those programs we will do so.

Ms WHITE: Earlier when I asked the Minister how the Federal budget cuts would affect preschool services in this State, the Minister picked me up: I should have said preschool and child-care services in this State. I understand that six child-care centres have already closed. How will the Federal budget cuts affect delivery of preschool and child-care services in this State? If it means that there will be a cut in service delivery in South Australia, will that mean that the State will be picking up that shortfall?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There is no doubt that the Federal budget will have an impact on the delivery of child-care services in South Australia. That is why I indicated to the honourable member that I thought her first question was

heading in the wrong direction, and that it was child-care rather than preschool services. That is part of the assistance that we, as Ministers, would like to provide to the Estimates Committees. There is no doubt that some of the decisions—in particular, the removal of the operational subsidy—will have an impact on the delivery of child-care services. The Commonwealth Government has introduced a range of other changes in its most recent budget which will also have an impact on the delivery of outside of school hours care services. However, regarding long day care, the figure of six child-care centres having closed dates back to early 1996. Those decisions did not come about solely as a result of the recent announcement in the Federal budget.

Some of those closures, which track back over 12 months or more, relate to Commonwealth funding decisions, because primarily funding for child-care comes from the Commonwealth Government. Certainly, the most recent closure of The Parks is attributed by the management committee and its supporters to the problems that they saw emanating from Commonwealth budget decisions. Whether that is the only reason and whether a combination of other factors is involved—for example, the reduced number of children—and it has not just been caused by the \$10 increase in fees, I am not in a position to make a detailed comment, but the people with local knowledge who run the local service have indicated that, primarily, it was a response to Commonwealth budget decisions.

The State Government does not have funding to make up for Commonwealth Government funding reductions. The Commonwealth Government makes its decisions and through its Ministers it will need to defend the impact of those decisions. The State Government expressed concern in relation to the operational subsidy—in particular, in relation to rural and isolated communities where no alternative is provided through the private child care sector. In some metropolitan areas an alternative is provided by either another community managed child-care centre or through the private child-care sector, but if you happen to live at, for instance, Penola, Bordertown or Balaklava the only child-care that is offered is basically through the community managed sector in some way and not through a private provider.

We are pleased to see after much lobbying by the State Government and a number of centres that the Commonwealth Government has just announced that a significant number of our country centres will continue to receive operational subsidies. I think that between 10 and 15 centres will now get operational subsidies—either existing ones or ones which are planned to be opened in some rural areas. So, we are pleased to see that amelioration of the impact of the removal of the operational subsidy and that our lobbying and the lobbying by individual centres has been successful.

We have been unsuccessful so far with the second part of our argument which relates to the fact that in some lower socioeconomic areas of the metropolitan area and regional cities and communities the Commonwealth might look at either a continuation of the operational subsidy or some version of a subsidy. So far, the Commonwealth has not agreed to ameliorate its decision regarding those areas. Those closures have been in the northern, north-western and western suburbs, but as I said there have been a number of closures of child-care centres over the past 12 months that have not all been related to Commonwealth budget decisions.

Mr BRINDAL: This is the seventh education estimates in which I have been involved, and I must say that I have not heard a poorer opening presentation from the Opposition. The

member for Taylor referred to pages 125 to 131 of the Budget Estimates and I believe got her figures immediately wrong. I would like to check those figures with you. The honourable member claimed that the program payments amount to \$1.02 billion but my reading of page 125 indicates that the program payments will amount to \$1 349 009 000, so she has made a rather mammoth error. She went on to convolute her argument by saying that whilst she acknowledges that you, Minister, have returned in real terms to 1993-94 levels of expenditure even on her figures to within \$1 million, and somehow claims that there has been this giant cut in education.

In view of the fact that you, Minister, have very quietly spent \$500 000 on one school in my electorate to catch up on the back-log and what was meant to be done over the years and decades before we inherited Government, could you share with us some of the problems you have had and some of the expenditures you have had to involve yourself in to get education back on track in South Australia and comment on the member for Taylor's rather stupid opening statement.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I thank the honourable member for his invitation; it was completely unexpected. I would have to agree with the honourable member. I have witnessed a number of these Estimates Committees and the opening statement that was written for the honourable member is an opportunity for the Opposition to flag where it intends to head in terms of piloting a different view—its view—from the Government as to where it would like to see education heading. Sadly I think the opening statement was just a continuation of a negative, destructive, overly and always critical view of our Government schools and care services in South Australia. I would have wished for better from the member for Taylor than perhaps agreeing to read that statement.

The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister in this area have been extraordinarily negative towards Government schools and care services in South Australia. In their view it is a litany of disaster, despair and troubled times. What we are trying to do on behalf of Government schools and care services is highlight some of the good things that go on in Government schools. I hope that the member for Taylor and the member for Elizabeth will not spend their whole day running down Government schools and care services in South Australia.

This is an opportunity for us to be positive, to highlight the good things that have just come out of Public and be Proud Week. It is an opportunity for members to highlight the good things that go on in Government schools and care services. We will be inviting people to look at the approach that is adopted by Government and Opposition members today when they have the opportunity to highlight some of the good things and to see whether or not Government or Opposition members are prepared to be positive about the good things that go on in Government schools rather than haring down the negative and destructive path all the time.

In relation to the overall figures, I admit that I was bemused by the figures that were quoted by the lead speaker for the Opposition. The information that has been circulated to all schools and people interested in education in the DECS budget brief for this year's budget (and I know I cannot table the document but copies can be made available to the member for Taylor) clearly indicates that after some slight reductions in the 1994-95 and 1995-96 budgets the actual payments made by DECS in the 1996-97 year, compared to 1995-96, was an increase of some \$110 million; and the estimated

increase for this current budget is a further \$72 million. In total, in the coming financial year, the budget that this Estimates Committee is looking at is \$162 million higher—an increase of \$162 million—than the budget I inherited from the last Labor Government. I am not sure where the honourable member's figures come from. Clearly we have a budget of almost \$1.3 billion, not the \$1 billion that the honourable member has somehow contrived. As with the lead question in relation to preschools and child-care, I think she has lost \$300 million somewhere from the budget papers.

Mr BRINDAL: They lost \$3 billion on the State Bank.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: They lost \$3 billion on the State Bank, so I guess \$300 million is not much from the education budget. One can convey a view that there are further cuts, with further negative criticism coming across our Government schools sector, or one can celebrate the fact that we had a huge boost in education funding this current budget year and another huge boost to education funding next year. You can highlight that or seek to manufacture figures from whence we know not, and try to highlight the fact that there are further reductions within the education budget. I will not take up the opportunity at this stage to go through all the problems we inherited because the day will allow me to do that in individual areas. I join with the member for Unley in dismissing absolutely this figure. The member for Taylor has misread the budget papers in some way. I am not overly critical of her for that, but to lose \$300 million when you are trying to look at the overall effect on the budget needs to be highlighted to the Committee and observers of the Committee process.

The CHAIRMAN: Would the Minister like to provide the Chair with a copy of the paper which was distributed to schools and to which he referred?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, it may be useful for members to have a copy of that.

Mr BRINDAL: My second question concerns page 142, policy area, education program sector, services to children and families. The member for Taylor asked the Minister about money set aside and I think that the figure alluded to in the Minister's answer was \$750 000 for learning difficulty and early intervention programs in schools. The Minister would recall that only recently this sector of education was regarded as a legitimate sector for looking at early intervention and children with learning difficulties. It was traditionally, under previous Governments, viewed as almost a child minding service. Your Government has used this area much more constructively. Could you share with the Committee how you have introduced learning difficulty and early intervention programs at the preschool level to address some of the needs of early childhood years in primary schools and outline how what is being criticised by the member for Taylor is an important initiative of this Government and the first undertaken by your ministry?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I would not be as unkind as the member for Unley—I guess that is not a surprise—because I think some very good programs have been undertaken in the preschool sector of the department. The Children's Services Office was a separate office for some years. As shadow Minister I supported many of the programs that the Children's Services Office undertook. The big change, with which I am delighted, is that part of our overall early years strategy has linked, first, the Department for Education and Children's Services. We now have a range of new early intervention programs both within the preschool sector and within the junior primary years, which we will take about this

afternoon. Also we are looking at innovative programs in relation to child care services and working with families under great stress or distress.

One example about which I am most pleased is the First Start Program, with which both the members for Elizabeth and Taylor would be broadly familiar. A four-year-old child arriving in one of our preschools may already be starting off behind the eight ball. Many of those children have come from a family situation that is very difficult and their language acquisition is a long way behind many other four year olds who commence the program at that preschool. The First Start Program was developed by officers within the department, and by others interested in this area, to start working with families under pressure, families who might have been identified by other Government agencies, such as Family and Community Services.

Officers within that First Start Program work with children in the age group of 0 to 3 years in the family home by visiting the home on a weekly basis and working with the parent or parents and the child or children to try to assist in the early language acquisition skills of that child. The areas in which the program has operated successfully are suburbs of Elizabeth, Munno Para, Salisbury, Hackham West, Taperoo and Port Pirie. We currently have 54 families using the service. The officers in the First Start Program are providing toys and activities, promoting language and literacy. They help model appropriate ways of talking and playing with children. They share books, games and other resources, because in many of these families the appropriate books, materials and resources are not available for the children in terms of early acquisition of literacy skills.

The early evaluations are entirely positive in relation to it. We obviously have ongoing and more formal evaluations of the success of the First Start Program. I would hope that future Ministers and future Governments will continue the model of these sorts of programs, not just relying on what we do in junior primary schooling but going back to pre-school (which have a range of programs that we may talk about for the next hour or so), and going back to child care, for those in child care. The First Start Program is in an innovative way going back working with families in the family environment and trying to correct some of those problems before the four year old arrives at our preschool program.

Mr BRINDAL: The members for Taylor and Elizabeth will join us on this side in saying that the Minister does not need to be quite so modest. I refer to page 132 of the Program Estimates. On that page reference is made to a number of important initiatives which have been undertaken during the Minister's administration, and I refer specifically to the ECLIPSE program, which is a screening assessment and enrichment program for children aged 3 to 5 years, the fact that a draft policy for preschool based on Foundation Areas of Learning is listed as completed, and that staff training in the use of Foundation Areas of Learning in the curriculum framework is well on track. I concede that the previous Government may have done early work in the area, but what has the Minister done to enhance this area?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am pleased that the honourable member has further explored areas in relation to the early years strategy as it relates to preschools, because earlier I referred to important work that officers have been undertaking in that area. The Foundation Areas of Learning document, to which the honourable member has referred, was funded to the tune of \$124 000 in the 1996-97 budget. In essence, that is the broad curriculum framework for our preschool centres.

We decided that in the school sector for 5 and 6 year olds and onwards the curriculum statements and profiles, which are the curriculum framework for teaching and learning within our junior primary and primary areas, secondary and special schools. The Foundation Areas of Learning document is the curriculum framework for the preschool program. I am told that a census just conducted by the Quality Assurance Unit in April of this year indicated that 94 per cent of our preschools are now using this Foundation Areas of Learning document. It is almost complete coverage in a relatively short time, which is very encouraging. A lot comes from the Foundation Areas of Learning document. It is the essential framework document for all teaching, learning and play that occurs within the preschool year.

The second reference was to ECLIPSE which, in effect, is a screening assessment and enrichment program for children aged three to five. In essence, it is the development of a screening tool to help our staff at preschool identify those children who might be having learning difficulties, particularly in the area of literacy. So, it is something which has been developed to provide that assistance and we look forward to its ongoing implementation within preschools.

Ms STEVENS: I refer to page 133 of the Program Estimates and Information booklet, and the funding of preschool centres. This issue has been raised with me by a number of management committees of preschool centres in my electorate. They say that, of their total funds, about half of their income is derived from the fees they collect from parents and the other half is split roughly between what DECS provides and fundraising initiatives. One example was that of the half split, the proportion they received from DECS, covered virtually only their cleaning and a small portion of their telephone account. They make the point that, because they have to pay for their utilities, telephone and other such things, they have quite a burden placed on them in terms of fees and fundraising. What is the total cost to preschool centres across South Australia of funding utilities and other matters such as telephones?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will obviously need to take that on notice in relation to the total cost of utilities and bring back a reply.

Ms STEVENS: As a supplementary question, how does that relate to the funding by DECS, and does the Minister agree that because preschool centres need to spend quite a large proportion of their budget on these matters there is therefore a very heavy burden on parents in actually providing funds for the real guts of what is going on in preschool centres?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We do agree that there is a heavy burden on parents in terms of supporting the programs at preschools. It is important to note that the costs to which the honourable member refers exclude the major cost to preschools, and that is the salary and staffing levels. So the costs the honourable member is talking about would be only the additional costs over and above what is probably 80 or 90 per cent of the total costs.

The situation is one of burden for parents. It is one we inherited from the previous Government. This Government has made no change in relation to this area. We have inherited—and this refers back to the earlier question from the member for Unley—in a number of areas, budget allocations which do not meet the demand in particular areas. Whilst the Liberal Government has been able to increase spending by \$162 million over what the last Labor Government spent, and whilst we spend more money per student

than any other State Government in Australia, we cannot solve overnight all the problems we inherited from the previous Labor Government.

When I speak to my management committees, as I do often, the view I put to them is that we cannot fix overnight all the problems we inherited from the previous Government. We are doing as much as we can, as quickly as we can, with increased spending by \$162 million over the last Labor Government budget. When you tell parents that, most will be delighted to hear that positive information and will welcome the fact. Whilst it does not resolve their particular problem immediately, it is some comfort to them to know there is recognition that there is a burden on parents and that the Government is aware of it. It is increasing funding to education and children's services in large lumps, but cannot solve overnight all the problems it inherited from the previous Government—that might be the bit the honourable member might want to change when she speaks to her management committees.

When this Government came to office, we asked a fairly simple question, 'Did preschools have access to a fax machine?' Had the previous Minister actually given preschools access to something which is fairly common these days, a fax machine, and the answer I got was the previous Labor Minister and previous Labor Government had not provided fax machines to preschools.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That does not help preschools. The honourable member interjects and says, 'Yes, but we gave it to schools.' If you happen to be speaking to one of your management committees—and you are a stand alone preschool and the nearest school happens to be two or three kilometres down the road—the fact that the member for Elizabeth said, 'Well, there is a fax machine three kilometres down the road, you can put on your raincoat in the middle of winter and walk three or four kilometres down the road and use their fax machine' is not of much comfort to them. I would not suggest that the member for Elizabeth uses that argument with her management committees. That is an example of the sort of problem we inherited.

At the moment we are in the process of providing not just a fax machine but a computer for preschools. If they did not have a fax machine, they certainly did not have a computer. That was too far whizzbang for preschools to be allowed access to. We are actually providing computer facilities to preschools so they can move into this century, let alone next century, in relation to their access to technology.

The honourable member would be delighted to know that there has been a huge boost in relation to access to special services for preschools. I am sure we will be able to discuss that in further questioning. There has also been for the first time some reasonable size training and development grants for our preschool staff. There has been a small grant to staff in preschools for training and development for computers and related technology, and most recently in this budget—again I am sure the honourable member will be delighted to know—there has been an allocation to the majority of preschools in the external repair and paint program, also something that had not been done previously.

Whilst this Government has not been able to resolve overnight all of those problems, it has been aware of these issues and has, in a sensible and reasonable way, been expanding resources for preschools and trying to address some of these anomalies, such as the paint and repair program, greater facilities, providing fax machines or fax

facilities with computers, as well as some training and development money. The critical area for them is early intervention and additional funding in early intervention. There are many other areas I could highlight, but I do not want to spend too much time in my responses. They are a few examples of key spending and resource initiatives that this Government is implementing in preschools. I would invite the honourable member to share this answer and others with her management committees.

Ms STEVENS: I agree about the importance of early intervention programs. Obviously it is extremely important for it to start in preschools. I wish to raise the issue of how staffing is allocated to preschool centres. One of the issues for dealing with situations where young children come to preschool and are, in the Minister's own words, 'behind the eight ball' in that they have not had the development of literacy before they arrive, is that in fact very closely linked is their attendance at preschool and the fact they also may have come from transient families that have a range of other issues they are dealing with, and therefore attendance becomes an issue.

I understand that preschool centres are still staffed on attendance rather than on enrolments. Therefore, preschools with a population of students who do not attend for various reasons—and often they are linked with those issues to which I have just referred—are disadvantaged in terms of the number of staff provided. Do you acknowledge that staffing preschools, and particularly those sorts of preschools, on that basis can have a detrimental effect on what can be provided, and are you considering any sort of social justice loading to staffing for preschools where it can be shown that students are at risk and therefore attendance can be an issue and, following on from that, the staffing formula would be affected?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The staffing of preschools on attendance was a policy which we inherited from the Government of which the member for Elizabeth was a member.

Ms STEVENS: That is not the answer to the question.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am just highlighting the situation. You are now highlighting allegedly detrimental effects of the staffing arrangements. This was actually a policy implemented by your Minister and your Government and supported by you.

Ms STEVENS: That is not answering the question.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is my answer—that is what I am giving you. I am surprised that the member for Elizabeth should now be critical of a policy which her Government introduced and which was supported by her as one of the key people in education and care thought and policy development within the Labor Party, so I am led to believe. That would be my first comment: no, I would not accept that the mere application of the staffing formula in relation to attendance *vis a vis* enrolment is something that will lead to a detrimental effect for children and families.

There is no doubt that the application of the attendance formula can create some difficulties in some areas, and that is why the calculations for the formula in relation to attendance are done not just in one week of the year but through four terms spread out over two weeks per term. This is done in an attempt to be fair because originally it was argued that it occurred in a week when a lot of children were away with the flu or were out fighting bushfires on the farm, or there was a variety of other reasons why attendance might have been low in that week.

For those reasons the sampling or surveying is done for a period of six to eight weeks spread over three to four terms so that we can get a fair indication of how many children are attending. For example, if someone has an enrolment of 100 students but only 80 students are turning up most of the time, then the formula is conducted on the basis of the attendance, and we think that is a reasonable approach, given that it is not compulsory to attend preschool, unlike schooling, and it is one of those areas on which we broadly gave bipartisan support to your Government in the implementation of the policy some time ago.

We understand also that it was negotiated with the then South Australian Institute of Teachers and was actually supported by the institute or by the union in relation to staffing in this area. We do make allowances in our staffing for the difficulties being experienced by families and staff in lower socioeconomic areas, so our staffing formula is either 1:10 or 1:11, based on a classification criterion which makes special allowance for the sorts of difficulties to which the member is referring.

The other area where special allowance is made is in terms of the number of students with learning difficulties, and clearly in your area or any other area where we have larger numbers of students with learning difficulties the range of special services and early intervention programs that we have will therefore be proportionately targeted to those sorts of areas to a greater degree than an area where there are few problems.

Ms STEVENS: Which preschools were closed, amalgamated or relocated to school sites in 1996-97 and how many closures, amalgamations or relocations are anticipated for the coming financial year, presumably after the election is out of the way?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I thank the honourable member for her vote of confidence that there will be a Liberal Government after the next election. I am delighted by that acknowledgment of the member for Elizabeth in her questioning.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: To tell the truth, the only people who have been fined for untruthful statements during the election period were the Labor Party at the last election, when the Hon. Terry Cameron was convicted in a court for misleading claims made during the last election campaign.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: He was the only one convicted. The only person with a conviction against his name is the leader of the Labor Party's strategy campaign. I do not think the member for Elizabeth ought to talk about misleading claims being made during an election period because she is not on strong ground.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Labor Party was the only one convicted. We would need to take on notice the issue of 1996-97. To be honest, there might be some in the country, but I cannot think of any in 1996-97 which have been relocated to primary school sites. We have had a number of proposals: one in the metropolitan area, at least of which I am aware, and two in the country, at Millicent and perhaps one or two in the Mid North, where we have had proposals that the stand-alone preschool be closed and relocated on the primary school site. If that information is wrong I will certainly come back to the honourable member, but I cannot recall any.

So, the answer to the honourable member's question is that in 1997-98 there will be ongoing consideration of some

of those requests from local communities about relocation. As Minister, I have not determined a final view. In broad philosophical terms, as Minister I actually support collocation where that is feasible. To have preschool and school services on the one site or next door to each other makes a lot of sense from a child, parent, school and care services viewpoint. Similarly, we have the same philosophy with collocation of child-care services. In some areas, as the honourable member will know, we are actually collocating child-care, preschool and school services on the one site. As a broad philosophy and direction I am supportive of that.

The next step is whether it is worth spending \$500 000 to move a preschool two kilometres down the road to a school site. Frankly, for some of the reasons you have highlighted in terms of other demands on the much needed dollar, we have to make a difficult decision. Do we spend \$250 000 or \$500 000 moving a preschool to a school site for the admitted advantages that might entail when it might mean that we cannot put some of these other things such as computers and fax machines into schools or indeed paint the schools because they have not been painted before. There are those sorts of things as well. They are the difficult decisions that we must take. So far my record has demonstrated, because we have not done anything in relation to that in 1996-97, that I prefer to spend the money at this stage on meeting some of those other demands whilst not ruling out some of these relocation exercises.

Certainly, if some of the relocations could be done in moving a preschool into surplus accommodation on a school site, it would be much more attractive to me as Minister because we are not having to build the new facilities on a school site. If there are surplus facilities on a school site and if we can move a preschool into it with some change, and if that is what people want, then certainly for a low cost I am happy to support it.

Some of the options might be within that model. However, I have some concern about the other options, for example, where we have to rebuild a new preschool on a school site. If it is going to cost significant sums of money, then we will need some convincing in terms of spending that money. In terms of 1997-98, whomever the Minister might be, if it happened to be me, I would approach it within those broad parameters.

Mr LEGGETT: I refer specifically to the child-care regulations on page 126 of the Program Estimates. Will the Minister say why it has taken so long to complete the review of child-care regulations, given that the initial work was begun in 1993, and does the Minister see any cost implications for consumers once those regulations are in place?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The question has been asked for the past two or three years, and one of the great frustrations I have had as Minister for Education and Children's Services has been the inability to bring to conclusion the review of child-care regulations. I do not think I have been bold enough to say definitely when it will be concluded, but each year when the question is asked I express the hope that it will be concluded within the next 12 months. I confess, again, that I am hopeful. I think there are more positive signs this year than last year about bringing it to conclusion. I would be hopeful of bringing it to conclusion before the end of this parliamentary term. Certainly, that is my wish and intention at this stage.

The big dispute in the area of child-care regulations has been the vexed question of quality, how far the regulations should go and the extent of the regulations versus cost and

affordability. The debate in 1997 has not changed from what was going on in 1993. We have had some information. We actually employed an external consultant about 12 months ago because we had all sorts of claims about the implications of the introduction of the proposed national standards for child-care regulations. Some people were claiming extra costs of \$20 to \$30 a week for child-care, perhaps even higher, if the Government went ahead with the national standards; others were saying, 'No,' it would cost a very small amount, certainly nothing near the \$20 to \$30. I will obtain the information for the member because I do not have it with me. My recollection is that the independent consultant made a few assumptions (which members would need to know, so I will provide that information) and that, as a result of the introduction of the national standards, it might lead to cost increases of about \$18. We might check that figure: I have a recollection it is between \$11 and \$18.

As a result of that information, we obviously had some concerns. We are supportive of the highest quality child-care service that we can provide. However, we are wanting to provide affordable child-care to families in South Australia. It is not much use providing high quality child-care which a large number of families cannot afford, particularly with the changes in not only this budget but also last year's Commonwealth budget in relation to child-care assistance. We have seen, for example, that those involved with The Parks child-care centre claim that a \$10 child-care increase—which they say was brought about by the Commonwealth budget—has led to the closure of that centre. If we have another increase of \$11 to \$18 in some centres, potentially we may well have a situation where we have higher quality child-care which cannot be afforded by larger numbers of middle and lower income South Australian families.

There is a balance. There are people within the child-care sector at the moment who are very critical of the Government for not proceeding posthaste with the national standards and increasing the staffing levels and quality of the staffing levels. They retain the view that we must have the highest quality standards possible. We have tried to balance that. We have consulted the child-care industry reference group and others. We have consulted with the child-care field, a *de facto* Green paper for want of a better phrase, which includes a range of changes but which does not proceed with changes to the staffing area. It maintains the existing standards within South Australia.

I think we have had 180 responses already to the discussion paper, so there is considerable interest in the field. We are in the process of looking at all responses, and we will seek to make a decision as quickly as we can in relation to the child-care regulations that have been circulated.

It leaves for another day the debate about the staffing levels and the impact on the cost of child-care services. We will look at that over the next 12 months when we see potential impacts of the Commonwealth funding changes and we have settled our other child-care regulation changes as well. I do not think I can add much more than that. It is an important issue, and I certainly do not want to be a Minister who implements child-care regulations which lead to an even greater number of child-care services having to close because of the cost of child-care and the fact that lower and middle income families can no longer afford to access those services.

Mr LEGGETT: I refer to 'Special needs' on page 127 of the Program Estimates. Will the Minister say how many children in preschools receive additional support because of disability or developmental delay? Will the Minister indicate

the types of services and programs that are in place for these types of children? Are there special initiatives in place to meet the needs of rural children?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will need to come back to the honourable member with the exact numbers and I will do so. My advice is that, broadly, we have about 500 children in the metropolitan area who receive support under our preschool services support program. We have a number of programs that operate in this area. Whether or not there are cross-overs between programs is an issue on which I am not clear. For example, a child might be accessing speech pathology services and, at the same time, be accessing some other service within the department. I would have to ask officers to explore whether or not there is a degree of double counting in the numbers of children.

Certainly, there are significant numbers. I have figures in relation to referrals to speech pathology in term one of this year. It appears that there will be over 400 referrals for speech pathology services in term one of this year. The incredible demand for speech pathology is an issue for preschool services and school services. This Government has increased speech pathology by 72 per cent from the level of speech pathology services inherited from the previous Government. Even through the budget reduction—

Ms Stevens: You've cut through health; that's the problem.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have not cut through health at all. I am delighted that the member for Elizabeth acknowledges that education has a huge increase in speech pathology. Even when we made budget reductions in some areas in 1994-95, we continued to increase speech pathology services because of what we saw as the priority of (a) the early years strategy and (b) speech pathology in particular. Through the slightly better years of the budgets for 1996 and 1997 we have further increased it. The level of speech pathology services for this year is 72 per cent higher, yet we still cannot meet the demand out there amongst families. All members, including you, Mr Chairman, in the south will know of examples from constituents. We have reduced the waiting lists but we still have waiting lists. Some waiting lists we inherited were six to 12 months. We have reduced the extent of them, but there are still waiting lists for services, and even with this huge boost we still cannot meet the tremendous demand and need for speech pathology.

So, we are looking at a range of programs and we are looking at trying to use our services better. We have problems in the country areas, which the honourable member has identified, in trying to attract speech pathologists to move to and be prepared to work in country areas. We are looking at what we can do. At the moment, metropolitan speech pathologists are visiting on a rotation and roster basis to try to meet the demand and reduce the waiting lists in those areas. For the first time we are using outsourcing with private providers of speech pathology to try to fill that demand in a number of areas.

I will take the rest of the honourable member's question on notice—in terms of the number of students, in particular—and try to bring back a reply which might indicate the total number of students who we are assisting in the special needs area. I believe that the answer will be many thousands, when we look at all the programs through one normal year. I believe that it will be interesting for members to ascertain how many children we help in a normal year with special needs with an additional service such as speech pathology,

guidance officer services and a range of other special education services.

Mr SCALZI: My question refers to bilingual assistance programs (Estimates, page 135). Will the Minister indicate what support is given to young children from non-English-speaking backgrounds to assist them to benefit from pre-schooling? How many children receive this support, and what are the costs?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Let me acknowledge the honourable member's ongoing interest in this Government's policies of multiculturalism and multicultural education and care. I know he has been a strong supporter of those programs in our schools and preschools. As I have done on many previous occasions, let me acknowledge some of the pioneering work done in this area by previous Ministers and previous Governments. As Minister, I believe that we have been able to build on a very good foundation in this area which was established by previous Ministers and previous Governments. As I have already done publicly, in the Estimates Committees I again acknowledge the very good foundation that was built for this Government in this area.

The bilingual support program, I am told, has been supporting about 350 children. We have 115 part-time bilingual assistants who work to support those children. I have to confess to almost a conflict of interest here because, unbeknownst to me, my mother, who is a Japanese national, was evidently employed by the local children's services section in the South-East of South Australia—I believe on a short-term contract, but I am not sure—to provide bilingual assistance, under this program, I presume, for a four year old Japanese child who had emigrated here with his father and mother. I believe his father was a Japanese teacher in one of the local high schools in Mount Gambier. I believe that the local primary schools had originally approached my mother to teach language because of the great demand to learn Japanese. She thought that it was difficult enough looking after three or four children, and the prospect of 25 or 30 students in a primary school class was too much for her to contemplate. She had been teaching Japanese language at TAFE. She was snared by, I presume, the local children services staff there to be part of this bilingual assistance program.

So, I have seen it from both sides now: I have seen it as Minister and I have seen it from a family perspective. The perspective that my mother gave me of the program—and I am not sure what centre it was in Mount Gambier—was an entirely encouraging one. She said that she does not know how staff would cope with a four year old Japanese-speaking child (who I believe, if I can put it kindly, was lively, in terms of his interactions with the preschool there) without the aid of a bilingual assistant for part of the time. I guess in the past they have had to: it is not always possible to resolve these issues. That is one of the challenges of preschool teaching, where you have some children who have no English language at all and you somehow have to communicate. So, it is not all a bed of roses in preschools, but certainly the bilingual assistance program is a terrific program, both from a ministerial perspective and also from a personal perspective now, from someone I know who is actively involved in the program.

Ms WHITE: One of the issues that looms very large in regions such as the one I represent and also those represented by my colleague, the member for Elizabeth, is the assistance to students with disabilities. Possibly these electorates would be the hardest hit by the Federal Liberal Government's

changes to child-care arrangements. We have talked a little about students with learning difficulties, but what special measures will the Minister now take to ensure that students with disabilities are not worse off as a result of changes to Commonwealth funding arrangements?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Again, we will need to define our areas. We have already briefly touched upon a significant expansion of State resources in terms of students or children with disabilities in our preschool or four year old programs, and I am happy to provide further information there. In the special education area there is a significant expansion of State-funded services for four year old children with disabilities in our preschool programs. Can the honourable member clarify what additional service she is referring to in relation to children with disabilities that she wants a response to?

Ms WHITE: Basically, there is a high proportion of children with disabilities in both child-care and preschool in our areas.

Mr Brindal interjecting:

Ms WHITE: A higher concentration of children who have disabilities—and multiple disabilities—which would require a higher proportion of funding to meet that need. Clearly, the Commonwealth funding arrangement changes will impact on them, and I am asking the Minister what measures he will take to try to alleviate the disadvantage those children would suffer as a result of those changes by the Federal Government.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will need to take some advice. The immediate advice I have from Dawn Davis is that the Commonwealth has provided us with some additional funding which might be up to \$800 000—I am not sure over what period of time that is, so we need to check that—for extra support for children with special needs in child-care and outside school hours care. It is evidently a new funding program under the Commonwealth budget; therefore, the money will not come to the State. We will take that on notice and try to get details of this new Commonwealth program and how it might apply to South Australia so the honourable member can share that information with her constituents. It is an acknowledged need, and if the Commonwealth is doing something additional in that area we would be pleased to share the information with the honourable member as soon as we can get it.

Ms WHITE: In relation to the issue of preschool fees, have the preschool fees imposed by preschool management committees increased on average over the past year? If so, what are the reasons for this?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will check for you, but I do not believe that we have any figures on a survey of preschool fees. I would be amazed if preschool fees have not increased. They have increased every year for the past 30 years under Labor and Liberal Governments. The simple fact of life is that costs increase on an annual basis, and under the previous Government there were annual increases in preschool fees. As I said, I would be amazed if a good number of our centres have not increased their preschool fees by a small amount. Some centres will seek to freeze their fees for a little while. It may be that this year some centres have frozen their fee level at last year's level to give parents a bit of a breather. However, it is my understanding that, as has been the practice for 20 or 30 years, increases in preschool fees would have been listed by management committees.

Ms WHITE: Will the Minister take that question on notice?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that question on notice, but I do not think that we would have any centrally collected information on this matter. We might be able to provide the honourable member with some assessments by district coordinators of rough orders of magnitude. If we have any figures, I am happy to share them with the honourable member.

Ms WHITE: The Minister has received some representations from kindergartens regarding their operating costs, particularly in respect of such items as cleaning and maintenance which seem to have become considerably more expensive for kindergartens. What is the Minister doing or what does he intend to do to assist kindergartens which are struggling to meet these routine costs?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I refer the honourable member to a response that I gave to an earlier question from the member for Elizabeth because it dealt with this exact area. If she is unhappy with any aspect of that answer, I am happy to further expand my earlier response.

Ms WHITE: Will the Minister supply to the Committee, on notice if necessary, a list of country centres which will continue to receive operational subsidies?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am happy to do that. From my immediate knowledge, those centres include Balaklava, Ceduna, the Riverland and, I think, Bordertown and Penola.

Additional Departmental Adviser:

Mr C. Charlesworth, Acting Director, Schools Operations.

Mr BRINDAL: I refer to page 125 of the Program Estimates and Information, specifically to capital works expenditure. I note that this year the projected capital works expenditure for DECS is \$105 million. Is that a significant increase? If so, why has the Government significantly increased capital works expenditure, which projects does the Government expect to complete during this financial year, and can any of these projects be put down to a cynical exercise in vote buying or do they actually form part of an ongoing program of the department?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I refer to an earlier question from the honourable member about the problems inherited by this Government from the previous Government. One of the biggest problems concerns the run-down nature of school and preschool buildings and facilities. There is a tremendous backlog of maintenance and minor works requirements in schools and preschools which has not been able to be handled overnight and which will take many years to try to tackle in terms of increased budgets. I am pleased that in last year's budget we saw a further significant increase in the overall capital works budget. It was the first time that the budget actually went over \$100 million to about \$102 million. This year's budget has been further increased slightly to just over \$105 million. So, it is certainly not a rapid last minute change in terms of increasing funds in this area. There has been a steady, slow build-up in terms of the amount of funding devoted to capital works programs.

As I said, this amount of \$105 million follows the \$102 million of the previous year. It is a significant increase in the level of budgets which seemed to vary about \$70 million or \$80 million a year (or sometimes less) under the previous Government. That was roughly what the capital works program seemed to average in variation under the previous Government.

To have a total capital works program now of over \$100 million is a clear indication of a very significant boost and a long-term strategy to try to increase funding in maintenance and minor works—the extra \$3 million this year for the External Repair and Maintenance Program is a further indication of that—and lift the quality of our schools. A number of members in this room, and the member for Elizabeth I am sure will be one, will be able to give personal testimony to the difference that a major redevelopment of facilities at a school can make. The honourable member's constituents under the previous Government and this Government have enjoyed the benefits of significant redevelopments of school buildings and facilities.

I know from discussions with staff and parents of the tremendous lift in morale and spirit in school communities when redevelopment is going on in those schools. I would love to be in a position, overnight, to do it for all the 650 schools and 300-odd pre-schools in South Australia. However, the reality of the finances of the State, with the State Bank debt and all those sorts of things, is such that it is not possible. The \$105 million program is terrific but it will still not solve the problems in one year: it is part of a long-term strategy to try to correct the problems.

Mr BRINDAL: With regard to the House of Assembly's recent apology to the lost generation of Aboriginal children and the debate whipped up in the community by the member for Oxley, can you explain the initiatives taken in support of the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee and the Anangu Education Program generally but with specific reference to the anti-racism curriculum, which I believe you are preparing for distribution, and also the capital developments associated with the Wiltja program which you have personally overseen?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I need to take some aspects of those questions on notice. The honourable member has had a personal commitment to the Wiltja program, and I think it was under his tutelage as the shadow Minister that I first visited the Woodville High School and saw the embryonic stages of a terrific program that was being commenced as part of the Wiltja program. We have committed significant resources—I think \$1.2 million—to a major new facility at the old Morris Hospital at Northfield, and I hope that we might in the near coming months be able to celebrate the opening of those facilities. There was no doubting that whilst the idea was terrific it needed upgraded facilities, and we were pleased therefore to commit \$1.2 million for those new facilities.

Those students who undertake their secondary school program at the Woodville High School make a very big cultural shift in terms of coming from the Anangu lands to the metropolitan area, and the Wiltja program allows them to manage that cultural shift. The new facilities will provide them with quality living and teaching and learning facilities as well as being involved at the Woodville High School. I am delighted that the Woodville High School this year will commence a \$3 million upgrade of its facilities. As one of the oldest high schools in the State it was in a sorry state of disrepair and needed significant money, and we were prepared to commit \$3 million to that program as well. The Wiltja program has been very successful in terms of what it is seeking to undertake and we have been supportive of the ongoing operation of that program to the extent of the capital works commitments that we have made.

In relation to the schools in the Anangu lands, officers from the Facilities Section of the department have visited it

recently and will be looking at what minor works and maintenance will be required and what ongoing commitments we need to give to those schools. I am visiting the Anangu lands with some colleagues I think next week or the week after because I want to see first-hand some of the facilities and programs, and soon after that we would like to look at what capital works we need to undertake in that area. I know that the Chief Executive Officer, Denis Ralph, has been to the Anangu schools in recent times and, after I have referred to some other aspects of your question, he might be able to offer some personal comment in relation to the issue of facilities that you have raised about the schools on the Anangu lands.

I am not sure whether I can provide much more detail in relation to the anti-racism curriculum other than the bit the honourable member has picked up from the Program Estimates, and that is that we have produced it and it is presently being distributed. The honourable member referred to a resolution passed in the House of Assembly in relation to the stolen generation. The Legislative Council moved the same motion which was supported not only by the Labor Party but also the Australian Democrats, so we are able to say that all Parties represented in the Parliament supported the resolution. As the Minister for Education and Children's Services I was pleased to move the motion in the Legislative Council in exactly the same terms as that which was moved by the Minister in the House of Assembly.

In relation to the anti-racism curriculum documents, I will get some information for the honourable member as to its distribution and the cost of its development. That program backs up our multiculturalism policy which we launched last year: I think the honourable member attended the launch of the Multiculturalism in Schooling and Children's Services Policy. As the member knows, and as I said, this is not something which has occurred just under this Government: we have built on the foundation which was established by previous Ministers. There has been the release of the new policy document and the anti-racism materials. Having looked at the anti-racism materials, they are quality materials and I think teachers in that area of the curriculum will be well served in terms of classroom and instruction programs that they might want to deliver.

We have seen some unfortunate activities by National Action outside some of our Government schools in South Australia, in the northern suburbs in particular. Today we have again had threats of actions by National Action outside one of our northern metropolitan high schools. Previously I issued a joint statement with the President of the Australian Education Union (which does not always happen) because on this issue we were prepared to condemn what was occurring late last year and highlight the distress it was causing not only to children in the schools but also to teachers, staff and parents. Whilst we are doing a lot of good work in schools there are tremendous pressures in the community, and not only the member for Oxley but other fellow travellers in South Australia and in other States are causing great distress for children, teachers and staff in our schools.

Mr BRINDAL: I acknowledge the bipartisan support and acknowledge the contribution the Minister has made. Specifically I was exploring the issue raised by the Opposition that this was a pork-barrelling electioneering budget. How many votes does the Minister think he has bought with this exercise?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In relation to this area, it should not be construed by anyone, Opposition or otherwise, as a political exercise. This budget includes terrific initiatives

funded in this area, which should not be portrayed by the Opposition as pork-barrelling or electioneering parts of the budget. They are important parts of an on-going program within our schools. I acknowledge the previous support and would like to see it continue for these important initiatives within Education and Children's Services.

Ms WHITE: As I open the examination on the schools area, I will return briefly to something relevant to my first question, namely, the comment of the member for Unley: where did the \$1.02 billion come from? It comes from page 150 of Financial Paper No. 2, which gives a figure of \$1.02 billion under 'Recurrent—Appropriated from Consolidated Account'. The figure that the Minister and the member for Unley have been quoting includes capital works plus all Commonwealth grants. If the member for Unley had listened carefully to my speech he would understand that I was talking about State funding. My statement was clearly correct.

The question I ask the Minister relates to the salaries increase of \$63 million. Given that the total funding of salaries increased by \$63 million, will the Minister tell the Committee how much the increase is to meet the cost of salary increases for teachers of 11 per cent from 1 December last year, 1.5 per cent from July 1997 and 1.5 per cent from December this year, 1997, under the enterprise agreement?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I respond to the honourable member's opening comments, as I do not think she has clarified the issue at all. Why would you refer to just one aspect of the budget and ignore important areas of paint, repair, maintenance and capital works?

Mr BRINDAL: They ignored it for 20 years.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, and they will continue to ignore it in this budget. To ignore a whole section of the education budget and say that one will concentrate on this figure because it is smaller—it is \$1 billion instead of \$1.3 billion—and to mount a claim that this is a terrible budget with further cuts, etc, really is an interesting way to interpret the budget figures, which is the kindest way I can put it. It ignores not only Commonwealth payments but also monies we generate within the department through land sales and ignores any fees and other revenues that we generate. Our budget is a total budget and a total expenditure. To concentrate on one particular area is dishonest. I do not personally blame the member for Taylor because she is relaying information from the Leader of the Opposition, Mike Rann, and the shadow Minister. I would level the accusations of dishonesty at those two.

Mr ATKINSON: On a point of order, Sir, the Minister has made in a House of Assembly committee an allegation of dishonesty against the Leader of the Opposition. I regard that as unparliamentary and one that may only be made by substantive motion, and I ask him to withdraw.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I do not want the proceedings of the Committee to be diverted. If the member for Spence has taken offence, I would be delighted to withdraw the accusation of dishonesty and replace it with an accusation of being extraordinarily misleading.

Mr BRINDAL: It appears to be quite in order for the member of the Opposition to use the privilege of other Parliaments to make quite serious allegations against Ministers, so I do not see why this Minister is out of order.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Unley knows that there is no point in this Committee going down that path. The Minister has graciously substituted his words with others and there the matter should rest. The Minister is completing his answer to a question from the member for Taylor.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I would love the opportunity to move a substantive motion, if that is the way of doing it—we might do that on another occasion. I was diverted in responding to the first part of the question. The second part of the question refers to claims that have been made by the Leader of the Opposition in an extraordinarily misleading way and by the shadow Minister that, with the \$72 million increase by the Liberal Government in this budget for education, \$63 million of that was for increases in teacher salaries. I had to correct the shadow Minister on three separate occasions in the Legislative Council on that extraordinarily misleading claim. In the Legislative Council I used stronger words than that, because it is not correct.

As I indicated to the shadow Minister, the increase in the salary cost includes a range of things; for example, large numbers of increased teachers and school services officers who have to be paid a salary. The mistake the shadow Minister has made on a number of occasions in interpreting the budget documents is that she has looked at the comparison of salaries for this budget and the last budget and immediately jumped out with the Institute of Teachers and with the Australian Education Union and said \$63 million of this \$72 million is actually the salary increase that the union fought for during the enterprise agreement. It is a fundamental, basic misunderstanding of the budget documents. We have had to correct the shadow Minister on three separate occasions publicly and in the Legislative Council on this issue. I highlight that again to the member for Taylor. In relation to the specific questions now being asked as to how much the individual components of the salary increases might have cost, clearly we will need to take the issue on notice and share that information with the honourable member.

Ms WHITE: In asking my second question I point out to the Minister, when he talks about dishonesty in that \$1.02 billion figure, that it comes from his budget paper No. 2, page 150, under the title 'Recurrent—Source of Funds—Appropriated from Consolidated Account'. That is his figure. The question I now ask relates to the total cost in 1996-97 of other commitments such as the flexible initiatives program under the enterprise agreement.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: To return to what is going to be an on-going discussion with the member for Taylor, she refers to one figure in the budget papers. The figure she quotes is an entirely accurate reflection of that one figure. What I am explaining to her is that she has picked up only one section of our total payments. I do not know how many times I have to explain to the member for Taylor: she has looked at and quoted that one figure but has not included the total DECS budget. It does not matter how many times she returns to page whatever it was, it is still only one section of our total budget. You cannot, in a fair way, refer to a section of the budget and make your criticisms in an aggregate or overall way about that. I am happy to have this exchange with the honourable member for as long as she wishes, but it will not change the fact that our budget is about \$1.3 billion.

In relation to flexible resourcing, which is the second part of the honourable member's question, the budgeted figure for the 1997 calendar year is \$18 million. The budgeted figure for the 1998 calendar year is \$18 million. I think the honourable member has now asked for the financial year 1996-97. I will obtain the exact figures for the honourable member, but I guess it will be a little less than half of the \$18 million for the calendar year 1997 so, as a ballpark figure, we would be looking at \$8 million to \$9 million.

Ms WHITE: Would the Minister address the reasons for the Commonwealth's specific purpose grants for primary and secondary education having fallen by almost \$4.5 million, from \$100 million to \$95.6 million? Which programs will be cut as a result?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I do not envisage that programs will be cut as a result of the Commonwealth-State funding relations in this area. The State Government has just brought down its budget based on both the State and Commonwealth moneys that we are estimating we will receive, and we have indicated what programs will continue for the coming financial year. In this area of school education, in terms of classroom instruction and those general primary and secondary programs, we do not just fund certain things out of the Commonwealth money and certain things out of the State money. Most of the money for schools comes from the State. Approximately 90 per cent of the funds come from the State and just over 10 per cent comes from the Commonwealth Government, so the vast bulk of the money is State related. Commonwealth money is obviously welcomed, but it is not the biggest component of State-based school education.

Mr LEGGETT: I refer to page 125 under 'Agency Programs', dealing with school closures—which is a fairly emotive issue—but specifically with my electorate of Hanson. Camden and Netley schools have been closed down to pave the way for the new R to 12 school at the Plympton High School site. It is an emotive issue regarding Plympton Primary School. The Minister is very much aware that I am a supporter that the school remain R to 7. At present there is a review for the Plympton Primary School to see whether it remains R to 7, is cut back to R to 6, or, God forbid, goes to R to 5. Can the Minister give an update on that present review?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Let me acknowledge the terrific work that the honourable member has done in supporting Plympton Primary School over his three or four years as the local member. It has an excellent principal in Simon Dawson, as well as some excellent staff, and I know that Simon and his staff have turned that school around over the last five or six years from a school with low enrolments to one which at one stage people were queuing up to enter. So, I acknowledge the excellence of the work that Simon and his staff have undertaken at Plympton and also the work that the honourable member has done in supporting them.

As part of the restructuring of schools in the Anzac cluster, as it was known, the honourable member indicated that Netley primary and Camden primary were closed and that a new R to 12 or R to 13 school at Plympton High School site was to be established. At the time those decisions were taken, there was an announcement that there would be a review of the structure of the primary school remaining at Plympton. As the honourable member would know, there was a view at one stage through the committees that Plympton Primary School should close as well. I know that was not supported by the local member and indeed a range of other people, so the decisions eventually were that Netley and Camden schools would close but that Plympton Primary School would remain open.

The decision was announced that we would review the structure of schooling at Plympton and whether it should stay as R to 7, or perhaps become R to 5 or R to 6. My advice is that the terms of reference for that review committee were approved in April this year. The review process was conducted in May, and the report was signed by all members of the review committee. A minority statement was submitted

by one particular person, and that statement related to an analysis of future enrolment figures for Plympton Primary School, but it did not relate to the recommendations of the group. I understand that there is an overall recommendation from that group.

As Minister, I have not yet seen the review committee recommendations. I would anticipate seeing those in the very near future and then being in a position fairly soon thereafter to make a decision one way or another in relation to the future of Plympton Primary School. I acknowledge the views of the local member, very strongly supporting the continuation of Plympton as an R to 7 school, and I acknowledge the strong support from a number of parents. I would be surprised if that view has not been reflected in the review committee's report. However, I have not seen the report, so I am not in a position to indicate whether or not that is the case. In terms of time lines, I would hope to be seeing the report and discussing it with the Chief Executive in the very near future and making a decision as soon as possible after that.

Mr LEGGETT: As a follow-up question, could the Minister detail the latest developments with the progress of Plympton R to 12, noting also that Roger Henderson is the new foundation Principal, which I am delighted to hear?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I might have to get some further information for the honourable member on that. I know that I saw in the last couple of weeks a report which gave a new working title, although that is not to be the final name of the school. However, they did not want to keep on calling it Plympton R to 12. The community is working on calling it Anzac R to 12, after the Anzac Highway cluster.

Mr Chairman, as we are getting close to the lunch break, I might conclude this answer with your concurrence when we resume. We might be able to obtain some further information about the management and facilities issues in relation to the establishment of that school for next year.

[Sitting suspended from 1 to 2 p.m.]

The CHAIRMAN: Before the break the Minister indicated that he had an answer to the question asked by the member for Hanson.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There are two aspects. One is that the capital works program for this year includes an announcement of a \$2 million program, with \$1.55 million to be spent this year on the redevelopment of Plympton High School, or whatever it is now going to be called, to look at occupational health, safety and welfare matters relating to technical studies, science, laboratories and art. There is that aspect.

In relation to the planning for the new school, I am told that the interim school council proposal has been approved by me, and it will take the major responsibilities in relation to the planning for next year, including responsibility for the school name. The proposed list of names has been referred to the school council for consultation with the community. Obviously, they will have to liaise with the department and the Geographical Names Advisory Committee, and then that recommended name will be submitted to me.

The selection process for the appointment of the principal of the new school has been concluded and the local member will be delighted to know that Mr Roger Henderson, currently Principal of Plympton High School, was successful in that. So, I extend my congratulations to Roger. We have had some fine leadership at Plympton High School over recent years, and I am sure that will continue with the challenge ahead of him.

In relation to the draft design education brief, a team of architects has been appointed. The team is in the process of converting the school's education brief into a concept plan for the redevelopment.

Mr SCALZI: I refer to page 145 of the Estimates of Expenditure. Under this Government there has been a record injection of funds for information technology in schools. This has been coupled with a whole of State emphasis on developing a world class IT industry, which includes EDS. What is being done to assist schools with the changes taking place, especially in relation to EDS?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is fair to say that with any new partnership or marriage there are always some wrinkling out problems that have to be sorted through. Whilst from a whole of government viewpoint the Minister for Information and Contract Services has indicated the overall savings to Government, clearly in relation to the individual impacts in individual agencies some issues have had to be resolved and remain to be resolved, speaking frankly.

One of the issues which I know has been of concern to schools is some concern with what is known within EDS as the change request process, that is, when they want to extend an aspect of the local area network at their school, the process they have to follow under the EDS contract, certainly in the early stages, has been too slow, has taken too long and has caused frustration to principals, teachers, staff, school councils, Ministers, and local members of Parliament.

I know that the member for Hartley has been interested in this area because one of his schools has been a leader in terms of the introduction of information technology in schools, and that is the Norwood-Morialta High School campus, in particular, Mr Ian Faulkner, whom I met when I visited the school some time ago. He is an expert in this area and his expertise is much valued by the school community and certainly, having that sort of expertise available to the department, assists the department in trying to handle the discussions with EDS and other suppliers as well.

The change request process issue has been discussed with the Minister for Information and Contract Services, and I know he shared my concern in relation to the early teething problems, as he put it, in relation to the change request process. He actually announced a month or so ago, I think, the results of further consideration and a discussion that he had with EDS. They had announced some changes in terms of their process in handling these change requests. That related not just to schools but to all agencies, and we are hopeful that some of the changes flagged by the Minister and EDS will mean that we will have a shorter turnaround time.

One of the issues with a new partnership like this is that there are 1 001 different examples of requests. I know EDS hopes that, now it has had the experience of a few months, it might almost be able to have some *pro forma* responses; that is, if a school requests this sort of thing, rather than having to investigate each request completely, independently and individually, it might be able to categorise them into a particular type of change request process, and that might then be able to be fast tracked it and done more quickly, thereby reducing some of the frustration.

They are the sorts of issues that we are still discussing. There is also the vexed question of the cost of the services which has been an issue. Again, this is a big change for agencies, and it will therefore be a big change for schools. For agencies, for example, we have a situation where in the past every few years we have purchased the capital equipment of computers and technology and putting in a network.

Then for a few years we do not spend much money and just maintain what we have got; then we find five years later that we spend another big lump of money.

EDS is now requiring agencies to pay on a yearly basis a proportionate share of the ongoing cost so that we do not have a big payment in one year and nothing for five years and then a big payment. In effect, we are purchasing a service and, for an agency, that is a big mindset change. We have gone from cash accounting to accrual accounting and we are looking at those sorts of charges. The same thing will happen for schools.

There is that frustration that they have perhaps purchased something in one year and have not purchased something for five years, and then have to do it again in five years' time. Instead of that, they must now pay an ongoing service charge for that service. We will continue to debate where we believe the charge is excessive: I am not saying that we will not be querying the number of charges, but there is that mindset or cultural change about the ongoing payment for a service rather than a lump payment every few years.

Ms WHITE: During the break I clarified with the Minister his response to one of my questions which he said he would take on notice; there was a misunderstanding about what I was asking for, and I wish to clarify that. Of the \$63 million for salaries, I asked the Minister to provide the respective components under the enterprise agreement of salary increases, and he agreed to do so. I then asked what was the total cost of other commitments in the 1996-97 year involving matters such as the flexible initiative programs under the enterprise agreement, and I think the Minister thought I was asking only for the flexible initiatives, but I was asking for all other commitments.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: For the 1996-97 year?

Ms WHITE: Yes.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am happy to take that on notice and try to provide whatever information I can.

Ms WHITE: With regard to page 126 of the Program Estimates, dealing with grants to schools, how much is the provision in this year's budget for operating grants to schools and what is the allocation formula?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will take that on notice, but are you talking about the school support grants or a range of other grants?

Ms WHITE: All grants that schools need to operate.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I think we can provide information on school support grants and schoolcard, for example. I think it is probably the school support grant that the member is asking about, because we have 1 001 different grant schemes which apply to different schools in different ways. For example, we announced this week the STEP program, a technology program worth \$145 000 which goes to only a small number of schools and which is submission based. I will certainly work on the basis of providing information on the school support grants, for which this year we have announced a 2 per cent increase in the budget. The allocation formula is per capita enrolment based.

Ms WHITE: Given the Minister's regulation which sets compulsory fees in all South Australian schools this year, what is the total amount that parents will pay this year through school fees?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will take that on notice, although I am not sure whether we will be able to provide that information. We have provided information about the level of fees, but schools have their own discount rates; for some, pay early and receive a discount, and others, make a payment

per term. Schools have a range of different arrangements in relation to the payment. We are certainly happy to provide information on the level of fees. We have actually gazetted the levels of fees up to \$150 and \$200 for materials and services charges. We are not sure of the total. Mr Treloar tells me that the ballpark estimate is \$18 million to \$20 million in total, but we will take it on notice and see what information we can provide.

Ms WHITE: I would be interested in that figure. I know that the Australian Education Union in its submission to the Senate Inquiry into Private and Commercial Funding did estimate a total of \$30 million. What school operating costs, specifically, does the Government accept responsibility for paying? In other words, what will the Government pay for and what will the Government not pay for? What does the Government accept responsibility for and what does the Government expect parents to pay for?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As it has for 20 years, the Government pays for essential tuition, teaching and learning that occurs within schools. That has not changed significantly from what has occurred in South Australian schools for decades under Labor and Liberal Governments. There is the notion that, in some way, school fees and the payment of a materials and services charge is a new notion. It has existed for decades. The charges have been increased over that period of time. The Government of the day is responsible under the Education Act for the essential requirements of teaching and learning. Clearly, the salaries of classroom teachers are the major component of costs but we pay for a variety of other things. That is what the budget document is about. We could go through every line to indicate where we make a contribution in terms of payment towards education and children's services. Equally, there is a contribution from parents through either fundraising or a materials and services charge, and there is a contribution, in a very small way, through sponsorship from some private sector organisations.

Ms WHITE: Would you be willing to detail those costs, perhaps on notice?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I do not think I can offer much more than that. I am prepared to reflect on my answer and, if there was anything more I could offer, I would. My immediate response is that there is not much more I can offer other than that. The budget document indicates where the Government is able to support the running of schools. To that we add parent contributions and any other revenue we are able to generate. Our operations are not much different from the operations under the previous Labor and Liberal Governments.

Ms WHITE: It was a fairly simple question.

The CHAIRMAN: Is the member for Taylor asking a supplementary question? The Minister did give an extensive answer and has undertaken to look at his answer. If he is able to bring back further information he will do so. Does the honourable member have a further question?

Ms WHITE: Yes, I do. Outlining what the Government is responsible for paying in terms of operating costs is a fundamental issue about which many of my constituents ask, so I hope that information can be given by the Minister. Does the Minister anticipate schools may take parents to court for the gap of \$40 (in the case of primary schools) or \$30 (in the case of secondary schools) between new schoolcard allowances of \$110 for primary school students and \$170 for secondary school students and the maximum compulsory fees under the regulation?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Schools do not have the authority to take people to court for the gap.

Ms WHITE: Is the answer 'No'?

Mr BRINDAL: I want to assist the Committee with the learning curve of the honourable member.

Mr Atkinson interjecting:

Mr BRINDAL: The member for Spence nods his head but it happens to be a very important issue.

Mr ATKINSON: I shake.

Mr BRINDAL: No, you nod; you never shake. The question is this: has this Government legislated or made school fees compulsory? Is there some new rule that states that schools have to collect fees? Secondly, could you explain the manner in which a series of governments have moved from things such as the blackboard grant, where you could order chalk and toilet paper purely by requisition, to school-based funding, and how school-based funding has made it very difficult to answer the question of who pays for what? There has been a shift from pure requisition—the Government supplying the electricity and many other things—to school-based funding where schools are responsible for their own accounts. Could you explain to all members how that makes it almost impossible to differentiate between what the Government pays for and what parents pay for?

The CHAIRMAN: Could we have a budget paper reference?

Mr BRINDAL: Page 126, provision of general primary education in schools and provision of general secondary education in schools.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In relation to the issue of compulsory school fees or charges, the honourable member is technically correct. The law does not require or compel schools to levy those fees and charges, but for decades, under both Labor and Liberal Governments, they have taken the decision, obviously, in terms of what they want to provide to their children over and above what the Government provides through the department, whether it be through fundraising or a materials or services charge. In the end, it is two different ways of levying funding or finances from parents or the local community. I agree with the honourable member: technically, they are not forced to, but in essence for decades they have been required to raise the funding because they believe what they want to provide to their students, under both Labor and Liberal Governments, can be assisted by further fundraising efforts of parents.

The Government has brought down a regulation which will assist schools in the collection of the materials and services charge. As I have indicated at previous Estimates Committee hearings, some schools have been successfully using the courts for years to enforce the payment of materials and services charges, in particular in the southern area. Mr Chairman, you would be aware of schools to the south of your electorate which have been successfully using the court system for a long time. However, one court, in particular, has not supported it. The Government put it beyond question and doubt by issuing a regulation which will allow the support.

In terms of the rest of the detail of the member's question, the member obviously has a good deal of history in the State system to which he can refer. In essence, I understand the point that he is making, which is that schools now have a budget, which is comprised of a whole range of different elements: it is the parent fundraising, the school materials and services charge income, Government grants and contributions, hire of facilities, and so on. In some areas it is a very important income for schools in terms of hire of facilities,

which goes into the school funds as well. So, all that goes together in terms of the particular decisions they make about their own school funding.

Mr BRINDAL: I wish to pursue the same line of questioning on page 125, and again through the capital expenditure. Minister, you would be aware of increasing pressure from other groups within the community concerning the preservation of all green spaces, and this is beginning to impinge on schools. I am aware of this in relation to one school which is much smaller than it was, which has identified some surplus green space it wants to sell so that it can build a performing arts centre for its students. That is a strong decision of the education and school community and allowable under your rules. I am also aware of another school in which similar surplus land to requirements has been identified, where it is proposed that that land be sold and the money used to build a gymnasium for children in the school, again with the strong concurrence of the local community. What are the Minister's thoughts on a Government which would put fetters on him, as Minister, to allow for the better education of children in schools based solely on the premise that every blade of grass is important and we cannot relocate the use of any land.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is always a question of balance, in terms of Government and Government administration. In philosophical terms, this Government and I, as Minister, have taken the view that where local communities have wanted to sell their surplus space—and that is an issue that has to be determined together with the departmental officers—we have been willing to work through with those local communities and support them in the sale of their space. That then raises other issues which the honourable member obviously will be familiar with, where there then may well be concerns from the broader community, not just the school community, about the preservation of open space. That then brings in other agencies and other Ministers and you then have to go through a delicate balancing act in terms of what is in the best interests of the whole community.

Clearly, as Minister for Education and Children's Services, my key responsibility is to defend and provide the best quality facilities I can for all students, teachers and staff within the Department for Education and Children's Services. Other Ministers obviously will have other major reasons for being and will need to argue their cases. In the end, Governments balance those issues and, in some cases, compromise, in other cases proceed in a different way, or just proceed with the original plan. Government will always be a balance of those various options.

Mr BRINDAL: You will excuse me for being slightly parochial in the next question, but it follows virtually the reverse direction of the same line. Goodwood Primary School has a very small amount of green space and, in my view, and that of the children, the parents and the school community, not adequate green space for the children who are there. There has recently been a proposal circulated that part of the green space should be sold by you to another body, and the school community is resisting this. On the premise that you just enunciated, would you support Goodwood Primary School in the retention of their green spaces for the children of the school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I believe the other body to which the member refers is the Unley council—let me put it on the record if the member is not going to. I must admit that I was given the professed position of the recently elected Mayor of Unley and I was surprised when I heard from the local school

community of the possible options being considered by the Unley council in relation to Goodwood Primary School. I know through you, as local member, but also directly from the school, of the school's concern, because it is an inner suburban school on a fairly restricted site. Clearly, they had some significant concerns about the plan of the Mayor of Unley and the proposals of the City of Unley which might have related to Goodwood.

I am pleased to see that in very recent times it would appear that because of the opposition from the local school community and the local member the City of Unley and the Mayor of Unley might have backed off. I believe they are indicating now that they did not really mean it. So, I believe that has been an example where the local community working in concert with the local member have had a victory, and the City of Unley and the Mayor of Unley perhaps are left to explain for themselves their position in relation to Goodwood and the position they have adopted on other issues.

Ms WHITE: I wish to clarify the Minister's answer to the last of my questions. I asked whether schools could take parents to court for the gap between the new schoolcard allowance and the gazetted maximum compulsory fee under the regulation, and you said 'No.' Are you saying that if DECS pays the schoolcard amount and the parent refuses to pay the balance to that gazetted maximum amount then your regulation does not apply?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes. I cannot be much clearer than that, I would have thought. It does not matter how many different ways you ask the question. The view is if you have a schoolcard student or family who can only pay to a certain level, in the discussions we had with principals—I am surprised that the member for Taylor would have any concerns about this—that it really ought not be the case where a school could take a schoolcard family to court for the differential between that and whatever the levied fee. I would have thought the honourable member would support that social justice aspect of our proposals.

Mr ATKINSON: I refer the Minister to page 133 of the Program Estimates, 'Provision of General Primary Education in Schools'. Regarding the closure of Croydon Primary School and Croydon Park Primary School, what is the estimated revenue from the sale of each of the sites? Will the sale of Croydon Park Primary School include the sale of Hudson Reserve, namely, the school land south of Hudson Avenue?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I signed a letter to the honourable member some time on the weekend in relation to Hudson Reserve which indicates that we are still using the facilities of the school and related facilities this year, and when the school is closed at the end of the year we will make a judgment in relation to what might or might not be done. The other aspect of the question that the member has not referred to which he referred to in his letter to me was pre-existing lease arrangements with the local council. Clearly, the pre-existing lease arrangements is something, as I have indicated in the letter to the honourable member, that will need to be taken into consideration by the Government and the department in any decision that it takes.

Mr ATKINSON: Taken into consideration?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, that is right.

Mr ATKINSON: Will the lease be honoured?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will take it into consideration. The first part of the honourable member's question referred to the values of Croydon and Croydon Park. We generally do not publicise the values of land or property that we want to

sell because, if we indicate what we are expecting to get and if there is someone out there who is prepared to pay a lot more, we do not want to discourage that sort of situation. So, it is not in the interests of the department's budget or the local residents and the community, because whatever money we generate from the sale of school properties in that area will go to the benefit of the local constituents in the broader local area.

Mr Atkinson interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, with the development at Croydon High School.

Mr ATKINSON: When will the Minister reply to a letter dated 27 March from Croydon Primary School parents about alleged health and safety risks to their children from travelling across the Grange railway line to Kilkenny Primary School which is located next to Australian Glass Manufacturers and electric motor manufacturer, Forbes Australia, on Port Road?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I think I signed a letter on the weekend addressed to Mr Frohlic and the other co-chair of the school council. It has been a difficult matter to respond to because a dozen or so different questions were raised by the school council in respect of a whole range of alarms that they seek to raise regarding Kilkenny Primary School. I am not sure whether the member for Spence is the member for the Kilkenny Primary School area, but I am disappointed to see the local member for the area at least indirectly—I am interested to see where this questioning leads—supporting this issue.

In my letter, I asked the two co-chairs of the school council to bear in mind the fact that their campaign seeks to denigrate a very fine school. Kilkenny Primary School has some hard working teachers and staff (both past and present) and a very strong parent community. Croydon Primary School—and indirectly the member for Spence through asking this question today—is denigrating and running down a very fine school and seeking to scare parents and the local community away from attending Kilkenny Primary School. I hope that the honourable member takes the opportunity today to distance himself as the local member from the campaign that is being conducted to denigrate Kilkenny Primary School and to scare people on environmental and other grounds away from attending that school. I invite the member for Spence to indicate to this Committee that he does not support that campaign.

Mr ATKINSON: I prefaced my question by saying that I have every confidence in Kilkenny Primary School. My neighbour's children go there and I ride by the school every morning. It is a thriving and happy school, and it should continue. I also prefaced my question with the word 'alleged' in reference to health and safety risks, part of which related not to Kilkenny Primary School but to students crossing the railway line to attend that school. I ask a supplementary question to allay the concerns of Croydon Primary School parents who for the first time (for the information of the member for Unley) will send their children across the Grange and Outer Harbor railway line to Kilkenny Primary School. Will the Minister agree to an independent environmental health assessment of Kilkenny Primary School?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am amazed. The local member seeks to imply support for Kilkenny Primary School, but now by way of a further question he supports the campaign by Croydon Primary School to cast doubt on the environmental safety of Kilkenny Primary School. The local member cannot have it both ways. He is trying very hard to have it both ways,

but on this occasion he will be caught on the barbed wire fence with one foot on either side. He needs to make up his mind where he is heading in respect of this issue. Does he want to be part of a continuing campaign to cast doubt on the environmental safety and the health and welfare of the students and staff of the Kilkenny Primary School or will he dissociate himself from that campaign? Clearly, by way of this further question he has decided to support the continuing destabilisation of Kilkenny Primary School.

I have written to the co-chairs of the school council indicating that the department has conducted a thorough investigation of all the claims. There have been discussions with the Environmental Protection Authority and a variety of other agencies regarding the information that is available on Kilkenny Primary School. I invite the local member, if he wants to support this campaign, to produce evidence to me to justify a completely independent, expensive and comprehensive environmental investigation of the site. If he can provide some evidence of why that should be conducted, I invite him to do so as the local member, as I have invited the co-chairs of the school council to provide me with evidence. We will not head down such a heavy-handed path lightly unless people are prepared to provide evidence.

At this stage, we have a number of claims seeking to destabilise Kilkenny Primary School as part of the campaign to oppose the decision to close Croydon Primary School. The member for Spence has chosen to be a part of that campaign by way of his questioning today. It disappoints me greatly. I normally have some admiration for the honourable member in terms of his capacity to serve his local constituents.

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Sometimes. I make that quite clear—sometimes. However, in respect of this issue I think the honourable member is leaving himself exposed to accusations of politicking at the expense of destabilising Kilkenny Primary School, which is a very fine school and which, I am told, he rides past often. I invite him to visit that school often and to see the effect that this campaign is having on its teachers, staff and parent community.

Mr LEGGETT: Before lunch, the Minister referred to improved funding provided by this Government for students with special needs and disabilities. He also referred to the fact that although funding has increased the demand for services continues to grow. I understand that a new allocative mechanism has been introduced to assist in the allocation of funds. Will the Minister briefly explain how this allocative mechanism works?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There has been considerable discussion within the department about the process used to allocate this amount of \$9.25 million of the enterprise agreement. Unfortunately, the initial decisions were delayed until some time during term 2. This has not meant that less funding was distributed in 1997. We collapsed all the available funding, which was to be available for four terms, into 2½ terms in respect of how that money was to be allocated.

We have done a number of things with this part of the enterprise agreement. We have increased funding to category I, D and A students. Under our students with disability policy we have five categories, the three most intensive of which are classified as intensive (I), directed (D) and additional (A). They are the highest actual allocations. We have just increased the formula for the allocation per unit of that particular funding for students, and this will mean that increased funding and resources will be available to all

schools which have students in those categories. We have also provided additional funding on a district basis for the other students in the Students with Disability Policy, in particular a large group of students with language and communication disorders.

Thirdly, we have included a new element, a new part of the allocative mechanism, which is for students with severe learning difficulties. As the member will know (because he and others have raised the issue with me for some time) the problem with the Students with Disability Policy was not the policy but where the cut-off point came. Just beneath the cut-off point were some students with very significant and severe learning difficulties, and because they did not qualify for the policy they missed out on additional resources being made available to the school.

Therefore for the first time we have recognised a group of students with severe learning difficulties and we are now allocating a small number of hours per student—10 hours per 35 students—which will provide additional school service officer or other support (depending on how the school uses it) within those school communities. Also we have provided funding for an Auslan project at Klemzig; significant funding for special schools in relation to the special schools review; and funding for students with extreme behavioural problems, in particular students suffering from autism or Asperger syndrome. A large number of students with autism now attend the Ashford Special School and some exhibit significant behavioural problems. We are providing additional assistance for the staff in those communities to try to manage those students. The old formula was 1:8 and we have now changed that to 1:6. As part of next year's funding arrangements we will be looking at what other changes we might be able to provide to further assist special schools in their difficult task.

Mr SCALZI: How successful has basic skills testing been and what funds will be provided for students identified through that testing as being in need of assistance through primary school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It will not surprise members to know that it has been extraordinarily successful. This year we are providing \$3 million—\$2 million for early assistance action plans and \$1 million for students identified with learning difficulties as a result of the Basic Skills Test. Next year we have committed ourselves to increase that to \$4 million and we are presently engaged in consultations to see how we might divide up that \$4 million. It may be that the \$4 million is divided evenly between the early assistance action plans and for students identified through the BST; or it may be \$3 million for early assistance and \$1 million for students identified by the BST; or a dozen other combinations in between.

We will consult with the principals, parent associations and the union in relation to that and make a final determination. I hope we can make that determination some time in term three if possible, certainly no later than early term four, so that we can indicate to schools what funding assistance they will be receiving from the early assistance plans in particular, how the BST money will be distributed. The individual allocations will take a little longer because we will need to get the results of the BST tests, and because those tests are conducted in August the results will not be available until about October so the individual allocations might not be available to schools until some time after that. Nevertheless, the overall formula might be able to be decided before that so that we can give early notification to schools.

Ms STEVENS: This question relates to page 126 and concerns general primary and secondary education. From 1993-94 to 1996-97 budget documents show that there has been a reduction in jobs of 1 456 full-time equivalents. How many of these jobs were teaching positions, how many were SSOs and how many were in other categories?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We need to take that question on notice. What the question does not indicate is that during that same period there was a significant reduction in enrolments in the Government school sector. In 1993 we had 183 772 students in Government schools and this year the latest estimate is 175 832, so we have had a reduction of some 8 000 students. Therefore, with regard to the classroom formula there will be a commensurate reduction in the number of teachers. To that you can add the Government's decision in 1994 to reduce about 400 teachers and in 1995 to reduce approximately 250 SSO positions. As you will see from the 1997-98 estimates, there is a significant increase in the numbers of teachers and school service officer staff that have been employed as a result of the decisions that we have taken on new initiatives, flexible resourcing and special education assistance.

Ms STEVENS: This year the budget shows an increase in the number of jobs funded from 16 901 to 17 431. Will the Minister give a breakdown of the 530 increase between teachers and other categories?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am happy to take that question on notice and provide whatever information we can.

Ms STEVENS: Will the Minister outline which programs they will be employed under and when recruitment will begin?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I think we have been talking about that for the last hour and a half. It will be through flexible resourcing and extra assistance for special education. With regard to those decisions in relation to flexible resourcing, the \$18 million is taken by the local school communities. The principal is given the extra staffing and he/she is required to make a decision in consultation with their personnel advisory committee as to how that extra allocation and employment will occur, and they then ticktack with the department if they need to in relation to employment for additional staff. That is a decision being taken by the local school communities and is not a centrally controlled decision.

Mr BRINDAL: I am surprised that the Opposition has not, in nearly four or five hours of questioning, asked any questions on vocational education, so I refer you, Minister, to Curriculum Services on page 128. I believe that in the 1997-98 budget \$3.7 million is to be provided for a new program called Ready, Set, Go, which addresses the needs of unemployed youth in our community, especially school leavers, and that the Government is prepared to spend \$11.8 million on that project in the next three years. What is the nature of that program and the benchmarks by which the Government hopes to measure its success?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Ready, Set, Go program came about as a result of the Government's response late last year to the Youth Employment Strategy when a \$30 million program was announced which included some responses from the education sector including our Ready, Set, Go program. There are a number of different aspects to the program but for me two of the key ones are that an increasing number of students are involved in work placements as part of a combined course of study, whereby they spend part of their school week at school, part of their week at a TAFE institute and part of their week in a business or in industry.

For the TRAC program, which the honourable member would be familiar with, as would a number of other members, the student might spend a day a week at the local Woolworths outlet or jewellery store, or wherever it might be, and then three days a week at school and maybe a day or half a day a week at a TAFE institute. So the student is getting a combination of schooling, TAFE training and on the job training in a work placement. We see that one of the big problems with the national decline in retention rates was the fact that we needed to do more in terms of encouraging those young people who did not want to go on to university to have had a reason for staying on in secondary school. We therefore want to see a much greater emphasis on vocational education and training options within schools. At the same time we would like to see our students complete the South Australian Certificate of Education if they can. One of the essential features of the Ready, Set, Go program is to try to encourage more students to finish their SACE, to undertake a course of work which prepares them perhaps for transfer to a further TAFE qualification if they require it, and then maybe on to university after that if they want to; but linking their school studies with a TAFE qualification or a training qualification, but also giving them real world experience in the world of work.

The second area concerns careers advice counselling, and funding is being provided to our districts and to schools to provide careers advice to students, I think working on the premise that it is not always the teacher or the councillor at a school who is best placed to provide careers advice to young people, and that maybe there are others in the community who can be used to provide careers advice. So that is an important second aspect to the program. There is a range of other aspects. There is a student at risk component, which is an important part of the Ready, Set, Go program. There is a range of component parts but they are the two key ones that I would highlight for the honourable member.

Mr BRINDAL: Supplementary to that, I was asked specifically by the members for Kaurna and Reynell to ask the question because they see youth unemployment as a particular problem for them, and it is identified in other areas although other members do not seem as interested in it. Minister, is there provision within the budget for the program to be specifically targeted towards those schools where perhaps the problem is greater than it is in other areas?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am reminded that there is the Student at Risk Work Placement Program, to which I referred briefly earlier. We are still having discussions about the precise nature of the funding formula, but clearly it is in our interests to spread the vocational programs as widely as possible in all of our secondary areas and, equally, in those areas of need where we can we will try to provide additional assistance. It will not just be through the Ready, Set, Go program but also through a range of other programs as well.

The members for Kaurna and Reynell will know that their local communities have been extraordinarily active in this area. Morphettville High School has been recently designated as the second enterprise high school after Salisbury High School in the northern suburbs, and that enterprise high school had a key focus for vocational education and enterprise programs within the Morphett Vale community. I know they intend to work with the other schools in the southern suburbs as well. Recently the Mobil Foundation, at a function attended by the Chairman and other local members, made a very generous donation to the local schools down there in terms of further programs in vocational education.

Mr BRINDAL: My second question refers to page 127, and I presume it comes under the umbrella of support for students and children with disabilities, which I would suggest needs to be reworded in future estimates, because the question is about the SHIP program (Students of High Intellectual Potential). I note, Minister, that you recently announced the inclusion of a second school, Glenunga High School, and I wonder whether you could report on the progress of the SHIP initiative in the first high school and your hopes for these particularly gifted children who have hitherto been ignored by our system.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We have had an early response from the Principal of The Heights School and his community, which was the first specialist SHIP secondary school, and that was an extraordinarily positive response in terms of surveys that they had done of the students, staff and parents. Certainly it has been very positive. I am not sure whether either the Chief Executive or the Executive Director, Curriculum actually have a copy of that. However, I would be happy to provide the honourable member with a summary of that particular report, because it is a comprehensive report based on survey information of the parents, students and staff of The Heights, which highlighted the very positive reception that that school community had for the new program. The one thing I was delighted at—and I know that with the member's previous connection with the Country Areas Program that he, too, will be delighted—was that some eight out of the 30 students were from country areas.

Mr BRINDAL: Probably the ones that I taught!

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I don't know whether they were the ones that the honourable member taught at Cook. That might be stretching a long bow, I think, because they would be about 45 by now and retired. But I was delighted at that, because we made it a key focus of the submissions from the schools that they had to be prepared to try to cater for country students as best they could, and that was to try to organise home stays, in terms of billeting, and I think The Heights, for example, has established e-mail contacts with the old schools that the students have left, so that those students who might have been year 6s or 7s now have e-mail contact with their old friends at their old country schools. So lots of little things, homely things, have been done in terms of trying to make them feel at home at their new school at The Heights and also to indicate that the program is intended to try to provide further options for country students as well.

Mr BRINDAL: In prefacing the last question, the Minister may not be aware that a study was done about 20 years ago, which the Chief Executive may be aware of, that actually suggested that children from country areas may well have higher overall potential than kids from city schools, and that is interesting in light of the Minister's last answer. I refer to the provision of general primary and secondary education, on page 126, in the context that I was most disturbed to hear a university intern say yesterday that something like 45 per cent of our young teachers are seeking employment and are being snatched up overseas, and I notice also that Channel 9 is running a promotion tonight, and I saw a grab of Professor Adey from the University of South Australia on the same thesis that we are providing excellent teacher training in this State only for other systems to grab. I am wondering, Minister, whether there is a strategy or what your comments would be on teacher needs in the future, in five to 10 years in South Australia, and the status of the teaching profession, in the light of the criticism that it often gets in the community.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I think the member would be delighted to know, firstly, that at the last two ministerial council meetings I have taken to Ministers a proposal for a national recruitment strategy for teachers. That is on the basis that, whilst there is some disagreement about the extent of the shortfall, there is agreement that there will be a shortfall of teachers nationally in the early part of next decade, and in particular I know that the Australian Council of Deans of Education is estimating that there might be a national shortfall of up to 7 000 teachers by the year 2003. The Commonwealth Minister and his advisers and some other State advisers do not agree that it will be 7 000 but they do agree that there will be a shortfall. When we bear in mind that the year 12 student who leaves school this year and commences a teacher training course will not actually start teaching until the year 2002 we can realise that the need for taking urgent action is obviously clear. I was therefore delighted that the Ministers at the ministerial council meeting in Darwin last week agreed to South Australia's proposal for a national teacher recruitment strategy.

South Australia will chair the working party which has now been established. We are looking hopefully to get Ministers' agreement out of session for a limited and targeted information campaign for year 12 students this year prior to their making tertiary entrance decisions in about September this year. That may include printed material, leaflets and posters, for example, highlighting the fact that a significant number of jobs will be available when they leave the university system early next decade.

Ministers have also agreed to consider at the next meeting a proposal to be worked up by the task force to, in a long-term way, embark upon a recruitment strategy, targeted not just at year 12 students. Clearly a large number of graduates who are perhaps undertaking a two year retraining course or further training period may well be suitable for teaching if jobs are available in teaching. There may already be existing graduates in that capacity or undergraduates in other disciplines who might be encouraged to continue. Potentially, that has a two year turnaround, so that is something we will need to look at.

The third group is that large number of teachers who have not been able to get jobs for 10 years or so because all the education systems have not been hiring new teachers in large numbers. We may be able to encourage some of those to return to teaching.

It is common knowledge there are more lawyers in training than in practice at the moment. It is common knowledge that, for the first time in a long time, medical graduates are no longer automatically entitled to positions. Information has also been provided that some accountancy graduates in recent years, after that boom of five to 10 years ago, are now struggling to find positions in that profession. So we are coming to a cycle when those particular occupations may not have the jobs and teaching will have the surplus positions that are available.

The final part about which I am pleased is that the Ministers have been prepared to consider—at this stage, anyway—the whole notion of perhaps a national electronic media campaign to try to lift the status in the community of teachers and teaching. I do not think there is any doubt that individual teachers are an easy mark for criticism from sections of the community. Media criticism is often directed to them; indeed, even some politicians direct criticism at our teaching force.

As the honourable member would know, we are lucky in South Australia in that we have an excellent group of teachers and staff working within our schools and school communities. We are not perfect: we are the first to acknowledge that. We know there is room for improvement, but overall I am sure all members would join me in saying that we have excellent teachers and staff in South Australia. Anything that can be done by Ministers, Governments and Oppositions to lift the status of teachers and teaching generally, rather than this negative criticism that we always get about teachers and our schools, will be welcomed. I am very hopeful that we might be able to embark on that electronic media campaign nationally as soon as possible so that people will see that we do have excellent teachers and that we can lift support in the community for our teaching force.

Mr ATKINSON: Referring to page 133 of the Program Estimates and Information, and the provision of general primary education in schools, has the Government made arrangements for use of the school building at Findon Primary School, which was closed last year by the Olsen Government, and will that include the establishment of a private school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have taken no final decisions in relation to the future use of Findon Primary School. I am aware that one section of the Chinese community—and the honourable member will know that there are a number of different sections of the Chinese community, so I say that advisedly—is looking to the potential for establishing an ethnic school.

Mr ATKINSON: A Saturday morning school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not sure. An ethnic school is generally held on Saturday mornings, but it can involve evening schools as well. Whether the Chinese community has other intentions in mind for the school facilities, I am not sure. There are potentially other parties interested in the Findon Primary School site. No final decision to my knowledge has been taken, but I do know that one section of the Chinese community is interested, and its original intention was certainly in relation to an ethnic school.

Mr ATKINSON: What role did Party political representation in the House of Assembly take in the Minister's decision to close three primary schools, namely, Croydon Park Primary School, Croydon Primary School, and Findon Primary School, all in one State electoral district, and how many other State districts have had three schools closed?

Mr BRINDAL: On a point of order, Mr Chairman, we are here to examine budget estimates, not Party political decisions, and I ask for a ruling on the relevance of this question.

The CHAIRMAN: While I appreciate the point of order by the member for Unley and would agree that the member for Spence has been treading a very fine line in this question, I believe that the question ought to stand and I am sure that the Minister is capable of responding appropriately.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There were no Party political considerations in relation to these issues, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of schools closed by me as Minister have been situated in Liberal districts. The majority of recent closures that I have announced have come from Liberal districts. If I were to be making judgments on Party political considerations, I might have been required to entertain the fact that the seat of Hanson is one of the most marginal seats in the State of South Australia, as would be known to the member for Spence, and I took a decision to close two schools within that district. I do not think the member for Spence will get too far with veiled accusations—

Mr ATKINSON: No, it is explicit!

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Well, explicit accusations of Party political bias in relation to the issue. In terms of the recent decisions, the three schools that were closed in the Marion corridor proposal were all in marginal Liberal electorates: the electorates of Elder—

Mr Atkinson interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: All three of those closures in the Marion corridor were in marginal Liberal electorates. The Sturt Street Primary School in the city was in a Liberal electorate. A majority of the closures have been in Liberal electorates; a minority have been in Labor electorates. The notion that there is some sort of class warfare or Party political bias which I know the honourable member and the shadow Minister have been seeking to inflame do not come into it.

I might say, however, that I was intrigued to know that, when I did close two schools in the honourable member's electorate and two schools in a marginal Liberal electorate, the only commitment that the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister gave to reopening was in relation to those in the Labor electorates. There was no commitment from the Leader of the Opposition or the shadow Minister to reopen Netley or Camden Primary Schools, but they were prepared to promise to reopen schools in the electorate of the member for Spence.

Mr ATKINSON: As we shall!

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I do not think so. If the accusation of Party political considerations might be directed anywhere, it might be directed at the member for Spence, the shadow Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms WHITE: I refer to primary and secondary education on page 126 of Program Estimates and Information. The Minister has talked about some of the undertakings under the enterprise agreement: the \$18 million for flexible initiatives resourcing, the \$9.25 million for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and the \$4 million to be distributed as yet by an undetermined formula with relation to basic skill test results or early assistance plans. That is a total of \$31.5 million in all those programs to be spent at the school level next year on additional teaching resources for children in need of additional assistance. This represents a major shift away from the way in which schools have been resourced in the past. Can the Minister tell the Committee how many additional staff will be funded under these programs and how schools will go about recruiting those staff?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I indicated in response to an earlier question, that is not an answer I can give to the member because, for example, we make an allocation to a big secondary school that it might have the equivalent of two full-time extra staff under flexible resourcing. It is then a decision for the school principal in consultation with the Personnel Advisory Committee as to how they expend that, whether they employ extra teaching time or whether they employ extra school service officer time or a range of other options as well. It is a decision for local schools to take and it is not something that has been centrally directed, as I indicated earlier. Therefore, it will not be until we see the end of this first year that we will know how the schools eventually have used the allocations available to them. If they seek to employ extra teachers, they will obviously tic tac with the personnel section of the department in terms of how they might be employed.

Ms WHITE: Are you really saying that you have no idea how many additional teachers this funding will mean?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Certainly, as it is a decision to be taken by individual schools. If all the schools decided not to employ teachers but to employ extra school service officers, that is a decision that they would take. It is not a requirement from me.

Ms White interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: You referred to additional teachers in your question.

Ms WHITE: I am asking about additional staff.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: With regard to additional staff, it will depend. School services officers are paid at a lower rate than teachers. If a school decides to spend all its money on school services officers, if it has two full-time equivalent teacher salaries, it might employ 3½ to four SSOs. It might do it in different levels of part-time employment. It might have an SSO working 15 hours a week and increase that time to 25 hours and increase an SSO who is working 20 hours to 32 hours. The question that has been given to the member looks black and white but that is not the case. It is a situation dependent on decisions taken by principals in schools in relation to how they use that particular funding.

Mr BRINDAL: A number of my colleagues have asked me to ask a question relating to page 128 under the title 'Services to Remote and Isolated Children and Students'. In this area there has been a modest increase from 1997-98. What are some of the key program initiatives being undertaken by your Government to increase the quality of education of students who are isolated and disadvantaged because of geographic factors?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Government has taken a variety of decisions. We have given a further increase to the assistance for the isolated children's allowance which, under this Government, has increased from \$730 up to \$1 100, a huge increase this year. I will ask the Chief Executive to comment on this aspect in a moment in relation to the tic tacking between our department and the Commonwealth on the access to the Commonwealth assistance allowance. The Chief Executive has to testify or give evidence about the inability of a student in an isolated area to access a reasonable standard of education in that local area. A number of factors come into the Chief Executive's decision making on that and I will ask him to indicate what factors he does consider. That is an important issue for isolated families because they sometimes take the view that there might be some education being provided through the Government system in their local government school but it is not to the level or standard required—there may be no other year 12 student there, for example.

In relation to other broader issues for remote and isolated children, the member is aware of the Open Access College programs which are a credit to the teachers and staff of that college. They have demonstrated that through the recent year 12 results. I refer to the results of Nerilee Rowan, the year 12 student at Snowtown Area School, which are testimony to the fact that our distant education model is successful. Nerilee undertook six subjects, three of them via the Open Access College at Snowtown Area School, and she was the only student in the State of South Australia—Government or non-government—to have six perfect scores in the recent year 12 examinations. That is a credit to Nerilee and it is a credit to the staff at Snowtown and to the Open Access College staff. We are continuing to refine that area and we are providing more and more opportunities for video conferencing in remote and isolated areas. We are in a stage at the moment where four families in isolated communities have been

provided with video conferencing equipment through the Open Access College to try to improve the quality of the program so that the students out on the isolated stations can actually see the teacher in the Open Access College.

In this last financial year we also put in another \$300 000 worth of extra video conferencing equipment into some of our area and primary schools in the country. It is not just in the remote and isolated areas but in some of our country communities as well that we are doing something to further improve delivery of distance education. I will ask Mr Ralph to comment on this vexed question of the Commonwealth allowance which is generous but which is also difficult to get hold of.

Mr Ralph: The matter of bypassing the local school is one that comes after a full examination of our determination to provide quality education at the local level. Through public education in this State we seek to provide that quality education wherever a child might reside and we seek to do that by what we can provide at the local level. If there are small enrolments, we have Open Access College programs which are amongst the best in Australia, if not the world, in the quality of education delivered at a distance. As our Minister has said, we have also strengthened that through the new technology that we have provided within our schools which links across a number of schools the program to be delivered across schools.

For some children there comes a point where at their local school we make a determination that it is not the range of education opportunity that child needs; it is not the appropriate education for that child. After serious consideration of that fact and a submission from the family to me as Chief Executive, I make a decision recommending to the Commonwealth that student's needs cannot be met adequately at the local level and financial assistance should be given to families for that child to move to Adelaide, board in the city and attend a metropolitan high school or, in some cases, move to a town such as Cleve or Clare to board locally and attend the local area school or high school. I want to emphasise that is a second order question after we have exhausted all avenues to provide the full range of comprehensive quality instruction as near as possible to where the child lives at their local school.

Ms WHITE: I wanted to put to the Minister a concern that many schools in my area have raised with me about additional money for students with learning difficulties. Their concern is that funding is based on international studies which show that 6 per cent of school-aged children have learning difficulties. When funding is allocated, that is taken into consideration in addition to subtracting from that the number of children who have other programs directed at them. In some schools, the number of children with learning difficulties is much higher than that; they say about one-third of their students have learning difficulties. They also point out that because the disadvantaged schools program will be replaced next year by the Commonwealth literacy program it means that in addition to the huge number of children with learning difficulties—much greater than 6 per cent—they have a multiple disadvantage. First, do you accept their concerns and, secondly, what can those schools look forward to from your Government in the future?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Any funding formula will have its strengths and its weaknesses. I acknowledge that the funding formula has a weakness in that area, that is, any average figure will have some schools above it and some below it. That is the nature of an average. The school communities

need to take up that issue not only with the department and me (as the honourable member has), but also with the Australian Education Union which negotiated this and which agreed to this formula to allocate funding. The dilemma that exists at the moment is how you define those students who have severe learning difficulties. Do you accept the figures the school gives, or do you rely on figures provided by someone independent of the school, for example, a guidance officer, or do you do it in some different way? The strength of the student disability policy is that someone independent of the school actually assesses whether or not a person qualifies within the student disability policy. Some people will argue against that formula and say that it is overly restrictive, and that is one of the reasons why we have had an extension to the area of students with severe learning difficulties. We are trying to develop a set of criteria. We would be happy to discuss those proposals with schools in not only the member's area but also other areas.

I will talk about the situation in broad fashion. The instance I have given in my press release is that we would be looking at some of the old criteria that guidance officers used to look at. For example, a student three years or more behind the reading age level of peers in his or her class might be classified as a student with severe learning difficulties. Some of the honourable member's schools might be saying that 30 per cent of their students have learning difficulties, but we are talking about a restricted group—those with severe learning difficulties.

There is a range of students with learning difficulties within the classroom that classroom teachers with training and assistance are required to cope with. We are now talking about another group of students with severe learning difficulties for whom we are providing additional assistance. It may be that one of the models might be that we establish the criteria and then either schools or guidance officers, or a combination of both, can attest to the fact that a student is or students are three years or more behind the reading age of other students that age and, therefore, we classify them as students with a severe learning difficulty.

If we have a situation where a school has 15 per cent of its students with severe learning difficulties, the funding formula might be better targeted to those schools with larger numbers of students with severe learning difficulties. I do not have a problem with an exploration of allocating mechanisms (to use the jargon) considering those issues. The 6 per cent figure was agreed between the union and the department to try to get resources into schools as quickly as possible. We could have spent—still might spend—many months arguing about an alternative formula. As Minister, I prefer not to be arguing forever and a day about how we get the money out. We want to try to get it out as quickly as we can to all schools that have students with severe learning difficulties and then spend the rest of this year trying to develop a better formula for next year.

Ms STEVENS: My next question relates to page 133 and concerns the provision of student counsellors in primary schools. Three primary schools in my electorate that do not qualify for a student counsellor—Greenwith, Salisbury Park and Salisbury Heights—have raised with me the problem of their administration staff, the principal and deputy principal, having to spend large amounts of time counselling parents and students, and referral to community agencies, needing to work through issues which are often related to behaviour management but which have quite a large counselling component.

Last week, the principal and deputy principal of Salisbury Park Primary School spent two days doing nothing else but this. They raised the point that times are now tougher in the communities and other services that previously existed around their schools, for instance, Care Link, Para Districts Counselling Service and FACS, have had services decreased so there is nowhere else to go. It is a significant issue for them in terms of resources and the fact that they cannot do it adequately to the extent required by many families. They also acknowledge that nearby schools in the electorate have access to student counsellors and that their need is also great. They make the point that even though they have a smaller number of schoolcard students they still have a large problem in that area. Does the Minister acknowledge that this is a burden for schools generally, and what are his plans to address this issue?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Government would love to be able to spend lots of additional money in lots of needy areas within the Education and Children's Services budget. It is important to note that the Government has made no reduction at all in the number of primary school counsellors—a total of 70. There have been some changes where some schools have obtained a school counsellor and others have lost a school counsellor, but the overall number has stayed the same. In an ideal world with lots of money we would be able to employ significant numbers of additional counsellors so that we could provide counsellors to all schools that wanted to have a student counsellor.

The reality with the dilemmas—and I do not need to remind the member of the State Bank and all those other issues—is that whilst we have a significant increase in the education budget of \$160 million-odd over the last Labor budget, we cannot resolve all these issues in one parliamentary term. So, we have maintained the expenditure on primary school counsellors and we intend to maintain the expenditure in that area; but we are not able to meet the demand from all schools for an individual primary school counsellor for their community. We will be happy to explore any other ideas of liaison with Family and Community Services.

I know that in the Fleurieu region, for example, there is a very innovative program between local councils, Family and Community Services and the local schools, particularly Goolwa Primary School, and that seems to be a first-class example of collaboration with some students who come from families under great stress and who require lots of additional assistance. It is not just the Department for Education that is working there; it is other Government agencies as well. Of course, we work with other non-Government agencies, many of the church-based agencies as well, in terms of trying to provide extra assistance for students from families under great stress.

Ms STEVENS: This question relates to secondary education (page 130). In his budget media statement, the Minister announced funding for a special interest high school for sport and physical education. Will the Minister announce where the special school will be established, how much has been budgeted for it this year, what sports will be catered for and whether there will be an equal emphasis on sport for girls and boys?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The last part of the question is 'Yes.' Clearly, it is intended that there be an equal emphasis on sport for young men and young women. We will be going through a process this term in selecting the appropriate site for the second school. The general process is that we establish a panel, we seek expressions of interest from schools—

because not every school is interested in being designated as a specialist school—and then the panel makes a determination. So, I would hope to receive advice from the panel some time towards the end of this term or maybe early next term recommending which school might be appropriate for the location of the site. Given that the first school was in the southern suburbs, there is a reasonable chance that the school will either be in the northern suburbs or heading in the general direction of the north and the north-west. I believe that two schools have already expressed an interest in being designated as a specialist school. There may well be others, of course.

In terms of the additional resources, we will look at that. Broadly, we would be looking at similar resourcing to the existing commitment we have given to Wirreanda High School. I believe that we had a one-off \$10 000 establishment grant and the equivalent of two step 12 teacher salaries for an initial five year period. So, we have not made the determination yet in relation to the new school but I assume it will be broadly similar.

Ms STEVENS: Minister, you mentioned that two schools have indicated that they are interested. Has there been a preliminary call for expressions of interest? Can you tell us who those are?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, I do not think there has been a call for expressions of interest yet. But, as with other schools, they knew that the Government was going to announce three special interest schools for students with high intellectual potential. In my first year in Government, even before we had proceeded with it, we had people writing in saying that they would like their school to be chosen. So, it has been along those lines. It is the same with the sport and phys. ed. school. The sport and phys. ed. strategy we released 18 months ago indicated that we were going to nominate three eventually and, after Wirreanda's announcement, a number of schools expressed some interest. In recent times there have been two that have been expressing interest from the broad north and the north-west.

Mr BRINDAL: My question relates to the transport services section—'Planning and Administration' and 'Departmental Bus Service' (page 129). In 1996-97 the departmental bus service costs were estimated at \$6.2 million, and they came out just a little over that. Use of private bus services was estimated at \$9.4 million, and in fact a saving of \$.7 million was achieved there. More importantly, the estimates for both services represent, at best, a very marginal increase. This would suggest to me that you are making significant savings in the matter of transportation of children who live in remote and isolated areas to schools near them. What initiatives have been undertaken by the department that have obviously resulted in children continuing to receive education while at the same time making the service more cost-effective and, presumably, competitive?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The existence and extent of bus travel for students to country schools has always been a vexed issue for country members in particular. For three years now we have been reviewing most of the bus routes for our country buses to country schools and we have achieved savings of more than \$1 million during that period. We have tried to be sensitive to the balance of making the bus services efficient but, at the same time, not unduly restricting a right of access to school. We have a clearly designated school bus transport policy which has not been changed by this Government—I believe it was broadly the pre-existing policy that we inherited. The bus officers have been looking at that existing

policy and seeing whether or not existing routes comply or not. We have had examples in the Clare area where we were transporting some students from one side of the town to the other side of the town to go to a local school. Clearly, in that case—and in a number of others—it was not consistent with the school bus transport policy, which says that you have to be 5 kilometres or more from a school before you will be transported at Government expense to that school. There have been a number of other similar examples. We have had buses going on extended routes just to pick up one or two students. In those cases, the routes have been changed and travel allowances paid to the individual families involved.

School bus routes are always painful decisions. I must admit that when in Opposition I was delighted at the prospect that we might hand school bus transport services to the Department for Transport—or whatever its equivalent now is. That is a difficult issue now because, being Minister, I am more fully aware of the significant educational issues that are involved in these school bus transport decisions. So, that remains a decision for the Government and we will continue to review that. But at this stage it remains with us in the Department for Education and Children's Services.

Mr BRINDAL: I wish to ask a question relating to personnel services, 'Occupational Safety and Health' (page 128). In particular, I wish to refer to the occupational safety and health of children. I predicate my remarks by saying that I note that over the years the Government has introduced various components to the curriculum, including protective behaviours and assertive behaviours to teach children some of their rights in respect to predatory behaviour from undesirable adults in our community. I note also increasing interest and attention being focused on incidents of paedophilia, especially where it involves people given custodial care of our young people. What is the Department for Education doing in respect of this matter and the safety of school children in South Australia's State schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will respond on two fronts. South Australia is one of only two States that have an independent Teachers Registration Board, something for which we can now be grateful. This Government has pledged to continue to support the Teachers Registration Board. Together with Queensland, we are fortunate in that respect. We are also fortunate in that we have a long history of mandatory notification of cases of abuse which has existed in South Australia for a long time. Other States either do not have such a policy or have adopted it only recently. Thirdly, as the honourable member has indicated, we have a history of introducing protective behaviour programs in classes for the majority of students. For a variety of those reasons and others, so far, thankfully, we do not appear to have had the extent of the problem that, for example, New South Wales has had in respect of the activities of paedophiles in schools.

On the second front, at a national level there has been considerable discussion about a national strategy to combat the activities of paedophiles in schools. These proposals have been pushed broadly by the New South Wales Minister (Mr John Aquilina). At the last two meetings of the ministerial council I raised some concerns about the New South Wales proposals. I hasten to say that in raising those concerns I indicated that South Australia supports the notion of a national strategy to combat the activities of paedophiles in schools. We agree that regarding the development of a process for the exchange of information on convicted paedophiles or on persons who have been found guilty by

departmental process of improper sexual conduct we do not have a concern.

However, New South Wales is pushing a further category to include those people who have not been found guilty of paedophilia or improper sexual conduct either by departmental process or the court. It is in that area where it starts to get a bit grey and where South Australia has expressed some concern. South Australia was the only State at the March meeting of Ministers actually to reserve its position on the national strategy that is being pushed by the Minister for Education in New South Wales. However, I note that at the meeting last week in Darwin a number of other States expressed similar concerns regarding some aspects of the national paedophile strategy.

I will highlight some examples of the potential dangers of some aspects of the proposals of the New South Wales Minister for Education. We are still seeking final details, but at this stage we have been advised that New South Wales has already exchanged some information with one other State, which shall remain nameless. As a result of that information having been given to that other State, that State decided to take action to remove a teacher from a classroom. The action might have been stronger than that—we are still checking to see exactly what action was taken—but for the moment we will say that the teacher was removed from the classroom. When that State found out that the offence of which the teacher was found guilty was not paedophilia or that he had not even been accused of having physically touched a student but of writing an inappropriate comment in a report, and that that had led to that person's being placed on the list, the department and perhaps the Minister on behalf of his staff had a collective heart attack and the teacher was reinstated quickly.

New South Wales also wishes to place another category on the list. In South Australia, a number of teachers have been falsely and maliciously accused by students of improper sexual conduct. After a long period of investigation, trauma and stress for everyone concerned—particularly the teacher who, of course, is removed immediately from the classroom—the students have confessed to having maliciously made up a story. We have also had examples of teachers having left the department and retired medically unfit because of the stress of the situation. New South Wales wants those people who have been accused and retired medically unfit to be placed on its list as category 2. As Minister, I would have some concerns if a teacher from another State, who wanted to get away to make a fresh start, was in some way prevented from continuing to teach because of that sort of a circumstance.

New South Wales also recommends a category 3 to comprise teachers and staff who have been accused but not convicted but who may well have been warned or reprimanded for inappropriate conduct. They might have made suggestive comments which they have been told were inappropriate, and they might have been reprimanded, warned or fined. I am talking about isolated examples. Clearly, if someone continued to do that for a long period of time that could well lead to stronger action or even dismissal if it were sufficiently serious. Under category 3 you could list people who have simply been warned about, for example, inappropriate and unwarranted touching on the arm of a student or a suggestive comment. New South Wales wants that information to be shared amongst all States and Territories.

If the sharing of that information were to lead to a virtual black ban on employment for a person in other States and

Territories, I have significant concerns—and I have expressed these already—on behalf of South Australian teachers and staff regarding their future employment. It is a difficult position. We have indicated that we support a national strategy but that we are opposed to a number of the aspects of the proposal put forward by the New South Wales Minister for Education. I do not think that the Minister has done himself or his proposals much good by going public in the Eastern States media in the past 24 hours threatening that if other Ministers did not agree with his proposals within eight weeks all teachers in those States may well face a black ban on employment in New South Wales whether or not they have been accused of paedophilia. I do not think that sort of a response is helpful. It certainly will not help the Minister to get his proposals across the line. As I said, I was at least heartened at the last ministerial council meeting to see some support from a number of other States and Territories of the position that South Australia alone put down at the March meeting of Ministers in Melbourne.

Mr BRINDAL: I commend the Minister for his stance and I hope that the Parliament can achieve some bipartisan support for two reasons. First, I refer to the actual issue of natural justice for our teachers. Secondly, I ask whether the Minister has considered the issue of liability. As has been the case in South Australia, sometimes in a domestic situation a teacher is wrongly accused and goes through years of trauma. The Minister would be aware of one instance where a large *ex gratia* payment was made by the Attorney. Would such a case be notified to an interstate authority? If subsequently that teacher or any other teacher were proved to be innocent, where would the duty of care lie? Could it mean that if the member for Hartley sought employment elsewhere but was wrongly accused and could not get a job, the onus or the legal responsibility could come back on this State as the original supplier of the erroneous information and that, therefore, there would be a large legal liability to the State which started to spread malicious, misleading and untrue statements about that person?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The issue of legal liability is an important one. We have taken Crown Law advice on the proposed national strategy, and the advice we have been given is that there is a significant possibility for legal action by teachers and staff for defamation. The honourable member is entirely correct in his hypothesis that the State might be found to be a party to that by sharing information. However, it depends on what information is shared and within what context and under what national strategy, and that is entirely the reason why we are expressing caution at this stage about some aspects of Minister Aquilina's proposals from New South Wales.

I hasten to say that we acknowledge that we have a difficult balance in schools and child-care services between the rights of the individual and the duty of care for children. I have been the first to acknowledge that there might be categories under a certain legal framework on which we could share information beyond the convicted paedophiles and those found guilty of improper sexual conduct. I do not believe that it will go as far as New South Wales wants, but I think there is a grey area there in relation to its being based on police information or on a history of accusations, and so on.

We are all aware that some people have been accused but not convicted and whom we would not want to see continuing in teaching. It is a question of how we distinguish those from others who have been falsely and maliciously accused. We

do not want to do anything to their disadvantage or detriment. I do not think the New South Wales proposals have that balance at all right in terms of duty of care and the rights of the individual. I think there are some signs now that some of the other States will be prepared to support this debate, but we might be able to get it back to a better judgment of where that balance should be in that difficult category.

Mr ATKINSON: I refer the Minister to page 128 of the Program Estimates and specifically to in-service training. Last week a judge of the Environment, Resources and Development Court said about the Goodwood Orphanage case that the adjournment of the court deliberations had 'arisen out of the failure of the Minister to make a decision'. Why did you change your position and agree to review the sale of The Orphanage land to the House of Tabor? Are you now withholding your decision because of the electoral backlash that will follow any decision to sell The Orphanage to the House of Tabor?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There should be no fear that the decision in relation to this issue will be delayed until after the election. I do not fear the electoral consequences of the decision that is to be made.

An honourable member: Neither is the member for Unley.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Neither is the member for Unley, I am told. That is excellent. I have made it clear in the local media that the decision will be announced prior to the State election so that the electors of Unley and indeed other electors will be well aware of the decision prior to the election. We have been prepared to consider a change in direction and policy because we are an entirely reasonable Government, and we are always prepared to listen to well thought-out, constructive, alternative propositions.

Mr Atkinson interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Responsible, moderate, reasonable—all those words can be used to describe—

Ms STEVENS: Unbelievable!

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member for Elizabeth has suggested 'unbelievable', but I would not suggest unbelievable. We are an entirely reasonable Government in terms of being prepared to listen to constructive suggestions. With regard to The Orphanage, a different approach was adopted by the two groups. The Unley council and particularly the Mayor of Unley adopted a destructive, combative and negative approach to trying to change the decision in relation to The Orphanage and the decision that the Government had taken.

On the other hand, the member for Unley adopted a sensible and reasonable approach because he needed to be able to stand up for his constituents against a decision in which he did not believe and which had been taken by his Minister. So, it was an entirely reasonable position for the honourable member to have adopted, as the member for Spence has indicated, and he then fought on behalf of his constituents.

Rather than adopting the negative, destructive and combative approach of the Mayor of Unley, the member for Unley put a proposition which was constructive, which I think has now been called by everyone the 'Brindal plan' for The Orphanage and which, if it worked out, was a win-win situation for everybody—that is, first, that the facilities would be sold to the House of Tabor, which would then be satisfied with that aspect of the decision; secondly, that the open space would be protected in some way between the House of Tabor and the Unley council; and, thirdly, that the sale of the

property and the premises there would be used by the Government to provide facilities equal to or better than the standard of facilities available to teachers and staff at The Orphanage.

Therefore the justice in this case was entirely reasonable in being critical of the Minister for not having made a decision because I had not made a decision at that stage. We are looking at the finances of that proposition, that is, whether we are able for the money we can provide from the sale of the site to generate facilities for teachers and staff that are better than or equal to those which we currently offer. Until I am satisfied that both those criteria can be met—that is, excellent facilities for teachers and staff and that the House of Tabor is not left high and dry, having had an agreement with the Government and with me, as Minister, for three years—I am not prepared to agree to an alternative proposition.

However, the Brindal plan has demonstrated that it is the only constructive option that is out there, and it may well be a win-win situation for the residents, the local member in supporting his constituents, the House of Tabor and the teachers and staff in Government schools in South Australia.

Mr ATKINSON: Staying with the same line, how much did the Government spend on restoring The Orphanage and converting the buildings for use as a teacher training centre? What alternative teacher training facilities have been identified in your consideration of the option of passing The Orphanage buildings to the control of the House of Tabor, and how much would it cost to move the teacher training facility?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am advised that previous Governments have spent about \$4 million in terms of upgrading facilities at the House of Tabor, and therefore any of the options that we are considering would need to see obviously a more than reasonable recoupment of existing expenses from the Government purse in terms of any possible sale.

Mr ATKINSON: What's more than reasonable?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: What's more than reasonable is what we determine in the end. In relation to what alternative sites are being explored, I am not prepared at this stage to give an indication of that. We have looked at a number of sites. We have rejected some already because they are not feasible.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member for Elizabeth is suggesting the Salisbury campus.

Mr Atkinson interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member for Spence is suggesting Tenterden House. I will take all suggestions. Does the member for Taylor have something in her area that she would like to recommend?

Mr Brindal interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We are not opposed to the proposition; as I said, it is an entirely reasonable one. Whatever community attracts the facility that is to be moved will be fortunate because we have a significant number of visitors through The Orphanage site—some 60 000 teachers, staff and other visitors. So, it would be an attractive proposition for any community if it was to be moved to a new location. I cannot indicate what other sites are being considered, but will take on board the suggestions of the members for Elizabeth and Spence.

An honourable member interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Is there a space there? It is a greenfields site. We are prepared to look at greenfields sites

and, if the honourable member has a car park there now, we are certainly prepared to have a look at it.

Ms STEVENS: I refer to page 126—primary and secondary education—in relation to the tender process for DECStech 2001. Why did the Chief Executive of DECS reject the recommendation prepared in July 1996 that the DECStech contract go to Southmark Computer Systems, and who authorised the second round of tenders that allowed the three companies that had run third, fourth and fifth out of five to put in a combined second tender?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: All the decisions taken in relation to DECStech 2001 were taken in consultation with senior officers in the department, with senior officers in the Department for Information Technology Services (DITS), as it was then called, and in some cases in relation to legal aspects on which we took legal advice. There were two aspects to the tender process, one being an evaluation by the Department for Education and Children's Services on what I would call broadly the educational aspects. A second evaluation was done by the Department of Information Technology Services on what I would call broadly the industrial development aspects of the proposal. Based on advice from Department of Information Technology Services as to how we would weight those two separate valuations, we then aggregated the two evaluations and came up with a final recommendation.

Ms STEVENS: The Minister did not specifically answer why he rejected the recommendation that was given to him.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not conceding that I rejected anything. I indicated that we looked at two aspects of the evaluation, that is, an evaluation based on educational criteria alone and an evaluation based on industrial development. We received advice in relation to the importance of industrial development criteria as part of the evaluation, and in the end we had to come up with a process based on DITS' advice to aggregate the two separate evaluations into one evaluation. We then made a final decision. I am not confirming or denying anything but indicating how the process operated.

Ms STEVENS: I assume that the recommendation that Southmark Computer Systems be given the contract was the educational part of those two considerations, according to this memo of July 1996 from Mr Bronte Treloar.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I would need to be provided with advice on what memos the member is referring to. If it is those which have been highlighted in the Parliament previously, we can certainly provide advice on that because we know what memos they were. They were highlighted in earlier sessions of the Parliament. If they are different memos, we would need to know what the memos are. A series of recommendations or separate sets of advice come to senior officers and Ministers in relation to these important decisions. In the end, the decisions are taken by either Ministers or Chief Executive Officers.

I have indicated the process that has been followed. If the honourable member has any further information to which she would like me to respond, I will need to get a reference to the material to which she is referring. I do not have a copy of the material. I am happy to take it on notice and bring back a reply.

Ms STEVENS: I refer further to the DECStech 2001 tender process. Why is the tender price, including after sales service, higher than the price for which equivalent or better systems can be purchased through the retail trade?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have seen claims from the Leader of the Opposition in this place that this was a terrible deal for

schools and that schools could purchase equivalent computers with the same level of service for \$1 000. If schools can do that, as the Leader of the Opposition is claiming, it is entirely the schools' prerogative to go off and buy these equivalent computers, if they meet specifications, at \$1 000. That will be cheaper than the Government's deal, even with the subsidy arrangement that the Government is providing. The reality is a little different from the claims being made by the Leader of the Opposition. We have already had orders for over 8 000 computers from over 500 schools under the Government's computer subsidy scheme. If these great deals are out there, as the Leader of the Opposition claims exist—equivalent computers, with the same level of service at \$1 000—not too many other schools are aware of them. I have challenged the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Minister to make that information available to schools, because I am sure that that retailer will be flooded with offers or requests from schools for the equivalent machines and the same level of service (of a whole of State nature) for \$1 000 rather than what the Government has offered. The reality is much different.

The Government is offering a whole of State contract. It is not a spot price for one community. We are mindful of our country colleagues in country schools and have therefore negotiated a deal in relation to servicing, and this means that there is the virtual equivalent of either someone working on the machine within 24 hours to try to replace it or sending off a replacement machine to that school or community. In some cases in the metropolitan area the turnaround is only four to eight hours, where there is a commitment to have a service technician working on a machine and trying to repair it.

Under the old system our country colleagues sometimes went for weeks without their computers. To have a proposition that a contract will be providing them with a replacement machine, being delivered in some way, within 24 hours of their machine breaking down, is a quantum leap in service improvement for those country communities. One of the aspects that the critics of the Government scheme have not addressed at all is the fact that it is a whole of State contract providing a service level to all of our communities, both city and country.

Ms STEVENS: How long is this contract? Will the Minister give the computer industry an undertaking that this contract will not be renewed and that local suppliers will be able to tender for school contracts managed by schools themselves?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will give a commitment to schools to give schools the best possible deal that the Government can negotiate on their behalf. With the first deal we have negotiated, which goes for a bit over 12 months and expires in April or May next year, we have been flooded with thanks and gratitude by schools, school councils, teachers and staff for the implementation of the program. We will give the commitment that we will similarly deliver another program along those lines on the expiration of this contract.

Ms WHITE: I refer to page 126 of the Program Estimates and Information. The Minister might recall there was recently a cyber leak from the office of the Minister for Employment and Training. One of the many documents on that disc was a copy of an internal minute to the Minister for Employment and Training from her senior policy adviser, Mr Bob Jackson, entitled, 'Teachers supply and demand to 2003'. Without reading the whole of that minute, key points made by Mr Jackson to that Minister included the shortfall of teachers; the fact that that shortfall could flow on into TAFE; if the

shortfall is met by increasing teachers' salaries, that also could flow on to TAFE lecturers; and the shortfall of teachers in secondary schools would be determined by the retention rate. Does the Minister agree with Mr Jackson that low retention rates will reduce the shortfall of teachers, and what are the official retention rate predictions for South Australia up until 2003?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Obviously we would need to take that issue on notice. There have been a number of guesstimates by Professor Adey and the Australian Council of Deans of Education about retention rate figures for teachers within the system. As I indicated in response to an earlier question, some of the assumptions of the Council of Deans have not been agreed with by the Commonwealth Minister and his advisers, and I know that a number of the States and Territories have also disagreed with some of the assumptions.

As I indicated before, this traces the earlier ground we have already traversed. Whilst there may be some arguments about the assumptions, there is agreement that early next decade there will be a shortfall of teachers. I do not think anyone can stand up and say they know exactly how many, because there are too many variables to be able to say there will be exactly 7 000 or exactly 3 000. It just depends on what assumptions are made. It is not just the retention rate assumption. It depends on the number trained through universities, the number of people you can attract into teaching as a career and a whole range of other factors. The retention rate assumption is not the only variable in this area.

Ms WHITE: The Minister seems to be indicating that his predictions for teacher shortages or otherwise to 2003 are different from the official retention rates. Would he be prepared to provide to this Committee those retention rates and also his predictions?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am saying to the member that she is making a huge assumption—which I think is partially incorrect—that retention rates are the only variable in relation to either a surplus or shortfall in the number of teachers in the early part of next decade. Retention rates is one assumption, but there is a whole range of other assumptions, in particular, the number of young people that universities churn through their teacher education courses. If the intakes are increased or decreased through our university courses, that will affect issues of surpluses and shortfalls. If we are able to encourage back into teaching some people who are not teaching at the moment but who have teaching qualifications, that will affect calculations of surpluses and shortfalls early next decade. There is a range of other factors as well.

The honourable member ought to be aware that it is not just a simple issue of one or two variables, adjusting those, and coming up with a calculation. There are dozens and dozens of variables that will impact on the calculation. All I am indicating is that the Commonwealth Minister does not accept the Australian Council of Deans of Education assumption. I am not sure of the estimates to which the honourable member is referring. She has referred to some document from a policy adviser to another Minister. I do not have a copy of that. I am not sure whether the estimates in that document are the ones from the Australian Council of Deans of Education or whether they are independent estimates that the policy adviser has undertaken. So, I cannot really comment on that aspect of it unless the honourable member is prepared to share the information with me.

In relation to the Australian Council of Deans estimate, I have said the Commonwealth Minister does not share the view as has been predicted by them. Some other States and

Territories have also expressed some differences of opinion about the assumptions in that calculation of a 7 000 teacher shortfall in the year 2003.

Ms WHITE: I was asking specifically if the Minister would table for the Committee the retention rate predictions to 2003 and his predictions for teacher shortages to 2003. Am I to take it that he is unwilling to do that?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am prepared to consider the honourable member's question and look at what information we might have available. If I see there is something reasonable we can share with the honourable member and other members, I am prepared to do so. Once you get out beyond the year 2 000, it is extremely difficult to make accurate predictions. If you want a whole series of estimates, depending on what assumptions, that might be a more reasonable way to go—not the honourable member personally, but in terms of predicting beyond the year 2000. I am prepared to take advice on the issue from senior officers in the department and see what information, if any, I am able to provide to the honourable member.

Ms WHITE: It was mentioned earlier that extra staff would be coming out of the commitments under the enterprise agreement. Does the Minister predict there will be any difficulty in recruiting extra staff funded in this year's budget?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In the majority of cases, no, but in some rural and regional communities, and in some specialist areas like languages, yes.

Ms STEVENS: Referring to DECStech 2001 on page 154 of the Estimates of Receipts and Payments, the papers show that the full budget allocation of \$15 million was spent in 1996-97. What was the breakup between computers, training, cabling and other expenses, and what is this year's breakup of the \$15 million budget between those same categories?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am prepared to take that question on notice obviously, but broadly we spent about \$3 million in the first year on training and development for teachers and staff, and about \$1 million on preschool computers. The other areas receiving an allocation included the subsidy scheme, support officers and capital works infrastructure developments in new developments. For example, with a development such as that at Hamilton Secondary College, we sensibly put in the cabling for DECStech 2001 whilst all the construction work was being done. That cabling aspect comes out of our DECStech 2001 strategy. I am happy to take that on notice and give a more detailed and definitive response to the honourable member and bring back a reply for her.

Ms STEVENS: As a supplementary question, on the matter of the cabling coming out of Hamilton's refurbishment, I do not think the same situation applied to Fremont Elizabeth City High School in terms of its cabling coming out of its refurbishment. Would the Minister inquire into that, because that issue was actually raised with me by the school? In fact, it appeared that that did happen for other schools out of the DECStech 2001 strategy, but not so for Fremont Elizabeth.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am certainly happy to check that. I visited the school recently and admired the wonderful facilities that are now provided for Elizabeth students. It is testimony to the fact that sometimes, when difficult decisions are taken by Governments, there is a net benefit to the local students and the local community. It was a difficult decision to close Fremont High School. I remember in my first year being booed and hissed—and a variety of other things—in the gymnasium at Fremont. The vision of people in terms of why

that difficult decision was taken was demonstrated by the feeling in that school community.

It is a credit to Bev Rogers, as Principal, her teachers, staff and the parent community at Elizabeth City Fremont—and former principals, although I do not know whether I should be that generous to the member for Elizabeth—but certainly credit to Bev Rogers and her teachers, staff and the parent community, who have done a terrific job. There has been a Government commitment to spend millions of dollars to redevelop their facilities. The present students and future students will be the ones who will benefit from what was a very difficult decision, roundly condemned by parts of the local community at the time. I am sure they see the benefit of that difficult decision now, as they would in many other areas where there have been difficult decisions on school closures. I visited the school recently and the reason might be that a lot of work at Elizabeth City has been done over a period of time and DECStech 2001 has only been about since last July.

Ms STEVENS: Specifically in relation to the new music centre.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I know, but when we are talking about cabling we are not just talking about cabling a music centre but talking about trying to link in a local area network the whole school community whereas, in some of the other communities, we are going into them in a fairly big way and we have been doing it since July last year. That might partially be the explanation but I will take it on notice and give the member a reply.

Ms STEVENS: What are the details of the cabling project? How much will be the total cost of connecting all schools and how long before schools are connected?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We are already doing cabling in some of those areas along the lines that I have suggested. In terms of the big contract, EDS has the right of first look at that contract and we are going through that process at the moment. If EDS says it is interested and is prepared to put in a price, we then have the option of looking at the price and, if we are not happy with it, we can go out to other prospective tenderers in relation to the project. We are going through that process at the moment. DECStech 2001 was named as a five-year strategy because it will take us five years to link up all of our schools, not only amongst themselves but also with our district offices and central office as well. It is a five-year program in terms of cabling and we have indicated right from the word go that we could not do all the schools overnight.

Ms STEVENS: Given that it has been estimated that it will cost schools \$80 per student per year to meet the DECStech target of one computer per five students, excluding the cost of furniture, what is DECS's estimate of the total cost to schools and parents?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That will vary among differing communities, depending on access to resources and funding. I am not aware of who undertook this estimate, whether it is the Labor's estimate or an individual school's estimate. We would need to look at the calculations. The actual estimate will depend on the varying schools and you will get a different estimate for different school communities in terms of being able to sustain the figure. It will depend on a range of other factors. We are indicating here the broad objective. It has not been mandated that they have to be 1:5 by the year 2001 or that some fearsome penalty will come down on their heads. It is an objective, together with many other objectives, that we have within the school system for DECStech 2001. Frankly, as Minister, if we arrive at 2001 and we have a fully

connected education network where all schools are linked with each other, with information services, with departmental offices and we have a computer ratio of 1:6 or 1:7 instead of 1:5, if I happen to be the Minister at the time, I would not be fussed with that at all.

The major goal of the DECStech 2001 strategy is the establishment of an education network linking all of our school communities with information and others. Because the Government has listed an objective of 1:5, our opponents—political and otherwise—have sought to portray that as the be all and end all of the DECStech 2001 strategy. They have also sought to portray it as a mandated requirement, that school fees will have to rise to whatever levels to ensure that this comes about. I have made clear to the many communities I have spoken to in the past 12 months that that is our objective. We will work towards that goal. If we find at the end of the year 2001 that we have managed to link the network but have not got to the goal of 1:5, we will reassess our objective.

Is it a reasonable one within the context of how much money the Government can give and how much money parents can raise and then we will review what we do then and determine whether we will continue to maintain it as an objective for a second five-year strategy? The Government of the day may well have to look at whether or not it adjusts its level of funding or, thirdly, the particular goal might be changed. It may well be determined at that stage that the goal of 1:5 is not a goal that in the end needs to be met to get all the benefits for students. It might be 1:6. Frankly, that is not the be all or the end all of the strategy. When we come to the end of the first five-year strategy, the Government and the Minister of the day will have considerable flexibility. We have locked in for five years \$15 million a year in expenditure in this area which, I hasten to add, was about \$14.6 million per year more than the Labor Government was offering for computer—

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Times have changed—but not by that much, I can assure you. The Labor Government was offering \$360 000. A vast lump of the expenditure for our first five years will be what I would term to be upfront costs in terms of establishing the network: it will be the cabling and infrastructure. There will be some ongoing maintenance of that cost, so it obviously all does not disappear. From the year 2001 onwards, if a Government is prepared to maintain its \$15 million commitment, there will be some free board for increased expenditure for computer subsidies and reduced expenditure on the maintenance of the infrastructure, cabling and network. We have these few people—schools and the Labor Party—running round and getting themselves into a lather over the year 2001 and the fact that this will mean a school fee of X squillion dollars or something and woe, the sky is falling in. They are getting themselves into a lather for not much cause at all. We need to be sensible about it. This Government is giving large lumps of money for the first time. It has to be better for schools and we will work together without being unreasonable in terms of school fee increases that schools will adopt and without being unreasonable in the amount of money that the Government can give.

Ms STEVENS: No-one is saying that we should not be sensible about it and no-one has a problem with the major goal of having schools properly resourced with technology. The Minister remarked earlier that people were taking this up in droves. That is true because people know that they have to provide this and there is absolutely no doubt about that.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: They want it.

Ms STEVENS: Certainly, they want it. However, there is considerable concern about their potential to pay and find the money and they say the only areas they have flexibility is in the curriculum areas of their budget, which they can see being squeezed, and they have little potential to raise their fees. That is the reality for many schools in my electorate and I would suggest in many electorates across the State. How do you expect schools to meet the costs?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It may be that those school communities determine that they do not want a computer strategy of 1:5.

Ms STEVENS: That is ridiculous.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is not ridiculous. I have just indicated that there is no mandated requirement that they have to have one computer for every five students. That is an objective.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, it is a shared problem between the Government, the department and school communities. We have an objective, I am sure the member will realise, of making sure all of our students are literate and numerate. We have an objective of harassment free workplaces and schools. The member, as a former principal, might be able to indicate whether or not she achieved that within her school community when she was a principal. The reality is that we are about setting objectives; the reality is that we have a five-year strategy. That is one of the objectives of the strategy but not the only one. As I have said to you, the overwhelming priority from my viewpoint is to establish the network and link our schools with learning, with information and data bases, with departmental and district offices and with each other. In the end, if it comes out that we have 1:6 or 1:7 or whatever it might be, we will make a reassessment at that stage concerning any of the three options I highlighted. If you have problems with school communities, get them to correspond with me or circulate a copy of my response and I shall be happy to enter into dialogue with them.

Ms STEVENS: I think you might find it will be 1:5 in some areas and 1:10 in other areas.

Mr BRINDAL: Following the same line of questioning, on the same budget line referred to by the member for Elizabeth, the Minister said that the Labor Government spent \$360 000 a year yet, despite that, a number of schools made computers a priority and invested considerable sums of school resources, generally raised by parents, into networks. Brighton High School springs to mind, as do a number of other schools. The member for Elizabeth acknowledged that that comes at great cost to the community. I am hearing the exact reverse to what the member for Elizabeth is saying. Schools have invested considerable amounts of money; they are ahead of the game and are now finding that \$15 million—and I commend the Government for the innovation—has been made available. They are saying, 'If we had waited, we would have got a share of this money. Now we appear to have missed out.' Would the Minister comment on the other side of the coin?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member raises a very difficult issue. When we looked at the DECStech subsidy scheme we knew there would be criticism from those who had committed significant parent resources. They went to the previous Government and asked for money and were told, 'Go away, we are not giving you anything. We will give you \$360 000 and you can divide that between 1 000 schools and pre-schools.' They therefore thought, 'Well, this is not an entirely generous Labor Government; we had better go away and do

it all ourselves.' They had fundraising and school fees and spent tens of thousands of dollars of their own money, without any assistance from the Labor Government, which was not interested in technology or the provision of computers in schools. They said, 'Tough luck' to the schools in the northern suburbs. Some parent communities who could raise the funds were able to do it entirely by themselves in order to provide computers.

Schools in the electorates of Elizabeth, Taylor and Spence were left entirely to their own resources and devices and had no access to computers and technology. The Government and the Minister of the day said to them, 'Tough luck, we will not help you. You go off and buy your computers yourselves.' People in the wealthier areas of Brighton, Unley and Marryatville could raise \$40 000 or \$50 000 and they did so. It is a bit hypocritical for Labor members to walk into this Chamber and criticise this scheme. This is the first time ever that a Government has been prepared to provide significant assistance for the purchase of computers. It is also the first time that we have given extra help to schools in the member for Elizabeth's area because they get far greater subsidies than, for example, schools in the member for Unley's area. We could have adopted a scheme which gave an equal subsidy across the board to all. We said, 'No, we will have a minimum subsidy of \$500 and maximum subsidy of \$1 000 and do it on a social justice basis.'

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is a lot more than the honourable member's own Party did in its years of Government here in South Australia. I reject absolutely the sorts of criticisms that we are getting from Labor members in this Chamber who have the temerity to be critical of the first commitment ever by a Government to a significant level of funding in this area when for many years they told schools in their own electorates, 'Tough luck, go and raise the money yourself. If you cannot raise the money yourself, you cannot have computers.'

Mr BRINDAL: I commend the Minister, especially on the social justice component of the answer to the last question. My question follows the same line. Minister, this Government was elected on a promise of excellence in education but excellence through choice, and progressively in the past few years you have announced the creation of a number of special interest high schools. Would you go through the program to date, indicating your plans for the future and say whether the special interest high schools have all been in the privileged eastern suburbs or Liberal areas of South Australia?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is an important philosophical question in terms of the direction in which this Government sees education heading. We indicated right from the word 'go' that we believed that we needed to provide an increasing variety of choice within the Government school system and, in particular, within the secondary school system. The Government is committed, for example, to three secondary high schools for students with high intellectual potential; one has been established in the north-east, one has been established at Glenunga and a third will be established next year. You would not have to be an expert to guess that broadly that will be in the geographic area of the south or south-west, to provide an option for students in that area.

We supported the establishment of the enterprise high school at Salisbury and we have supported the establishment of a second enterprise high school at Morphett Vale. Again, I am a strong supporter of the work done by Peter Turner and his team in providing alternative options and concentrating

on vocational education for students at Salisbury High School. We hope that Doug Moyle and his staff will be able to provide similar quality programs for students from the south. We have established the first of the specialist phys. ed. and sports schools at Wirreanda in the south. As was indicated in response to an earlier question, we are going through the process of establishing another school which, we believe, will be in the north or north-west. There is an intention to establish a third one at some stage, but we have not yet indicated a time frame. The Government has provided those options.

We have continued the program of focus schools in the primary school area. There were four existing sport focus schools and there are now two further sport focus schools at Marryatville and Seaview with tennis. Another four new enterprise clusters of schools are anticipated to commence this year and next year. So, the Government is seeking to provide a variety of options to parents and families to strengthen and broaden choice for them within our Government school system. We have provided schools in all areas: what one might term the wealthy areas and certainly in the poorer areas. Some are in Labor electorates and some in Liberal electorates. As with the question of school closures, as Minister I reject absolutely the notion that we have determined the choice of schools on any political basis. They have been well justified and, generally, on the basis of panel recommendations.

Ms WHITE: I refer to page 22 of the Capital Works Program. Six major school projects to commence in June 1997 have been announced as new works in either two, three or all four of the Minister's budgets. On 3 June, the Minister told the House, in response to a request by the shadow Minister, that he would obtain details of the contracts that have been let for those projects. Will the Minister tell the committee which of these six projects have now started, the names of the contractors and the new completion dates?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Precisely for the reasons indicated by the honourable member, we have not designated them as 'new works'. We have designated them as 'previous works' which will commence after the budget but before the end of the financial year in June this year. So, the Government has been accurate and definitive in terms of its description. These are not described as new works; they are described as works planned to commence in June 1997. The next category then says, 'New works, new works, new works', under a variety of subheadings. So, in relation to what work is commencing and who has been appointed, we are already chasing that information in relation to a question in another place. I will be happy to share that information with the honourable member when it is collected.

Ms WHITE: Given the Minister's repeated explanations that projects such as the Tanunda Primary School were delayed because of negotiations about the school's location and the Seaton High School project was delayed because of design negotiations with the school, how many of the 12 major new projects on this year's list are designed and ready to go?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that on notice and bring back a response.

Ms WHITE: Given the really abysmal record of Services SA, which manages the contracting for school projects, how many of the 12 major new projects listed in this year's budget does the Minister expect to commence on time?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Mr Chairman, I believe that the honourable member's comments in relation to the hard-

working public servants employed by Services SA are unfortunate. I am sure public servants working in the honourable member's electorate would be disappointed to hear her slugging their colleagues in the way in which she has just done.

Ms White interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member says that she does not resile from her criticisms of the public servants. I am disappointed that the honourable member in this place should criticise the staff of Services SA in such a way, particularly after some of the good work that those hard-working Services SA staff have accomplished in relation to some schools in her own electorate.

Mr BRINDAL: I rise on a point of order, Mr Chairman. Standing Orders of the House require that we question the Minister for Education. I believe that the member for Taylor has directly criticised another Minister and another Government department, which I do not believe she has the right to do under the Standing Orders.

Ms White interjecting:

Mr BRINDAL: You said 'abysmal performance', and it is not this Minister whom you are referring to.

The CHAIRMAN: While the member for Unley makes a point through his point of order, the work done by Services SA interacts with every Government agency. I do not allow the point of order simply on the basis that the Minister has the opportunity to clarify the matter, if there is a misunderstanding by the member for Taylor—and, indeed, the work to which she is referring may not even be undertaken by that agency. So, I acknowledge the concern of the member for Unley but I believe it appropriate that the Minister respond.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will take on notice the honourable member's question in relation to those 12 projects to which she has referred and see what information we can provide.

The CHAIRMAN: I believe it is appropriate that I point out to the Committee the fine work undertaken by Services SA in Parliament House. Members need only to walk through this building—a heritage building—to witness the great skills that we have in that department. So, I pay a tribute to the members of Services SA for that work and for the work they have done in schools in my area.

Ms STEVENS: I return to questions on DECStech 2000—Estimates of Receipts and Payments, page 154. Will schools receive a subsidy, say in two years, on the first round of replacement computers—which I understand could be up to 10 000 computers overall—or does the subsidy apply only to the initial purchase?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The computer subsidy scheme will operate for the five years of DECStech 2001.

Ms STEVENS: Minister, I know you said it would operate for five years. Is there only one round of subsidies or is there a round for replacement within five years?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I indicated, the subsidy scheme will operate for the five years. The mechanism for that will need to be determined. I could not comment as to whether it will be in two years, for example; but there will be a continuing subsidy scheme so that when it is determined that the computers have gone beyond their use-by date, or whenever the particular scheme has expired, it would be the intention to continue the arrangement for a school so that they could go back a second time—and, hopefully, continue beyond that as well.

Ms STEVENS: What are the details of the teacher training program in relation to DECStech 2000? How are funds being allocated to schools? Are these training programs being credentialled to ensure that teachers are being appropriately trained?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am happy to provide a copy of a press statement that I issued on this issue some time ago, which indicates that \$3 million is being given to schools this year. The money is being given to principals. A set of specific outcome statements has been given to principals and they are required to ensure by the end of 1998 that all the teachers and staff within their schools are able to meet those particular outcome statements. It has been done in a number of ways. Some are employing private contractors, some are using TAFE or the university and others are using existing staff within the school or within the cluster of schools.

Ms STEVENS: As a supplementary question, how are country teachers accessing training programs? I understand that the training and development grant works out at about \$90 per teacher. For country teachers, I presume that would mean that they would have to travel as well to receive this training, or is training being delivered in some way in regional centres? What is happening? How far will that money go for people who live a long way from Adelaide?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take advice on that. My recollection of the training formula that was used was that additional moneys were given to country communities. I do not think it is accurate to say that it was a blanket \$90 a teacher across the State. With our training and development grant formula generally we take into account distance from Adelaide. The second issue is that some of the country communities would be delivering the training and development in their local community. If they have an experienced staff person who can train the others to get to the base level of competence that we require, many communities are undertaking that, or local TAFE or private training providers are visiting clusters of schools and providing that sort of training in country and regional communities. So, a lot of that training is occurring at the local level.

Ms STEVENS: What has been done to assist schools to obtain software and, given the dangers of viruses being introduced into the system, what controls are in place to prevent this happening?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: In relation to the viruses, I would need to take some advice. In relation to software, it is correct to say that the DECStech 2001 strategy is not assisting schools in the current purchase of a whole variety of software, as was the case prior to the establishment of DECStech 2001. So, the situation has not changed: it remains a school-based decision. For some programs it may well be that software is provided but, generally, it is the responsibility of school communities, as it has been for some time.

Ms STEVENS: Have any standards been issued relating to the physical installation of computer rooms, such as lighting standards, distance between computers, power surge arresters and safety switches?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take advice and provide some detail on what standards have been provided for school communities in that area, particularly in relation to lighting and the other issues that the honourable member has raised.

Ms STEVENS: Has the Minister had any negotiations with the Australian Education Union concerning the introduction of computers in relation to matters such as how this will change the role of teachers, the optimum number of students

in computer classes and the recognition of special technology qualifications?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Not detailed ones. I meet on a regular monthly basis with the leadership of the Australian Education Union, and the agenda is generally set by the Australian Education Union. If they would like to raise that issue at one of our regular meetings, I would be delighted to discuss it with them. We may have had a brief reference in broad terms to some of those issues but we have certainly not had a detailed discussion.

Ms STEVENS: I refer to a memo dated 11 February 1997, which was sent by the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Ralph, to principals of schools about the departmental audit scheme, the second paragraph of which states:

I acknowledge that the work undertaken by the Audit Branch since the inception of the scheme [departmental audit scheme] has contributed to a generally high standard of accounting being observed in the schools on the scheme. I also acknowledge the efforts of school staff in contributing to a generally high standard of financial management in schools on the scheme. Thus, the overall assessed risk factor is considered to be low. As a result, the Senior Audit Manager and I are of the opinion that there is no need for these annual visits to continue.

The Chief Executive Officer also refers to an alternative arrangement, as follows:

Regular remote audits will be phased in with the development of computer assisted audit technique (CAAT) software.

When will these regular remote audits be phased in? I understand that the audits carried out under this new scheme will occur every three years. In the meantime, are schools expected to audit annually?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that question on notice. Is the honourable member referring to enrolment audits or financial audits?

Ms STEVENS: Financial audits.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: If I can provide that information before the close of this session tonight, I shall be happy to do so.

Ms STEVENS: I understand that the CAAT software program is part of the EDSAS financial arrangements. A number of schools have indicated their concerns about the continual hitches in that particular aspect of EDSAS. In answering these questions, I would like the Minister to take into account the time line for the introduction of this program. Who will pay for these audits? If schools have to audit their own finances in the intervening years, who will pay? Is the Minister confident that the high standard of financial management which was acknowledged by the Chief Executive Officer in the memo to which I referred will be continued under this new arrangement?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take those questions on notice and provide a reply as soon as possible. I am not familiar with this package. If it is linked with the finance module of EDSAS, I think it will be at least a few months before that will be implemented, because the finance module is currently being 'redone', and it might not be until the end of the year when we will see an entirely workable finance module package operating in schools.

Ms STEVENS: The memo to which I referred informs schools that there will not be an annual financial statement audit for the 1995-96 financial year. So, I assume that audits were suspended as from the date of this memo. The issue for schools involves the auditing of their financial accounts, especially when they are increasingly managing large sums

of money to hire teachers and run programs and for maintenance, etc. So, there is a gap.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I have said, I will take those questions on notice. If I can provide any useful responses before the Committee concludes, I will do so. If not, we will provide the answers in the normal way.

Ms STEVENS: What is the department's policy and time line for devolution of responsibilities and functions from DECS to schools? Regarding the devolution of non-curriculum functions to schools, schools in my electorate have told me of a number of things that they now do. For instance, departmental forms are now produced on site by schools. Also, since the outsourcing of cleaning, the management of cleaning contracts takes a finite amount of the bursar's time. If things are going fine, that is reasonable, but when there are problems with cleaners keeping to the terms of the contract it requires a significant input of time. I have also been told that schools are now having to buy light globes and to replace light fittings. Those three examples were cited as evidence of the increased responsibilities that schools are now expected to undertake. The comment was made that this is happening by stealth rather than as part of an articulated policy. So, whilst on the one hand a number of increased funding grants have been given to schools for various things, as the Minister has mentioned, schools also say that they are being expected to take up other functions which eat into their resources.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Government does not have a time line within which any particular model or philosophy of devolution must be achieved. On a number of occasions, we have said that we see incremental change in the area of local school management and devolution as an evolutionary process rather than a revolutionary process. So, there is no answer to the honourable member's question, because we do not have a time line. We have a policy of incremental change through working with local school communities. When it is considered that a particular responsibility can be devolved to schools, we will do so, but we will not dump a whole range of responsibilities on schools over a short period of time when they are not ready for those extra responsibilities.

Mr ATKINSON: I refer to page 155 of the Estimates of Receipts and Payments Financial Paper No. 2—Assistance to non-government schools. How much Commonwealth funding will South Australia lose this year under the Howard Liberal Government's new formula for funding public education?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That has not yet been determined. The State Government has expressed its concerns at the operation of the enrolment benchmark adjustment. Whilst that has been legislated for, the detail of how it operates has not been concluded. I am pleased to say that the Commonwealth Minister did acknowledge some of the concerns that South Australia had expressed at the most recent ministerial council meeting last Thursday and Friday and has undertaken to have his officers have urgent discussions with South Australian and other State officers on a number of issues. I will just highlight one: the State system carries the huge cost of maintaining high-cost rural schools in small, isolated and rural communities, and the non-government school system does not have to maintain those high costs. That is just one example of a number that I have raised with the Minister, and I am pleased to see, whilst he has not given a commitment to change, that he has indicated a willingness to have his officers revisit those issues and to see whether or not changes can be made. He has also indicated a willingness to introduce

potentially a buffer or a cap in relation to the funding changes.

The final resolution of how much the adjustment might involve will not be possible until after August, when the census of the number of students in non-government and Government schools is taken. The honourable member will have to wait until after August, perhaps I suggest October or November, and he might like to ask me that question again and I will be delighted to see what information I can provide him with.

Mr ATKINSON: Further to the Minister's announcement that he did not intend to agree to open-ended additional funding for non-government schools, the questions asked on 27 May concerning the Minister's new Non-government Schools Planning Advisory Committee, can the Minister now name the membership of the committee?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I cannot directly, but before the end of the proceedings today I can bring the names of the officers involved. It is to be chaired by Bob Lean, who was a former Chair of the joint planning committee (this is the committee that replaces that particular committee), and it is broadly representative of interests within the non-government sector and the Government school sector.

Mr ATKINSON: How does this new committee change the purpose of the old Non-government Schools Planning Advisory Committee, and what terms of reference have been given to the new committee?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I publicly released a press statement and a copy of the policy a month or so ago. I would be very pleased to provide a copy of that policy statement to the member for Spence, and it will indicate the terms of reference and the guidelines for the operations of the committee.

Mr ATKINSON: What are the criteria for assessing an application from the private sector for a new non-government school? Given that the Minister has closed several State schools with enrolments of around 150 pupils on the ground of limited curriculum opportunities, will the Minister require a minimum enrolment for a new non-government school?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The policy document that I have already indicated I will provide to the honourable member will cover a number of those issues but not all of them. It will broadly indicate that there will need to be an assessment by the committee of education impact on existing Government and non-government schools within the community, and the planning committee will need to consider that and then make recommendations to me as Minister based on its assessment of the impact on existing providers in that community.

As with the previous Labor Government, there is a minimum enrolment provision within the policy which is much smaller than 150 or 200. That is something supported by the member for Spence in his support for the previous policy under the Labor Government, both State and Federal.

Mr ATKINSON: Has the Minister provided advice to the Commonwealth Minister on capital assistance for non-government schools this year? What projects have been recommended?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have not provided any advice to the Commonwealth Minister on capital works for non-government schools. I need to check whether officers have, but I suspect probably not. Most of the funding for capital works is done through block grant authorities within the non-government sector—the Catholic sector and the independent sector. I think most of that is generally done directly with the non-government sectors themselves without any input from

the Department for Education and Children's Services. I will have that checked, but I am pretty sure that will be the case.

Mr ATKINSON: Given that actual recurrent payments to non-government schools have increased from \$57 million in 1995-96 to \$62.5 million in 1996-97 and this year is estimated to be \$64 million, what has been the cause of this increase?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As it has been in the Government school sector, increases in salaries for staff. There have been significant salary increases, if the member for Spence is not aware, for teachers in the Government sector and the non-government sector. Also, there have been increased enrolments in the non-government sector.

Mr BRINDAL: I wish to pursue the member for Spence's extraordinary and covert attack on independent schools in South Australia. Does the Minister accept that while 150 pupils might be a viable enrolment for a Government school given that in the local area there are other Government schools which any parent can choose, in the case of, say, a small Buddhist community or an Islamic community there are other considerations related to ethnic origin and religious practice which may relate to differing curriculum choice and a different set of criteria? Therefore, the committee may well come up with entirely different guidelines as to the pupil ratio at which an acceptable curriculum can be evolved for that community and its needs. Do you, Minister, or does the Government accept that premise, or do you want to be bound into the sort of idiot thinking of the Opposition?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I would never want to be bound into the idiot thinking of anybody. It is true that the previous Labor Government maintained a policy which allowed the establishment of a non-government school with one student in it. That was a policy supported by the member for Spence as a member of the State Labor Government, and supporting, I am sure, the policies also of the Commonwealth Labor Government. The member for Spence in his support for his own Labor Government's policies in this area also supported the establishment of the school that the Brethren have established (and the member for Unley will be aware of the Brethren), and that school I think has fewer than 20 students in it.

The member for Spence is a supporter of establishing schools with small numbers in them in the non-government community, and this Government will continue broadly that particular policy direction. We will continue to allow choice for families in relation to a number of these areas.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Spence appeared to be indicating by way of hand gesture some dissatisfaction with comments by the member for Unley. I remind the member for Spence that if he feels that the member for Unley is reflecting upon him in any way, shape or form he has every right to take a point of order at that time. It may be that the member for Spence thought that the member for Unley was calling him an idiot, and if that were the case the member for Spence could have raised the point of order at that time. The Chair does not recognise hand gestures.

Mr ATKINSON: Thank you for the invitation to raise it now, and I am pleased to raise it. The member for Unley referred to the line of Opposition in question, our policies and indeed ourselves as idiot. That is unparliamentary. My hand gestures were meant to suggest that you, Sir, as Chairman would intervene without being invited to do so to obtain the retraction of unparliamentary language. Since you did not do so, perhaps owing to your inexperience, I now invite you to do so.

The CHAIRMAN: I hope that the member for Spence is not reflecting upon the Chair; I remind him of the provisions in the Standing Orders should he be so doing. The Chair is of the view that the member for Unley gave a broad intimation that he believed that there was some idiocy in Opposition policy making. I did not hear the member for Unley specifically refer to the member for Spence as an idiot and for that reason the Chair did not intervene. In view of the fact that the member for Spence was gesturing from his seat, I thought that he might wish to clarify the situation.

Mr ATKINSON: I believe the remarks of the member for Unley attached to me personally and to the member for Elizabeth and I ask him to withdraw.

The CHAIRMAN: Was the member for Unley calling the member for Spence an idiot?

Mr BRINDAL: As the member for Spence will know, there is ample illustration in the Bible of people who gesticulate and carry on—the processes by which they think and not the person themselves—being referred to in those terms. I was not referring directly to the honourable member but simply to his thought processes, but if the member takes offence to the way he thinks and my reference to the way he thinks, I will withdraw so that he is satisfied.

The CHAIRMAN: That is very charitable of the member for Unley.

Mr ATKINSON: Given the Minister's answers to my last line of questioning, surely one of the reasons why there is an increase in recurrent payments to non-government schools is the increasing number of pupils in those schools. The Minister nods his assent. Surely one of the reasons for there being an increased number of pupils in non-government schools is that there is a decreased number of pupils in State schools. A good example of that is the abandonment of the north-western suburbs of Adelaide of the State education system. Will the Minister inform the Committee whether there are any benefits to State consolidated revenue in closing down State schools, transferring the pupils to the Catholic education system, as will occur in my electorate with the closure of Findon, Croydon and Croydon Park Primary Schools, and therefore shifting the cost of educating those pupils to the Commonwealth budget, which has primary responsibility for the Catholic education system?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I indicated in response to an earlier question that enrolments were a factor. It may have slipped through to the keeper as the member for Spence did not pick up that part of the answer. I am very disappointed that the member for Spence thinks so poorly of the quality of education being offered in Government schools in the northwest such as Kilkenny, Woodville, Seaton Park and a variety of other schools which former students from Findon, Croydon and Croydon Park might attend. I am disappointed that he has joined a conspiracy to drive away students from our quality Government schools remaining in the northwest, such as Kilkenny, as he engaged in earlier today. He is encouraging, obviously by way of that question, parents to move into the Catholic and non-government system.

It is disappointing that a local member should think so ill of the quality of education in Government schools that he would be indicating that that would occur. I cite the example of Netley and Camden, where virtually all the students in those schools—the decision being taken at the same time—will attend other Government school providers within that cluster. They are not heading into the non-government system at all but going to Government schools because in that circumstance we have local school communities and a local

member who is not seeking to denigrate other existing Government schools in the community as the member for Spence and his supporters are doing in relation to Kilkenny. Exactly the same decision was taken at exactly the same time. I announced both decisions on the same occasion, yet the overwhelming majority of Government students in Netley and Camden are transferring to other Government providers in the western suburbs.

Mr ATKINSON: What about Findon?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have just talked about Findon. If there is to be a difference in the north-western suburbs, it is because of the attitude and approach being adopted by the member for Spence and his fellow travellers who are seeking to denigrate existing Government schools in those north-western areas. I can only caution the member for Spence against heading down this path.

Mr ATKINSON: By way of supplementary question, now that Findon Primary School has been closed for this year, where have the pupils from Findon Primary School—those who were with going to continue at another primary school—gone? If the Minister knows the answer for Netley and Camden, I presume that he also knows it for Findon.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I know a number of things, but not everything. I am happy to concede that. I am happy to take it on notice and endeavour to get information.

Mr ATKINSON: I see them at St Joseph's.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The honourable member says that he sees them at St Joseph's. I am happy to take it on notice—St Joseph's in what suburb?

Mr ATKINSON: Hindmarsh.

Ms STEVENS: I refer to capital receipts, on page 153. Given that this year's capital receipts of \$10 million were down by \$4.5 million on budget, why were agents not appointed to sell a number of properties including portions of Aberfoyle Park and Glenunga secondary schools and Hindmarsh, Norwood and West Lakes Primary Schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take advice in relation to each of those individual cases. I will need to consult with the Department for Environment and Natural Resources. If parts of the site have been declared surplus to our needs it is the agency which manages the sale.

Ms STEVENS: Given that poor sales impact on new works, what steps has the Minister taken to maximise sales to meet the budget target?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have tried to combat members of the Labor Party who continue to oppose many of the budget sales and many of the closures. That is an extraordinary question to be coming from the Labor Party. You might suggest that the drafters of that question throw it away next year. Clearly we are doing many things, one of which is seeking to combat Labor Party spokespersons and others who seek to oppose the closures or indications of sale of surplus Government assets or land in the department. This department and Government are working as assiduously as they can with the Department for Environment and Natural Resources to sell properties that have been declared surplus. In some cases, like the Playford High School site closed and declared surplus by the previous Labor Government, because there are few takers in the market for many years it may take a while to sell all of it. In some areas there is huge demand and as soon as you put them on the market the properties are sold.

Ms STEVENS: Given that a 'Back to Schools' grant scheme was implemented to return funds to schools from the sale of properties declared surplus to requirements, why is the capital construction program now dependent on receipts from

the sale of assets? I remind the Minister that last year he told the Committee that, if sales fell short, works could not be started.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The strategy in relation to the sale of assets being churned back into education facilities is one that we inherited from the previous Labor Government. It is no different. When school facilities are declared surplus, the value of those assets is churned back into education. We are no more or less reliant on revenue from land sales than the Labor Government was in its last years. In one of the last years of the Labor Government, it had a budgeted item of \$20 million to \$30 million from land sales. As the member has noted, we have a modest land sale program of about \$14 million for this year.

Ms STEVENS: How many Government funded new schools have been opened since January 1994?

Mr Brindal interjecting:

Ms STEVENS: Given the Minister's promise not to close more than 40 schools, can he confirm that 39 schools have been closed since 1994?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I can certainly confirm that because, as the member for Unley indicated, we monitor that figure closely.

Ms Stevens interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Exactly; we like to keep as many promises as we can. There are a couple of arguments about whether Penong and Coorabie are closures or not, but our calculations are that there have been 39 closures or amalgamations of schools since 1 January 1994 by decisions of this Government. A handful of those are not closed yet. They will not be closed until the end of this year. The 39 figure actually includes a handful of schools that will be closed at the end of this year. It does not include schools that are already closed. I need to take on notice exactly how many new schools have been established since January 1994, but they include Hewitt Springs at Gawler, Blakeview, Woodend and a couple of others. It is about four or five, but I will obtain a list for the honourable member and provide it to her.

Ms STEVENS: The Minister said a handful of schools would be closed by the end of the year. Is that five schools or two handfuls?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is only the ones I have announced already, so that would involve Croydon, Croydon Park, Netley, Camden, McRitchie and Iron Knob. So, it is a handful plus one finger!

Ms STEVENS: Which properties make up the list of sales to net \$13.5 million this year?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that on notice. I think we have netted approximately \$10 million so far this year. I am not sure where the \$13 million comes from. If the honourable member gives me a reference, I will follow that through. In relation to the schools that have been sold and the money that has come in, we have no problem in indicating the amounts of money recouped from those sales.

Ms STEVENS: What is the Government's policy on retaining open space where schools such as Marion High and Findon Primary are closed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I refer the honourable member to an earlier question asked by the member for Unley when I gave a full and comprehensive reply to the difficult issue of balance between wanting to provide the best facilities for our students and staff and the issue of open space preservation by communities. If there is something in that reply that the honourable member wants to further clarify, I will be happy to do so.

Ms STEVENS: Essentially, each one on its own merits?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Certainly. We have no fixed rule that governs every decision we take. We seek to be as reasonable and flexible as we can in relation to the particular circumstances. I am advised that the \$13.5 million figure, to which the honourable member has referred on sale of land and buildings, is likely to be an estimate for the sale of land and buildings for 1997-98. If that is the case, I am not in a position to provide that for the reasons I gave earlier to the member for Spence. We do not flag how much we intend to get from sales. I am happy to give a breakdown of the approximately \$10 million we have recouped this year on the sale of land and buildings.

Ms STEVENS: As a supplementary question, has the Minister considered the views of the Marion council that the State Government should retain the open space at the schools, and has he investigated options other than sale and development?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, I have considered their views but, in the interests of students and staff of school communities, and because we are upgrading Hamilton, Daws Road and a number of other schools in the local community to the tune of about \$5 million, the department needs to recoup the funds from the sale of the schools that have been closed down. To do otherwise would mean we would have to seriously curtail the improvement programs in the schools in the southwest.

Mr ATKINSON: I refer to page 131 of the Program Estimates and Information under 'Payments of a Capital Nature'. Given that the Government had some difficulty last year in working out what the implications were of the Howard Liberal Government's cuts to Commonwealth specific purpose payments, can the Minister now provide a clear analysis of the actual impact on South Australian programs of the cuts to specific purpose payments by the Howard Government in 1996-97 and this year?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We should be able to gather some information in relation to 1996 because that has occurred now and we obviously know what they gave us and what they did not. I will take that on notice and give a considered response to the honourable member. It does change through the years, but in relation to this particular financial year I am not sure what information I will be able to provide. Broadly the Commonwealth Government has told us there is very little change in all in respect of specific purpose payments for this year.

Mr ATKINSON: The Minister may care to take on notice the following questions. What is the total cost of all projects listed in the 1997-98 capital works program? How much of that expenditure has been incurred in previous years? What is the estimate of expenditure on those listed projects in 1997-98? How much expenditure is scheduled to be spent on these listed projects in 1998-99, 1999-2000, and 2000-2001?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member is quite right. I will take the question on notice and see what information we might be able to provide that might be of use to him.

Mr ATKINSON: What is the value of the capital works listed in this budget's capital works program which are already committed, either because work has commenced or because contracts have been signed and what is the estimated expenditure on those projects in 1997-98, 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-1? Which capital works are already committed?

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

Ms STEVENS: My question relates to page 153 of Estimates of Receipts and Expenditure (Financial Paper No. 2) and relates to the EDS contract. How much will DECS pay for EDS services in 1996-97 and was this a saving on the previous year's cost of providing information technology? If not, how much extra did it cost?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will need to take that question on notice and bring back a reply. As the Minister for Information and Contract Services has indicated on a number of occasions, in looking at these comparisons it will be important to make adjustments so that we can compare apples with apples and oranges with oranges. We will seek to do that in terms of the response that we provide to the member.

Ms STEVENS: I refer to the same page. Is DECS satisfied with the service provided by EDS and how much is budgeted for in 1997-98?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I indicated earlier some of the concerns that our schools and school communities had, particularly with the change request process. I refer the member to the response that I gave to that earlier question when I indicated that the Minister for Information and Contract Services had instituted some changes with EDS in terms of that process. If there is any further clarification that the member wants, in addition to that earlier question and answer, I would be happy to further respond.

Ms STEVENS: What is the budgeted amount for 1997-98?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will have to take that on notice. There is no single budget line for EDS charges because there is a variety of different charges. Clearly, the sort of charges the member for Hartley was talking about earlier will not be charges relating to our budget line because they are individual school budget line charges. In relation to the Department for Education and Children's Services, we will look at those charges. Unit pricing has evidently just been announced by EDS which I think is probably going to have a favourable impact on some aspects of our budget. There might be some other aspects which have been increased as a result of the pricing policies of EDS. We will look at what information we can provide and see what information is available for the member.

Ms STEVENS: I refer to the same line but in relation to EDSAS. The enterprise agreement with teachers provides \$600 000 for an IT help desk for both curriculum and EDSAS applications and \$500 000 for EDSAS training. Is support available at the regional level for assisting schools to implement these information technology programs or are all problems handled through the central help desk?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We have support running out of our ears. We have support officers all over the State, particularly in the country area for some time, and we are now seeking to replicate that in the metropolitan area. We have a help desk centrally located as well. We have a combination of a help desk and we now have district support officers who are trying to provide support in district levels.

Ms STEVENS: How will EDSAS training money be allocated and what training guidelines have been issued?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am advised that we will need to take that on notice and we will bring back a reply for the member.

Ms STEVENS: The report into EDSAS of February 1996 said that a second consultancy to study the resource implications of EDSAS was scheduled to take place after the

acceptance of the first report. Was this work carried out, what were the findings and how much did it cost?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take that question on notice. I am not sure whether there was a second consultant's report but we will certainly check and see what information we can provide.

Ms STEVENS: I now refer to page 126 of the Program Estimates concerning secondary education, although the Minister may have answered some of this previously, but I want to make sure we get all of the information. How much will be provided to schools under the Ready, Set, Go program this year to arrest falling retention rates and how will these funds be allocated to schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member for Elizabeth is right: this question has been answered before.

Ms STEVENS: Again referring to page 126, dealing with secondary education, does the Minister recognise that the average retention rate disguises the real situation, particularly in many low socioeconomic areas where the retention rates are much lower and the low figures are not disguised by a cohort of part-time students and what is being done to assist these schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I made some comments earlier about retention rates and the Ready, Set, Go program. I refer the member to those earlier answers. Certainly, the Government sees the Ready, Set, Go program and the increasing emphasis on vocational education in schools as one part of the Government's response to the national problem of declining retention rates in Government schools in particular. There are a number of other issues which the Government school system will need to address and this evening, when the Chief Executive Officer of the Senior Secondary Assessment Board is with us, she will be able to share some information with members in terms of what the board is doing in relation to the structure of the South Australian Certificate of Education. Certainly, there is some information available that some students who are dropping out are dropping out because of their perception of the degree of difficulty of the South Australian certificate. There is a major research study being undertaken by the board but it is not in a position to release the details of that study, but it is undertaking a number of research programs to try to throw some light on why students are not continuing with their studies at years 11 and 12.

Ms STEVENS: Can the Minister give any specific information about what impact the Ready, Set, Go program is forecast to have on retention rates over the next two years? Have you any targeted predictions for this?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: When we released the Ready, Set, Go program late last year/early this year the press statement, which I am happy to provide to the member, did include a number of students envisaged to be part of the program over three years. My recollection is a ballpark of 5 500 students to be involved in that part of the program. The impact that will have on retention rates will depend on a number of other factors as well: the numbers accepted into university and TAFE courses and the general perception about their ability to get jobs, apprenticeships and traineeships. We can certainly give the member a figure about how many people are involved in the program. It is then problematic as to whether you can make an accurate assessment about what that means for retention rates.

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

Membership:

The Hon. Frank Blevins substituted for Ms White.
Mr Venning substituted for Mr Leggett.

The CHAIRMAN: For those interested in statistics, members of the Committee might like to know that so far during proceedings the Opposition has asked 66 questions and nine supplementary questions, with the Government asking 27 questions and two supplementary questions—a total of 104 questions in all.

Mr ATKINSON: Referring to page 133 of the Program Estimates and the provision of general primary education in schools, which are the six sports focus schools and which sports are they promoting?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The sports that are being promoted are volleyball at Heathfield and Brighton, netball at Blackwood, baseball at Seaton, and tennis at Marryatville and Seaview.

Mr ATKINSON: Staying with that same page of the Program Estimates, how many students are now combining part-time work with SACE?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will need to take that on notice. We have tried to explore this issue. We have about 2 700 full-time equivalents of part-time students but we also have a series of year 11 and year 12 students who undertake part-time work. They are full-time students who work at McDonald's or Hungry Jacks and a variety of other jobs. We would have figures on the first category, that is, part-time students working part-time. We would not have figures on the number of full-time students who are also working part-time. I will see what information I can get for the member and bring back a reply.

Mr ATKINSON: With respect, Minister, this Chamber is full of public servants.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member for Spence have a supplementary question or is he asking another question against the budget line?

Mr ATKINSON: The point I am making is that I am surprised that the Minister would have to take a comparatively simple question on notice when the gallery is full of public servants. Someone here must know the answer.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I have given the answer. There are approximately 2 700 full-time equivalents of part-time students. It depends on how the question is phrased. We might have a part-time student who is only undertaking two or three subjects. That is not counted as a full-time equivalent. If you want to add together the full-time equivalents of all these two or three subjects or whatever at year 12, it is approximately 2 787.9, down to 2 535.7 full-time equivalents in 1996. That is full-time equivalents. If you are talking about the actual number of students, it is somewhere in the high 2 000s who are actual part-time students. The question as phrased by the honourable member, that is, referring to students who are working part-time, also covers another category for which there are no figures—that is, a full-time student at Woodville High School, for example, who is working part-time at McDonald's is a student who is studying part-time. The member, after dinner, may well want to be glib and aggressive, and if that is so he might like to frame his questions a little more clearly so that we can provide detailed responses to his questions.

Mr ATKINSON: A very good point by the Minister and one which I accept in the spirit it was intended. Given that 3 227 students were suspended from school in 1996, what

programs are being implemented to address the problems caused by these children leaving school early and at risk of being unemployed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member has made an assumption in his question which is erroneous. Because a student is suspended for a period between one day and five days it does not mean that they are leaving school early. We have students as young as six, seven and eight who might be suspended for a day or two for violent behaviour towards a fellow student but they are not leaving school early. The assumption the honourable member has made is wrong.

Membership:

Mr De Laine substituted for Ms Stevens.

Mr VENNING: I notice under the DECS Facilities program title (page 142 of the Program Estimates) that major works in progress include Clare. I gather that includes the new middle school concept as well as upgrading of the primary school. Will the Minister provide a run-down on this concept? Is this the first part of putting that concept into fruition?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Certainly, that is the intention. As the member knows, a decision has been taken to move year 7 students from the primary school site—which is struggling to accommodate the number of students—to the high school site. There has been an indication from the Government that there will be some work at the high school site to assist in the accommodation of those students and there will also be some work at the primary school site which needs some upgrading.

I believe, in broad terms, that at this stage we are talking about \$300 000-odd for changes at Clare Primary School and about \$200 000 at the high school. However, no definite decisions have been taken as to exactly how that might occur. There are some suggestions that perhaps the transfer of year 7 students might be delayed by 12 months. Some people are requesting that. I have not agreed to that at this stage, and we will obviously consider that further.

Mr VENNING: This is a supplementary question. Is the work of the committee that was set up to examine the options of this middle school ongoing, or has the work of the committee come to an end?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will check for the honourable member. My recollection is that the committee finished its work and is not ongoing. However, if that is not the situation, I will correct that for the member.

Mr VENNING: My second question has already been referred to today, I believe, in relation to the Tanunda Primary School site, and also in the budget speeches. I understand that the project is very close to commencement. When will the building work commence and when can we expect it to be completed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The honourable member was better informed than I was, as Minister. He was telling me down to the day when it was going to start, and I thought he was suggesting that it was starting in 10 days. I hope the honourable member is correct, because we have certainly indicated that the works will be commencing this month. We have 13 or 14 days left in the month of June, so I trust that the honourable member's information is correct. We will follow that up.

There was an earlier question in relation to work commencing on these six schools in June 1997, and we have undertaken to provide committee members with an update in relation to what work has to be undertaken.

Mr VENNING: I have a supplementary question on that topic. The special education facility that was added to that project in the past few days has certainly been well received in the community. Why was it decided to locate it there, and was it a priority that came from DECS?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: There has been no final decision in relation to that special education facility at Tanunda Primary School. It occurred because a number of people have strongly recommended that it be located there, as a number of students and children from families in the Barossa area have to be taxed or transported in some way to the Elizabeth or Salisbury area for this sort of special education facility. They believe there is strong demand for such a facility and they are therefore recommending that it be at Tanunda. I am not in a position to take a different view to that at this stage. I have requested a detailed explanation of the arguments for that facility being located at Tanunda and, if there is a persuasive reason for it, we will continue with it. But there is no concluded decision on that at this stage.

The CHAIRMAN: Before the member for Culance asks his third question, for the benefit of the three members who have joined the committee, I draw their attention to part of the introductory comments that I made in opening the proceedings of the Committee. When questions are asked, it is expected that references to the appropriate budget papers will be made to assist the Minister in answering questions and also those referring to them at a later date, and ensuring that the references are appropriate and easy for them to follow up any additional information that may be required of the Committee. Also, in relation to supplementary questions, it is expected that they will be the exception rather than the rule. The Committee has adhered to those requirements well during the proceedings today and I believe that it has assisted the proceedings.

Mr VENNING: All my questions have been on the same reference that I opened with, Program Estimates page 142, under the heading of 'Major works'. My last question is in relation to Nuriootpa High School, where the amount of \$1.2 million for a new facility is mentioned in the budget. The budget papers give us a brief outline, but I would like more detail, if possible. Will that money cover the whole project? Does the Minister envisage finishing it with that allocation?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The only detail I can provide at this stage is the information that is provided in the budget documents, and that is a second stage of permanent core construction buildings to enable the demolition of specialist timber relocatable buildings with significant backlog maintenance. The second stage would consist of eight general and specialist teaching classrooms plus support spaces. The budget for that is \$1.2 million, of which \$500 000 would be spent in the coming financial year. I will endeavour to see what further information might be provided to the member. At this stage, all we can say is that this is the best estimate the departmental officers and Services SA officers have been able to put on the cost of the project. Given that it is a fairly discrete project—that is, eight general and specialist teaching classroom spaces—then the chances of the estimate being relatively accurate are obviously much higher than if it was something different and involved perhaps major redevelopment or realignment of existing buildings. So, it is more likely that that estimate is going to be closer to being accurate than perhaps some other redevelopment projects.

Mr Venning interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Let's hope we do not have any problems with native grasses.

The Hon. FRANK BLEVINS: My question relates to page 133 of the Estimates. The Minister would know, as he made an announcement recently, that the Iron Knob Primary School will close down. I believe it has about 19 students left. It employs 1.6 teachers, two part-time SSOs and a grounds-person. I do not know whether the Minister has been to the Iron Knob Primary School, but it is a very well developed community school and is highly regarded in the community. Whilst small, it is a very attractive school. I believe it is unlikely that the school will be able to be sold, so I do not think that any money can be realised from the sale of the school after it has been closed. Maybe I am wrong. It appears to me that there is a large amount of property at Iron Knob for sale which anybody can buy, or probably take. So, I am not quite sure what monetary savings will be made by closing the school—particularly as I assume that a new air-conditioned bus will have to be purchased to bus the children into Whyalla.

How much will it cost to provide the bus service out of Iron Knob each school day? Will DECS provide someone to supervise the children on the bus? Will the bus be on call to take a child home to Iron Knob in the event of that child's being ill or having a minor accident during the day? Will there be contingency travel plans for those children should they wish to partake in after school activities or should they be kept in late after school, and so on? Will parents be given a choice as to which primary school their children will attend in Whyalla? If they are to be given a choice—and I hope that is the case—what arrangements will be made for transporting them to the different schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will use the existing school bus transport policy that was implemented by the Labor Government for school bus transport—a policy with which the former Treasurer and Minister in the Labor Government will be very familiar. We have not made any changes to that policy, and we will use that policy to determine the appropriate level and quality of school bus transport service that we will provide. Therefore, we will not be providing an additional person on a bus to supervise. That is a responsibility for the school bus driver.

In relation to the question whether the bus will be available to take home a sick child through the day, that is not part of the school bus transport policy which, as I said, we inherited from a Labor Government. So, we will use the existing bus transport policy and apply it to the circumstances at Whyalla.

Regarding choice of school, families will have a choice of school, but the school bus transport policy does not provide for a choice of school. I understand that the community is already engaged in some discussions about which school will be attended by the majority of students. We will apply some flexibility in the case of Whyalla if we have to, and then negotiate the transport arrangements for the school bus. Normally, under the school bus transport policy the school bus would go to the nearest Government school, but it certainly will not do a ring route of the remaining 11 or so primary and junior primary schools in Whyalla and drop off one student at each of those schools. We will take this decision as part of the transition process, and we will transport the students to that school.

In some other country communities, families prefer to send their children to a school different from the one which has a bus service. Under the existing policy, that is a

judgment that those families may take in respect of choosing something different.

With respect to the savings issue, the department in making its decisions is not looking just at financial issues. As a former Treasurer, the member for Giles would freely acknowledge that it is not just the bottom budget line which Governments look at but the combination of the economic costs of services and educational grounds in terms of the educational services that the department can provide. If one were interested in looking at just the financial aspects, it would not be simply a question of whether the buildings can be sold. I acknowledge to the honourable member that that may or may not be difficult in Whyalla—obviously, he would know the local circumstances better than I—but it is an issue of having to employ separate principals and administrative staff and having to make separate maintenance arrangements and provide for a range of other ongoing recurrent costs when one is operating and maintaining two additional schools in Whyalla and the surrounding districts. If we were looking at just the financial aspects—and we are not doing that—obviously there would be some savings from the closure of the two schools in the Whyalla area in terms of ongoing and recurrent costs to the department.

The Hon. FRANK BLEVINS: Will the Minister get back to me with a more precise breakdown of these alleged savings, or is that it?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am happy to take the honourable member's question on notice and see what additional information I can produce to the honourable member over and above that which I have been able to provide.

The Hon. FRANK BLEVINS: The Minister has announced that the McRitchie Crescent Primary School is to close at the end of this year. The way in which the decision was taken and announced to the McRitchie Crescent community and the Whyalla community left a fair bit to be desired, to say the least—they heard about it in the media. My office was advised the day before, but I could not run around and tell each individual student and parent. Whilst I appreciated the courtesy of the 24 hours' notice, it was not terribly helpful to the school community. These things may have to be done from time to time, but there are ways of doing them which show more respect for the students and their parents than was shown in this case, particularly as the DECS committee in Whyalla said that there would be no change. So, the parents and the students were quite unprepared for the announcement.

As the Minister would know, the community is being led by the Whyalla City Council in opposition to this closure. They are appealing to the Minister to reverse the decision. I am not confident that the Minister will listen to reason. I have an awful feeling that he will continue on his course and close the school despite the very reasonable case that will be put forward by everyone. If that is the sad reality, what arrangements will be made in Whyalla to take care of these children, a very high percentage of whom have very special needs? McRitchie Crescent is in one of the poorer areas of Whyalla, and the students have particular difficulties. This school has taken care of these students in a superb way. I cannot say too much for the staff of the school and the Education Department officers in Whyalla for the way they have done this.

Obviously, these children are to be distributed throughout other schools in Whyalla, if the Minister has his way, but I would like the Minister and DECS to accept some responsibility for the special needs of these children and not just say that that is for the receiving schools to sort out. I hope the

Minister can reassure me and the Whyalla community that the special needs of these children will be taken care of and that responsibility will be assumed if this unfortunate decision goes ahead.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Government and I are always prepared to listen to reasonable arguments. We considered all the submissions that were put prior and subsequent to the review decision. In this case, not having found any evidence to change the decision that the Government has made, obviously it intends to proceed with its announced decision.

In respect of the students of McRitchie Crescent Primary School, I assure the member for Giles that my departmental officers and the receiving schools will bend over backwards to continue to provide a quality education service for these students who are soon to be educated in other schools in Whyalla. I am sure that the member for Giles will join me in saying that we have some fine primary schools in Whyalla led by some fine principals and staffed by some fine teachers. There is no reason why the quality of service that those students have received at McRitchie cannot be replicated at the other fine schools that exist in the Whyalla community. We will be happy to work with the member for Giles and all others concerned about the future of McRitchie students to try to make the transition as painless as possible under the circumstances and to ensure that their special needs are catered for in their new school.

A management group is to be established by the District Superintendents from both McRitchie and Iron Knob, and I am sure that they will be encouraged to know that they have the advice, guidance and assistance of the member for Giles to provide for the transition as painlessly as possible.

The Hon. Frank Blevins interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: They are receiving considerable amounts of Government money from the extra \$72 million that has been provided for education in this budget on top of the \$110 million which has been allocated in this year's budget compared with last year's. I am sure that as a former Treasurer the member for Giles would not have seen that much generosity being shown towards education and children's services. I can say no more than that my officers will have the interests of the students of McRitchie paramount in their mind as they try to manage this process.

The only other comment I make relates to the honourable member's opening remarks. There is no easy way to announce a school closure decision. The intention in relation to Whyalla as with all other school closures is that the—

The Hon. FRANK BLEVINS: You've had a bit of practice.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We've had a bit of practice, but not as much practice as the Labor Government, which closed 70 schools. However, we are almost there—we are up to 39. The Labor Government had 70, so—

The Hon. Frank Blevins interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: No, in the past few years. There is no easy way. The goal is always to have meetings with the principal and the Chair of the school council and to advise the staff.

Mr Atkinson interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I ask the member for Spence not to speak of individual members of the department in that way.

Mr ATKINSON: He has retired; he is not a member of the—

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That person has not retired; he is unwell. I therefore ask the member for Spence to be careful in what he says about individual officers of the department.

I would be happy to explain privately and not on the public record the personal circumstances of that person, and I would ask the honourable member not to bring up his name in the Estimates Committee proceedings. We try to advise the principals, the chair of the school council and the teachers and staff, and to have them advise the students, before any public announcement is made. In relation to this announcement somebody outside the school community obviously alerted the media prior to the decision, we think the day before. One or two people were advised prior to the decision. As the honourable member has indicated, he was advised (although I am not suggesting that he told anyone else) and somehow somebody advised the local media in relation to the issue.

In terms of our procedures, we will have to look at whether or not these one or two people ought to be advised prior to the announcement. My view as Minister is that the decision should not be advised to anyone until the day, and in that way we might be able to get through the process. Obviously we cannot advise the parents individually prior to the decision because as soon as you announce it to teachers and staff, the AEU representative and the school it immediately gets leaked to the media. Some people say that you should write a letter to all parents or something, but you then have a situation where the story gets leaked before you are in a position to publicly announce it and the details of the decision.

As I said, this issue of managing school closures is difficult in terms of managing the communication. We will look at our experiences in relation to the Whyalla schools and see what, if any, changes we might usefully make to the process.

Membership:

Mr Clarke substituted for the Hon. Frank Blevins.

Mr CLARKE: Like the member for Giles, I feel that we are the only people representing the rural community in South Australia as far as education is concerned because Liberal members of Parliament have abandoned their duty to the bush, and in particular to the children of the bush. I have a few questions concerning the far northern areas, in particular the Carrington school (which is north of Port Augusta). The parents and staff are concerned at rumours that the school is subject to closure in two years' time. Can the Minister categorically rule out the possibility of the Carrington Primary School being closed?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As Minister I cannot rule out anything. One never knows the decisions that might be taken by future Governments. Obviously the Deputy Leader is not very confident of a Labor victory at the next election if he wants guarantees from the Liberal Minister in relation to what will happen after the next election. Should there be a Liberal Government, should there be a Liberal Minister and should the Liberal Minister be me—and there are a lot of 'should be's' in relation to that—I am not aware of any review that currently involves the school at Carrington. Other than that, I cannot say anything more. A school closure only occurs after there has been a review conducted at the local level, and that involves full community consultation and discussion. Then decisions are eventually taken by the Minister of the day and, to my knowledge, there is no review that involves Carrington. I have no plans for a review of Carrington. As to what might happen with a different Government or Minister

that would be something for a different Government or Minister to make a judgment about.

Mr CLARKE: As a supplementary question, a staff member at the Carrington school is concerned about the insufficient time allocated to training. Of the 18 days that are allocated per annum, 12 are consumed by compulsory attendances, so that the Principal of the school has six days in which there is a plethora of different training that she could attend. The problem that she has is that there is insufficient time available to her to replace herself to attend these up-skilling, advanced courses and the like that the department runs. That impacts on the children of Carrington if the teacher/principal does everything and is not able to avail herself of the training that is available in up-skilling herself to the benefit of the children at the school. What plans would the department have in terms of making allowances in such circumstances to enable those teachers who find themselves in that situation adequate time off and relief staff to be found so that they can take advantage of these training courses?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The professional development of country teachers and staff is an important issue. It is of concern to the department and the Government, and I guess to previous Governments as well. This Government has continued with a very significant training and development budget for teachers, I think of the order of \$2 million per year.

Mr CLARKE: That does not help her at the moment. What are you going to do to help her situation?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Over night we cannot solve all the problems created. The honourable member has not been here earlier but the dilemmas of the State Bank were created by his colleagues in this Parliament, such as the member for Giles, the member for Spence and the member for Price. If he wants to absolve himself from blame that is fine, but he can dump his colleagues in it. This has meant that the State cannot resolve all these problems over night. There has been a huge increase in the education budget this year and last year, an increase of \$162 million over the last Labor Government education budget.

So we can resolve some of the issues but we cannot resolve all the issues which the teacher or Principal at Carrington might have raised with the member for Ross Smith. The Government and the department are looking at other ways of tackling professional development for isolated country communities. In particular one of our big arguments for the \$75 million we are putting into DECStech 2001 is that we will be able to provide training and development via video conferencing to teachers and principals in isolated country communities through the DECStech 2001 link. The Government is working to see how we can in an alternative way provide additional training and development for country teachers.

Mr SCALZI: Earlier the Minister mentioned the Government's plan to recruit young teachers to overcome the projected shortfall. What is the Government doing to acknowledge the excellence of the present teaching force in South Australia? As a former teacher I understand the importance of having young teachers and more experienced teachers and to have an efficient teaching force there must be a combination of both. What is the Government doing to acknowledge the excellence in teaching so as to maintain that combination for the future? I am referring to page 128 of the Program Estimates.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As Minister I frequently acknowledge the excellence of the teaching and learning programs

undertaken by the teachers and staff in our Government schools in South Australia. The honourable member would have seen over the last week a number of statements made by the Chief Executive Officer, myself and other departmental officers supporting the 'Public and Proud' Government school promotion organised by the Australian Education Union and supported by the Department for Education and Children's Services. We will be highlighting in an on-going way the good things that go on within our Government schools over the whole year.

We indicated at the start of the year that we ought to spend 1997 as a year of being positive and highlighting the good things that go on in Government schools. The past week has been just one week in that overall year long program. We will have an exciting presence at the Adelaide show. The Xsite was an important and informative addition to our promotion campaign for Government schools in South Australia at the last Adelaide show. We will be seeing further developments in relation to that at this year's Adelaide show. There are a variety of other promotional exercises that the department and the Government will be engaging in to try to highlight the good things that go on within our Government schools.

The member may not have been here earlier this afternoon when I referred to a proposal from South Australia to other Ministers for a national teacher recruitment strategy. I refer the honourable member to the answer I gave earlier, for the benefit of his constituents who have raised these issues with him. I refer him in particular to that part of the response that indicates that we will, hopefully, be looking at a national electronic media campaign to highlight and increase the status of teachers and teaching within the community. Personally I hope that other State and Territory Ministers will agree to this South Australian initiative for a national campaign as soon as possible for two purposes: first, to raise the status of teachers and teaching in the community and, secondly, obviously to attract more young people to look on teaching as a very real career prospect.

Mr SCALZI: I refer to page 126 of the Program Estimates. Recently there were calls for greater discipline in schools. Will the Minister explain the overall Government policy in relation to behaviour management of students and how the 1997-98 budget supports behaviour management?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The Government announced a number of initiatives in relation to behaviour management. One of the more significant, which was announced earlier this year and which will be funded as part of this budget, is a new school for students in the northern suburbs with significant behavioural problems. A group of principals in the northern suburbs approached me early last year with a submission that said that the existing services are good—I am referring to the learning centres where some of these difficult students could be excluded for a term or two—but when a hard core group of students were returning to their mainstream schools they were still causing significant problems for the majority of students who wanted to get on with learning in those classrooms and in the school. What they believed was required was a more long-term facility that would allow this group of very difficult students to have small student-teacher ratios, lots of special additional assistance and the ability to stay at that site or school for a longer period where the intention is that they will have their behaviour changed so that they can return to a mainstream school or, if that is not the case, prepare them for the real world when they leave school.

That school will commence in term three. It is to be located at the Salisbury North Primary campus. The Principal of Bowden-Brompton, Lyn Symons, who is an excellent principal, as the member for Spence would know, runs a very fine program at Bowden-Brompton and will have administrative oversight at this northern campus, at least in the initial stages. We hope it will be a significant innovation in the northern suburbs. In recent years there have been a number of budget initiatives, which are continuing in this budget, but there are no further significant budget increases other than the flexible resourcing. Some school principals have used their section of the \$18 million to undertake either annexed or specialist programs for students in the secondary years who are having significant behavioural problems and, in particular, they are linking some of them with some of the vocation-education options they are providing in those secondary schools for those students.

Mr VENNING: I refer to page 136 of the Program Estimates, under 'Instruction—secondary'. The member for Ross Smith said that we do not care about the rural people. That is absolutely rubbish and is wrong. What support will be provided for agricultural studies as a vital component of curriculum in country schools?

Mr ATKINSON: On a point of order, Sir, is it appropriate for such egregious comment to be made in prefacing a Government question? Is it within Standing Orders?

The CHAIRMAN: On this occasion I uphold the honourable member's point of order. The member for Custance was treading the fine line required in a Committee of this nature. I ask him to confine his comments to the question he is asking, rather than stimulating further debate from the Opposition. The proceedings have been well ordered to date and I hope that the member for Custance does not disrupt them.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I will take aspects of that question on notice. Clearly agricultural studies is a significant component of a good number of our schools, primarily in the rural areas. Nuriootpa High is one example, but we also have significant programs at Cleve. We have a range of schools with aquaculture programs, such as Cowell and Lucindale. There are excellent programs for country students. I am reminded by the Chief Executive that this Government is involved in a multi-million dollar redevelopment of Urrbrae Agricultural High School in the metropolitan area—a commitment of some \$6 million from the Department of Education and Children's Services. TAFE is involved in a \$10 million redevelopment on the same site in a joint exercise. There is a significant commitment from the Government to services provided to rural communities.

Mr CLARKE: Speaking like the member for Giles as the champion of the rural community, I direct the Minister's attention to the Marree Primary School, in particular, to the absolutely appalling physical condition of that school. How it could have been tolerated by this Government for so long is beyond me. There are concrete pavers in the front of the main school building. If it was a metropolitan school it would be declared an occupational health and safety hazard and they would default it. It is dangerous not only for the staff, but for small children to run around on that cracked paved area, pock-marked with great gapping holes in it—I have photographs if the Minister would like to see them later—

Mr VENNING: Where is this?

Mr CLARKE: Marree. I realise that there is a difficulty for some Liberal members to go north of Gepps Cross. The physical condition of that school is an absolute disgrace. In

addition, the roof of the Child and Parent Centre at the same school needs to be totally replaced. It lifts in the wind and the rain comes through because the tiles are lifting. The toilet cisterns do not work, and because there is a big Aboriginal component in the school there is a constant interdepartmental fight between DOSAA and DECS as to who has the responsibility for fixing the toilets. I find it outrageous that interdepartmental fights occur and the toilets do not get fixed whilst working out the bureaucracy between the two departments. The computer systems are totally outdated. Students are being taught with insufficient and outdated computer systems and technology. The large component of Aboriginal children, who respond very well to computer technology, are being taught on computer equipment so old and outdated that it puts them behind.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Ross Smith is now starting to debate the issue rather than ask a question. I appreciate the fact that he may wish to give explanatory comment which the Chair is happy to permit, but he really does need to get to the point of the question.

Mr CLARKE: I just wanted to paint the picture for the Minister, but I appreciate your ruling, Mr Chairman. The conditions of that school are an absolute disgrace. What will the Minister do about it in fixing up that school? Do not give answers about the generalities of backlog of maintenance for the State as a whole. What will he do for the Marree Primary School? That is what I want to know and it is what the local community wants to know. Can we have a straight answer on that?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am delighted to welcome the member for Ross Smith, obviously after a good dinner. I thank him for his generous comments in relation to the problems this Government has inherited. Let me assure—

Mr CLARKE: You've had four years. Don't talk to me about this sort of rubbish. You've had four years to get off your tail. What are you doing about it?

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Ross Smith has just joined the committee. I am sure that other members of the committee will be happy to relate to the member for Ross Smith the fact that this has been a harmonious committee through the day. A lot of questions have been asked, particularly by the Opposition, through a cooperative effort, and I would be very disappointed to see that good track record damaged through a new addition to the committee. If the member sits back and listens, I am sure he will get an appropriate answer from the Minister.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I thank the honourable member for his further assistance by way of interjection as I tried to respond to his question. The Government will obviously have officers from the department investigate the situation in relation to Marree to see whether the situation as portrayed by the honourable member is in fact an accurate portrayal of the circumstances at the school. I am sure the honourable member will at least freely acknowledge that we would not automatically assume that everything he says is correct, not that I dispute his description of the circumstances at Marree, but his past record would indicate that we ought to be cautious about accepting everything the honourable member says as being correct.

Mr Clarke interjecting:

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Ross Smith is well aware from his past experiences that interjections are out of order. I ask the honourable member to sit back and listen to the answer. If he wishes the opportunity to ask further questions, that opportunity will certainly be provided.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I indicated, given the member's past record, we would obviously want to check the accuracy of some of the claims that he has made. Certainly we will have those claims checked and then see what, if anything, the Government is able to do to assist the teachers and staff of the Marree school. Certainly if there is an interdepartmental problem—although I have not been made aware of that problem; it has not been raised with me before—we will do all we can as expeditiously as possible to sort out any interdepartmental problem and resolve it to the satisfaction of the local school community. I might remind the honourable member—who obviously is not wanting to be reminded of the backlog and mess within Government school facilities that his Government left the people of South Australia—of the Northfield Primary School and the condition in which his Government left the students, teachers and staff of Northfield Primary School.

Mr CLARKE: One of the few good things you have done.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am grateful that the member says it is one of the good things that this Government has done. This Government looked at the state of those facilities in the honourable member's electorate of Ross Smith and spent some \$2 million on upgrading what was a deplorable situation left—

Mr CLARKE: What about Marree?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Because we spent \$2 million in the electorate of Ross Smith, supported by the local member, one of the problems when establishing priorities is that other schools have not been able to be assisted in that particular budget program. When he came to me two years ago I did not hear the member for Ross Smith saying, 'You've got to do something; the Labor Government did nothing for 13 years at Northfield. There is \$2 million in upgrading that needs to be spent. You've got to do something because the Labor Government, the Labor Premiers, Treasurers and Ministers would not do anything.' So we did something, and certainly there was never a suggestion from the member for Ross Smith at that time: 'Don't spend \$2 million on Northfield; perhaps spend a couple of hundred thousand dollars on Marree and a little less on the Northfield Primary School.' It is very easy for the member for Ross Smith to come in after dinner tonight and start jumping up and down asking what we are going to do about a particular school. What we are doing is spending—

Mr Venning interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is eminently reasonable. We are spending over \$100 million a year, which is much more than the Labor Government ever did, on trying to fix up the mess, disrepair and appalling facilities that the Labor Government left for many of our teachers, staff and students in Government schools in the city and in the country. If the member for Ross Smith wants to talk about Marree, I could talk about a dozen other schools in the city and the country with equally deplorable physical facilities, which I can list for the member for Ross Smith, which need upgrading and which cannot be upgraded at the moment because we cannot do everything overnight.

Mr CLARKE: After that political speech, I take it that the Minister will get back to me and provide an answer on Marree. A further question deals with the school bus for the Lyndhurst area. This bus is not airconditioned. It may seem a minor matter in terms of people resident in metropolitan Adelaide, but I can assure members that in Lyndhurst it is a major issue given the extreme temperatures experienced

during the summer months. Is the Minister aware of that situation? If so, what will he do about it? If not, will he undertake for the department to investigate the air-conditioning of that particular bus?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am very pleased to indicate to the honourable member that we are using exactly the same school bus transport policy that his Government instituted. Airconditioning is not provided as a standard, even in the hot areas of South Australia. That was a policy his Government supported. That policy is being continued by this Government. So, Lyndhurst is not being treated in any way that is different from other school communities in the hot areas of South Australia. A review is currently being conducted by a departmental officer to determine whether or not it would be sensible, when buses are being replaced, to replace them with airconditioned buses. Retro-fitting of airconditioning units would be a prohibitive cost for the department and it is just not an expense that we can currently afford.

However, with new buses it is an issue that we are having a look at. Certainly, a review conducted by the Labor Government back in the late 80s on the airconditioning of some buses in the north indicated that airconditioning was not used on the morning run. Given the cold temperatures overnight, the use of airconditioning run meant that people were freezing and it had to be turned off. The only run where the airconditioning was being used was in the afternoon but they found that, with the constant stopping and doors opening and closing, only those people at the end of the long run were gaining the advantage of airconditioning. Because the bus had been standing in the heat for the whole day, as with car airconditioning it takes a while for the airconditioning to crank itself up and, if you keep on opening the doors and stopping, in those circumstances it is not as effective as some local communities believed it would be. I am not ruling anything in or out: I am just indicating the results of the review that the department under the Labor Government conducted. We will have another look at that but it is a difficult issue. If it is a huge additional cost, is the benefit for potentially the last half of the afternoon bus run for some students sufficient to justify airconditioning? Perhaps the department will look at some long runs in very hot areas. Whether the Lyndhurst run qualifies under such broad parameters I will have departmental officers examine to see what if anything can be done. Certainly, nothing can be done in the short term.

Mr CLARKE: I desire to ask a supplementary question. With regard to shade, Marla Primary School is comparatively new but has real problems with dust and quagmire. There is no paving area around that area school. In summer the fine red dust just blows into the school and, since your Government's decision to cut back on cleaning hours in respect of that school by half an hour a day, it is impossible for the cleaning to be adequate in the time available. Cleaning was cut from 2½ to two hours. Occasionally it rains in winter at Marla and the red sand just turns into an absolute bog and the school has a huge problem on those few occasions with the bog-like material coming straight through the school. Staff, students and parents walk through it. In addition, there is a need for additional shade areas within the school because, as the Principal put it to me, for six months of the year the temperature is some 40° plus and then there are extreme days of hot temperature. You can understand how hot it gets for half a year and there is insufficient shade for staff and students.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We will ask departmental officers to look at what is provided. The Chief Executive tells me there is some paving round the Marla school because he recently visited and played basketball with students on the paved area. As to what additional paving might be requested by the school, we will need to take advice and I shall be happy to provide a more detailed response later.

Mr CLARKE: A police officer at Woomera has been to the United States at the request of the significant American service population and their children to be trained in the DARE program—Dare to Say No in terms of drugs and alcohol—where police officers go into schools in the US and talk to students about drugs, drug abuse and so on and they sought to do this in Woomera. They do it at schools as a result of requests by American servicemen and parents as US Government policy. However, there have been problems with respect to the Education Department to extend the scheme. I am not aware whether formal representations have been made to the department by the Police Department but I know the Woomera police officer concerned, whom I spoke to, has concerns and believes it has been a successful program in the US and is worthy of greater consideration in South Australia. What is the department's view?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: The member will be aware that the department gets many suggestions in relation to drug education programs by community groups and from other Government agencies as well. Certainly, I am happy to get some detailed advice on this DARE program but, as to many of the other drug education programs, some of the concerns expressed by departmental officers are, first, that they need to be part of an ongoing linkage with our curriculum statements and profiles. They express a concern that, if someone just comes in for a one-off program and disappears and it is not linked to the ongoing drug education program of the school, it is not an effective way of teaching and persuading people in terms of the importance of not taking up drugs or an effective drug education program.

The one-off programs they are concerned about to some extent, because people come in, put their program and disappear, and there is nothing to follow it up and support it. In relation to some of the other drug education programs, that has been one of the concerns expressed. The second concern generally expressed about some drug education programs is that sometimes inadvertently they might arouse the interest of young people in particular drugs and, therefore, have potentially a reverse effect to the one intended. We would be interested in getting information. If it has been in America, it would have been there for some time and there would have been evaluations of the program to see whether it has been effective.

One thing with drug education and literacy programs is that the individual proponents and advocates are always 100 per cent convinced that they are the most effective programs and, indeed, they might be, but not all of them can be right and we have to try to sift our way through all the various suggestions and work out, based on evaluations, which have been the most effective. We are happy to explore that issue. I understand the Chief Executive has had some discussions with the previous Police Commissioner on this issue because, at more senior levels at the Police Department, they are interested in pursuing this program in schools as well. We will continue evaluations of the program.

Mr VENNING: I refer to the DECS Facilities program at page 142 of the Program Estimates. The Minister will be aware of a long-term problem at Kapunda Primary School

where his department acted last year and brought in a Demac style relocatable building which was much appreciated and resolved a crisis situation. However, the long-term problem remains. The heritage listed building is dark, dank and very unpleasant and is supported by a row of temporary classrooms that look like a row of chook houses. This is very much a heritage town where we must be careful what we do. Has any planning been done in relation to the school? It is my highest priority to get this matter resolved. I know that some of your officers have looked at it. Has anything been planned for the upgrade of Kapunda Primary?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not in a position tonight to give any commitment in relation to upgrades for Kapunda Primary School. I am advised that we will look at some aspects of what the honourable member is referring to under our maintenance and minor works programs, but I cannot give any commitment in relation to that. I do not see much prospect of complete or major redevelopment of Kapunda Primary School, if that is what the honourable member is referring to. I understand that this year, for example, almost \$30 000 in back to school grant funding was given to Kapunda Primary School, and that is probably a fair indication that there is a reasonable degree of maintenance and minor works required.

We will certainly look at the situation for the honourable member to see what might be done. I am also told that under the 'Exterior Repair and Paint Program' \$13 500 was provided to Kapunda Primary School. So, with back to school grants and the external paint and repair program there is almost \$50 000 funding that the honourable member has obviously won for the Kapunda Primary School. He ought to be advising the school and the local community of the hard work he has undertaken on behalf of Kapunda Primary School.

Mr VENNING: I refer to page 126 of the Program Estimates and the provision of primary and secondary instruction. What ongoing provisions will be made in the 1997-98 budget for religious education seminars to occur in schools? I represent the Barossa Valley, and there is a strong push to private schools because they do provide this extra curricula education.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Through the teaching and learning area of society and environment, we provide education about the various religions as part of that core of teaching within primary schools, in particular, in the member's electorate. We do not have, as the member will know, regular religious instruction.

Mr VENNING: More the shame.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That might be the member's view and I can understand that. Under the Education Act we do allow for religious instruction on one or two afternoons a term.

Mr ATKINSON: A term!

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Your Government removed it, so do not jump up and down about it. Seminars or religious instruction by local chaplains, I think, are allowed once or twice a term.

Mr Venning interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That is a decision for the local communities to take. The member should have a discussion with the school council chairs and the principals at his local schools. They have that capacity to offer, at least, one or two seminars of religious instruction through the local chaplains and churches during each term. I would be interested to know, after those discussions, how many of the member's

schools are currently availing themselves of that opportunity if this is a priority for his local school communities. I will be interested to receive correspondence from the honourable member as to how many are taking up that option.

We are also supporting about 70 chaplains who operate in schools, although they are not involved in direct religious instruction. The Government is a strong supporter of the chaplaincy program within, generally, the secondary school sector at the moment, although a pilot program is now occurring in primary schools. As Minister, I have indicated that we will be supporting, by way of some administration and coordination assistance, the chaplaincy program within Government schools. If the evaluation of the primary school chaplaincy is successful, as Minister I will be supporting a further extension from church communities of the chaplaincy program into primary schools.

One of the reasons for the decline in religious instruction in schools was not just decisions taken by Governments of the day: it was the fact that many religious communities were running out of clergy, priests or representatives to conduct all these regular weekly instructions within schools. I can say from my own brand of Christianity, the Roman Catholic religion, that the lack of priests and religious people meant that in many communities there were not people available on a weekly basis to conduct a religious instruction program, particularly when you might have a range of students who are proving difficult and not interested in religious instruction.

There are a number of reasons why religious instruction programs were removed from Government schools many years ago. As Minister I indicated earlier this year—and I know the honourable member was supportive of the general statement I made as Minister—that we were going to try to make explicit the teaching of values within our Government schools not only in the area of society and environment but also in a number of other curriculum areas. I had a discussion with the Chief Executive today about the imminent appointment of a project officer to oversight the production of quality teaching materials in the area of the teaching of values within Government schools, and I would hope that that person will also have an appropriate reference group—again, something I discussed with the Chief Executive—to provide appropriate oversight for the establishment of that program within the Government schools.

The department is also in the final stages of completing its charter document which will guide Government school education through to the next century, and I can assure the honourable member that one of the important foci of the charter document will be the issue of values and values education within Government schools in South Australia.

Mr VENNING: I thank the Minister for his answer to the question, particularly in relation to teaching values in our schools, and I will certainly be pursuing it further. Referring now to page 126 on the same line, what provisions are made in the 1997-98 budget to support the high standards of music teaching in State schools? I refer, in particular, to the programs of which I am aware at Nuriootpa and Kapunda High Schools.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I need to take advice in relation to the programs at Nuriootpa and Kapunda High Schools. Certainly, there is no change—

Mr Atkinson interjecting:

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Certainly, we have the Senior Secondary Assessment Board panting at the bit to answer questions. Officers have been waiting all day for you to ask questions of the Senior Secondary Assessment Board and we

do not want to deny them the opportunity to be questioned by you and, I am sure, your colleagues.

There is no change to the overall instrumental program in this budget. As the honourable member will know, in the 1994-95 budget there were reductions in the instrumental music program in terms of trying to correct the significant budget problems that the Government inherited from the previous Labor Government. A review is currently being conducted of instrumental music across the whole State and we are only part-way through that process. It is not a review; it is the development of a strategic plan for instrumental music in South Australia. We are looking at what we can do with the existing resources that are available to the department to develop a strategic plan. I am sure it will build on the fine programs that exist in the Nuriootpa and Kapunda High Schools.

Mr VENNING: Has the Minister heard the Nuriootpa High School Band play? It is a credit to the system.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, I have seen and heard the Nuriootpa High School Band and can attest to the quality of their performance.

Membership:

The Hon. Frank Blevins substituted for Mr Clarke.

Mr ATKINSON: I refer to the Minister's line, with which I am sure he is familiar. Last year at page 130 of the Program Estimates, the estimate for the Minister's office for the 1996-97 financial year was shown as \$840 000. In this year's book at page 130 the same estimate has been revised to \$1.017 million. At the same time, there has been a corresponding fall in the estimate for executive and administrative support. For how long has it been the Government's practice retrospectively to change last year's estimates after they have been presented to Parliament and this Committee? Why was the funding for the Minister's office increased by \$177 000?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I ask the honourable member to indicate to which document he is referring. On page 130, the Minister and Minister's office, the budget estimate for 1996-97 is \$1.017 million and the revised estimate is \$1.003 million.

Mr ATKINSON: The estimate last year was \$840 000. We say that the estimate should be \$840 000. The revision might be \$1.003 million, but how was the estimate revised?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: If one looks at the estimate from last year, one sees that the total for inter-agency support services, within which the Minister and Minister's office and the executive professional lines are incorporated, is exactly the same, that is, \$54 448 000, of which the vast bulk obviously is executive professional support, and the Minister's office is \$1.017 million on the estimate in this year's document. The honourable member has queried why last year it referred to \$840 000—

Mr ATKINSON: No, what did it refer to?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Why did it refer to \$840 000 in last year's document, whereas this year it is referring to the estimate? The overall figure has not changed, but the component parts have. We do not have an explanation for that. We will have to take that on notice and provide an explanation to the Committee members and to the Chair. If we can find anything before the end of the evening we certainly will do so; otherwise, we will provide a response to the honourable member as soon as we can.

Mr ATKINSON: I have a supplementary question. When will we get some of these answers to questions on notice? Roughly half the questions today have been taken on notice. When will we get the answers? What is the timetable?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: That is a nonsense response from the member for Spence. He has not been here for good parts of the day. The vast majority of questions have been answered by me, as Minister. In terms of his question as to when he will get a response, he will get a response in accordance with the Standing Orders of this particular Estimates Committee—and no sooner than that.

Mr ATKINSON: I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

The CHAIRMAN: Before the member for Spence does that, he may recall that in the opening statement of the proceedings of the Committee the Minister was advised that answers to questions are required to be with the Clerk by no later than 4 July.

Mr ATKINSON: What is the consequence if they are not there?

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Spence.

Mr ATKINSON: I seek leave to make a personal explanation.

Leave granted.

Mr ATKINSON: First of all, the Minister said that I have not been here for most of the day. The fact is that I have been on this Committee since the opening this morning—and I hope that is recorded. In response to an earlier allegation by the Minister concerning an Education Department employee who is obviously away on illness, his name was read into the *Hansard* record by the Minister, not by me, because as the Minister well knows, if interjections are not responded to, because they are out of order, they do not go on the *Hansard* record. So, I want it to be known that that man's name was put on the record by the Minister's putting it thereon.

The CHAIRMAN: Does the member for Spence wish to ask a further question?

Mr ATKINSON: Yes, I do. Staying with that same intriguing line—I suppose this is a supplementary question and the Minister will take this on notice—why was funding for the Minister's office increased by \$177 000?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not aware that funding for the Minister's office has been increased by \$170 000. It is news to me. But the member has raised an issue in relation to the Program Estimate figures listed and, as I indicated in response to the previous question, we will take up the issue. In relation to the honourable member's comments about an officer of the department, the member for Spence knows full well that he made the unfortunate comments about that particular officer, and it does him no credit at all to try to wriggle out of the unfortunate reference which he, quite gratuitously, made by way of interjection to a comment that I was making.

Mr ATKINSON: You put it on *Hansard* though.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Spence knows full well that interjections are out of order. Does the honourable member have a third question?

Mr ATKINSON: Yes. Could the Minister provide a list of grants made by the Minister from his miscellaneous line in 1996-97 to community organisations?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am happy to, but I am sure now that I have taken that on notice and I do not have each individual grant in line we will have more mock outrage and indignation from the honourable member because we have not been able to provide it.

Membership:

Ms Hurley substituted for Mr Atkinson.

Ms HURLEY: I refer to page 127 of the Program Estimates. Does the Government accept the criticism by SPELD that there is a shortage of specifically trained teachers to fulfil the learning needs of children with specific learning difficulties, that there is a lack of remedial programs to assist dyslexic students, that the \$2 million allocated to assist students who have a wide range of learning difficulties is insufficient to include assistance for students with specific learning difficulties, and that the cornerstone program to assist in identifying children with learning difficulties operates only for reception, year 1 and year 2?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Before I reply to that question, prior to the break, I indicated in response to a question from the member for Spence about the fact that there appeared to be an increase of \$177 000 in the Minister's expenditure that I was unaware of such an increase. During the break we have been able to track down the reason for that supposed increase. Treasury has directed that the special act payments for the Minister's salary, allowances and expenses should no longer be paid for out of a separate line ('Executive, professional, technical, administrative and clerical support') but now be listed as being paid out of the Minister and Minister's office line. So, there has been no increase of \$177 000 in the Minister's office expenditure. It was a direction from Treasury to incorporate the Minister's salary, allowances and expenses into this particular budget line.

The CHAIRMAN: Will the Minister clarify for the Committee that that figure of \$177 000 to which the member for Spence referred is totally covered through the ministerial allowances, salary and expenditure?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Yes, it is, Mr Chairman. I understand that it is referred to on page 131 of the Program Estimates—'Special acts payments'. I am not familiar with the statement from SPELD to which the member for Napier referred, but I will respond to those quoted comments. I would be interested to know which person from SPELD made those statements. I hope they have been made within the context of SPELD's acknowledging the significant additional resources provided by this Government for assistance for students with disabilities and severe learning difficulties. If they have not been provided within that context, I am disappointed, because this Government has initiated a large number of important reforms and a significant amount of additional resources has been poured into this important area. Ann Bayetto who has done a lot of work with SPELD in terms of some of its training programs has been appointed in charge of the learning difficulties support team. That support team has been expanded in this budget to provide additional help for teachers and staff in primary and secondary years to assist students with learning difficulties. There have been a variety of other initiatives which I indicated earlier in response to other questions.

I also indicate that today I announced outside the Estimates Committee funding for a new program of vacation literacy camps. We will conduct some pilot programs in October this year. In an intensive one week program, students will be able to catch up on reading, writing and spelling skills. I hope that a coordinator for that program will be appointed during the next week to manage the pilot programs in the October holiday period. Hopefully, having learnt from the experience of those pilot programs we will then implement the program for 1998 and beyond. It will target year 6

and 7 students who suffer significant learning difficulties and who require additional assistance. I hope that advice in relation to the detail of that program will be provided to schools in the early part of term 3.

I acknowledge that we have not been able to resolve all the problems in respect of students with learning difficulties, as has been highlighted by the spokesperson for SPELD but, as I have said, if those comments have not been made within the context of acknowledging the significant improvements that this Government has instituted for students with severe learning difficulties, I express my disappointment.

Mr BRINDAL: Will the Minister comment on the problem that seems to be inherent in children with disabilities that it is often very difficult to identify the specific nature of a learning difficulty. Whilst I do not in any way denigrate SPELD, for a while it became almost fashionable for children with certain modes of disability to be described as dyslexic or autistic. There seems to be a desire on the part of some parents to try to explain the difficulties their children have in learning by ascribing to those children a particular condition. Whilst they might have learning difficulties, this condition might not necessarily be the cause. Is that just my perception, or is it a real problem, and how can a system address the varying and multiple needs of 120 000 students at any one time whilst making sure that they all get the right name, get put into the right box, and get exactly the sort of attention that every parent in an ideal world would hope to have for their children?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I understand the question that the honourable member has put and I think that the claimed incidence of ADD or ADHD is a further example of this. I think as was interjected by another member, one of the problems that the department—and we are a very big department—and parents have in terms of trying to assist their child is if a family can identify and put a label on the problem, first, they feel as if they have identified the problem and, secondly, they can set about trying to gather assistance for the learning difficulty or disability. I think that there clearly is a natural desire from parents and families to want to see a label or a reason for the problem their child is having for the two reasons I have indicated. I do not know whether there is much more I can add to the reply than that.

Mr VENNING: I refer to page 126 of the Program Estimates and the aquaculture course at the Cowell Area School. The Minister would be aware of the success of this course as he did allude to it earlier, but he may not be aware of the trouble the school is having in getting a suitable lecturer. The lecturer it had was extraordinary but he has left to increase his experience at a higher level. Does the department have another lecturer to take that person's place? If not, how can we attract a suitably qualified person to that position? Are there any plans to provide a similar course at other schools, for example, Port Lincoln or Ceduna?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: We do not think we have been able to attract a person yet to fill that position who has the equivalent skills to the person who left the position. It is not possible during the Estimates Committees to have the details of every individual teaching appointment in the State. We are happy to take the question on notice and leave ourselves subject to the criticism of the member for Spence and others that we have been unable to provide you with a more definitive reply.

Mr VENNING: I asked the Minister whether a similar course would be available.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not sure about Ceduna but I know that a number of schools such as Lucindale and Urrbrae are providing quality aquaculture programs for their students. I visited the new facilities at Urrbrae only last week and it has some state of the art facilities that have been developed in conjunction with, I think, the Flinders University, SARDI and a variety of other agencies in terms of the operation of its aquaculture program.

Mr VENNING: Is that the same curricula or is it diverse?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am not aware of the individual curriculum details of Cowell's aquaculture course. I would need to take advice on the curriculum course that Cowell is offering and the ones that Urrbrae and Lucindale are offering to see whether they are broadly similar. I would guess that they are broadly similar, but we need to take advice on that and provide you with answers.

Mr SCALZI: I refer to page 126 of the Program Estimates, relating to the provision of general primary and secondary education in schools. In recent years there has been a greater focus on schools being the most appropriate site for making important management and educational decisions. In relation to the 1997-98 budget, what support is there to assist and enhance local management of schools?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I indicated in response to an earlier question today, the Government's position on devolution or local school management is that we would prefer to make changes incrementally rather than dumping a whole load of additional responsibilities on schools and saying, 'You will now manage all these responsibilities.' We are in the process of reinstituting a working party or committee within the department to provide the devolution of responsibility or local school management of extra responsibilities within schools.

I am also advised that under the enterprise agreement provision exists for some pilot programs within schools in this area and we would hope this year and next year to look at further programs in relation to local school management. Certainly there have been a number of trials in relation to the utilities; for example, the management of energy savings at the local level and a trial which is currently being conducted at the Eastern Fleurieu School, which will provide us with information on how a school will be able to manage a budget where it is given control over utilities and a variety of other responsibilities and will monitor the success of that pilot.

Mr De LAINE: I refer to the Support Services program at page 145 of the Program Estimates. The Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the outsourcing of information technology has been told that, as a result of the Government's contract with EDS, all agencies are now being charged a recurrent sum for information technology, which is greater than their previous costs, as depreciation and cost of finance are now included in the charges. The select committee was also told that the Treasury would be compensating agencies for this increase by an adjustment to their budgets. What is the compensatory amount provided to the Department for Education and Children's Services and under what budget line is it included?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Some aspects of that question were referred to in an earlier question today, but in relation to the additional payment from Treasury, I am advised that in 1996-97 an additional payment of about \$870 000 was made to the Department for Education and Children's Services.

Mr De LAINE: My next two questions relate to page 136 of the Program Estimates and the Services for Aboriginal children program. The superintendent of the section of the

Education Department responsible for schools in the Pitjantjatjara lands, Mr Jeff Iversen, has four professional staff, including a highly-paid consultant, by the name of Ms Priscilla Aird-Thomas, and one clerical officer in Adelaide, plus a principal and several other staff based at Ernabella—all to support nine schools—while most other superintendents have one professional officer and access to a typing pool to support nearly 30 schools. Why does the section of the Education Department responsible for schools in the Pitjantjatjara lands need so many staff?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: Part of the reason for that is the extraordinarily difficult and complex nature of education in the Anangu lands. It is unfair to be comparing the task of the Superintendent of Aboriginal Education with the tasks of other superintendents managing perhaps 20 or 30 schools, admittedly throughout other parts of South Australia. There is no doubting that the task ahead of this Government, as has been ahead of every other Government in past times, in terms of trying to lift literacy and numeracy skills and providing a quality education to students in the Anangu lands is, first, a very difficult one and, secondly, a very important one. I will certainly have aspects of the honourable member's question considered, but he ought to bear in mind the particularly complex nature of the task before that particular superintendent. I am advised by the Chief Executive that it is not only a more complex task but also a much broader job in terms of job description than is the case for other superintendents.

Ms HURLEY: Could the Minister advise who are the staff personnel here today and their salary levels?

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I am happy to take down the names of the staff persons here today and provide an indication of the salary levels of those involved. Some of the officers are here to deal with the budget lines for the Senior Secondary Assessment Board and they have been waiting patiently for almost two hours for some questions from the Opposition. It would appear there is not much interest from the Opposition in questions that relate to the Senior Secondary Assessment Board. The other officers are those who have been here all day responding to school education questions, and they are waiting for the members of the Committee to move onto the SSABSA lines so that they can go home.

Mr BRINDAL: On a point of order, Mr Chairman, we are examining estimates, expenditures and receipts, and that is what we have been doing all day. The question just asked is entirely without precedent and I do not consider that it is relevant to the line of questioning that is enabled by the Parliament to be pursued by this committee. I would ask you to rule that the last question is not in order and should not be answered. I think it is insulting to those people.

The CHAIRMAN: Whilst I would very much like to uphold the point of order of the member for Unley, because I appreciate and concur with the spirit in which it is intended, I believe the Minister has countered the question adequately. There is also ample opportunity for the committee to be introduced to officers, and every time officers have come into the Committee behind the Minister to participate they have been introduced to the Committee and their names are recorded into the proceedings. I know that during my time as Minister it was not uncommon for staff of their own volition to come in to watch the proceedings. It could well be that that has happened today. Many officers actually like to come in and watch the proceedings of the Committee in their own time without additional payment. If they have done that, rather than be singled out and have their salaries highlighted for the public to see, they should actually be commended for

that action. I will leave it to the appropriate discretion of the Minister to answer that question in the way he deems appropriate. He has taken part of it on notice and I think we will leave it there. I appreciate the spirit in which the point of order has been raised by the member for Unley. I cannot uphold it on this occasion, but I agree with the sentiment behind it.

Ms HURLEY: The Minister raised the issue of SSABSA questions. I would like to get on to them and I wonder whether we can put some of these other questions on notice.

The CHAIRMAN: We will now proceed to Government members for their round of questions. There being no further questions, I am happy to comply with the request by the member for Napier.

Ms HURLEY: These remaining questions can go on notice and we will move onto the SSABSA area.

The CHAIRMAN: The member for Napier may like to take into account the fact that it is now 9.45 p.m. and it will cut into the member's time to ask further questions. There are other avenues to place questions on notice, but it is at the discretion of the member. I am prepared to accept them on notice now, but there are other avenues to put questions on notice to the Minister.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I seek your guidance, Mr Chairman. What are the guidelines of the committee in relation to questions on notice? Is it purely at the discretion of the individual member or does the Minister have a role as to whether or not he is prepared to accept the questions on notice? We have been here all day; we have had officers from SSABSA waiting for two hours to answer questions; and we now have veiled criticism by the member for Napier because we have officers in the gallery waiting for questioning and she seeks to know how many officers are here and what their salaries are. The clear inference is that in some way a large number of officers are here. It is purely because of the position taken by the member for Napier and her colleagues, because they have not moved on to questioning. So I would seek your guidance, Mr Chairman, as to whether it is an issue at the discretion of the member or whether it is an issue in which the Minister appearing before the committee has some say. Certainly, there are plenty of other opportunities that the member for Napier has had and will continue to have to place questions on the Notice Paper.

The CHAIRMAN: I remind the member for Napier that in my opening remarks I advised members that questions on notice could also be tabled on the first day of the sitting of the Parliament.

Ms HURLEY: In view of the time and our desire to get on to SSABSA questions, I will deal with them now.

Additional Departmental Advisers:

Dr J. Keightley, Chief Executive Officer, Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia.

Mr M. Coleman, Manager, Assessment Operations.

Mr A. Mercurio, Manager, Curriculum Development.

Mr G. Benger, Manager, Information Services.

Mr D. Whitmore, Manager, Business Services.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: As I have indicated in previous years, the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia is a completely independent authority, not subject to ministerial control or direction. Whilst through form the questions are directed to me, I will refer questions in general

to the Chief Executive Officer and only make comment if there is something that I might be able to add. As Minister I wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer of SSABSA and her officers for making themselves available and also congratulate her and her staff for what has been a fine job of work done in the past two years, in particular, managing the year 12 results release process.

Ms HURLEY: Last year, Dr Keightley told the Committee that SSABSA had a research project into SACE completion rates that linked with retention rates. Since then the rate has fallen to 68 per cent. What results have been produced by SSABSA research and has any connection been identified between the declining participation rate to year 12 and the introduction of SACE?

The CHAIRMAN: To which section of the budget papers is the member referring?

Ms HURLEY: I do not have a reference, Sir. If the Minister has difficulty relating the question—

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: It is not up to me but to you.

Ms HURLEY: You asked for SSABSA questions and now you are not going to answer them.

The CHAIRMAN: I advised the member earlier that it is the practice for members to refer to a specific budget document. After all, that is what we are examining today. If the member wants to ask a question, she needs to refer to the appropriate program and the appropriate reference.

Ms HURLEY: I refer to page 134 of the Program Estimates.

The Hon. R.I. Lucas: I ask Dr Keightley to respond.

Dr Keightley: As part of the SACE improvement strategy established by the SSABSA Board as part of its commitment to continuous assessment, we indicated that we were about to commence a major research program, the SACE completion project. I am pleased to say that we have taken up the project, which has turned out to be a very significant and a much more time consuming one than we expected.

I think at the last Estimates Committee hearing I indicated that we were going to identify students who were on the SSABSA database at the beginning of stage one and who were not on our database in December 1996 as having completed the SACE. As a result of this, we identified 2 847 students in that category. We then attempted to locate them via their schools. As you will be aware, this is a very mobile population, so locating them was a significant difficulty. However, 2 847 questionnaires were sent out. Of those, 391 students responded and 251 surveys were returned 'not known at this address', which is an indication of how mobile the population is.

However, we decided to continue with the project because this information was of significant value to us. We then approached 125 SACE coordinators and school counsellors to ask them about reasons why they thought students might be leaving school. In addition to that, we have analysed our database to get a profile of that student group who are missing. We asked in our questionnaires whether anyone would be interested in giving us more information by interview, as a result of which 88 students indicated they would be pleased to talk to a SSABSA officer to give more information.

However, when we materialised and asked them whether they would be happy to talk to us, I am afraid the 88 diminished to 24. We did interview personally 24 students for an extended period in a structured interview to gather first-hand information as to the factors affecting their leaving school between starting at stage one and not finishing at stage two.

That has been very time consuming because we have been committed to try to ensure that we find students right across the diversity of metropolitan and country areas, paying attention to socioeconomic status, paying attention to location within both areas, and also paying attention to non-English speaking background and Aboriginal origin people. We had to chase fairly hard to fill some of that profile.

As a result of that, we are still in the middle of analysing a large set of data, so at this stage we are unable to give any projected report. However, I can say that I believe that by September of this year we should have a significant report with some strong information that will tell us reasons for students being with us in stage one and not being with us two years later in stage two.

I would also like to inform the Committee that, because this has been such a significant piece of research, we have discovered in our literature search that nobody else that we can find anywhere else in the world has tried to pursue this kind of student to find out this kind of information. As a result of that, in the past four days we have reached an agreement with Professor Roger Murphy from the University of Nottingham to act as an independent referee-commentator on our research methodology so that, in fact, the board, when it gets the report, will have not only an in-house research project but also an internationally highly regarded person who has done a lot of research into 16 to 19-year-olds to give a comment on it, too. I believe that will give the board the level of confidence that they can make policy decisions based on that information. That is where we are at with the project. I believe it will be a very significant project and will provide a lot of advice for us for policy making.

One of the issues, of course, is that the work of SSABSA is only ever as successful as the partnership between SSABSA and its schooling sector partners. As a result of that, we could not do this without the terrific cooperation of our schooling sector partners. Might I add it is all three schooling sectors that have worked really closely with us. Clearly, we are finding that the issues are extraordinarily complex and very interrelated. As a result of that, a single, easy analysis has not been possible. We are having to go much deeper into the data.

The other issue, I believe, is that the first project, while it is very significant and will make quite a contribution to the research literature, will only end up posing more new questions, but very focused questions, than those to which perhaps it gives answers. It was really important to do a baseline study, because we have been plagued with anecdotal information, and we all know that samples of one tend not to be a very good basis on which to make policy decisions.

Ms HURLEY: What results have come from the curriculum assessment project undertaken by SSABSA and are any changes to curriculum proposed as a result?

Dr Keightley: Could I clarify that? Does the honourable member mean the curriculum assessment policy development?

Ms HURLEY: There was a project, as I understood it, for curriculum assessment. I guess it was policy development.

Dr Keightley: I am just trying to clarify that. If you are happy, I will talk about that policy development.

Ms HURLEY: The policy development, yes.

Dr Keightley: SSABSA has been working within the parameters of a curriculum and assessment policy which was developed in 1984 and amended slightly in 1987. That has been our policy basis. As a result of that, about 12 or 14 months ago we resolved that we would look at developing a new policy framework within which curriculum development would go into the next century. We were also aware of the fact that some of our policy development procedures were not as coordinated as they might have been and perhaps not as explicit as they might have been to the outside world—although those who worked inside SSABSA were pretty clear about the process that needed to go. As a result of that, we have embarked a two-stage process. The first part of the process was to review the curriculum assessment policy. The second part is to develop what we are calling a curriculum assessment procedures manual. The board has just approved the curriculum assessment policy framework and we are in the stages of drafting the various sections of the procedures manual.

The policy was developed after wide consultation with the widest community. One must be aware of the fact that SSABSA has a very broad base of representation on the SSABSA board, to the extent that the major stakeholders in the education community are represented on the board. As a result of that, the board was very active in ensuring that their constituency had an opportunity to comment on a draft that was out for consultation. We have now developed a policy framework that has been passed by the board and will now lead us into stage two, which is the procedures manual. I am happy to make a final copy of the policy available to you.

The CHAIRMAN: That brings to an end the time that the committee has available for questioning of the Minister on these lines. I remind members that any questions they have not had the opportunity to ask may be placed on the next day's House of Assembly Notice Paper. At this stage of the proceedings, I declare the examination of the votes completed and I thank the members for the way in which they have conducted themselves through the day's proceedings in answering questions in a mainly orderly and expeditious way. I thank the Minister for his attendance and time here and his officers and the officers of the Parliament for their work and assistance throughout the day.

ADJOURNMENT

At 10 p.m. the Committee adjourned until Wednesday 18 June at 11 a.m.