



EDUCATION AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mrs RN Menkens MP (Chair)
Mr SA Bennett MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr MR Latter MP
Mr MJ Pucci MP
Mr NA Symes MP
Mr W Byrne MP

Staff present:

Ms B Watson (Research Director)
Ms E Booth (Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC BRIEFING—EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2012

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2012

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2012

Committee met at 9.48 am

GRANTHAM, Ms Julie, Director-General, Department of Education, Training and Employment

RONEY, Mr Christopher, Acting Director, Legislative Services Unit

MARKIE-DADDS, Ms Carol, Executive Director, Regulation, Assessment and Strategic Initiatives and Engagement

PETHIYAGODA, Ms Margaret, Executive Director, Education Queensland

RYAN, Ms Kateena, Director, Strategic Policy and Research

CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to everybody. Before we start I do ask that mobile phones be switched off or set to silent. I would particularly like to welcome Ms Julie Grantham again, the Director-General, Department of Education, Training and Employment. Ms Grantham is briefing us today on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. Accompanying her are Mr Christopher Roney, the Acting Director of the Legislative Services Unit; Ms Carol Markie-Dadds, the Executive Director, Regulation, Assessment and Strategic Initiatives and Engagement; Ms Margaret Pethiyagoda, the Executive Director of Education Queensland; and Ms Kateena Ryan, Director, Strategic Policy and Research. I welcome you all and thank you for coming here this morning.

I would like to introduce the members of the Education and Innovation Committee. I am Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin and chair of this committee. With me are the committee members: Mr Bill Byrne, the member for Rockhampton; Mr Neil Symes, the member for Lytton; Michael Latter, the member for Waterford; next to me is our research director, Ms Bernice Watson; Mr Steve Bennett, the member for Burnett; Mr Michael Pucci, the member for Logan; and Mr Mark Boothman, the member for Albert.

The briefing today is being recorded and will be transcribed by Hansard for publication on the committee's web page. It is also being webcast and the video will be available on the committee's web page until it is superseded by a subsequent recording. It may also be used for training purposes in the future. Parliamentary privilege applies to all committee operations, including this briefing. To mislead the parliament, including this committee proceeding, is a serious offence. If you are unable or unwilling to provide an answer to any question the committee might put to you, you should advise me accordingly, giving your reasons. We will consider those reasons and provide ample opportunity for you to seek any advice or assistance that you need. You might also wish to take questions on notice if you do not have information at hand. As well, you may request that any material you provide be kept private. Again, the committee will consider that request. All of this is detailed in schedule 8 of the parliament's standing orders to which I believe you have been directed. For the benefit of Hansard I ask officers to state their name the first time they speak. Ms Grantham would you prefer members to ask any questions as you go through your presentation or that we wait until the end?

Ms Grantham: I would like to outline the full content of the bill and then we will direct questions, if we may, to the members from the department.

CHAIR: Thank you for that, Ms Grantham. Honourable members, I would ask that you put any questions through the chair as the briefing progresses. Thank you and I will now hand across to you, Ms Grantham.

Ms Grantham: Thank you, Chair, and good morning to members of the committee. It is a pleasure to be here today to brief you on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. To start, I will provide a brief overview with the key amendments that are contained in the miscellaneous provisions bill and then we can ask those questions as the chair has clarified. This bill will enable delivery of a distance education kindergarten program by the State Schools of Distance Education; it will enable the Queensland College of Teachers to adopt national professional standards for teachers; it will clarify that section 204 of the Criminal Code does not apply to a failure to report a likelihood of future sexual abuse, and, finally, it will remove the requirement to send anniversary letters to persons permanently excluded from state schools advising them of their right to periodically seek a revocation of the decision. Instead, students will be advised of their review rights at the time that they are notified of the exclusion. They are the four components of this amendment bill.

Consultation has been undertaken with non-government and government stakeholders during development of the bill. I will detail this for the committee as I talk about each area of the bill. Firstly, can we turn to e-kindy. This amendment enables the Queensland government to fulfil its commitment to providing universal access to kindergarten for all Queensland children, including those in regional and remote areas of the state. The committee would be aware that in areas of population growth it is quite easy to provide a kindergarten program, but in remote and rural areas where there is not a sustainable population for a group program then this amendment enables us to deliver e-kindy to those children in those areas. Queensland, together with all other jurisdictions in Australia, has agreed to provide universal access to quality early childhood education under a National Partnership Agreement for Early Childhood Education. Queensland's target under the National Partnership Agreement is to achieve 95 per cent participation in kindergarten programs by mid 2013. We started in 2008 with approximately 29 per cent of children in kindergarten programs. That has risen since that time. Last year we had a target of 65 per cent and we achieved 68 per cent. This year our target is 86 per cent and then reaching that final target of 95 per cent by 2013.

The National Partnership Agreement includes a commitment to implement specific strategies to support access and participation of children in rural and remote communities. The vast majority of Queensland children will be able to access centre based services. However, some children are unable to because of geographical isolation, medical conditions or an itinerant lifestyle. This bill will make amendments necessary to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* to facilitate delivery of e-kindy by State Schools of Distance Education. The amendments are necessary because currently State Schools of Distance Education can only provide primary, secondary or special schooling under the Act so they cannot provide a kindy program. This amendment enables that.

E-kindy is a digital, teacher-led and directed learning program that provides an opportunity for children to participate in a range of learning experiences similar to children who attend a centre based kindergarten program. The program includes a package of parent resources, teacher led lessons and assistance which will be provided over the phone and internet as well as some face-to-face contact. In addition, a range of parent resources, including fact sheets, e-books and music activities will be made freely accessible to all parents via my department's website. The Brisbane School of Distance Education has already developed the e-kindy material and is running a pilot program this year to finalise the materials. More than 100 families are participating in the pilot already and it has received very positive feedback from the Isolated Children's Parents' Association.

Subject to the passage of the bill in the 2012 parliamentary sittings, it is intended that e-kindy be provided free of charge to eligible children from 2013. The bill sets the eligibility criteria based on geographical location and access to centre based activities, medical conditions and itinerant lifestyles. The Isolated Children's Parents' Association and the Schools of Distance Education Alliance have been consulted on the e-kindy proposal. Both organisations strongly support delivery of the e-kindy program by the State Schools of Distance Education and the proposed eligibility criteria. The department has also consulted with the Association of Independent Schools Queensland—which I will refer to as ISQ—and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission on the proposed e-kindy model to determine if either organisation had an interest in providing a state-wide e-kindy program. Both organisations advise that they did not have an interest in providing a state-wide program. The Queensland Catholic Education Commission supported delivery of the e-kindy program by State Schools of Distance Education. ISQ's position at this time is not to be the sole provider of distance education kindergarten programs in Queensland. Their preference was for independent schools to deliver to their own clientele on an as need basis and be supplementary to the State Schools of Distance Education delivery.

I will now turn to the amendments concerning national professional standards for teachers. The bill amends the *Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005* to enable the Queensland College of Teachers, or the QCT, to adopt the national professional standards for teachers. The national professional standards were developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, which I will call AITSL, in accordance with the national partnership agreement for improving teacher quality. AITSL had significant input from and consultation with all jurisdictions, including Queensland. The QCT already had Queensland standards but participated in the development of the national standards. The national professional standards articulate what teachers are expected to know and be able to do during their careers. The graduate and proficient levels of the professional standards are relevant to the QCT's functions. The graduate level of the national professional standards will be applied to applications for provisional registration for beginning teachers to enter the profession and for accrediting teacher education courses. The proficient level will apply to applications for full registration and renewal for teachers with the requisite experience. The QCT must adopt and apply the national professional standards in the place of their existing professional standards to decide applications for provisional and full registration of teachers. The national professional standards cannot be amended by the QCT. However, the QCT retains the capacity to develop or adopt standards other than the national professional standards with the approval of the minister. This capacity is necessary in case the national professional standards are not maintained in the future.

Adoption of the national professional standards will reduce red tape by improving the mobility of teachers because consistent standards for teacher registration will apply throughout Australia. The QCT was consulted about the amendments to the QCT Act during the development of the bill.

The bill includes a clarifying provision regarding the operation of mandatory reporting requirements introduced into the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* by the previous government in 2011. Legislative reporting requirements were expanded last year so that school staff members are required to report to the police suspected sexual abuse and the likelihood of future sexual abuse perpetrated by any person. These expanded reporting requirements are consistent with Education Queensland policy, which requires state school staff to make a report where they reasonably suspect a student has been harmed or is at risk of harm by any person. This includes harm caused by sexual abuse.

No penalty was prescribed for failing to report a likelihood of future sexual abuse. The aim was to mitigate concerns that the risk of criminal sanction would increase reporting of inappropriate low-level matters. It was always intended and agreed that both state and non-state school sectors represented by the ISQ and the QCEC that sanctions for any failure to report a likely future sexual abuse may be dealt with by employee authorities through disciplinary action in appropriate cases. It has subsequently been identified that a person who fails to report the likelihood of a future sexual abuse may be guilty of a misdemeanour, carrying a maximum penalty of one year imprisonment under section 204 of the Criminal Code. Section 204 provides that a person who fails to comply with the statutory obligation is guilty of a misdemeanour unless a mode of proceeding against the person is expressly provided. If an amendment is not made, it is feasible that a person could be prosecuted for failing to report a likelihood of sexual abuse. As I said, this was never intended.

The amendments in the bill aim to avoid the application of section 204 in relation to the reporting of future sexual abuse. Independent Schools Queensland and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission were both consulted on these amendments now before the parliament. There was agreement that the amendment be made. Subject to the passage of the bill in the 2012 parliamentary sittings, it is anticipated that the expanded reporting requirement regarding likely future sexual abuse will commence at the beginning of the 2013 school year. Schooling sectors are also aware of the potential commencement date. Education Queensland is taking appropriate action to inform staff of the expanded requirement. Training materials have been developed to assist staff to identify appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviours and how to respond to those behaviours. It includes a number of case studies. This material has been provided to the non-state sectors.

Finally, the bill will remove the requirement for Education Queensland to annually advise students who have been permanently excluded from state schools of their right to periodically seek a revocation of the exclusion decision. While there has not been public consultation on these amendments, they are technical amendments that merely provide that there will be a different and more effective way of informing excluded students of their existing rights of review. Currently, after each anniversary of a student's permanent exclusion from a state school, it is a requirement to send a letter, an anniversary letter, to the student's last known address, until the student is 17 years of age, to advise them that they can apply to revoke the exclusion decision. This requirement will cease. Instead, the bill will amend the procedures under the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* to require up-front notification of the student's review rights to be provided when they are first advised of the exclusion. In addition, advice about review rights will be placed on my department's website. The effectiveness of advising students of their review rights through anniversary letters is questionable. The department is not always advised of a change of student address, so we cannot be sure how many letters reach their intended recipients. Between 2009 and 2011, approximately 2,800 students were permanently excluded from state schools. Over this period, regional officers advise that approximately 25 students sought a revocation of an exclusion decision and six were revoked.

I want to make it clear that these amendments do not remove review rights; they simply revise the way students are informed about those rights. Also, since 2006, my department has significantly enhanced case management of excluded students. Regional case managers are appointed to work with all excluded students to facilitate the students' successful reengagement in education or another eligible option such as TAFE. Case managers assist students and their parents understand their review rights and capacity to seek a revocation of the decision. I thank the committee members for your time this morning. We would now be pleased to respond to any particular queries that you may have about the bill.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Grantham, for that. Over to the members. I remind you to please give your names before you ask any questions. Michael?

Mr PUCCI: I have a question on the national professional standards for teachers. You mentioned that the QCT was consulted. I was curious as to whether they were in agreement with what we are putting into this bill?

Ms Grantham: Yes, they were. They were very much a part of the development. They were actually part of the working party that developed the national standards. We had a very strong influence in what these national standards looked like. I also say that Queensland has had standards for teachers for a long time, so the national standards are very much consistent with what the Queensland standards already looked like.

Ms Ryan: That covers the question, I believe.

CHAIR: Getting back to e-kindly, which I think sounds a tremendous idea being involved in a rural area myself, tell me: how does it work? Are the children on Skype? I assume it is on the internet. Tell us more.

Ms Grantham: It is very much the School of Distance Education model. I do not know if you have seen that?

CHAIR: Not in recent years, no.

Ms Grantham: Carol will be able to give you the full detail. It is a great program where you can see the children on the screen, they can see the teacher and they can also see other children who may be in the group at the same time. It is like a virtual classroom, if you like.

Ms Markie-Dadds: I was very fortunate to visit the Brisbane School of Distance Education just a couple of weeks ago and see e-kindy in action with the current pilot families. They had four children on the screen at one time learning songs together and singing, doing the actions that go along with it. They had another child doing a one-on-one session with their teacher, playing with playdough and manipulating that, where the child could see what the teacher was doing and the teacher could see what the child was doing with their playdough as well. It is just like distance education for the prep program upwards. Children are able to participate in three sessions a week with their teacher, of up to 20 minutes duration. Some of those are one-on-one and some of those are in a group format. As the children become more familiar with the technology, the teachers move to more group interactions with the children. Then there are opportunities for those children to come together in what we call cluster days at the seven sites of the schools of distance education that we have across Queensland, so they can mix with their peers and their teacher at those events as well.

Ms Grantham: If I can just add, of course, the role the parent or the home tutor will play in this area is very important. Of course, the families that are involved in distance education have a strong tradition of actually fulfilling this role. As I said, there are supplementary materials that will assist the parent to complement the work that is happening with the teacher. It is a very comprehensive package of materials that has a whole range of mediums that are applied to ensure that the child can participate in a program.

CHAIR: I was going to ask what was supplied to the student and the family.

Ms Markie-Dadds: For each family, there is a parent guide and there is a resource kit for the parent as well, which will include lots of songs, music, fact sheets on playing with children, different types of play, dramatic play and sand play and water play and so on. Then there is a teacher guide. Those materials are provided in both a hard copy and a memory stick version for the families to be able to access at home from their own computer sources. The materials are also on the internet to be downloaded as well, but our families do appreciate having the hard copy, particular when the parents are learning their role and what their lesson plan is for the next day. They have appreciated having a hard copy that they can read at night, in preparation for the next day's activities. The program is designed to be run over a 15-hour period during the week, so while there is about an hour with the teacher, the other time is with the parent guiding the child through particular activities. The day is structured in much the same way as a day would be in a centre based kindergarten program. There is time to set up for routines; there is activity time; get ready for meal times; pack up; rest time; music time; story time. Those sorts of activities are structured through the day. There is a range of cards and materials that are sent to the family to help timetable the day. There are pictures for the child to learn what it is that they are going to be doing today, so it is story time when you see this symbol or music time when we see this particular symbol. That is put up for the child each day so they can see what the structure is.

Ms Grantham: Carol touched on some important points. In order to satisfy the definition of 'kindy', a kindy program has to have a qualified teacher with an accredited learning program for 15 hours a week. That is what we determine is a kindy program eligible for funding and then, of course, the conclusion is us reaching our milestone of engagement of children in these areas.

Mr BYRNE: I am very interested in e-kindy, but I am particularly interested in the level of participation and the technology presently available or what is projected to be available over a period. What is the delta, if you like, with the current penetration rate, particularly for remote communities? I am thinking of the circumstances of a cattle station outside of wherever, west of the Great Divide. I know that technology there is not sufficient to be able to carry the data and band widths for anything, really, except the most primitive internet connections. What is the present level of penetration likely to be based on the technology that is available and what is the growth path projected with NBN rollouts?

Ms Grantham: You have touched on the hazards of distance education, particularly with technology access. We know right across Queensland that there are areas where it is very difficult to get a good internet service. That is why Carol referred to the printed materials available on a stick where you do not need the internet connection, so the parent has that readily available. I will get Carol to talk about participation rates in the more remote communities, but this is a trial this year and we have had 100 families participate successfully. What we have to do and make sure that we communicate well is that this program is available so that we penetrate and use every avenue available to us through the Isolated Children's Parents Association, their networks and the schools of distance education, to let people know that this is available for the category of children that are geographically isolated, satisfy the medical criteria or are itinerant. Certainly, the take-up rate in some communities will be a greater challenge than in others. I will ask Carol to speak about those participation rates.

Ms Markie-Dadds: The participation rates have been overwhelming for the pilot. To give you an indication of the uptake, in prep for State Schools of Distance Education we have approximately 150 children enrolled a year. We would expect 150, on average, children in kindy would take up the e-kindy

program because they are not near a school. In a very short period, we had two weeks to recruit families for the pilot, we were thinking maybe we would get 20 to 40. We ended up with 113 currently participating in that trial, with a very short lead-in time. It was actively promoted through the Isolated Children's Parents Association and the current School of Distance Education Alliance.

The majority of families are from the far west and central west—Longreach or Charleville would be their closest base for their schools of distance education. Part of the pilot is looking at some of the technology issues and broadband width problems. We have had some dropouts but the program can still be run with telephone contact if the parent has the hard copy materials with them as well. We are looking at ways of saving broadband time such as having static displays on the screen sometimes, because we have had feedback from families that constantly using the webcam with the vision on the child can use up too much of their broadband. So the Brisbane School of Distance Education is looking at ways around that as well.

CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you.

Mr BENNETT: Following on from the question about isolated communities, we circulated with interest the e-kindergarten program in my electorate, which is probably not remote. The interest came from parents with school-age children but who are worried about kindergarten capacity for their younger ones. Ms Grantham mentioned group formats and things. Where there is absolutely no kindy provision within these communities and they wanted to engage, say, at the state school level if rooms are available, is that something that could be considered? Is that a possibility? Rosedale State School and Lowmead State School in my electorate are very keen to look at this but they probably want to do it more as a social thing with mums and kids in remote areas.

Ms Grantham: Earlier on we talked about schools being able to do this and stepped away from that because there were a whole range of issues, which I do not have time to go into now, that did preclude that. But Carol can answer on the strategy of who will be eligible.

Ms Markie-Dadds: Essentially it is families who are more than 16 kilometres away from a centre based early childhood education and care service. We are currently rolling out kindergarten programs in kindergarten services as well as long-day-care services. The uptake in our long-day-care services around the state has been very positive, very strong. I think the latest figures I have are that more than 950 long-day-care services are now delivering, or approved to deliver, a kindergarten program across the state.

For families that can access a centre based service, that is where we are encouraging families to go as opposed to looking for an e-kindergarten or alternative model. For families who are looking for informal and small group activity times with their children and other parents, there is a large playgroup network across Queensland and a lot of our state schools lend their spaces to those playgroups to allow them to congregate. There are a range of regulation issues in terms of setting up a kindergarten or a long-day-care service where children are left in the care of another adult, and that is what Julie was alluding to in some of the challenges with using a state school facility. They are not designed for prior to school-age children and there are a number of challenges and costs involved in addressing those.

Ms Grantham: Certainly if there is space for a playgroup, schools will work with the community to ensure that there is engagement wherever that can happen. I know in Cunnamulla, where I am government champion for that community, we use the old preschool that is on the school site for playgroup. So there are certainly examples of where that can happen.

Mr LATTER: My question follows on from that, Carol. You mentioned eligibility being those who are 16 kilometres or more away from a service provider. In rural and regional communities 16 kilometres is not necessarily a great distance. Have any of the service operators or providers in the preschool industry expressed any views on the e-kindergarten program at all?

Ms Markie-Dadds: There is general support for e-kindergarten programs across the sector from parents and alternative providers. For instance, I think Julie mentioned in her opening statement that there are a small number of independent schools who would be interested in opening up e-kindergarten to the clientele that would come into the independent school sector. The legislation that is being proposed here is enabling for state schools. There are no government impediments to any non-government organisation or any other party offering an e-kindergarten program. The challenge in Queensland is that there is no organisation currently with the capacity to provide a state-wide service to this relatively small cohort of children, and that is what this legislation will enable us to do—that is, to work with the State Schools of Distance Education to be that state-wide provider, but it will not preclude other organisations.

Ms Grantham: If a parent had a choice of attending a local centre where their child is in a full-time, 15-hour program or being on distance education, I do not think a parent would by choice necessarily elect the latter. But, in the absence of a full-time program being available, we are saying to the community that here is a great opportunity to prepare children for that prep year and to involve themselves and their children in a great program. Of course it requires the parents to do 15 hours with their child of not formal learning but learning in a more structured way and that is a demand on parents. As Carol said, there are 150 in prep. It is not a market that I think we will be overwhelmed by, but it certainly provides that opportunity where otherwise there would be none.

Mr SYMES: I have just two concerns with the bill. My question is to the director-general, Ms Grantham. The first question is to do with anniversary letters. You said that there was no public Brisbane

consultation to date. Will there be public consultation in the future? If so, how will the department consult with the community?

Ms Grantham: I will ask Margaret Pethiyagoda to answer with respect to the anniversary letters. The statistics are not great in our response in this. I think 2,800 students were excluded. We have a very low response rate to the anniversary letters. Although, having said that, the fact that we get a response is important and we cannot dismiss that. In terms of who do we consult with, we would consult with the parent body, the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, to ensure that they were aware as well. Although how that information then becomes known to other parents—I think it is important for us that when a student is being excluded we really stress that and make sure it is clear in the package of materials that is provided to the person who is being excluded and to their parents, because we provide information to the parents as well. Marg, I do not know if you can add anything further there.

Ms Pethiyagoda: I think the main issue here is that we are not actually changing the review rights of the students. So when they are being potentially excluded they will be advised about their rights in the discussion with the case managers and the parents. In actual fact we are probably in some respects enhancing their knowledge of it from doing it at the front-end rather than relying on an anniversary letter.

Mr SYMES: My follow-up question deals with mandatory reporting of sexual abuse. Have you had any stakeholders express concern about the way the department is going about the mandatory reporting of sexual abuse?

Ms Grantham: Are you referring to the removal or clarification of section 204?

Mr SYMES: Clarification.

Ms Grantham: The stakeholders actually raised it as an issue that there was ambiguity as to whether section 204 would apply or not. We sought further information. There was a potential that it could apply. Therefore, the amendment has been made so that it will not apply. Christopher may want to add more.

Mr Roney: No. I think that is probably all. It was just something to be clarified. It was an oversight last time and it is now being addressed in the bill.

Mr PUCCI: I know you gave the figure on the number of permanent exclusion letters that were written. How many submissions were made for revocation and how many were approved?

Ms Grantham: I think it was 25.

Ms Pethiyagoda: From 2009 to 2011 there were approximately 2,800 students who were permanently excluded from state schools. Of that approximately 25 students made submissions seeking revocation and of those approximately six decisions were revoked.

Ms Grantham: So that is over 2009 to 2011. Is that three calendar years?

Ms Pethiyagoda: Yes, it is three school years.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Julie, I have been going around to a lot of my schools recently to find out what type of action a student needs to have done to be excluded from that school, because I am seeing that in different schools around the area they have their own rule books. Is that left up to the actual principals themselves or is it across-the-board?

Ms Grantham: It is actually not up to the principal but up to the school community. So every school develops a code of behaviour. What is called?

Ms Pethiyagoda: Responsible behaviour plan.

Ms Grantham: And that plan is developed between the school and the community, because it is important that a school and its community set the standard: 'What do we want our school to look like? What are the things that are important for us? What are the values and the behaviours that we expect?' So we do not say, 'These are mandatory. You must do this,' because we believe a school and its community is best positioned to give direction for that school. So you will find variation.

It is about community standards and different things that are important and valued within a particular community. So we will set out a range of things. If I were still a principal of a school, certainly there would be things that I would say such as, 'If you bring a weapon and threaten people, you will not be a student here. We don't allow that. If you bring and sell drugs in our school, we won't allow that.' It is up to the principal and the school community. It cannot be the principal alone. The community has to support the principal in the standards that are being applied. So it is very important that everyone sits down and signs on to that: 'This is what we value, this is what we stand for and this is what will be accepted in our school.'

Mr PUCCI: Who has access to those school behaviour plans?

Ms Grantham: I believe they are on every school's website. Parents when they come to enrol their children would normally be given a precis of what is important at that school so that they can think about, 'Do I want to be part of this or is this school not for my child?' I think it is important that everyone is well informed about the standards. Of course schools spend time going through these with students: 'These are our values. These are our standards. If you do this and that, then this is what will happen. There will be consequences for behaviour.' So it is important that there is clarity and constant communication of what is expected.

CHAIR: I have a quick question about e-kindy. I understand that for eligible children this will be cost neutral.

Ms Grantham: Yes.

CHAIR: We do have a lot of families who choose to home school their children. Would this be available from a commercial perspective?

Ms Grantham: We do have a number of parents who elect to pay to do distance education. I am not sure of that answer but Carol will know.

Ms Markie-Dadds: We have not looked at making it commercial or user-pays at this stage. We could look at that down the track. Kindergarten participation is not compulsory but it is actively encouraged, and there are a range of resources available to all parents that they can use to promote their early childhood development. So the parent resources that have been developed as part of e-kindy have been rebadged and put into fact sheet formats and into an e-book. We also have an iPad application. Those resources are on our department's website now and all parents are able to access those resources to help promote quality time with their children and promote their early childhood development. So there are a range of resources there for parents who choose not to participate in a kindergarten program.

CHAIR: That is excellent. I think that is something that needs to be promoted too.

Mr BOOTHMAN: With regard to the State Schools of Distance Education, I was actually watching some of the technology at one of my local schools, and the interaction between kids at Highland Reserve State School and kids out in remote areas was absolutely fantastic. Are there any ideas on the table to include this sort of thing in the kindergarten scope, because kids getting to talk to somebody thousands of kilometres away is amazing for them?

Ms Grantham: And that is what happens in any distance education class. You might have a class in Boulia, Urandangi, Camooweal or Birdsville that are all together in a group on a screen, so the children think they are someone who is next door when in fact they are hundreds and hundreds of kilometres apart. I am not sure of the frequency in kindy, but in distance education we bring the children together to their local School of Distance Education where they then meet each other and see each other in person, and they have that familiarity and friendship almost because they have seen the children on the screen and talked to them through their lessons. So it is a great way to connect isolated communities.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I suppose I could rephrase it in the sense that us city slickers, especially the kids at Highland Reserve State School, found it absolutely fantastic to see how the other half lives.

Ms Grantham: With our kindy program, how we have managed to raise our percentage of participation is that we have funded private enterprise. We have funded long-day-care centres to have enough subsidy to hire the teacher and therefore provide the program, because we know in populated areas children are already in day care. Of course we have the existing community kindergartens but also community kindergarten provision in state schools. Then we have further provision in the independent and Catholic sectors where we have funded the building of a kindergarten. Because kindergartens are administered under another Act—I was going to say the Child Care Act but the national law has been passed now—it is not the same as schooling where we would intervene or be able to encourage that to happen. We would hope that would happen because people see that as a great idea. Whether long-day-care centres would have the same technology for that cohort, I am not sure, but the model of how we have managed to build the percentage of participation is a great model and it has worked very well for Queensland.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Thank you.

Mr BYRNE: I am particularly interested in national teaching standards. I appreciate your brief on where we are heading. Are you aware, or is the department aware, of any substantive stakeholders that are expressing countervailing views to the direction proposed?

Ms Grantham: I am not.

Ms Ryan: During consultation there was no adverse feedback given in relation to the standards. The QCT, as Julie advised, has been very active and has had a lot of input at the national level in shaping the standards. For Queensland teachers there will be different language but there will be very familiar ideas and concepts about what they are expected to know and be able to do to meet each level of the standards.

Ms Grantham: On Monday the Queensland Teachers Union sought clarification of how a standard would be applied in a particular circumstance but it was not raised as an issue of, 'We shouldn't be doing this.' Because of the consistency and the long familiarity Queensland teachers have had with the Queensland standards, moving into the national standards is not a huge leap into something we have not seen before.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions from the committee?

Mr SYMES: Is there any data to show that changes to curriculum or daily breakdown of classes could reduce expulsions in a class? For instance, in my electorate, Brisbane Bayside College has changed its class structures and that has had significant reductions in expulsions because it has given the children more active learning.

Ms Grantham: There is certainly not an absence of data about exclusions, short-term suspensions, long-term suspensions or cancellations of student enrolment. We have lots of data that is aggregated to a state level and also by school by school. A school is always looking at how they can best serve the children in their school and will constantly look at, 'Are we satisfying the needs of a particular group?' For example, there might be a group that has an interest in football. I have seen programs where students actually learn through grouping together because of their interest in sport or their interest in a particular way of learning through ICT, for example.

Schools are constantly looking for a link which they can use to hook these kids in so they enjoy learning. For students who are suspended or excluded, while there are many reasons that contribute to it, sometimes it is because they haven't got the skills to participate. Therefore, they disengage because they do not understand what is going on anyway so that leads to all sorts of misbehaviour and other ways of exhibiting actions that end up ultimately resulting in an exclusion. Schools constantly reassess, think about things, see if they can do it better, look at other best practice, listen to examples of what is happening in other schools to see if that will be suitable as an approach to engage students in their own school. We do not as a system say, 'This is what you must do,' but schools by their very nature constantly seek to satisfy the needs of the children who are enrolled.

CHAIR: Are there any other questions? I believe you have satisfied our committee. Thank you very much for your time and for coming along. We really do appreciate it. This is an interesting piece of legislation and I think it is going to be delivering something most exciting for Queensland people. I thank you for your assistance. I now declare this public briefing of the Education and Innovation Committee closed. I would urge those who have an interest in the Education and Innovation Committee to subscribe to the committee's e-mail subscription list via the Queensland parliament's website.

Ms Grantham: Thank you, Chair. Can I thank the members of the committee and the members from my department for their excellent work, as always?

Committee adjourned at 10.36 am