



EDUCATION, TOURISM AND SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SJ Stewart MP (Chair)
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr SE Cramp MP
Dr JJ McVeigh MP
Ms JE Pease MP
Mr BM Saunders MP

Staff present:

Ms S Cawcutt (Research Director)
Ms M Salisbury (Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2015

Brisbane

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2015

Committee met at 9.00 am

ARMISTEAD, Ms Shari, Director, Strategic Relations, Independent Schools Queensland

ROBERTSON, Mr David, Executive Director, Independent Schools Queensland

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I declare open this public briefing by Independent Schools Queensland. I would like to introduce the members of the Education, Tourism and Small Business Committee. I am Scott Stewart, the member for Townsville and chair of the committee. The other committee members are Dr John McVeigh, member for Toowoomba South and deputy chair; Ms Joan Pease, member for Lytton; Mr Mark Boothman, member for Albert; Mr Bruce Saunders, member for Maryborough; and Mr Sid Cramp, member for Gaven.

The briefing is being broadcast live on the parliament's website and is being transcribed by Hansard. Before we start, I ask that all mobile phones be switched off or put on silent mode. The committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to its standing rules and orders.

The purpose of this briefing is to inform the committee in more detail about the role of Independent Schools Queensland and current issues for independent schools. I welcome Mr David Robertson, Executive Director of Independent Schools Queensland. We have allowed until 10 am for your briefing and members' questions. Mr Robertson, would you like to make an opening statement? I will invite members to ask questions at the end.

Mr Robertson: Thank you very much for your invitation to address you today. I will take this opportunity to make a short opening statement. Independent Schools Queensland is the peak body representing and supporting independent schools across Queensland. We have 196 member schools operating at over 220 campuses. These schools educate nearly 120,000 students, accounting for 15 per cent of Queensland school enrolments which includes nearly 20 per cent of secondary enrolments.

ISQ is in its 47th year and its role is to advocate for, promote, support and develop independent schooling. We provide support services and resources for our member schools to ensure they remain up to date with education changes and are supported to enhance their own school services and achieve improved outcomes for students. We assist our schools with a range of services including extensive professional learning, we administer a range of federal and state government programs for schools, and we provide specialist advice on areas including governance, compliance, employee relations, school improvement and performance, curriculum, teaching and learning and business management.

Perhaps the best way for you as committee members to get some idea of the scope of work that we do is for me to mention our five flagship programs that we run: Our Schools—Our Future, which is a research based program which promotes informed public debate about schooling and particularly independent schooling; our governance services, which is a range of technical programs and specialist training tailored for independent school boards; Self-Improving Schools—we have over 130 of our schools involved in this program—which is consultancy support for schools to develop and implement evidence based strategies for continuous improvement; our highly successful Literacy and Numeracy Coaching Academy, which is training and mentoring for instructional coaches to work within schools, to develop teacher skills for improving literacy and numeracy; and Great Teachers in Independent Schools, which is a strategic support program and resources to empower schools to design and implement sustainable practices to effectively lead and develop great teachers. ISQ, apart from all of those service activities, also represents the sector on over 160 boards, committees, advisory groups, task forces et cetera, and clearly we regularly liaise with state and federal members of parliament.

In terms of the independent schooling sector itself, you would be aware that for more than 150 years independent schools have been providing high-quality educational services to a wide range of students in Queensland. Independent schools offer parents choice in the education for their children.

They enable families to select schools that best serve their children's needs and enable families to choose a school that best promotes the values they believe are important. Independent schools are a very diverse group of schools. They include non-denominational schools, schools with church or ethnic affiliations—such as Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Jewish and Islamic schools—Montessori and Steiner schools, schools that specialise in providing for students with learning difficulties, special assistance schools, schools for Indigenous students and distance education schools. So we have a great diversity of schools. The sector also caters for a range of students that reflect Queensland communities. Students enrolled in independent schools include nearly 4,000 boarders, 1,500 overseas students, 3,500 Indigenous students and over 3,000 distance education students in addition to over 3,000 students who have been verified as students with a disability.

In terms of the sector, 50 per cent of the funding to run independent schools comes from governments on average. That is approximately 35 per cent from the Australian government and 15 per cent from the Queensland government. Of course, the remaining 50 per cent comes from parents in the payment of fees. So independent schools are not-for-profit. They must comply with government regulations and standards. However, they are established and operated independently and can develop their own educational programs, policies and procedures within those government regulations and standards.

I will quickly outline some current issues around schooling and particularly for independent schools. As I am sure you are all aware, Queensland schools have been through a period of considerable change over a 15-year period. We had the *Education and Training: Reforms for the Future*, which included the introduction of the prep year; the Queensland Certificate of Education earning or learning laws; and this year we have seen the transfer of year 7 to secondary, the implementation of the Australian curriculum, universal access to kindergarten and a focus on literacy and numeracy. Some of these reforms have not been easy for schools and most have involved very significant government investment. We are very pleased, therefore, to see the very substantial improvements in educational outcomes of Queensland students as, for example, measured by NAPLAN.

There are two reforms which will be significant for schools over the next few years. As you would be aware, the Minister for Education recently announced that the recommended changes to Queensland senior secondary assessment and tertiary entrance procedures will proceed with the introduction of a new system from 2018. This is an area of vital interest to independent schools, and I know that the sector will have a strong level of engagement in the development of the final system and the trialling of the new system in the lead-up to 2018.

Another critical issue for schools will be the transition of NAPLAN to an online system. The transition commences in 2017 with all schools required to be undertaking NAPLAN online from 2019. So schools will be engaging in their readiness for NAPLAN online, which includes a host of technical issues, as well as the readiness of teachers and students.

A significant challenge for the independent sector relates to the continuing increase in student numbers across the state. Investment in new schools and the expansion of existing schools is required into the future. We are therefore very pleased that both the current and previous state governments have allocated additional capital funding assistance for non-state schools to help with this task.

One of the barriers to school development is the regulatory environment in terms of planning and approvals. We are hopeful that the government will extend designation status to non-state school sites just as it does for state school sites to ease some of the burdens and costs associated with the provision of what is ultimately a community infrastructure.

The funding of schools is always an issue which attracts considerable attention. Independent schools acknowledge the significant support provided by both the federal and state governments towards the costs of schooling. As a sector, we seek certainty in funding arrangements to ensure proper and good long-term planning. Schools have faced a period of uncertainty in terms of funding as the Gonski funding model has been debated and implemented. Further changes are likely to funding arrangements from 2018, with the federal government at this stage only committing to the current funding model to the end of 2017. We will be seeking from governments fair and equitable funding arrangements, particularly post 2017, and arrangements which support parental choice and encourage private contributions to the cost of schooling.

The funding arrangements for students with disabilities is always an issue of particular concern. For many years the level of assistance provided by governments for these students enrolled in independent schools has not matched the costs involved in providing the education that these most

vulnerable students require and deserve. ISQ will continue to take a strong advocacy role on behalf of independent schools in these issues and other matters impacting on school education in Queensland. I am very pleased now to take questions from the committee.

CHAIR: Does anyone have any questions for David at this stage?

Dr McVEIGH: Thank you, David, for your presentation. You mentioned amongst I think you called them your flagship programs the area of governance, which I take it is providing support in terms of corporate governance responsibilities of independent school boards. What are the challenges there? In many ways in my mind those issues exist for independent schools and quite obviously for other schools—the Catholic schooling system et cetera. What are the challenges there and the issue of parent engagement which extends across all schools as well, including state schools? I wondered whether you have any views on those issues.

Mr Robertson: Thanks for that question. Independent schools generally are either companies limited by guarantee or incorporated associations. There are some other models but they are probably the two most common. Independent school boards have legal responsibility for their schools and for the operation of their schools. We would have probably about 2,500 governors in the independent sector if you take on average school boards. The vast majority—probably 99 per cent of them—are volunteers. So they take on big responsibilities. They run very big organisations with multimillion dollar turnovers, yet they have the same responsibilities as the board of a commercial company. So there is a lot of upskilling to be done.

Often parents find themselves on school boards and will contact ISQ and ask, 'What does this mean? What are my responsibilities?' There has been over a long period of time a very strong trend towards more professionalism in school boards. The traditional models which might have been a majority of parents, for example, I think are being slowly replaced by experts. A lot of people are willing to contribute to schooling through governance roles in independent schools. I think most schools will look for expertise on their board including legal skills, financial skills and educational skills. Of course, many schools in our sector are still very much about parent engagement, and that starts right from the top.

Boards, I think, face some significant challenges. Finances are always a very significant challenge. Enrolments, reputational risk, risk management, hiring the right principal, monitoring the principal and looking after the long-term health of the school—I think there are some challenges there. Certainly we have a very strong program which covers the legal responsibilities as well as those other strategic issues.

Mr BOOTHMAN: At the end of your opening statement you spoke briefly about funding, or the lack of it, for students with disabilities. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr Robertson: Yes. Under legal requirements—the Anti-Discrimination Act and the Disability Discrimination Act—schools have to enrol students with disabilities. They are happy to do that. Our sector does a fantastic job in educating those 3,500-odd students with disabilities. It is a bit of a contested area, but if you wanted a figure about how much it costs on an individual student basis \$40,000 a student would not be unusual. Clearly, it depends on the type of disability and the adjustments required. We very strongly believe, and schools would believe, that governments have an obligation to support fully those costs. These are the most vulnerable group of students in our society. On average, I would suggest schools might get something around \$15,000, so there is a big gap between the actual costs and what governments provide in additional funding to support those costs. Clearly, schools have to make up that difference from their own parental contributions. So I think that is a major issue. It has been a major issue for a long time. We know the number of students with disabilities is increasing very strongly and has been for a number of years. Therefore, we appreciate the demands on government funding around supporting students with disabilities, but I think we need to address this issue somehow to support schools more to provide the educational services for those students.

Mr BOOTHMAN: I gather you would not have the information before us, but over the last 10 years what type of increase have you actually noticed?

Mr Robertson: In 10 years I would say our numbers—again, I can get you the actual figures—would have gone from less than 1,000 to 3,500. I think, from memory, we had a very big increase from 2013 to 2014—something like 13 per cent or 14 per cent—whereas the sector has been growing on average at three per cent or four per cent.

Mr SAUNDERS: Do you work in conjunction with Education Queensland with that problem?

Mr Robertson: Yes, absolutely. One of the unique things about Queensland is the very strong level of collaboration and cooperation across the three schooling sectors. Clearly we represent our

sector on lots of groups and task forces that are established by the department and so forth. We have very regular liaison with the director-general, with the minister and with the Catholic education office. So we work very closely together, yes.

Mr CRAMP: David, following on with children with special needs, I have a two-part question. I understand that you may not have the information, but what sorts of programs and planning do you have currently and for the future for children on the spectrum? Also, does that include, or is there any intention to include in the future, children who are not on the spectrum but who have behavioural disorders such as high anxiety or ADHD?

Mr Robertson: Autism would be the biggest group of students with disability that are verified within our sector. You may be aware that there is a new national definition system coming in called NCCD which all schools are having to participate in this year. That will identify a whole new group of students with learning needs as well as disabilities. It is a massive issue. At the current time about four per cent of students are verified as students with disabilities. Under the early data from the NCCD we are talking potentially up to 20 per cent of students who will be identified as requiring some adjustments in terms of their learning needs. Given what I have said about the funding arrangements, we cannot meet the funding arrangements at the current time for the existing group of students, yet we are going to identify a whole new group of students whose parents, I am sure, will expect additional support, and I think that will be an issue into the future. I will mention that in our sector we do have two special schools. We also have—and I think it may even be in your electorate—Toogoolawa Schools which deals with—

Mr CRAMP: I believe it may be in my colleague's electorate.

Mr BOOTHMAN: It is in the electorate of Coomera.

Mr Robertson: Coomera, okay. That school deals with students in primary years who have these difficulties. One of the fastest growing group of schools in our sector are our special assistance schools which are schools which cater for disengaged students, so we now have nearly 18 special assistance schools. Going back, again, many years ago, people might be aware of Southside Education and Glendyne in Hervey Bay—well-known schools that catered for these students. There has been an explosion in these schools in recent times, which is fantastic, and they do a really great job for the kids, but there are obviously more students out there needing this sort of help and it is a very expensive provision.

Ms PEASE: Thank you, David. Further on that, with regard to mainstream schools, what is the position in regard to refusing or not accepting students with learning needs?

Mr Robertson: Schools cannot do that under Commonwealth and state legislation. Clearly that is the legal situation in that schools have an obligation to make the adjustments required for a student. I would have to be honest and say parents and schools obviously talk about a student's needs and sometimes a school obviously cannot make the provision within the resources available. I think parents make decisions in the best interests of their child. Sometimes after engaging with the school that they might wish to go to they decide that perhaps it is not the best option, but ultimately at the end of the day every independent school in Queensland has an open enrolment policy. We do not have any selective schools academically or in relation to the cohort of students.

Ms PEASE: Thank you. I have a couple more questions with regard to your governance. Do you assist with employing principals, for example? I know that is probably up to the board, but often the board might not necessarily be capable of going through that selection process.

Mr Robertson: Sure. We will support schools in their arrangements about employing or identifying principals. We certainly help sometimes by sitting on selection committees. We will help boards in terms of contractual arrangements, yes.

Ms PEASE: Further to that on the other side of the scale, with regard to people who are on the board, do you engage or assist the principal in appropriate people being placed on the board?

Mr Robertson: Yes. Again, as part of those governance services we do activities like board reviews and schools matrixes of boards when they are perhaps identifying what skills they might be seeking on a board. A lot of independent schools would also engage commercial organisations to assist with those processes. But, yes, we do support boards in whatever way they might need that support.

Ms PEASE: Thank you.

CHAIR: David, I have a couple of questions for you. The first one relates to discrepancies in student counts, so the numbers of actual students and those that are actually recorded. Where do

you see the greatest challenge is for you? You have a whole number of schools with diverse clientele and in diverse populations. What do you see as the biggest contributing factors to those discrepancies in actual numbers?

Mr Robertson: Thank you for that. It is an interesting area. As you would be aware, there are two censuses for schools—one in February, which is state, and one in August, which is Commonwealth. They are very important, and schools treat them as very important not only in counting the students but also in their link to funding. I am aware of recent reports from the Queensland Audit Office. I would have to say that I have great confidence in independent schools and their integrity in terms of the census. In fact, I do not accept some of the inferences from one of the audit reports. However, it is very well known that there are some difficult areas in deciding whether a student is enrolled and attending a school at census day, and that particularly relates to Indigenous students. I must say I think the issues are well known there because of the arrangements around Indigenous students and attendance. I think schools certainly endeavour to do the right thing. Yes, there are occasionally errors picked up through audits and that is why we have audits. I think that process is working, and government and the community can be assured that there is a process of checking. My view is that the vast majority of those discrepancies are administrative, but I do think we should be perhaps looking at Indigenous disengaged students et cetera as to whether there is a better way to measure the attendance of those students at schools.

CHAIR: What strategies have you put in place since that report has come out for those identified issues that you have addressed?

Mr Robertson: I think schools are looking for better guidance around some of the contentious areas of the census. For example, in the state census, students with ESL—English as a second language—are recorded. Ultimately, there is not a definition of that for them to work off, so it is a judgement by the school. Clearly, there will be some difference of opinions between auditors and schools as to which students are ESL students. Again, we will support schools in that. My understanding is the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board is looking at putting out some stronger guidelines. We will run some professional development for schools on that when they are available. Again, I would be very confident that schools are doing the right thing. Yes, there are some issues, but I think we can address those.

CHAIR: Given that there is only basically this week left in this term and then we have a range of time frames, depending on whether it is high school or primary schools and where those schools are located, for term 4, what specific strategies will you be putting in place, particularly for those identified schools that were seen as being in the high band—high as in there seems to be a pattern of overestimating their students? What specific skills or what specific strategies are you putting in place between now and that February census?

Mr Robertson: When we get the updated information from the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board with the better guidelines, we will run sessions for school registrars and other people who are responsible for filling out the census in terms of working through them and making sure people understand them. As we always do, come February next year, which is the next census, we will have staff available to provide telephone and face-to-face assistance for interpretation of guidelines, which is something that we always do. Again, we are happy to work with the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board around what might be schools that might be termed as high risk—and again the Audit Office identified some categories of schools where potentially there were high risks—and as an organisation we would certainly provide more support for those schools.

CHAIR: Would that be on a needs basis? In other words, you talked about a phone process of the school activating that. Can that be driven the other way as in those schools that are identified in that high-risk area might have some pre strategies put into place, so rather than being activated from the school it is activated from above?

Mr Robertson: We are happy to look at that, but ultimately we must remember that these are independent schools. We are not like the Catholic education office or the department. We do not have any jurisdiction over them. We cannot instruct them what to do. We support them. Generally, we have to wait for them to come to us. But given the circumstances—and I take on board your suggestions, which I think are good ones—we certainly will look at playing a more proactive role, particularly around those schools that have been identified that potentially might need assistance.

CHAIR: Is there a particular format or are there some particular processes that are clear right across the entire organisation around the processes and steps that schools need to take when identifying—you highlighted ESL students—some very clear definitive processes to ensure that they do not overcount? Are there processes in place? I know speaking from experience in North Queensland cyclones certainly do have a big impact as well as some issues with regard to families.

Mr Robertson: The Non-State Schools Accreditation Board, which runs the state census, is responsible for putting out the guidelines and the rules, which it does and which are available to every school. We clearly have an input into those through the accreditation board's consultation processes. They are basically the guidelines. If schools are having trouble interpreting the guidelines, yes, we are there to help, as is the accreditation board, I think.

CHAIR: Are there any penalties for that—penalties is probably not the correct word? If a school continues to show trends of overestimating their student population and you have put all of these strategies in place, is there a process for those principals who are ultimately the accountable officer in the school? Are there any actions taken upon that particular group?

Mr Robertson: I think the ultimate action is that the accreditation board has quite strong powers in terms of accreditation processes to deal with any schools that either deliberately or do not reform their ways which ultimately could result in closure of the school.

CHAIR: Our job is to make sure that all public moneys are accounted for. We saw from that report from the Auditor-General that there are discrepancies. We just want to make sure that there are processes in place for very clear transparency.

Mr Robertson: We would certainly accept that and accept that independent schools need to be accountable. We think they are. Yes, there are some issues but I think we can deal with them. It is very important that the government and the community have great confidence in the census process.

Dr McVEIGH: Could I follow up with a comment, I guess, more than a question, Mr Chair, in extending on some of the comments that you were making? It goes back to that corporate governance issue. Mr Chair, you have referred to the accountable officer typically being the principal. The board of a school also has responsibilities from a corporate governance perspective, I would imagine, as well.

Mr Robertson: Yes. As an example, I think it was probably a couple of years ago the accreditation board now needs the board to sign off that they have delegated specifically the responsibility for signing off the census to the principal. The days when boards would not even have known about these things are long gone. So I think there are strong protections in there.

Dr McVEIGH: Yes. I guess I simply reiterate our chair's words there; that this committee is very conscious of the appropriation of public funds.

Mr Robertson: One of the things that we have been working on for some time, particularly with Indigenous schools and special assistance schools—these are the schools where students will come and go et cetera—is as an alternative to fund those schools on places rather than the number of bodies on a seat on a day in the year. That is quite unfair sometimes, because if a student comes to one of those schools a week after census they do not receive any funding for that student for the whole year. That might involve nine months of education. Yes, they might also lose some students who were there on census day. The theory has always been in the past of swings and roundabouts, but I think we could look at funding those schools in terms of the number of places that are available on an average across a year for the particular cohorts of students they deal with. That would take a lot of pressure off schools holding on to students for census day and then moving them on. We hear stories about that, unfortunately. I would hate to think that the need for good accountability and proper accounting in a census is then a driver for other practices that are not in the best interests of students.

CHAIR: David, I am just going to go back a couple of steps. You talked about having processes in place. Is there independence in that process of support? Is it an external audit process that is conducted?

Mr Robertson: The Non-State Schools Accreditation Board audit is an external process. This year, as a number of schools contacted us, it is very rigorous. I think we can have great confidence in that audit. The Commonwealth department of education also has an audit process that is run independently around the August census.

Mr SAUNDERS: Does your organisation have any training set up for potential board members or board members of the schools?

Mr Robertson: Yes, we run tailored training for individual boards as well as scheduled sessions. Under our governance program we have a 15-module training program, which covers everything that any board member would need to know about running an independent school. Obviously, as organisations in the community, there are other training options. A lot of board members do courses with the Australian Institute of Company Directors, for example, but our governance training is tailored specifically to independent schools and their responsibilities.

I think, from memory again—I can check the figure—we would have put nearly 400 people through tailored independent schools governance training last year alone. What we find is that boards also want to do very tailored training to their needs. They might think they have a weakness in a certain area. So, yes, we certainly provide that training as well.

Mr SAUNDERS: Is that optional for schools or mandatory?

Mr Robertson: Yes, it is optional in terms of our training because, again, we are not a system; we are a membership based body and a support body. We cannot tell schools, 'You must do our training.' That is the nature of independent schools.

Mr SAUNDERS: I would prefer, as a member of this committee, for it to be mandatory, especially when we are talking about taxpayers' funds going into it. I would like to see it mandatory that all board members of independent schools have to go through a governance course.

Mr Robertson: That would be a matter for government, clearly. I am aware that in New South Wales recently they brought in mandatory requirements that board members must do X number of hours of PD a year from accredited providers. I am sure that is a matter that the government will have a look at.

Ms PEASE: You talk about becoming members. What is the fee that schools have to pay?

Mr Robertson: Schools pay us membership fees. It is \$18.60 per student per annum.

Ms PEASE: You talked about the five areas. Can you elaborate on the Our Schools—Our Future?

Mr Robertson: Sure. Our Schools—Our Future is a research public policy type of institute almost where we commission quite a lot of work around public policy and schooling. I have a very strong passion that there is a lack of public policy debate in a Queensland context in schooling. If you look at some of the other states and territories, particularly the ones to the south of us, there is a lot of people involved in policy debate, institutes, universities et cetera. I think we lack that in Queensland. So for the last four years we have invested in policy debate issues, commissioning work to be done.

As an example, we recently released a research report on the GST, which is a federal issue, obviously, but it has some state implications. As people would be aware, there is a debate on at the moment about tax reform and there are some organisations that are advocating that the GST should apply to school fees. So we have commissioned some research around that, which basically says that the government would be worse off in a net sense if it applied the GST to school fees. That is the kind of research and public policy debate that we have been trying to encourage.

Ms PEASE: In regard to the other services that you have talked about, is it a fee for service for the schools or once they have paid their \$18.60 per student all of your services are—

Mr Robertson: Our services are provided to members based on their membership fee, yes.

Ms PEASE: Thank you.

CHAIR: David, I am going to ask some more questions. We identified that the high-risk schools are schools with large Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student populations, which are the ones that have been identified in the report. I know that this is going to be generally speaking, but do schools have specific resources that they attribute to assist that transition between home and school to ensure that students are coming to school, particularly before census time?

Mr Robertson: Yes. Schools that are catering for those students at risk in that area, I know, put an enormous amount of energy and effort into looking after the student as a whole. As you would be aware, unless they attend school and unless they have decent meals and clothing and all the rest of it, they are not going to learn anything. I am aware that a number of our SAS schools, for example, run buses to pick up kids, as they do in the Indigenous areas et cetera.

I was at St Patrick's College in Townsville on Monday. As you would be aware, they have a high number of Indigenous students. I think those schools do a fantastic job but it is in really difficult circumstances, as people would appreciate. The other key Indigenous schools, for example, in North Queensland are Shalom and Djarragun. Their enrolments fluctuate. I think that would be very frustrating from a school point of view. They have put a lot of resources and energy into individual students, but something happens and they have left and do not return. It is very frustrating, I think, for schools.

I will mention also Girl Academy, which people may not be aware of. It is opening up next year on the old Wangetti site, north of Cairns, as part of the Cape York partnership. That is going to be a school specifically for Indigenous girls who have children. They are going to run a creche at the school

so that the students can bring their children to school. These are the sorts of things that are happening out in the field. As a sector, I know we are often accused of not doing the heavy lifting in these areas, but that is not what I see happening. I see fantastic things being done by independent schools—not just Indigenous schools but also mainstream schools that have high proportions of Indigenous students.

In the past, the state government has provided assistance with transition, particularly for boarding students. Another area of strong provision is our traditional boarding schools with scholarships for Indigenous students. Of course, taking a student from their local area to a boarding school in Brisbane, or wherever, has unique challenges in itself. I know the state government, through a transition program in the past, helped with people who were at airports to see kids get off planes and on to planes and all of those sorts of things. Again, I think there is a degree of collaboration across the sectors which indicates to me that all schools want to do the best things by these students in what are pretty challenging environments.

CHAIR: David, are you aware of any schools that have picked up the model used by Dr Chris Sarra? He was the principal of a great school where he empowered his community beyond just being a board members but actually coming into the classroom and getting some of the elders in the community to be part of that learning process alongside the teachers. Are there any schools that you are aware of that do that?

Mr Robertson: Yes. As a general comment, independent schools are very much about parental engagement. Their whole reason for being is meeting parent needs. If you do not as an independent school meet the needs of your parents in the community, you will not exist. Without specifically signalling out schools, because I think generally it happens across the sector, I will use the example of Hymba Yumba. Some people might be aware that that is an Indigenous school at Springfield. I was out there a few months ago and I think there were as many community members in the school as there were children on the day. There is really strong engagement in that sort of context.

Some of the challenges for Indigenous schools in North Queensland is that a lot of their Indigenous students are boarding so you do not have that same level of parental engagement. But, again, these schools are very much built and supported by communities. So I think there is that very strong community support.

CHAIR: David, thank you very much for coming in. I suppose what we were searching for this morning were processes that have been put in place since that report from the Auditor-General came out to ensure that the accuracy of that collection of student numbers is there. What you have told us today shows that you have some steps and processes in place. I am sure that we will be looking forward to further conversations with you. We thank you for your time this morning and for coming in.

Mr Robertson: Thank you.

Committee adjourned at 9.43 am