

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 28 April 2014

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Mr C. Thompson, director, priority projects branch,

Ms V. Hall, director, curriculum implementation and partnerships, and

Ms R. Roberts, manager, planning and assessment, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The CHAIR — Good afternoon to you all. Before our interaction starts I need to advise you of the formal processes that will be captured by Hansard staff today. Welcome to this hearing of the Education and Training Committee inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing, however, may not be afforded such privilege. Everything will be recorded today, and you will be given a proof transcript in about two weeks time to pick up typographical errors only, not contextual ones. We have some questions to put to you, but I am interested to know whether Ms Hall, Mr Thompson and Ms Roberts, in their respective capacities and areas of responsibility, have any opening remarks. If you have opening remarks on your individual areas of expertise, I invite you to address the committee on them. We do not want those opening remarks to be too lengthy. It is important in the short period time we have together that it is as interactive as possible and members of the committee can put questions to you.

Ms HALL — Excuse me, Jan, can I confirm that we have that speaking time. Is this the time for opening remarks and the speaking time is for questions? Is that the format for today?

The CHAIR — Yes, but I would like to see the opening remarks be as succinct as possible so that we can have interaction.

Mr THOMPSON — I think we will pass it over to Victoria Hall, who will be making those opening remarks. Rest assured we have limited it to around about 4 or 5 minutes.

Ms HALL — Is 4 minutes okay?

The CHAIR — Yes, that is fine. Thank you.

Ms HALL — With regard to the department of education in Victoria, we are guided by Towards Victoria as a Learning Community and New Directions for the teaching profession to provide direction in regard to the curriculum and the homework guidelines that are set in Victorian schools. The key parts of that are about flexibility, school autonomy, professional trust, accountability and choice. The department is committed to supporting schools by providing an evidence-based approach to improving student learning outcomes. Where that relates to homework, we have our guidelines and expectations as set out in our school policy and advisory guide. Whilst these are updated each year to reflect changes in priority areas, there has not been a formal review of the guidelines in the past seven years. This inquiry therefore provides a timely opportunity to gather input from schools and other stakeholders to review homework guidelines and expectations.

Our guidelines provide information about fostering good lifelong learning and study habits. They outline the underlying principles of homework, the importance of administering level appropriate homework to students and the different types of homework that could be undertaken in schools. These guidelines also provide some time guidelines that are quite flexible as well, as in suggested times for different stages of learning.

With regard to the research and evidence that the guidelines are based on, we have been doing some continuing work on checking the research and evidence base behind homework, and it has been a very topical issue within the community, within the media and internationally as well through social networking platforms for education. The evidence base regarding the benefits or otherwise of homework is not well developed at this point. Results to date lack coherence. They are complex and oftentimes conflicting in the views that we have received. Homework is said to contribute to improving retention and understanding of what is being taught, extending and integrating the knowledge and skills gained through classroom instruction, improving students' study skills and attitudes towards school and developing metacognitive skills, including a range of self-regulation skills, such as time management and responsibility for learning.

Research on the effectiveness of homework is inconclusive, and there is little evidence as to whether homework improves student attitudes to learning or achievement. The researchers do agree that there is no evidence that homework improves achievement in primary years of schooling. I have some other research to talk about later on if needed.

The current position is that we have our guidelines and our expectations, and they are available on our website and also in our school policy and advisory guide for schools, which is also available to the public. The guidelines were developed by the department with the assistance of parents, teachers and students in Victorian primary and secondary schools. The guidelines provide a framework to help schools engage with their communities when developing or reviewing their existing homework policies.

The expectations provide advice and examples which describe homework tasks that are age or development appropriate and advice for teachers, parents and carers in supporting students with their homework requirements. An email link is also provided so that any questions can be answered by the appropriate person within the department. There are different expectations linked to stages of learning and stages of schooling. They are all recommendations only, with a gradual increase towards more formal homework requirements as students reach the senior years of secondary schooling.

Schools and school councils develop their own policy to meet the needs and expectations of their school community and in consultation with their school community. School councils are responsible for developing and publishing a homework policy in partnership with the principal and teachers and after consultation with parents and students. The school level homework policy should be consistent with the guidelines as published on the website.

In conclusion, quality homework is defined on our website. It should be appropriate to the student's skill level and age; purposeful, meaningful and relevant to the curriculum; interesting, challenging and, when appropriate, open ended; assessed by teachers with feedback and support provided for the student if necessary; and balanced with a range of recreational, family and cultural activities. Consideration of those points will assist schools with ways of developing common understandings of the role, value and purpose of homework among teachers, parents, students and the community, including further discussion with pre-service teachers and in university courses.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. We might move to some questions from the committee. We have had the opportunity to have some fairly intensive discourse this morning. Some of our more formal approaches might be coloured by some of the input we have received this morning. I heard in Ms Victoria Hall's contribution talk about the nature of the research that is out there. Has the department sought to institute any research on this subject? Many points regarding homework, I think we would agree, are contentious.

Ms HALL — At the moment we have been looking at more of a desktop research study, and there was an extensive literature scan done in New South Wales in 2012, which had quite current understandings, and a literature review across the United States, Canada and the UK. It looked at the research and evidence bases in those countries. We also work with John Hattie here, and he has looked at some effect sizes of homework. Our role in the department is actually to provide avenues for advice to schools rather than saying, 'This is the way you should do things'. What we are trying to do is gather evidence that we can alert schools about when they have their discussions and when they are reviewing their policies as part of their ongoing review of all policies within their schools.

The CHAIR — In terms of what is coming to you through the inquiry from schools and your understanding of what policies schools might be adopting, are there any trends that you would like to comment on from the department's point of view where you see issues arising — problems in terms of a crowded curriculum, for instance, that teachers are not able to provide assessment of set homework or feedback and the sorts of things that we see would be ideal but on the ground and in reality are not happening?

Ms HALL — I believe the guidelines provide flexibility to schools to be able to work with their school communities, so if it is not working or if it is too crowded then they would be having discussions about that at the school level. What we have observed with the feedback we have received from schools is that there is a difference; there is a homework policy, which reflects the guidelines that is actually quite personalised for each learning context. Schools have that flexibility, and that discussion is something that is quite common within school councils as an ongoing issue particularly if they have long day care

arrangements after school and taking into account the needs of their specific communities. Chris, do you have anything to say about the — —

Mr THOMPSON — I think what Victoria says is correct in that we know that all of our schools meet the needs of very diverse communities and our approach is to trust our schools, teachers and principals and their experiences to tailor their learning programs and, more particularly, homework activities to the needs of those families, students and their broader communities. We are seeing a diverse range of approaches across schools.

The CHAIR — What sorts of resources or approaches would you see would bring about the tailoring to the needs of communities? How would you see things as being tailored? What would they draw upon?

Mr THOMPSON — We often see — and perhaps if I just talk about communities that have a high proportion of non-English-speaking families and communities — that those schools will work closely with community organisations to support the learning of their students. One of the initiatives that the department has been supporting since 2008 is a partnership with the Centre for Multicultural Youth. The department provides funding on an annual basis to the Centre for Multicultural Youth — and I might use the acronym CMY — and the CMY runs a program called Learning Beyond the Bell. Learning Beyond the Bell supports homework clubs right across the state; there are around 300 across the state. We see those homework clubs often working very intensively in areas where there are high numbers of non-English-speaking families and new arrivals.

Those homework clubs take a whole range of different approaches. Some of them work on quite structured homework that might have been set in the school; others focus more broadly on learning activities; others have a balance between learning activities and also recreational and social activities. I think it is fair to say that their focus is on building the confidence of students in tackling school and homework, but particularly school, and also building the confidence of students, particularly those who are new arrivals, in integrating within Australian society.

The CHAIR — I know our deputy chair, Mr Brooks, wants to put a question to you about homework clubs.

Mr BROOKS — Thanks, Jan. We had a full discussion this morning about homework study centres. The other key issue we discussed this morning was the quality of homework. What I want to ask about is how many schools in the state have a homework policy under your guidelines and how you measure the quality of the homework policies. Do you have the principle of ticking a box saying, ‘We have a homework policy’ and that is the end of it, or is there an assessment of each of those policies?

Ms HALL — Within the school review process all policies and curriculum documentation are brought to the table, so there is a way of building in reviewing on a four-yearly, three-yearly or annual basis, depending on the needs of the community. Whilst we do not have that oversight of which school has which homework, they are also encouraged to publish those on their website. A quick scan of school websites, which we do for lots of different reasons and obviously on a random basis, has shown that most of them do have that. It is part of an expectation of a communication between parents when they join the school so that expectations are clear and negotiated from that point.

Mr BROOKS — To flip that around the other way, upside down if you like, with schools that do not have a homework policy, does the department have a role in providing some scaffolding — to use a term that was used this morning?

Ms HALL — There are examples of homework policies published on our website, which would support schools that are having difficulty or are starting that conversation. As I said, it is timely to work out ways to provide further support; as I said, the department’s role is to support and provide advice rather than be the regulator of homework policy, because we do have professional trust and school autonomy. There is a trust that it will meet the needs of the students, but it is very transparent because the policies are usually on their website within their whole school curriculum documentation.

The CHAIR — Do schools on such a basis work in a regional or collaborative neighbourhood sense on such a topic, particularly when we are looking at homework centres?

Mr THOMPSON — Once again it comes down to individual school choice, but we do find that schools collaborate, particularly when schools have cohorts of students who have similarities. In geographic areas there might be children who come from particular cultural backgrounds, so they may collaborate and work together with different community organisations in providing support to students and families. That support is not necessarily solely about homework. It can be other types of welfare support, activity supports, or supporting and encouraging students to engage in sporting or cultural activities, but we find that schools are very effective at developing their own networks and sharing their insights into best practice.

Mr ELASMAR — Is the same homework policy provided to primary and secondary schools, or is it different?

Ms HALL — The guidelines set out stages of learning. The expectation is that, when working towards the higher academic demands in senior secondary schooling, there would be some leading up so it is not actually a surprise when you get to year 10. Rosemary might want to talk about the guidelines we provide on our website for students going into year 7, and for parents, to try and talk about that transition point in regard to expectations of homework and independent work. It is not independent work outside of the classroom, but again we are trying to work towards fostering lifelong learning, so it is along a continuum. There are specific points where advice is provided that is age and development appropriate.

The CHAIR — With the provision of that information, is that going to be accessed by a variety of language groups? How is that message conveyed of that very important transition between primary and secondary school?

Mr THOMPSON — I can answer that. The department provides a range of interpreting and translation services to our schools. Schools are able to access those. To go back a step, if a school develops a homework policy in consultation with its school community, it then obviously wants to communicate that to its parents. If parents and families come from a range of language backgrounds, those policies are able to be translated in written format, and the department has a funding source to support schools in doing that. Then they are distributed in that way. Similarly, interpreting services are available to schools, so interpreters can attend parent-teacher interviews and parent information nights so that information can be explained effectively to parents who might come from a non-English-speaking background.

The CHAIR — So it is not a financial impost on the school to provide those translator services or interpreter services or the translation of any written material.

Mr THOMPSON — Yes, that is correct. All the costs associated with that are borne by the department at a central level, and the schools are not required to pay anything to access those services.

The CHAIR — Did you have any follow-up comments?

Ms ROBERTS — I was going to talk about the document that Victoria alluded to. We do have a document, apart from our homework guidelines and homework expectations. It is *Welcome to Secondary School 2012 — A Parent's Guide to Victorian Government Secondary Schools*. Among other things, it is all about transition and what to expect in a secondary school. There is a section on homework and it is only two pages but basically it says:

At secondary school your child will generally have homework each day. The number of hours per day will increase as they move into senior years.

It also goes on:

Even if you can't remember some of the things you learned at school, you can help your child by asking questions, helping them focus and encouraging them to persist with difficult material.

It goes on to say not to do the homework for the students. It is not about getting better marks but about cultivating self-discipline and learning how to be an independent learner. It also reiterates the importance of maintaining that balance between study and recreational activities to avoid placing too much pressure on the child. That is from that document.

The CHAIR — Is anything said, suggested or alluded to in terms of the nature of the environment — it might be a little quiet corner in the house, lighting, ventilation and all those sorts of things, because we think of people coming from very different cultural backgrounds — as to what would be an ideal environment for the completion of tasks like that?

Ms ROBERTS — They go into time management tips and they talk about encouraging your child, for example, to use a school diary, to create a to-do list and to draw up a simple home timetable using a calendar to plan activities, list exam dates and other commitments, list due dates for essays, establish the context or the notion of working backwards — ‘This is the date that I have an assignment due, and this is what I need to do to get that in on time’ — and set an order or priority against each task to help achieve goals, to avoid being overwhelmed by what has to be done and then rushing. The document goes through the home environment and, as you said, talks about lighting and making sure that there is a place for students to sit and do their homework.

Ms HALL — Many teachers actually reiterate that at the beginning of the school year, in primary schools in particular, when they have their meeting with their class setting up the expectations for the whole classroom and talking about what supports your child to be learning outside the classroom.

Mr ELASMAR — Chris, you spoke about homework clubs; about 300 I think you said there are. What does the department provide? Are there any funding arrangements?

Mr THOMPSON — Yes, the department provides \$1 million per annum to the Centre for Multicultural Youth, and that funding is to support the Centre for Multicultural Youth in its work with those homework clubs. That work takes a whole range of different aspects, but a lot of that is building the capacity of those clubs. Some of those clubs are born out of local libraries, others out of social welfare organisations and others are voluntary organisations. The Centre for Multicultural Youth provides training to volunteers and homework club workers in working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. That is the funding that the department provides to support those clubs.

In addition, I should also talk about another initiative the department supports, which is the Refugee Education Support Project. This is a program where the department has entered into a partnership with the Centre for Multicultural Youth and also Foundation House. That program involves working with 80 schools in clusters across Melbourne and regional Victoria. It is a three-year program. So CMY and Foundation House work with a cluster of schools for a period of time, generally 18 months. That is about building teachers’ capacity in working really effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

In addition, our schools that have a high proportion of students from English-as-an-additional-language backgrounds are also provided with access to multicultural education aids. Their staff are located within schools, and once again they work closely with teachers, students and families to help those new arrivals build their English skills and build their understanding of how the Victorian school system works. Ultimately that leads to better student outcomes.

The CHAIR — In terms of the make-up of the volunteers who would be working in these homework clubs, would they be people who are studying to be teachers themselves, perhaps? Would they be retired teaching professionals? What are we looking at in terms of the quality and make-up?

Mr THOMPSON — They come from all walks of life and all stages of life. There are many retirees — often recently retired teachers who are still keen to make a contribution are involved in those homework clubs. There are many students who are undergoing teacher training who see it as an opportunity to get a taste of what it is like to work with students before they enter the real school system. There are also other people who do this in addition to their normal day-to-day lives, whether they are students or workers who

just want to make a contribution and help those in the broader community. In short, those people come from all walks of life and bring a whole range of different skills and experiences.

Mr CRISP — Victoria, perhaps to clarify some of your opening remarks around homework, has the department undertaken any research into homework? I know you have said that information was sketchy in terms of its benefits, but has the department actually undertaken any research?

Ms HALL — Not a formal review or research. We have only done desktop research, and that has just been looking at what has been gathered across the country. Because of the Australian curriculum, we are always scanning other states and looking around so that we are not doubling up on work. We have been looking particularly at the other states but also New Zealand, which has also done some recent work on homework. In Canada there are certain areas that we look at educationally, and we look at educational outcomes. We have also looked at the effect of homework as noted in the PISA results and countries that have recorded students spending different time rates on homework, and we have looked at whether that has an effect on outcomes or achievements in any of those PISA results. At the moment we are at the gathering evidence stage, I suppose, rather than publishing.

Mr CRISP — In parallel to that, are you also actively monitoring the various policies? Schools have a fair bit of latitude on homework policies. Do you monitor, collate or do any work in relation to reviewing those policies?

Ms HALL — That is not really our role. As I said, schools are quite autonomous, and they report to their school councils. Through their annual implementation plan they would be reporting on the policies within their schools and the effectiveness of those and adjusting them to meet the needs and expectations of their local communities.

Mr BROOKS — In school homework policies there are varying degrees. We have heard this morning that excessive homework loads can lead to issues like burnout and family conflict. On the converse there could be very poor homework guidelines or no homework guidelines at all for a school. In the autonomous era, are you saying there is no role for the department other than sending out guidelines and providing an online website?

Ms HALL — And providing examples of what that could look like. Providing the research and evidence base or at least pointing people towards the research and evidence base in order to make informed decisions about their own homework policy and the implementation of their homework policy.

The CHAIR — Are you aware of a variation in thinking where, say, school principals might have opinions across the spectrum and you could have extremes at either end of that spectrum? Then that principal can move on, so you have a dynamism and not necessarily a consistency. I understand the role that school councils play in this and the professional cohort, but sometimes people play quite an influential role in school leadership. Are we seeing extremes in those sorts of philosophical attitudes manifest themselves out there?

Mr THOMPSON — I think we see differences in approaches, but when we talk about the role of school councils, school councils and the parent body are very good at moderating those extremes. I think we cannot underestimate the effect that school councils and parents more generally have in impacting on the way in which homework is delivered and structured through our schools.

Mr CRISP — Can I follow through on that? I think we are now getting into the area of how teachers tailor homework and also volume versus quality. Are you saying that school councils are responsible for all of that?

Ms HALL — We are responsible for developing the policy. The principal has a key role in implementation and leadership within the school of that policy and also listening to the parent voice and the student voice in decisions that are made around implementation — and also the professionalism of the teachers. I think one of the things that is mentioned in the secondary schooling particularly is having a very coordinated approach so that it is regularly reviewed and monitored for issues of balance and homework

load across different subjects. Some subjects would have more demand on homework time, and it is about balancing that out for the student.

Ms ROBERTS — That is actually in one of the expectations on our homework expectations page. Teachers can help students with their homework by coordinating the allocation of homework by different teachers in secondary schools.

Mr CRISP — That is a volume management issue. The quality management issue is one that I would like to explore some more. Again, is it up to school councils to have that quality discussion as well? Does the department provide any guidelines around the quality of homework issues?

Mr THOMPSON — Perhaps if we take a step back and look at the broader context of school performance, the department has a school performance framework which requires schools to evaluate their performance against a range of outcomes, whether they be academic or wellbeing outcomes. During that process, schools conduct a self-evaluation report where they look at how they are performing and then they look at the various impacts on that performance. Obviously there are a range of factors that impact on their performance, and homework is one of them. The periodic review process is an opportunity for the school — through its principal, its leadership team, its teachers and the school council — to reflect on the various policies they have in place, whether they are having the desired impact and whether they should be reviewed, with a different approach going forward.

Mr CRISP — Do you see much evidence of schools actively doing that?

Mr THOMPSON — Actively reviewing their performance and changing the way in which they operate?

Mr CRISP — More actively looking at that quality-of-homework issue versus quantity.

Ms HALL — I think we would be expecting to see that in the context of curriculum, and obviously it is about student outcomes and student learning outcomes. That is where it would be seen as part of the bigger picture about learning more generally — homework learning compared to in-school learning, in-class learning. With the way schools are operating, I suppose the boundaries are getting a bit blurrier on what is learning inside and outside school. We would be expecting to see that in regards to learning outcomes more generally, so it would not be seen as something separate.

Mr CRISP — Thank you.

The CHAIR — Within the area and the momentum towards self-directed learning, you spoke about the blurring and where the self-directed learning is conducted, and we see examples where there are equity issues, issues of access and other social pressures, including in CALD communities. In relation to the whole blurring of where the learning should occur and how you actually keep track of that, my concern is that a lot is said about the setting of homework, but not so much is being said or reported on — I am not even sure whether there is an evaluation mindset that applies — the input from the teacher on what is actually set. Quite a lot of self-directed stuff is quite nebulous, and there is no real monitoring or feedback coming back students, so it is a bit like pinning jelly to the wall in some instances.

Ms HALL — Oftentimes homework may be set as talking about learning experiences because it is not actually under instruction, so there is no way of monitoring. With the teacher not there, it is not actually recommended to be students self-teaching; however, a student's learning may be in a project-based learning process. The homework could be open-ended, and there would be a clear intention from the teacher in setting the homework.

Our guidelines talk about being really clear about what the purpose of the learning task is or what the learning that is happening is and how to tie that in. A lot of that is brought back into the classroom to support teaching across the subject, and students are encouraged to follow their interests outside school, if that is where their interest is. Even though it is student-directed, I think by modelling the learning intentions in the actual teaching and learning in the classroom, it is easily brought to be most effective in

the classroom. Again it is encouraging those lifelong learning skills of the student to actually look and think, ‘What am I learning here?’ and ‘Where would this information be best placed as well?’.

The CHAIR — Does the department have a view on the notion of an assessment grid, whereby other forms of learning outside of the structured elements — homework for mathematics or science in particular — can be drawn upon and that can actually be formalised and seen to be structured?

Ms HALL — I think in the classroom there are often rubrics developed — an assessment rubric for, say, something that would be taking place in the classroom. It may be something in science that may have quite broad outcomes and aims that are actually developed within the rubric. It is recommended that most rubrics be developed in collaboration with the students so that it is very clear what we are trying to achieve and students can actually work their way along. This is often set up as a capability matrix of how independently they can do certain aspects or where they have demonstrated their learning in different ways. It may not be at school; it might be in social action that is outside the school — volunteering et cetera — depending on what the rubric is actually assessing. I think that is where that does actually carry across into different places. Many projects that are in school that sometimes students would work on outside of school would be still using the same rubrics. That is probably the scaffold that goes across out-of-school and in-school learning.

Mr BROOKS — I was just thinking through some of the answers that have been given before. I think you said before that there had not really been any research into homework done by the department. I am wondering what these guidelines that are issued to schools would be based on. Are they up for review, and what will you be doing to review them?

Ms HALL — Yes. The inquiry is actually quite timely for us to be able to have a look at those guidelines. As I said, they have not been reviewed for at least the last five years, although they are checked every year. What I have noticed in the updates is that things like community expectations have been added along the way, so it is timely that we review them. We will take the information that is gathered from this inquiry. That will actually support us to work on our actions going forward in the homework space.

Mr BROOKS — When do you think? Is there a timeline around that in terms of when it might be completed?

Mr THOMPSON — I think it would be wise for the inquiry to be finalised. I believe the report is due to be finalised in November.

Mr BROOKS — This year.

The CHAIR — Certainly this year.

Mr THOMPSON — So I think we would await the finalisation of that.

Ms HALL — But contextually we would be placing homework within the curriculum and curriculum planning and assessment in that broader context already, so we will be gathering information. This is a great opportunity to hear from schools about what they want and what they need to support them to have more effective homework policies.

Mr BROOKS — If I can say so, Chair, the gap for us will be that we do not know, because we do not know how many schools have a homework policy and whether it is a quality homework policy and one that academics are telling us is worthwhile or not.

Ms ROBERTS — We have measurement metrics in regard to a school census that is conducted in August. It may be something that we can address this year and ask whether schools have a formal homework policy. As for the quality, that is probably not able to be gathered. Maybe it is also the fact that we do not get many letters from parents requesting information on homework. We would normally hear the extreme of ‘not enough homework’ or ‘too much homework’, but we actually do not get very many of those at all.

Mr THOMPSON — And I guess it is really important to put on record that homework is just one part of the teaching and learning program. Schools' performance in terms of their academic outcomes is reviewed on an ongoing basis, and teachers, principals and leaders are closely involved in reviewing that performance and making changes to their whole teaching and learning program, of which homework is one important component.

The CHAIR — I have a broad question for any or all of you. It is about teaching practice in terms of the application of and access to technologies, which might be portable devices that the families own and the children are encouraged to bring to school or buy in lieu of books or any of the other sorts of means of accessing technology and the information from it. Is teaching practice getting a little bit ahead of itself in the use of technology? This is an equity issue in terms of who can access that technology, should that need to be applied in a homework or out-of-school setting. Quite often people are not going to be forthcoming that the family is not in a position to buy not only the original but the upgrade path of the technology, which is an ongoing expense, or subscriptions and so on and so forth. Where is the thinking in terms of people just getting transported by technology and forgetting some of the on-the-ground realities?

Mr THOMPSON — As you indicated, technology plays a really important role in education, within the school context and outside the school. Schools are only too aware of the opportunities that their families and communities have and also those families and students who may have less access to technology. Schools make decisions about the use of technology outside of school with full knowledge of that broader context.

In terms of what the department provides, the department provides all schools with access to two things. One is called the eduSTAR suite of tools and programs. These are a range of learning programs that all teachers and students can access. It also provides access to FUSE, which once again has a range of tools and activities that students can access free of charge. In terms of schools making decisions about the use of technology, they always make those decisions with a firm understanding of the technology access that their students and their families have at home.

The CHAIR — That is comforting. Is that reviewed? Is that something that is annually reviewed?

Mr THOMPSON — That is reviewed through the school performance framework, and if any issues arise about access to technology, parents are encouraged to raise that with the school in the first instance. If they are dissatisfied with the outcome of that advice from or the discussion with their school, they are then encouraged to work with regional offices and the department so that that can be resolved.

Mr BROOKS — On a point of clarification — I might have missed it in the discussion before around the homework clubs — I think you mentioned a program running either as part of that or separately with the Centre for Multicultural Youth. I just want to know where the funding came from for those particular programs and how much it was.

Mr THOMPSON — In terms of the funding to support the Learning Beyond the Bell program, \$1 million is provided per annum, and that comes from the department's funds. In terms of the funding provided through the Refugee Education Support Program, I do not have the quantum available with me right now, but I can provide that — but once again that is funded from the department.

Mr BROOKS — Directly?

Mr THOMPSON — Directly from the department.

Mr CRISP — Just very quickly to wrap up, are you familiar with the term 'flipped learning'?

Ms HALL — Yes, I am familiar with the term. Again I think there is great opportunity there. Already we have schools that provide access to online versions of classroom teaching. Teachers use flipped learning in different ways in their classrooms. It is something that is being used across the system in lots of different ways, and we also have examples of that in some of our virtual learning networks as well. We

have online courses so that students in rural areas can access teachers and use flipped learning to support their learning both in senior secondary as well as throughout the primary years.

I think different schools do it differently, and it is a great opportunity for schools. What I have seen in scanning across a lot of the schools is the many different ways that schools are doing that right now and providing access. Also through our strategic partners — we work with organisations — there are some of those educational experiences available online that can be used at any time for reinforcement or for interest and exploration.

The CHAIR — Just finally in terms of the homework clubs that are driven by CMY, you talked about those being conducted in libraries. Could they be conducted within the school and on the school campus itself? Is it a continuation of the school day or do people go about their business — go to sports training — and come back? Tell me a little bit about how they operate.

Mr THOMPSON — They operate in a diverse range of ways. Often they do happen in the school space, and often they happen directly after school. That can work really effectively at the primary school level, but it is actually more challenging at the secondary school level when secondary students often have other commitments, whether they be sporting, the arts or the like. They often happen in libraries, as I mentioned before. They can happen in neighbourhood houses and in schools. They happen in a whole range of different settings. I think it is fair to say that the homework clubs have to meet the needs of the students.

Often they will start delivering directly after school, but they might find that students see other activities as more attractive things to do at that point of time. The numbers might be quite low, so then homework clubs often decide they might start at 5 o'clock, once students have had a chance to catch up with their friends, do their sporting activities and then reconvene later. They operate in a myriad of ways, and once again it depends on the local community and the different commitments that students have.

The CHAIR — With the 300 that you have talked about, did they all come on together? Did some start up and others close? Is there a waxing and waning? Could you talk a bit about the life cycle of the clubs?

Mr THOMPSON — Yes, there is a waxing and waning. Some are very longstanding, and some have come on later. Once again, they wax and wane because they have to meet the needs of the students. If the student population changes, homework clubs may close down. One really valuable initiative that the Centre for Multicultural Youth delivers through the funding the department provides is a yearly conference for these homework clubs. At that conference, there are a number of presentations about best practice, whether it be retaining volunteers or working with students who come from diverse backgrounds. The feedback we get from the Centre for Multicultural Youth, our schools and homework clubs is that that is a really valuable resource in trying to share the best practice on what works well with students.

The CHAIR — Very good. Thank you very much. I think we might draw our time together to a close now. Ms Roberts, Mr Thompson and Ms Hall, thank you very much for your contributions today. We really value that.

Mr THOMPSON — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.