C O R R E C T E D V E R S I O N

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 30 April 2014

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Witnesses

Dr K. Landvogt, social policy and research unit manager, and

Ms S. Maury, social policy researcher, Good Shepherd.

The CHAIR — We welcome you to the public hearings for the Education and Training Committee inquiry into approaches to homework in Victorian schools. It is important for you to appreciate that all the evidence that is captured here is subject to parliamentary privilege but that parliamentary privilege would not be extended to you outside of this immediate environment. You can see that the evidence you give will be captured by Hansard, and a transcript will be available to you in two weeks time. You can make some changes to typographical errors.

Thank you very much for your submissions. Dr Kathy Landvogt, social policy and research unit manager of Good Shepherd, and Ms Susan Maury, a social policy researcher, welcome to both of you. Do you have opening remarks, in terms of scene setting? We thank you for your submission and some of your other outreach. I had an interface with the media a few weeks ago, and I have to commend you for being on the front foot in this exercise. I am looking forward to our dialogue.

Dr LANDVOGT — Thank you. Good Shepherd is very appreciative of the opportunity to address the committee, and we also commend you on this somewhat unlikely topic for an inquiry. I say that because a number of people have said, 'Well, that's a strange thing to be inquiring about'. In fact, as I hope is clear, we do not think so. We think homework is a taken-for-granted and under-the-radar area of critical importance to students, families and schools, but not in ways that are generally unpacked and understood. The thrust of our response is for a systemic look that joins homework to other aspects of education at the government level, the department level and the school level, and of course through to the family level. We are looking at the whole package through the lens of the families and students — the young people we work with — who are vulnerable and come from disadvantaged communities, and through the lens of our research as well. Good Shepherd is lucky enough to have a research and policy unit that we are part of as well as providing practical services. We bring those together.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Dr LANDVOGT — You have read the submission, so I will not go over it, and I will welcome questions later. What I want to do is mention two things that have happened since we put it in. The first is that we have become aware that the Victorian Auditor-General's Office is looking at education costs, and we have had the opportunity to speak to them. We believe a lot of our submission around access and IT and technology speaks directly into that as well. We look forward to them taking an integrated look and picking up homework costs as well as the general costs because they connect. The thrust of what we are saying is that in terms of technology access to the school curriculum program, it is the same at school as at home. That is the way the laptops and the internet access are working, effectively, for students and schools. If you need a laptop at school, you need the same laptop at home. If you need internet at school, you need internet at home. That is the thrust of it. So a lot of our comments about access and cost relate not just to homework-required technology but to school-required technology.

The second thing I just want to mention in my 5 minutes — and then Susan will have a quick word — is that we specifically went to Bendigo and spoke with five care leavers from the St Luke's youth movement initiative about the barriers to homework. We were privileged to consult them and they provided some very illustrative material, which I hope to get the chance to speak to. They are among the most vulnerable students in our system.

The CHAIR — Are those care leavers still within the system?

Dr LANDVOGT — They are still with St Luke's. All of them are about 19. They were engaged in a project that is philanthropically funded, which is looking at education access and ongoing education for kids who have been in foster care and residential care. They formed a consultancy group — that is, the project — you can engage them and consult them. For example, their comment about homework, apart from the IT access issues, which were significant and I will not go into, is that it is asking too much. These are some direct comments: 'It is a flawed concept'; 'It is designed to meet curriculum, not engagement'; 'It needs an overhaul'; and 'It adds stress to the families, the carers and the students'. That was very interesting to hear directly from them.

The CHAIR — There is a requirement within the curriculum for elements of the curriculum to be supported and enacted by a technological platform?

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes.

The CHAIR — So they are challenging that notion?

Dr LANDVOGT — Their challenge to homework was broader than that. It was saying, 'After being in school all day, and we are already stressed and we are going home to carers who cannot support us to do the homework, who do not have internet, and we haven't got a laptop because DHS is taking six months to get it to us and the school says it is our problem, how are we supposed to do the homework and keep up?'. That is what they are saying. They are saying there are a whole lot of issues that are affecting them, on top of the fact that they have changed carers six or seven times, and they have changed schools that many times. It is an uphill battle, and they cannot get a laptop for six months in VCE. In the end — —

Ms MAURY — I was just going to say, these are high-performing young people. They were all voracious readers and as engaged in school as you could expect children and young people in this situation to be. It was not that they were not capable of doing the homework; they were quite bright.

The CHAIR — The fact that they have come together, this coalescence of a consultancy group, in itself displays quite a lot of initiative, does it not?

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes, and we would recommend if there is any capacity to pick up further consultations that you could consult them because that is their role, and a direct voice is always better than us conveying it second-hand.

The CHAIR — Can you give us the details of how to contact them? Could you let our executive officer know that?

Dr LANDVOGT — I will, yes. Did you want to say, briefly, in our intro anything else?

Ms MAURY — Yes. I just wanted to summarise a few of the points that I have pulled together from my section of our submission, which was around parental engagement. We have two major pieces of research which I have pulled on for this. One was talking to children from vulnerable families about their departure from school, most of them early, and the challenges that they had faced. It is a piece of research called *I Just Want to Go to School*, which they did. The other piece is something which I am just wrapping up now and will publish soon, which relates to talking to mothers of children who are at risk of disengaging about what they want for their children. Just to summarise what I put in there, we work closely with families on the margins and children and young people who are at risk of educational disengagement. That is why we have come to you today to talk about that.

Our view of homework is that it is a wonderful bridging opportunity between the learning taking place at school and the more holistic learning and development that children and young people experience outside of school, primarily guided by the parent or the carers. Therefore homework should contribute to a child's overall development, while strengthening the parent-child bond through open discussion, questioning and exploration, and it should not require parents to have content knowledge. This is something that the research also backs up. The homework interactions are more effective and enjoyable if parents are briefed about their role and if it is an exploratory kind of interaction between the parent and the child.

Finally, the most vulnerable and critical group of children to consider are those who have little or no parent or guardian support to complete their homework. These children's needs should sit at the centre of the school's practice. Right now I think quite often they are considered an outlier, a bit of a problem, and ad hoc solutions are cobbled together at times and other times not. But to know that these kids want to learn and to be supportive of their interest in learning will help to fill the gap between the poor parent support and help these children secure a better educational outcome.

The CHAIR — In relation to children who are at risk or not in a family setting — recipients of care — when you talk about the notion of them being at the centre of the school's practice, can you expand on what you mean by that in a practical sense in terms of how the school would address that? Can you give us detail on that?

Ms MAURY — Yes, I will start and Kathy might like to expand on anything else. We talk a lot about inclusion in educational systems and this is an area where we find that young people and children are quite often excluded unintentionally. It is not planned but it does happen. The school tends to cater to middle and upper-class families, rather than children who do not have a strong family support. Ways that that can be done is to assume that there are children who are in that situation to start with and to be able to proactively identify them and talk to them, and their carers and parents if possible, about what their specific needs are, and to fill that gap from the very beginning when they are quite young. If they need a quiet place to do homework, if they need tutoring, if they need help with English as a second language, if they need a study group, those kinds of things can be organised either by the school or perhaps in partnership with a social services agency.

The CHAIR — I was quite moved by your opening remarks when you talked about homework being a bridge between the school and the family. Can I ask you to repeat that again, because I want to make a special emphasis. I was really struck by that.

Ms MAURY — I said that our view of homework is that it is a wonderful bridging opportunity between the learning taking place at school and the more holistic learning and development that children and young people experience outside of school.

The CHAIR — I think that is a really profound statement. I congratulate you on it.

Ms MAURY — Thank you.

The CHAIR — It says so much and it actually distils the essence of what we have found through our endeavours in this inquiry thus far. Did you want to say something else?

Dr LANDVOGT — I had a couple of other systemic suggestions in response to your question. The first is about how schools can put those students at the centre, and of course why they would is that if you are looking after the most vulnerable, then you have a very good system. If you are addressing the needs of the hardest to engage, then you can be very sure that the rest are well engaged as well.

The CHAIR — And if some of the ones that you do not expect would have problems, you are well equipped to just include them?

Dr LANDVOGT — To include them. An example of that is the idea of managed individual pathways — MIPs — in schools, which I think has been introduced, but I do not believe it has been as comprehensively taken up as it could be. If we had that for every student, embedded; at the moment I think it picks up career advice a bit later in school. I may be wrong about that; it is a little while since I have had direct experience in the school system. That means that every child has an individualised plan. There are two benefits to every student having that. One is that you do not let some slip through the net; the other is that it is normalised. Therefore it is not only the kids with the MIPs who get targeted. They are very peer sensitive and it is too easy for them to become a labelled group. So one system which we would really like to be revisited and looked at in the department is the managed individual pathway system.

The other is that 10 years ago now Good Shepherd was involved in developing a low-income awareness checklist for schools. That was taken up in something called the Standpoint project. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development funded a further research project with Victoria University and Good Shepherd about that. It has not been published yet; it is still in the department, where we are looking forward to it being progressed. I think it is being trialled in Aboriginal schools. What it is is a lens through which schools look at their policy, procedural and pedagogic responses to low-income families.

The CHAIR — The title of this research — —

Dr LANDVOGT — The Standpoint project. We have an earlier version, which we are happy to share with you, called the low-income awareness checklist. That is on our website, but I can make that available — —

The CHAIR — Yes, we will make a note that we would like to acquire that.

Dr LANDVOGT — Okay. The other thing I was going to say was just backing up what Susan has mentioned, which is the opportunity to partner with community service organisations like ours in addressing some of these deeper needs. The issue there is I do not believe a comprehensive approach.

I may be wrong. I know there is work being done by the department in looking at key partnerships in disadvantaged areas. I think there needs to be a broader policy approach — a framework — that includes community service organisations as partners. We recognise that the education sector is huge. It has much bigger players than us. At the same time we in the community service sector, while we sit on the edge of that education system, work with those students who are the most difficult for that system. Our capacity to address the problems that the education system has in the tail, the long tail of disengagement and dropout, is major. There is not at the moment a system-wide way for us to engage, nor is there system-wide data collection about the different ways in which the community sector is currently engaging. That would be my add-on to your point about that.

The CHAIR — They are very strong points, thank you very much.

Mr BROOKS — A significant part of your submission relates to the cost of people being able to complete their homework and participate in education. On page 14 you talk about the education maintenance allowance, and the reason given for the education maintenance allowance going at the end of this year was that Gonski money was to pick up some of the need. Now that the large portion of Gonski money has not come in, I suppose I am wondering if you can talk a bit more about the participation package that you have highlighted, what that might look like and the importance of that, in the absence of the EMA and Gonski money, for the communities that you are talking about.

Dr LANDVOGT — The loss of the EMA is something that is of deep concern to many, many families. Many of them do not realise it is going to be lost, particularly the people we work with, but we know how much they depend on that to fund the school fees and the general costs. So there is a lot of concern within the community service sector about that impending loss. We just do not believe it is sustainable.

We know that the government also is concerned, and we are very hopeful that there will be a replacement which is better; even bigger and better would be our ideal. I speak as a member of the Equity in Education Alliance of which the Good Shepherd was a founding member. We have continued to advocate about this over the years and a great deal of advances have been made in terms of improving the way that requests go to parents from schools.

A number of us have got together and are devising proposals for government. We have written an open letter and we are hopeful of a response about a replacement for the EMA. When it comes to the mechanisms for that, there is an opportunity to do it better. One of our questions is: would it be possible to be administered through the concessions unit of DHS rather than having a separate administration? Would that be more efficient and effective? These are not questions for us to answer but to ask.

We are advocating that technology is the biggest single cost for families. It is unchecked at the moment. It is inequitable at the moment because, as I hope our case studies have shown, there is a variation across the community. There is no consistency in the way that schools pay for that, or in the way that they ask for that payment. There is no support coming up with the loss of the EMA and the loss of the schoolkids bonus from the federal government. There are a lot of problems. We see this as an opportunity for the government to get it right and rethink it from the start because it has been a matter of trying to pick up and patch together something federal and something state. Here is the clean sheet. We could start again and do it really well. What we would really like is to be consulted in that process.

Mr BROOKS — I admire your positive attitude.

Ms MAURY — We quoted the PISA stats that show that children on that tail are up to two and a half years behind their peers. That is a massive impact on our economy. Whenever we are talking about these things the first thing people ask is, 'How much is this going to cost?', but how much is it costing us to have people leaving education with such a deficit. It is incredible to think about the impact.

The CHAIR — If we talk about the obvious learning disadvantage associated with not being able to have private access to technology, whether it is a calculator, an iPad or a laptop and a printer — all of those devices — what impact do you feel that has in terms of the level of comfort amongst peer groups within schools, that sort of individual discomfort or cringe at having to either compensate or make excuses? Can you give us some input on the cost to the person's sense of wellbeing and self-esteem?

Ms MAURY — I think the cost of wellbeing and self-esteem is pretty high. You do start feeling excluded. Even with my own children, they go on and on about how they do not have a phone. That is our choice. But there are children where that is never going to be within their reach and with the kind of digital social networking that high school students in particular are very committed to, that really does sort of eliminate you from the circle.

Dr LANDVOGT — Just from the kids from St Luke's, the young adults, one quote which relates is 'The other students in class all have laptops and iPads and you have to do the homework research with one book'. Another quote which relates to textbooks, but I have included it because it was looking at that, is 'My biggest fear over the whole holidays was that I wouldn't have my books by the first day of school'. That is about not having the equipment that everyone else has. It is about not being able to show up and be just one of the kids.

The CHAIR — It is very obvious that you have either got them or you have not.

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes, and of course it is the digital stuff now with the added social impact of that. That will just be a multiplier effect.

The CHAIR — As a means of ameliorating things in the short term, while the bigger funding issues are digested and dealt with and accommodated, how do you provide advice or impetus around the notion? We received a lot of profound information from entities that run homework clubs, for instance, where there is an intermediate step when they are not at school — other safe and semiprofessional environments that children can actually interact with. Sometimes there is access to devices; sometimes it is more either group or even one-to-one support environments. The emphasis has clearly been on new arrivals to this country — obviously refugees and just generally new immigrants to this country, as the families accommodate language and cultural differences and so forth. There are some fantastic initiatives out there. Are the children within your reach aware of some alternative means where they can get some, if you like, amelioration of that shortfall in their educational experience?

Dr LANDVOGT — Were you aware of any homework clubs mentioned with the research? Your work was with primary schools; it was less relevant.

Ms MAURY — Yes.

Dr LANDVOGT — I would say that because we work in disadvantaged communities there are homework clubs in most of those. I agree with the perception that it is largely the kids of migrant and refugee families who make use of them. I do not know why that is. I could only perhaps hypothesise that there is a fair bit of motivation in those families to use the education that is available and to push on. Some of the families we work with have intergenerational unemployment, mental illness and drug and alcohol problems. The kids have probably already disengaged by the time they get to the homework club opportunity. Primary school is a place where we would be advocating to work more with parent engagement and in a more holistic way than setting up an alternative service; in a way that uses the best available evidence on how families are doing their best for their kids but are really short on capacity and capability.

The CHAIR — In terms of parental support, we talk about the problems with English as a second language for migrant communities. As part of the raft of problems that would diminish the support from parent groups, would you identify people who have been living in this country for generations but have one parental cohort who might be illiterate themselves and not in a position to discuss these sorts of things — where we make basic assumptions but there are profound hidden problems?

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes. I think that is a good one for you to talk about, Susan.

Ms MAURY — Yes. Talking about parents, they all want the best for their children but many of them feel unable to support their child well or they have a lot of anxiety around engaging with the school, perhaps because of past experiences of their own or perhaps because they are new to the country and they do not actually know what is required. Of course there are cultural differences too; in some countries it is not acceptable for a parent to go in and talk to the teacher, for instance, because it is considered disrespectful.

One of the things I found when I was researching for this is that giving parents clear guidelines about their role in all of this makes a huge difference. You cannot assume that this kind of assistance comes naturally to them or that they know how to approach a dialogic kind of interaction on homework with their children. Some of them may feel that they need to have content expertise, and they may find that very off-putting or very intimidating and they may feel they are unable to take on that role. One thing that schools could do, which would be really easy, is include some kind of engagement with the parents around what is expected from them in terms of supporting homework.

The CHAIR — They might find they are not alone. We heard evidence from people from the select-entry schools. You would expect to have some of the most intelligent cohorts in the state attending those schools, and their parents have the same problem. Parent involvement often cuts out at the primary level, where with new techniques and technologies a lot of it has bypassed many parent cohorts. I think the learning curve for people to be parents is probably not as complex as we actually think, and proper communication strategies probably resolve that and give them a measure of comfort that they are not alone. They are probably more in the majority, losing ground.

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes, because content knowledge is always going to be out of our reach, isn't it, with the next generation? The key learning from the evidence is that it is not content knowledge we should be asking parents for. Parents should be very clear about that, but I do not think that is made clear generally. I think the reason is that homework is added on. I am unsure where it fits in the pedagogy at the moment, in the educational theory.

The CHAIR — You are not alone in that.

Dr LANDVOGT — I remember when my own kids were in primary school that I did a little survey of my own asking people who were educators of educators, and at that point — which is going back a little way, 15 years or something — there was no content in teacher training on homework in the courses I asked about. No content on homework in teacher training! What does that say about the pedagogy? I hope it has changed now.

I think the problem is that it is added on. In one of the case studies we gave this example — or maybe the kids said it, sorry — of when you have not finished your work in the class and that is given to you as homework. But of course if you did not understand it in class and you were slow and you go home to a family that does not do maths methods regularly over the dinner table, how is that going to help your learning? I think it is really something that the education system has to look at seriously: how is it using homework? How is it fitting into the whole framework of learning? And come back to that question about, as you said, the dialogic approach to learning.

We know now, for example — Susan knows far more about this than me, and she can correct me — that even parents who are illiterate can help their children at the early childhood stage learn conceptual thinking by telling stories and asking 'why' questions, rather than just using descriptive language or instructional language. That is coming through a whole lot of programs in early childhood now that you can actually

help your child learn by telling stories from when you were in Sudan or telling stories about when you grew up in country Victoria. Because you have a beginning, a middle and an end, and there is some cause and effect, the learning and the wiring in the child is happening, whereas if you just say 'that is a dog', 'go to your room', 'come to dinner', that is not setting up the same wiring. We know there is evidence there, and we know that the education system could actually be using that a lot better in working with parents as real partners. Is that correct?

Ms MAURY — That is correct.

The CHAIR — Could we extend that to say that because our Indigenous families are so gifted in storytelling we should be providing greater celebration opportunities for that?

Dr LANDVOGT — We would totally endorse that. From Good Shepherd's point of view, absolutely. There is so much we can learn from that idea of story.

The CHAIR — And placing a greater value on it as well?

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes.

The CHAIR — The oral history or anything — family opinion.

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes.

Mrs MILLAR — I am particularly interested in your comments with respect to the stress on parents, both from the perspective of the five youth whom you spoke to via St Luke's in Bendigo and their comments about stress on families but also the further research about mothers with children potentially disengaging. I am just wondering what your views are on schools making themselves accessible to parents, particularly in respect of what we have not yet touched upon, which is working parents — that is, not necessarily parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds but parents who finish work at 5.00 p.m. and are not home until 6.30 p.m. Typically at schools everyone is gone by 4 o'clock. Parent-teacher interviews are typically set from 4.00 p.m. until 6.00 p.m., and staff will not work beyond that. I am just interested in whether your research has picked up on the theme of parents having a lack of opportunity — not a lack of willingness or barriers — to meaningfully engage, particularly with primary schools.

Ms MAURY — The research shows that the engagement that matters is not really on the school grounds, per se. What matters is the engagement with the learning, and that can happen at home. That is important to understand. Parents who are squeezed for time can participate in their children's education in a proactive and rich way, even if they do not have time to help out with reading at the school or at the bake sale or whatever.

I know that schools and teachers struggle with the parent engagement. They know that is part of their brief, but according to the research they find it very stressful because it is not part of their core business as they see it. It is not part of how they are trained. I think quite often there is trepidation on the school's part and on the parents' part. Bridging that in-between space can be tricky, but I do not think it is as difficult as everyone seems to think it is. Rather than schools informing the parents about what is what at the school and saying, 'This is how we do things around here, and this is what we expect from your child' and that being the end of the conversation, it would be much more productive if it were a dialogue. There are schools that are experimenting with different ways of creating dialogue with parents and allowing parents to ask questions and have input into the fundamental ways in which the school is operating. The schools that are experimenting with this are finding that it is making an enormous difference to their outcomes and engagement with children, which is what we all care about.

The school that I was working with, Hastings Westpark Primary School, had one parent who was basically doing the duties of a normal parent association. They did not have a parent association. Nobody spent time at the school, but I managed to get nine parents together to talk about some of these issues. When they went away they felt empowered, and they had a really clear vision of what they wanted for their children. They had plan for themselves, the school and the community. They were able to articulate that beautifully.

They have become their own advocates around some of these issues. It is making a profound difference to the school, which is operating with the parents much closer to the centre than they were a year ago.

Dr LANDVOGT — That was three two-hour workshops with that group, and it was based on a framework that has been used in international community development and that Susan used. It is an empowerment framework that engaged in a specific process. We would be happy to provide more information, and the report is about to be published.

The CHAIR — We would be delighted to hear more about that. That just sounds magical.

Dr LANDVOGT — We would say that it came at a time when a lot of other work was being done down at Westpark in Hastings, so we will not claim all of the credit. But there have been significant changes, and this project was part of that seismic change.

The CHAIR — You said you were able to inspire nine of the parents. So there was one person doing all the heavy lifting and playing a representative role for the entire school community, and that converted to that person being joined by eight others.

Ms MAURY — No, it was much more profound than that. They decided that the school was actually okay in their eyes, but they felt that the community was not supporting what they wanted for their children or where the school was heading. They also saw that as nine people they were not going to make a huge difference; they needed to bring people in on their vision. They do have a working parents association now. Last time I talked to them it was 12 parents. Not all of them were involved in their research. I think about five or six were, and the rest they have coopted from the parents. They have become advocates for their plan, and they are bringing in people, organisations and politicians as well to support the plan and get action on it. They have done an amazing job.

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes, and central to that, coming back to that question about the school's and the education system's recognition of the importance of parent engagement for learning outcomes, the way that that is usually framed is, 'How can we get the parents to be more active in their kids' learning?'. When we asked the parents in this very developmental, open, sort of empowering way about where they stood with all this, for them the question was, 'How can the school help us to get the kind of community our kids need to grow and learn and be healthy?'. So the agency in that, if you can see the difference in agency in where they were sitting, was that they knew they were the most important people in these kids' lives, but they wanted help from the school to clean up the park, rename the community so that it was not stigmatised and — what else? — get some local film groups going with film nights — accessible, affordable recreation. They knew what the kids needed to be healthy and growing and learning, for family life as well as the school. So it was a very interesting turnaround. The school then became a genuine partner in that, rather than saying 'Let's get the parents to sit with the kids and do more homework'.

Ms MAURY — Although that happened as well.

Dr LANDVOGT — That was part of that.

Mr ELASMAR — Most of the questions have been asked. I have been through some of the scenarios that are written here, but one scenario that comes to mind is when teachers give homework to students. Do they do their research on whether they have the internet at home or they have access to the internet or what difficulty there is in it and what is the solution to that?

Dr LANDVOGT — The evidence before us would be that they do not know. They assume that students have access to the internet. Some individual teachers would of course understand the issues for individual students. Whether they feel they have any options to respond to that — what is available and provided to teachers to try to assist these individual students — I do not know, but I do know that the assumption is that the students will have access to the internet, and many students do not. One of our items in the low-income awareness checklist is: has the school got a policy for ensuring that homework tasks do not assume access to the internet? This came up again with the St Luke's youth. The school would say, 'That's okay. We've got a computer lab. You can stay until 5' — or whatever time it is — 'and do your

homework there'. This young person said, 'Well, I couldn't, because I had to get the bus home'. It might be, 'Well, I have to go home and cook tea for my younger siblings'.

Mr ELASMAR — Or, 'I've got a tennis game'.

Dr LANDVOGT — This is not an adequate response. As you get higher up into school there are a lot more hours needed for homework of course, so sitting in the computer lab for an hour or two after school is not going to solve that problem anyway. I think schools are trying. I think this is a system-wide problem. It is at all levels: government level, department level, school level and community level. It is not just the schools, because I think in many cases they are doing very well with what they have.

The CHAIR — On just a very practical level on the EMA — I do not particularly want to go into that specifically but to a more generic question — last year I had a conversation with a school principal. She was talking about the research that the school had undertaken about laptops, tablets and iPads. The school's own research showed that there was better value from a new offering as a tablet called Surface and that that was somewhat less expensive. It is the notion of somebody having buying and bargaining authority. It is this adhocery of people, if you like, going out as a family, buying an offering and paying a retail price, rather than something being done with all the benefits of buying grunt to bring forward the best play, and the research. I am not talking about the cost of connections to the internet, but just so there is some independent tool for buying technology. We are sort of saying that a device cost this amount of money, but in reality that can be reduced considerably by buying power.

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes. We are talking about the hardware now —

The CHAIR — Yes.

Dr LANDVOGT — and perhaps a bit of the software. Absolutely; there are a couple of things. Every school is dealing with this differently, so all of the costs for them of trying to source the solution and trying to do their research must be enormous. They are all facing this problem. There may be ways that can be done across the whole system. Secondly, schools and the education system do not allow you to have a private laptop, because they need security and certain platforms, so it is a school requirement for a certain kind of hardware as well as software. It does not work to go and do the individual purchasing anyway because you may well buy something that you cannot then use, except at home. You need one for school. Students now need a laptop that pretty much goes from school to home and back to school. If they do not need it now, they will soon because that is the way the system seems to be going. Unless we have a new technology that removes hardware altogether — I do not know. The point is that the hardware is the major purchase, the major cost. The way it currently functions is inequitable. It is completely luck as to which school you are at and what you are required to get.

The other point I make is that some schools are requiring both an iPad and a laptop. I do not understand how the school could ask for both of those things and need both of those things. It would be nice to have both those things, but as a minimum requirement, when the cost of those and the education value of those needs to be factored in, that is a serious concern.

The CHAIR — I can offer a personal comment on this. The allure of technology runs very fast ahead of any social response to it. I do not know how we can ever correct that. I think we have to just accept that, but it is very alluring.

Dr LANDVOGT — I agree we have to accept it. What I am addressing is what is on the textbook list for parents to purchase — what is on the list of equipment. Surely one device is enough to ask of families.

Mrs MILLAR — We should in that context also note that there has been a shifting of the cost base from textbooks. When I was at school, and probably when most of us here were at school, you bought a big bagful of very expensive textbooks. They could be typically $80 or $100 each. With the shift to technologies, yes, you do need to buy the iPad, but the app cost is considerably less than the textbook cost. My own children are both at primary school, and there is that shift. Yes, you are still required to fund a

considerable amount, but you are not buying the textbooks. Having the device does enable some offset at that point.

Dr LANDVOGT — It does, and I think that trend will increase.

Mrs MILLAR — It will.

Dr LANDVOGT — I just come back to another comment from one of the young people at St Luke's, which was, 'Yes, you do not have to buy textbooks now — you get them on the app — but if you do not have internet, then that has not solved the problem'. They are saying that in some ways books were easier for them, because you would get a second-hand book or hand-me-downs. — —

The CHAIR — I was just about to make that comment. There was always a profound second-hand book market. Even in the most elite private schools you could always buy second-hand school uniforms as well.

Mr BROOKS — Sometimes they had the answers in pencil still left in them.

The CHAIR — You could have that provided. Books can be then handed on through the whole family

Dr LANDVOGT — Yes.

The CHAIR — I am well informed that many people made textbook selections in the past based on the longevity of that particular edition and so on, and of course technology does not allow that sort of thing.

Dr LANDVOGT — No.

The CHAIR — I suppose we could ask a pejorative question. If you have toy libraries, why can you not have iPad libraries?

Dr LANDVOGT — I think that is how perhaps schools and the whole education system could think about these devices. I agree totally with you. The technology races ahead of us — certainly ahead of me. The young people seem to do a bit better, but it is very demanding for all of us in our organisations and government. It is racing ahead. We have to get ahead with that new thinking about how the hardware is just the hardware. Maybe it can be in libraries, and maybe it is leased. A lot of schools are doing that leasing. It is the software that needs to be accessible, and maybe the hardware is just the means. Anyway, there is a lot of new thinking that is needed.

The CHAIR — Indeed. I think we agree on much of this. Our time has now elapsed. I have to say that I expected that our time together would be profound and moving, as well as being informative. We have learnt a lot from our time together; I feel that is a reasonable thing to say on behalf of the committee. I thank you for your input. As you can see, it has hit a note with us all. Ms Maury, we would like to quote your introductory remarks.

Ms MAURY — Thank you. I am flattered!

Dr LANDVOGT — You could send that through.

The CHAIR — I just really think that had a particular resonance, and it was a lovely, succinct offering. Thank you very much for that and for your research. Our executive officer will probably follow up on those things before the imminent publishing of that report. We would certainly like to be abreast of that. Thank you very much for your time with us today.

Ms MAURY — Thank you.

Dr LANDVOGT — Thank you all very much. Lovely to meet you.

Witnesses withdrew.