

# **GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 3**

**Monday, 29 August 2016**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

## **EDUCATION**

**UNCORRECTED PROOF**

**The Committee met at 14:00**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. N. Maclaren-Jones (Chair)

The Hon. B. Franklin

The Hon. C. Houssos

The Hon. S. Mitchell

Reverend the Hon. F. Nile

The Hon. W. Secord

Mr D. Shoebridge

### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. A. Piccoli, *Minister for Education***

## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

**Corrections should be marked on a photocopy of the proof and forwarded to:**

**Budget Estimates secretariat  
Room 812  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000**



**The ACTING CHAIR (The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones):** Welcome to the public hearing for this inquiry into budget estimates 2016-17. Before I commence, I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respects to elders past and present of the Eora nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present. I welcome Minister Piccoli and accompanying officials to the hearing today. The Committee will examine proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Education.

Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live by the Parliament's website. A transcript of today's hearings will be made available on the committee's website. In accordance with broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record committee members or witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I would also like to remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the committee's proceedings.

It is important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to what witnesses may say outside their evidence at the hearing, so I urge witnesses to be careful about any comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence, as such comments would not be protected by parliamentary privilege if another person decided to take action for defamation. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could only answer if they had more time or documents at hand. In these circumstances, witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and that the answer must be provided within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members of staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the committee secretariat. Minister, you are able to pass messages directly to the advisers seated behind you. Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Finally, I ask everyone to please turn off their mobile phones or turn them to silent.

All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn in prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn in as you have already sworn an oath of office as a member of Parliament. I would also like to remind Ms Leslie Loble, Mr Gregory Prior and Mr Philip West from the Department of Education that they do not need to be sworn in as they were sworn in at an earlier budget estimates meeting. Other witnesses will need to state their name, job title and agency, and swear either an oath or take the affirmation, the words of which are in front of you.

**PETER RIORDAN, Acting Secretary, Department of Education, sworn**

**LESLIE LOBLE, Deputy Secretary, External Affairs and Regulation, Department of Education, on former oath**

**GREGORY PRIOR, Deputy Secretary, School Operations and Performance, Department of Education, on former oath**

**JANE THORPE, Acting Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Education, affirmed**

**JANET DAVY, Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Evaluation, Department of Education, on former oath**

**PHILIP WEST, Chief Financial Officer, Department of Education, on former oath**

**TOM ALEGOUNARIAS, President BOSTES NSW, affirmed**

**The ACTING CHAIR:** I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Education open for examination. The questioning of the portfolio of Education will run from 2.00 pm until 4.40 p.m. There is no provision for an opening statement. We will therefore commence with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, I would like to start with the issue of school capacity.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I think it is overcrowding.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I stand corrected; it is overcrowding. Minister, in New South Wales, what is the optimum utilisation rate for schools? What percentage are schools supposed to be on?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not understand what you mean by "optimum utilisation".

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I was using your department's language.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I will ask Mr Riordan to answer that question.

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am not exactly sure either, but we tend to try and run our schools at, or as close to, capacity as possible to ensure that all students have access to a quality education.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What is capacity then?

**Mr RIORDAN:** It depends what measure you are using. Capacity in our terms would be the occupation of the permanent buildings on a particular school site. If every classroom on a school site is occupied, that would be deemed to be 100 per cent capacity.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You aim to have schools in New South Wales at 100 per cent capacity?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Or thereabouts. Some schools are below that capacity—it depends on what the enrolments have been. Some schools will be slightly above that, and we accommodate that demand through the use of demountable classrooms.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** On that point, what happens when a school reaches 101, 102 or 103 per cent?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We deploy demountable classrooms onto those sites to ensure that students who wish to attend that school, who come from that local area, are able to get their education at their local school.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What happens if a school reaches 105 per cent or 110 per cent capacity?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We continue to place demountables on that school site, having regard to the area available. If there is insufficient area available, we may re-look at the boundaries for those schools to ensure that students can be allocated to other schools closer to their area.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Would that involve splitting up families and things like that?

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, that would be most unusual, that a family would be split up. If a boundary did change and that split siblings, normally the school principal would make an accommodation to still take the siblings of the student who is already in the school.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** But that has happened in Maitland. We have had reported cases of families being split up because a school was over capacity.

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am not aware of the particular circumstances of Maitland. I am happy to take that on notice. But principals make every effort to ensure that, where siblings are enrolled in the school, those who come behind them are able to enrol in the same school.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you aware what percentage of schools in New South Wales are at 100 per cent capacity or above?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am not aware of that.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What do you do if you cannot bring a demountable into a school? What happens with teaching space in that school?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am sorry, but I am not sure what you mean by the question.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You said that if a school is above 100 per cent you bring in demountables.

**Mr RIORDAN:** That is correct.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What do you do if you cannot bring a demountable into a school and it is at 110 per cent capacity—or 120, 150 or 200 per cent?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We have some other options as well. We have modular classrooms—two-storey classrooms—that can bring in four teaching spaces on a smaller footprint. They have been used in some places.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What is a teaching space?

**Mr RIORDAN:** A classroom.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** But, if you do not have classrooms and you are at capacity, does a kitchen, a broom closet, a hallway or a library constitute a teaching space in New South Wales?

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, teaching spaces are classrooms. There can be multipurpose rooms that are perhaps not necessary for any of their multiple purposes at a particular point in time—they could be used as a classroom on an interim basis. We do that at the start of some school years, for example, when we are just forming up classrooms. The library might be used for a few weeks if enrolment unexpectedly increases beyond what was anticipated by the school principal. We might form a class in the library while a demountable is installed—or, on some occasions, if the weather is bad over the January period, a demountable might not be available on day one of the first term.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I was told earlier today that there are approximately 2,186 schools in New South Wales. How many of those schools are at 100 per cent capacity or above?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I think you asked that before, and I do not know that number.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** We have received Government Information (Public Access) Act information from your department which shows that every school in New South Wales has been tabulated. Are you aware of the Government Information (Public Access) Act request?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Yes, I do recall the Government Information (Public Access) Act request, but I cannot recall the number.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You said earlier that you did not have that data.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Point of order: The witness has clearly said that he does not have that figure available to him. I think he has sufficiently answered the question.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** I am sure he would be happy to take it on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** We have quite a long time today. I think there will be enough time for you to get the Government Information (Public Access) Act information by email.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That is not up to you to propose.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I am proposing it.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Order! Do you have a question? The witness has answered—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I am getting to the question of overcrowding in New South Wales schools.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Please ask your question.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I am giving some context. A freedom of information request was provided to the New South Wales Labor Opposition, and it shows that 37 per cent of schools in New South Wales are at 100 per cent capacity, or above. I would like to know what is the Minister's response to the fact that 37 per cent of schools in New South Wales are at 100 per cent capacity?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Or more.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Or more. Thank you for the correction. Our children are like battery hens in New South Wales classrooms. I want to know what is the Minister's response to the fact that 37 per cent of New South Wales classrooms are at 100 per cent capacity or more.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** The Minister should ignore the argument in that question.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** You should not misinterpret what 100 per cent means.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Usually 100 per cent means full.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Order! Allow the Minister to answer the question.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As the secretary said in regard to a school's capacity, the advice to me is that it is when it has reached 100 per cent capacity of permanent buildings, and then it is accommodated sometimes by demountables in schools. Demountables have been a part of our schools for a long time, not only government schools but also Catholic and independent schools. The other thing we are doing is making a substantial investment in increasing that capacity. An additional billion dollars in this year's budget over the next four years is dealing predominantly with issues of capacity.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, when a school is at 100 per cent capacity, is that full? Is 100 per cent, 100 per cent?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is not necessarily 100 per cent of that site's capacity to have students, and sometimes that capacity is accommodated by the use of demountables. Of course where we are able to we build permanent classrooms, as we have done since we came to office. As I said, we announced in this year's budget an additional \$1 billion. Most of that money is going to increasing capacity with permanent classrooms.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, I will give you an example. Bondi Public School is at 141 per cent capacity; in the Central West, Orange East Public School is at 110 per cent; Kogarah High School is at 113 per cent; Bourke Street Public School is at 145 per cent; Wilton, in the Macarthur region, is at 155 per cent; Woollahra Public School—

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** Point of order—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I am giving context. I will give the list and then the Minister can respond. It is a question.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** What is the question?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** It is a compound question.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Order! The Hon. Walt Secord can ask his question.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Woollahra Public School is at 124 per cent; Vacluse Public School is at 129 per cent; Maroubra Bay Public School is at 130 per cent; Orange Grove Public School is at 164 per cent; Concord is at 108 per cent; Parramatta is at 113 per cent; Dubbo is at 105 per cent. I will not list the entire 807 schools; that is to give you a sense. What are you doing about those schools—which is 37 per cent of New South Wales schools—that are at 100 per cent or more capacity?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I said, several things are being done. You should not misinterpret that information. I can give you an example of where I live in Griffith. There are a couple of schools that are full, but they take out-of-zone enrolments. When schools get full, they are no longer able to take out-of-zone enrolments. If I recall correctly, they are no longer able to take international students so they manage. Sometimes some schools have stronger demand than others, depending on a variety of things within a community. Often schools get out-of-zone enrolments and they can take out-of-zone enrolments until the point where they become full. Once they become full they are no longer able to take out-of-zone enrolments. There may indeed be, as is often the case, schools near that school that are not full. I will give you an example. A couple of years ago Ultimo was full and Glebe, which is not far away, still had excess capacity. So when a school is full, it does not mean every school around it is full and there is some kind of crisis.

It is the case that in parts of Sydney, particularly where we have clusters of schools, they are full and we have invested substantial amounts of money. The lower North Shore is an example. You raised a couple of

examples. I was at the opening of Wilton Public School only a couple of months ago. I think there are 10 new classrooms. I am happy to take each of those cases on notice and to give you a response as to what is happening at Wilton. Bellevue Hill Public School, which I presume is not far from Vaucluse Public School, is a substantial investment. I drove past it the other day; the cranes are working on that investment. You mentioned Parramatta. In January next year we are beginning on the Old King's School site and developing that school into a primary school. More than \$100 million is being spent in and around Parramatta on school capacity. In regard to a number of the sites you raised, yes, we are very aware of the growing demand for enrolment and we are accommodating it by making additional investments, particularly in the inner west.

You have mentioned a couple of other schools in the inner west. There are substantial investments in the inner west. The department purchased the Marie Bashir Public School, which was an independent school, and that has been converted into a public primary school. There is the Victoria Street School at Strathfield, plus numerous other investments in the inner west. In the eastern suburbs there is a lot of investment around Coogee, Randwick and Bellevue Hill. On the North Shore we opened the Anzac Public School only a month or so ago. That school has a lot of capacity. It has got only kindergarten at the moment. That will accommodate some of the capacity issues in schools such as the Neutral Bay Public School; we know there is a lot of demand there. When new schools are built, they change the zoning around so that the new school has its own zoning and that reduces zoning in other areas where schools are at capacity. There are numerous things, but we do have growing enrolments, as do the Catholic and independent sectors. In fact, the three sectors are working together on how to accommodate all those students.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, are you aware that there are schools in New South Wales where students are told not to run in the playground or not to run in the school because the school is at capacity or above capacity?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I cannot vouch for the reasons or individual school cases, but how schools treat the activities of their students is up to them. It is certainly not a direction from me.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Principals have told parents that they have to strike a balance between students having space or wanting them to be safe.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I cannot vouch for what principals tell parents.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Can you tell us what is happening at Homebush Bay West?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes. We are spending \$20 million to build 26 new classrooms in a terrific school that is getting great results for its kids and there is lots of demand.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** How much are you spending on this school?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is 26 classrooms and I think it is \$20 million, if I recall.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Can you take us through how long it has been? What is the timetable on that school?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I would have to take that question on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you aware that there are schools in New South Wales where children are asked to take staggered lunches because they cannot take the capacity during lunchtime?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That may well be the case. Secretary?

**Mr RIORDAN:** There are some schools that have local arrangements in place.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Can you explain to me how that works?

**Mr RIORDAN:** For example, K-3 might have a recess break at 10.30 a.m. until 11.00 a.m., then they go back into class. Then the year 3 to year 6 kids would come out on the playground at that point in time, and the same with the lunch period. It means that their schooling and recess and lunch breaks are staggered. There is no impact upon the hours of schooling; there is no impact upon the student learning. It means there are fewer students in the playground at any one time.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you aware of schools in New South Wales where classes are taking place outside the classroom with the lack of demountables?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Not because of a lack of demountables, no.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Can you tell me a bit about the schools where classes are taking place outside the classroom?



**Mr RIORDAN:** Many schools operate a class outside the classroom. We have invested in covered outdoor learning areas in many of our schools, and teachers get outside to do experiential learning. They always have to do it within the four walls of the classroom.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Do you know how many demountables there are in New South Wales at the moment?

**Mr RIORDAN:** On school sites?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Yes.

**Mr RIORDAN:** About 5,200.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Is that an increase or decrease from 2011?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I would have to take that on notice. I am not sure.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** It is a significant increase.

**Mr RIORDAN:** There would certainly be an increase in student numbers over that time as well.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, would you like to comment on the number of demountables that are currently in public schools in New South Wales?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** What would you like me to say?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Do you have a view on the number and the fact that it has increased so dramatically?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are you pleased?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** In the few years before we came into office—when I became Minister in 2011—there had been declining enrolments in public schools. There was, at least, a flatline of enrolments when we came into office in 2011. Since then we have seen a substantial spike in enrolments. As a result of that we have had to accommodate some of those enrolments in demountables.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Some of those enrolments?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I refer you to comments that you made prior to 2011. You said:

Every parent, teacher and student knows that learning in a demountable classroom is no alternative to learning in a real classroom. Our kids should not be languishing in second-rate facilities like demountable classrooms.

Would you care to reflect on that in light of what you have just said?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** We would prefer not to have any demountables. We would prefer not to, but that is the nature of what happens when there is this kind of enrolment growth. I would suggest that it is somewhat unprecedented in New South Wales. We are not left with any alternative but to provide some of that additional capacity in demountables. We have a legislative requirement to enrol students. We have to do that, and some of that capacity is dealt with through the use of demountables.

We have replaced a substantial number of demountables in places like Rutherford Technology High School. In the \$100 million of leftover Building the Education Revolution [BER] money that we spent on special schools we have replaced a huge number of demountables. The capital works program, including the \$1 billion extra over the next four years, will see quite a few of those demountables replaced. It is a good thing that we have such confidence in public education that people are choosing to enrol their children in public schools. Yes, it is a strain to accommodate them, but we will accommodate them—and we will do so proudly.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** A well publicised internal department document outlines that more than 10,000 additional classrooms are required by 2035, which is an average of 435 per year. How many of those 435 per year are you providing currently, and how many of those will be demountables?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The document you are referring to was a 2015 document which said that, based on current funding, that was the projected figure.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Sorry, was that based on current funding or current enrolments?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No, based on current capital funding. Several things have happened since then, including the State budget, which allocated an additional \$1 billion in capital works funding, much of which will go into accommodating the additional growth and these additional classrooms. There is a substantial

investment to deal with that. Next year there will be another budget, and the year after that there will be another budget. So it would be a mistake to take one budget and just extrapolate that forward. As I said, even since that document was put together things have changed, including a budget where an additional \$1 billion has been allocated. The Government recognises that there are issues arising from increasing enrolment and it has put money behind it.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Can you tell us how many new classrooms that \$1 billion will build?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I can tell you how many classrooms it is. I am happy to take the question on notice; I will get you an answer in a moment.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** You have spoken of the unprecedented capacity that is required for New South Wales schools. Can you outline why, in Green Square, which is set to become Australia's most densely populated suburb, there is no plan for new schools?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is because the previous Government—a Labor Government—sold off quite a few school sites around there. That has made providing schools in the inner city much more difficult and much more expensive.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, after six years, perhaps it is about time that you started building some new schools. Can you tell me what your plan is for Green Square to provide schooling education for the people who are moving into that area?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I will ask Mr Riordan to answer that question, but it has been made more difficult by the sale of former school sites. When enrolments were going down governments like the Labor Government saw no need to have those schools open any longer and it sold the sites. That does make it very expensive—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I will stop you right there.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** If you can find me six hectares in Green Square, I am all ears.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** The Labor Government closed, on average, 5.5 schools per year. Between 2014 and 2015, this Government closed 20 schools. So let us compare apples with apples and oranges with oranges.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Do you want me to provide a list of those schools that we closed? I can tell you where they are: Bilbul Public School, Murrumbidgee Public School—not exactly prime real estate in the middle of Sydney.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** What are you doing to provide for the students and families in Green Square which is, under your Government's planning, designed to become Australia's most densely populated suburb? What are you doing to provide primary school education and high school education for people moving into that area?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I can tell you that there has been a significant investment at—I am trying to remember the name of the school—Alexandria Park Community School. There has been a very significant investment there. I cannot remember exactly the amount but I can give you that number. And of course there is the Inner Sydney High School at Cleveland Street, which is a \$60 million investment.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I draw your attention to the Sydenham to Bankstown corridor, where 36,000 new dwellings are due to be built in the next 20 years, under your Government's plan. What is your plan for schools in that area?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am happy to take that question on notice, but I can tell you that the redevelopment of Alexandria Park Community School will accommodate up to 2,200 students from kindergarten to year 12.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** If you are taking questions on notice, I would also be interested to hear what your plans are on the Parramatta Road corridor, where up to 70,000 people are due to move—into 40,000 new homes—over the next 30 years.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I can also tell you that in this year's budget—with that extra \$1 billion over four years—there are 22 projects that are yet to be announced. So there is still a significant component of those additional funds where the projects have not yet been announced. I think we announced nine in the budget, and then \$250 million of the poles and wires money is to be spent in regional New South Wales. It is yet to be announced where that will be spent, although \$50 million will be spent in Ballina. A significant portion of the

\$700 million allocated towards metropolitan schools is yet to be announced, although that does include the school at Cleveland Street and Arthur Phillip High School at Parramatta. The answer to that question would be: stay tuned.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** When did the process to recruit the new Secretary of the Department of Education begin?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I would have to take that question on notice. It is a process run by Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC]. I do not employ—the department does not recruit—the secretary of the department. It is a process undertaken by DPC.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So you had no involvement?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** In the recruitment? It is a DPC process.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I asked you a very simple question. I asked you whether, because you are the Minister, you would take an interest in who your director general or who your secretary would be.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So I ask you again: When did the process begin?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I said that I will take the question on notice, because I do not run the process. It is a DPC process, and the secretary is technically employed or appointed by the Premier.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, when did you think—light-bulb moment!—"I need a new secretary."

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** From the moment the former secretary told me she was leaving to take up a new position in the Commonwealth.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** When was that?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I cannot remember, but I am happy to take the question on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Did you approach the Premier with a suggestion that Mr Scott would be secretary?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Did I approach him with that question?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Yes.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Were you involved in the interviewing and recruitment process?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Point of order: The Minister has very clearly said that he was not involved in the recruitment process.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Of his own secretary?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** He has already said that twice, and he has answered the question.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I am just trying to jog his memory.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** He has answered the question. He does not need your help.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Order! The Minister has answered the question, but if the member did not hear the answer he can ask it again.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** My understanding, and the advice to me from DPC is, that it went through the proper recruitment processes under the Government Sector Employment Act [GSE].

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Did you have any input?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Under the Government Sector Employment [GSE] Act?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Did you have any input into the selection of your secretary?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, I was in the interview. The recruitment firm interviewed a number of people—recommended two people—and I was involved in the interview process at the end, interviewing those two applicants that the recruitment firm had put up.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So you were involved in the selection process.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, once they had nominated two people that they thought were worthy of being interviewed, yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Maybe I used the wrong word. When did the selection process that you were involved in begin?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The selection process?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** That you were involved in.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** When did your involvement in the process start?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Thank you.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** David is the Walt whisperer.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** We got there in the end.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I appreciate it. I will take that also.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, the recruitment company asked me what were the attributes that I wanted, or that I would like to see in a secretary, but I recall that that was before any potential applicants had been, kind of, interviewed or any approaches made.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So when was that? Was that last year, this year, earlier this year?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I cannot remember. Without wanting to give an inaccurate answer, I cannot remember so I would have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Has he begun work yet, or does he begin later this year? When does he begin?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** He starts on Thursday.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** When did you decide on, or how did you determine, Thursday to be the start date?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, it is my understanding that he had pre-existing family commitments between his job with the ABC and commencing this job.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So it is no coincidence that the estimates hearing process takes place on Tuesday but he does not begin until Thursday.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It is Monday.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** I think what you meant to say is that it is a coincidence, not that it is no coincidence.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And it is Monday.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** It is no coincidence. Is today Monday or Tuesday?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Monday.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Today is Monday. So it is a coincidence that estimates occurs on Monday and he begins on Thursday.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes. That is right.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** It is just an absolute coincidence.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, I do not know what you are trying to get at.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I think he should be here.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is good. I am pleased to have that opinion. You are entitled to it.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Who determined his start date?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I say, it is a contract with the Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC]. It is not a contract with me. I presume that they negotiated the commencement date. It is not a negotiation I undertake; nor does any Minister, is my understanding.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I think usually Ministers have input on who their secretary or their directors general are.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, you said that the recruitment company approached you about some of the attributes that would be required in a secretary. Did you have any other input—any input into any other parameters for the search?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** They asked me what my expectations would be, et cetera, which I presume is a normal part of their recruitment process. As I said, they then produced a short list of two.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I will just stop you there, Minister. That was the only input that you had into the selection process?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Based on my recollection, that is correct.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So you did not specify that you wanted a national or an international search, or a local search?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, I think my suggestion to the recruitment firm was to go as wide as possible. Why would we not want the best person for the job, nationally or internationally?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And given your extensive background within the education department, not only in government but also in opposition, did you have some people who might have been in mind that you suggested to the recruitment company to approach?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes. There was one person.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Was that Mr Scott?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, I am not going to share that with you because I think—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I think it is a given.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** —that is a person that I knew that I thought would be an appropriate person. But, you know, they asked me if I had anybody in mind that they should approach.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, is it not surprising that this is one of the most important departmental head positions in the State, paying \$560,000 a year—

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** —and you are completely disengaged with the process of the selection.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, look, I do not think that is the case, but there was certainly going to be no political interference by me in making sure that we got the best person for the job. And I think we absolutely did.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Sorry, can I just go back a step. You said that there was no political interference in the process.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** But you interviewed the final two candidates of the process.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, there is a difference between politicians being involved and political interference. There is a difference between those two things.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** But I am just trying to clarify—

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am a politician.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** —that you had some involvement in the process.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes. I was part of the interview for the final two, yes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Apart from setting a few parameters of what you were after, that was the extent of your involvement in the process.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes, and I presume the recruitment firm asked others what they expected, or expectations about the secretary's position.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Time has expired for questions from the Opposition. We will move to questions from the crossbench, beginning with Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, as you know, there has been some controversy about the so-called Safe Schools Coalition course. From your recollection, who do you understand Roz Ward to be?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am sorry, who?

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Roz Ward. What is your knowledge of her?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, she had some involvement with Safe Schools. Yes, I have seen her referred to frequently in the media, yes.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** You are not sure of her role in the production of the Safe Schools course?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Well, the Safe Schools material is hosted by the Commonwealth Government so, no, I do not recall ever having had any personal contact with her.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Are you aware of her ideology?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Look, I am aware from media that she has made some quite controversial statements, yes.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** That she boasts she is a proud Marxist.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes, among other things.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Would that concern you—to have that type of input into the sensitive area of education of schoolchildren?

**Mr Hon. ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am confident, following the review the Commonwealth did on the Safe Schools earlier in the year. There were recommendations from that and I subsequently met the reviewer, Bill Loudon, who is a very eminent educationalist in Australia, and the department has applied those recommendations. Now the only material under the banner of Safe Schools is posted on the Safe Schools hub. It is substantially different from what was previously called Safe Schools. In that sense, I think what the Commonwealth did was the right thing. That certainly clarified what material is, essentially, to be called Safe Schools as opposed to other stuff that is available on the internet—other resources.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** You cite that review as something that satisfied you. Are you aware that it was only a cursory review, a very short review, not an intensive review of the Safe Schools program?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Look, I cannot vouch for how much or how in-depth it was, given that it was not a review conducted or commissioned by the New South Wales Government, but Safe Schools is a program that was begun by the Commonwealth and extended by the Abbott Government. There was a review because of concerns about some of the material. Now they host it on the My School hub. I have had a pretty good look at the My School hub and, you know, it has got links to the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, the Federal Department of Health, and various other appropriate resources. I have to say that I do not find anything particularly offensive that is now on the Safe Schools hub.

There are other things on the internet that are under the banner of Safe Schools, but in terms of what schools can use when they talk about Safe Schools, it is the stuff that is on the Safe Schools hub. There are links to beyondblue and what you do to assist—what you can do as a teacher to assist students who might be depressed or anxious, or feeling suicidal. You know, there are resources that I would consider to be, personally, not offensive. But that, unfortunately, gets mixed with the stuff that is off that hub, which is also called Safe Schools and which is the controversial stuff.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** But you can access it, though, if you go looking through Safe Schools, to M1 and other programs.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Look, you can access, as you know, anything on the internet. That is for sure. But what is located on that hub is what the Commonwealth authorises in terms of its material.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Would you be able to table for us a list of the New South Wales schools that have adopted the Safe Schools program? I am asking that question because it was on the website and apparently it has been removed.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I will let Mr Riordan partly answer that question, but I can say that anyone can access the Safe Schools hub and the links to the material. Anyone can access those at any time. Schools use

it, schools might use it for a while and then not use it. To keep an up-to-date list of schools is very difficult, I think. Mr Riordan, do you want to expand on that?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Thanks, Minister. I might ask Mr Greg Prior to take that question as the Deputy Secretary of School Operations and Performance.

**Mr PRIOR:** I think there were a couple of points to that question. Originally, when the issue was raised around the Safe Schools, we had 120 schools that had registered and were on the website of the Safe Schools Coalition. They comprised of 90 secondary, 22 primary and eight central schools. When we started to implement the recommendations of the independent review, though, we determined that there were 89 of those schools that had never accessed resources—they had registered but they had no intention in the immediate future to do that. As a result of implementing those recommendations we felt that the listing of those continually on the website was giving an inaccurate picture of schools that were accessing it, and we asked that the New South Wales schools be removed from that. From the independent review, if secondary schools are going to use any of the resources available, the parents and the community must be informed, so schools and parents are in the right position to know whether any of those materials are being utilised in a school.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** So there is a form that parents are required to sign that they agree for their child to be involved in that Safe Schools program?

**Mr PRIOR:** From the independent review, we contacted each of those schools personally to make sure that the recommendations were followed through on that. There were two very important points: One was that in primary schools Safe Schools programs were not to be used in classroom programs at all, and only to be used if required to support professional learning of teachers to deal with students who may be recognised as transgender. The second part of that was with the secondary schools, where the material if it was going to be used, yes, parents had to be informed, it had to be age-appropriate and the material had to be reviewed before it was to be used as part of any of the classroom programs.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Will that list now go up on the department's website?

**Mr PRIOR:** At this stage, again, we have not considered doing that because it is probably a dynamic space and it is hard to keep an accurate record where schools are dealing with personal matters. One of the important points around this, going back to your last point, is that we have provided support packages to schools, which includes templates for parents, so we have assisted schools in how to keep that communication open. It is a fairly dynamic space because, whether we want to recognise it or not, we have a number of students who are going through gender transition in our schools, with the youngest being a four-year-old the moment. In trying to deal with the privacy of families and students in how we do that, as that occurs we deal with that on a school-by-school basis. The Safe Schools is only one resource that can be used from a variety of resources in how we would support that family, that student and the school to accommodate a child going through the transition. Again, it is a very difficult thing to keep an accurate day-to-day record system for who will be supporting that.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Safe Schools is a very well organised Australia-wide organisation that recruits schools, so it must have a list of schools in New South Wales that have enrolled.

**Mr PRIOR:** My point in trying to look at how we operationalise that, is that it is very difficult where schools may have registered initially—and that is what we found when we first investigated this after the independent review—but not thought about the implications of being on a registered list. It was difficult for them, as an individual, to get their name removed, so as a system we asked for the list to be removed because we believe that it was not accurate.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Some parents who have contacted me have the impression that the department is keeping it a secret and does not want the parents to know. I think parents have the right to know what is being used in the local primary or secondary school.

**Mr PRIOR:** We totally agree with that and that is why we have provided the support packages to schools. I have provided a memorandum to all schools informing them about the independent review and the processes that need to be followed so that principals and school leaders could work with their school community and give that transparency that you are talking about around these resources.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Over the years the Department of Education in New South Wales has and still keeps high standards and is very careful about what material is used in New South Wales schools. The department does not just rubberstamp something from the Commonwealth. In approving the use of the Safe Schools Coalition course in New South Wales schools, what was the role of the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards, for example?

**Mr PRIOR:** I think maybe Mr Alegounarias, from the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards, will want to answer that, but if I can just say that the department never approved the use of the material. The material is an optional resource that was available to schools. There was no funding from the State perspective and it did not form any part of the board of studies curriculum. It was just an optional resource that was publicly available.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Is that correct, Mr Alegounarias? You have never been involved in any discussion about Safe Schools?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** That is correct. No, it is not within the ambit of the board's work. We consider the mandatory curriculum as defined in the legislation for kindergarten to year 12, and that material does not fall within that ambit.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** So the Board of Studies has no role, and Mr Prior said that the Department of Education has no role. What is the role of the principals in the approvals process?

**Mr PRIOR:** Could I correct that?

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** You said you do not approve it.

**Mr PRIOR:** No, but by saying it was not an approved resource, I was not implying that we do not have a role. We certainly do have a role in the implementation of anything in our schools, and that is why we made sure that the recommendations of the independent review were implemented across all our schools.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The department gets asked regularly to endorse websites or programs, and generally the department does not. The schools' responsibility is to deliver the curriculum using age-appropriate material delivered by trained teachers. In the same way that the department does not endorse the *National Geographic* website and materials contained within that website, the department does not endorse this. It does not mean that the program is not endorsed. It has to be age-appropriate but the department does not go through all the different resources to approve some and not approve others. That would be a very cumbersome process.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** It is very interesting when you have a controversial nationwide course and the department has a hands-off approach. What is the role of the principals in this? Do the principals make the decision to use the program? Who approves it being used in the school? I thought there was pretty strict control over what goes into schools.

**Mr PRIOR:** Whilst this sounds a little bit pedantic, it is not a program that we implemented at the schools that have been using it. They use some of the resources. I can give you an example without breaching privacy. We have a four-year-old who is transitioning to kindergarten next year who has identified as transgender. That school initially registered on the site because it wanted to access some of the materials to use those materials for the professional development of teachers so that they could prepare the staff to assist that child. The resources are used because we have an obligation, as you rightly said, to have high standards and to look after the welfare of all our students at our schools and to support them in the best way possible.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** As soon as you mentioned that child, I thought about the situation in Victoria. Are you aware that in Victoria, which has implemented this course enthusiastically, the numbers of children now applying for a change of gender has risen from 20 a couple of years ago to 200 last year, I understand? Does that trouble you?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I cannot vouch for those numbers. I would be very cautious about drawing any conclusions about what that means. I can say this: Some of the media issues recently that have been linked to the Safe Schools hub—differentiating the Safe Schools hub from other material that is called "Safe Schools"—are talking about not using words like "girl", et cetera. I have not seen any reference to anything about not using the word "girl" in the Safe Schools hub material.

Sometimes when issues arise around gender, gender fluidity and various other things, there is a temptation to draw it straight back to Safe Schools. I have not found the link. I have had a pretty good look, and I cannot see the link between the two. I would tell people to have a look at the Safe Schools hub and the material that is on there. It is not allowed to be used as teaching material in primary school. In high school if you are the PDHPE teacher, you have to deliver the curriculum and you can source the material that you teach from lots of different places—from textbooks, from websites, from special guests. It is up to the teacher, the head teacher and the principal to make sure that it is consistent with the curriculum and it is done in an age-appropriate way.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** We will move to questions from Mr Shoebridge.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, you have said in answer to Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile's questions that you are not offended by the material on the Safe Schools hub. Is it not true that the material on the



Safe Schools hub is valuable and important and in appropriate cases can provide essential assistance to vulnerable students?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I know there has been a lot said about Safe Schools and, as I have said, I have had a look and I cannot find anything that really justifies some of the attention that it has had.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I am just pressing you on your categorisation that you are not offended by the material. This is important material that can be made available where appropriate to help some really vulnerable students who need that kind of assistance in an education counselling context. Do you agree with that?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes. As I said, it links to sites to assist people dealing with mental health and particularly assist teachers in how to handle complex issues, so in that sense it is. I say I am not offended because I know lots of people say publicly that they are offended by what is happening with Safe Schools, and I just think it is conflating what might be available on other websites with what is actually available in the Safe Schools hub. Whenever I get asked, I say, "Go and have a look at the Safe Schools hub and the material there." There is a range of things that offends people, but I have had a good look through it and to me it is a useful resource for teachers. That was the conclusion of the review that was undertaken as well.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is the position of the New South Wales Coalition Government clear that Safe Schools will still be made available to schools in New South Wales through the hub?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is available. It is voluntary—no-one is making schools do anything or banning them from doing anything.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, have you seen what is described as "the cage" at Aspect Macarthur School?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am aware of the allegations that were raised a couple of weeks ago but no, I have not been to that school.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Have you seen an image of what is described as "The cage"?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I saw the 7.30 report.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Would you agree that that detention facility to house special needs students in the middle of a school in New South Wales is a woefully inadequate and inappropriate way of dealing with children with autism?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The Aspect is an independent school. We and the Board of Studies were made aware of the issues that had been raised, and these issues were raised a few years ago but were raised with us recently—Mr Alegounarias, would you like to answer?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** The complaints were forwarded to us immediately they were made on the twelfth of this month. We immediately followed up with the school and visited the school at the first available opportunity. We invited the journalists to forward all complaints, any complaints, to us. Within the auspices of our responsibilities to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all students, we are investigating the complaints currently.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is "the cage" still there and still being used?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** No. Subject to advice with regard to the investigation being formally tabled with us and subject to that formal disclaimer, I cannot confirm the premise that it was used and can attest to the fact that it is not currently being used.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is it still there? Is there still a cage—basically a detention facility for special needs children—in the middle of a school called Aspect Macarthur School?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** I cannot attest to the premise that there was a cage for that purpose or that it is still there. That is what the discussion is about.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You are doing an investigation about it, and you cannot even say whether the cage is still there in the school. Is that really the situation?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I can tell you, and I have not been to the school: According to the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, it is now a Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Was "the cage" brought down after the publicity?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** You are making the assertion about "the cage"—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I am asking you. You are the Minister, and this is the department: Is "the cage" still there?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am not going to accept the classification of it in the way you classified it, because that is subject to investigation, but the advice that I have—remembering that this is an independent school—is that it is now a Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is it true that when allegations, concerns and complaints were first raised there was an entirely internal investigation done by the school and there was no investigation until this month, years later, by the department?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is an independent school. If the Minister's office and whoever is the Minister is not aware of the complaint or the Board of Studies is not made aware of the complaint, then it is difficult to conduct an investigation. As soon as we were made aware of it, the board was advised and the board said—

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** There is no record of a complaint at any time being formally tabled. There is no claim that a complaint was forwarded, formally or informally, to the board in any form. The moment a complaint was received, it was investigated.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is there no protocol in place that private, Catholic and independent schools have to notify the department when there are serious allegations of abuse of children happening?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** Yes, there is indeed.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** What about locking an autistic child in a cage? Surely that should have triggered a protocol.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** If the events occurred in the way or in a similar way to what is asserted and the complaints were not forwarded to the appropriate authority—and depending on the nature of the complaint, the authority would differ—that would be a breach of requirements, and that is what we are currently investigating.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Can you please provide on notice full details of those protocols and requirements?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** We will take that on notice, absolutely.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, there were questions being asked about school capacity, particularly in some of those development centres that have been identified by the Government, such as the Sydenham to Bankstown Urban Renewal Corridor. Is there a School Asset Strategic Plan being undertaken for that corridor?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Being undertaken across New South Wales, yes. Particularly Sydney.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** When will that School Asset Strategic Plan be made publicly available?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is a matter for Cabinet consideration, but it is a dynamic process. In fact, in this year's budget, as I said, \$1 billion in additional funding over the next four years will be allocated to partly deal with the issues raised in that plan.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is it completed?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I say, it is a dynamic process because there is funding going towards it. There are other measures, such as changes to zoning, that are used to accommodate increased enrolments. It is a dynamic plan. Like all Ministers, I go to Treasury every year, every budget cycle, asking for more money.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Is that the dynamic plan that identified, either late last year or early this year, that an additional \$10.8 billion is needed to be invested in classrooms to meet the expected surge between now and 2031?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I said, the document you are referring to was from last year. That was based on funding from 2015-16 but obviously we have had another budget and we have increased that capital works allocation. I would presume and certainly expect future budgets to increase that capital allocation. Yes, things change. There is more money allocated towards it. The department is still looking at where the demographic changes are, particularly in Sydney. That is why we cannot set something in motion now and expect it to be completely linear over the next 10 or 15 years. That is also on the expectation that every additional enrolment would be accommodated by new building space. There is still capacity in schools. Some of

the zonings might need to be changed to accommodate schools that are at capacity to encourage enrolments in schools that have a spare capacity. That is also a way to deal with the issue.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Are you rejecting your own department's analysis stating that \$10.8 billion in additional funding is needed for new classrooms by 2031? Is that still the situation? If not, please correct me.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not know that that is exactly the figure. The document is now six or seven months old or older.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** If it is not \$10.8 billion, what is it?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The department has done much more work. The figure is being considered through the cabinet process; it is considering what future investment will be needed.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You are here, Minister, and all the current senior staff are here. If it is not \$10.8 billion as identified in your department's own document as recently as six or seven months ago, what is the figure? You are all here.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Great, but I will not give you—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** An answer.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** —a figure. As much as the member might want a figure, it is not as simple as that.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I am sure that Treasury wants a figure. Give us the figure.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Things change. If you ask me what the enrolment will be in 2525, I can make a best guess, but it probably will not be completely accurate. Enrolments change and the proportion of government and non-government schools changes. It is more expensive to accommodate those changes in some places. Enrolment pressure in the inner city costs more to resolve than it does in the south-west or on the North Coast. It is not easy to forecast the cost. However, we have invested as much as we can in every budget to deal with that growth. As I said, this year it is \$1 billion more.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** This year?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is \$1 billion more over the four years than forecast in the previous forward estimates. I certainly hope—as all good Ministers do—to get additional funds from the Treasurer.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** To help you out in that Treasury negotiation process, can you be very clear and confirm that even with the additional \$1 billion over the next four years that will not provide enough teaching space to deal with your own department's predicted surge in public school enrolments?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** If nothing else were to happen over the next 15 to 20 years, that is probably correct. However, that is based on the assumption—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** The bulk of the surge is meant to happen in the next seven years. Your own documents say that. You have to do something now.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** There is an additional \$1 billion this year.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But it is not enough, is it?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** There will be another budget next year.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** In a roundabout way you have effectively conceded that the \$1 billion over the next four years will not be enough and additional funds will have to be provided by Treasury to meet your own department's expected surge in enrolments.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** There will have to be additional funding over the next 15 years.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Substantial?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** There will have to be additional funds. It is a huge growth in enrolments. The Catholic and independent sectors are experiencing the same difficulties.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Based on your own department's figure—and it is the best figure available in the public domain because you will not provide another figure—\$10.8 billion will be needed by 2031 to accommodate about 170,000 additional students. If we continue business as you have established it in the current budget, there will be a \$7.2 billion shortfall.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** If you had asked me this same question last year I would have said that for the 2016 Budget we would go to Treasury and ask for more money. We did that and we got an extra \$1 billion over the next four years. The same will happen next year, the year after that, and so on. If Labor is in government after that, it will probably do the same thing.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** If we continue at the current rate over the next four years, which is the best we can identify, there will be a \$7.2 billion shortfall in necessary funding for public school classrooms.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Stay tuned until next year's budget.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** That is not acceptable. Do you agree that you will need substantial increased investment in public schools to meet the expected number of enrolments?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No-one is making a secret of that.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Has any particular study been conducted into the capacity of inner-city schools in Newcastle?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am not aware of any specific study.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Are you aware that a number of Newcastle schools such as Biddabah Public School and Newcastle East Public School are at 100 per cent or more and are refusing to take any out-of-catchment enrolments as a result?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** They are entitled to do that. That is the rule and it has been the rule for a long time. Schools gain a certain reputation and people will come across town to enrol their children. When that school is full, it is then limited to taking children only from that zone. That is why zones exist.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But your own Government is proposing a substantial surge in the construction of residential buildings in the middle of Newcastle. What has your department done to identify the places and the investment needed to cater for public school enrolments in Newcastle?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am happy to take that question on notice. Local directors will look at the enrolment capacity in local schools. I am not completely familiar with the issues in and around Newcastle, but I am happy to take that question on notice.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** The time for questions has expired. We will take a 10-minute break and resume at 3.15 p.m.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone. We will recommence with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, why is school planning not included in urban planning in New South Wales?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Mr Riordan, would you like to answer that question in relation to schools and urban planning?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I am not sure of the direct relationship but certainly schools are considered. With the Greater Sydney Commission, for example, in their work, the department is represented on the development committee of that group. We are ensuring that schools are a consideration in any future urban planning. If we are going to put in more accommodation for people, we need to ensure we have adequate schools available for the young people in those areas.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Obviously the Greater Sydney Commission is dealing with schools going forward, but the particular planning areas that I spoke about earlier—Sydenham to Bankstown and the Parramatta Road corridor—are not currently being considered; is that correct?

**Mr RIORDAN:** I do not believe so. We certainly keep a very close eye on developments across New South Wales. There is extremely strong growth in a variety of different areas across Sydney. We are constantly planning for where schools might be and where school capacity can be increased to meet expected enrolment well into the future. At this stage we have projections going out to around 15 years. We have more certainty for the shorter time frames—that is five to 10 years—and then we have planning out to 15 years to ensure that we have a pipeline of places becoming available.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Thank you. Minister, I return to the appointment of Mr Scott as the new secretary. A photograph accompanying the announcement of Mr Scott's appointment appeared on the Premier's Twitter account. Were you present at the meeting?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** When he sent the tweet? No.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So you were not cropped out of the photo?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not recall. I do not recall a photo being taken.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It happens to the best of us, Walt. You know that.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It would not be the first time. I do not recall a photo being taken or when it was tweeted.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** It was 1 June.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Right.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** The starting salary for the new secretary has been publicly advertised as \$560,000—is that correct?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes, that is correct.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And will that be higher than the salary of the previous secretary?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am not aware what the previous secretary's salary was. That again is set by the New South Wales remuneration tribunal.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. And are there any performance bonuses available to him?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I will have to take that on notice. As I say, the secretaries are appointed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC]. They prepare the contract.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** You might also like to take this on notice: What are the criteria for such bonuses if they are available?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not know if that is disclosable. That may be subject to some confidentiality.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Is Mr Scott being paid yet?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** He is not starting until Thursday so I would presume not.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Has he begun any activities with the department?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** When the announcement was made he held some meetings that were arranged by me. He spoke to people at the Bridge Street offices of the department. Mr Scott spent a day with me in my electorate a week or two ago and I took him to some schools—those kinds of things. I took him to some rural schools—to Goolgowi Public School, amongst others—to have a look at country schools and the particular challenges they have there. He has been doing the kinds of things that you would expect of a good secretary. I put on the record that I think we are very fortunate in New South Wales to have a person of his calibre as the Secretary of the Department of Education. Coming from the role he was in with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC] there are numerous corporate things he could have done that would probably pay substantially more than he will be paid in this role, but his commitment to public service has encouraged him to apply for a role like this. I think that is fantastic and certainly in the interests of New South Wales and it is an appointment I am very happy with.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Our only disappointment is that we do not get to question him until next year.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** You have got a year to think about it.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, were any of the costs associated with Mr Scott's travel covered by the department?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am not aware. Can I take that on notice? I do not know and I do not want to give an incorrect answer. I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, when did you know the Government was going to appoint Mr Scott as Secretary of the Department of Education?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I said, I was part of that interview process. There were two candidates interviewed. It was the conclusion of all three people who interviewed him that he would be the best candidate, so it was probably at that time.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I want to ask a couple of quick questions on deradicalisation programs in New South Wales schools.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Deradicalisation programs in New South Wales schools? There is no such thing.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Preventive?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** We are very cautious about the language that gets used around this issue.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What language do you use?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** "Countering violent extremism" is the general expression used. We are very cautious and indeed we seek the advice of police and national security agencies around language because the incorrect language can cause more problems than it solves. I say that so that you understand the context around it.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Is there a unit or a team? How does it—

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I ask the Secretary to answer that question. A lot of work has been done here to support schools and students where issues have arisen. But, as I said, we proceed very cautiously and very much on strong advice from law enforcement agencies.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Late in 2015 the Premier made an announcement about an investment in countering violent extremism which involved the engagement of 25 specialist staff in the department in order to support schools particularly around awareness of issues involving countering violent extremism. The approach we have adopted is one in which we seek to support people so that they do not get caught into that environment in the first instance. These specialist support teams go out and work with schools, training our staff and helping them to understand the sorts of things that can lead to a student following a different pathway than would normally be expected of people in New South Wales. So far that has proven to be a useful strategy and welcomed by the schools that the teams have been involved with.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Does a principal call up this unit or do you guys decide to go out? How does it work?

**Mr RIORDAN:** A principal can. It is available to all schools, I should add, not just departmental schools. It is a team that can work across all of our schools in New South Wales. Principals can make a call for support and assistance. We monitor reports coming from schools that may give rise to some concern about activity that may be occurring. So we take a few different ways of looking at this. We also work very closely with the NSW Police Force to identify any issues that they think could be emerging amongst particular individuals that may warrant some intervention at an early stage.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Can you explain or educate me about what these teams actually do? What does their work comprise?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay. Most of it is around resilience and awareness training. We are not about trying to target individuals to get them caught up in the justice system. What we try to do is work with schools to identify the sorts of activities that could give rise to somebody falling foul of extremist views and then converting those into some potential activity. It really is education and support. The people we have employed as leaders of those things are experienced deputy principals coming out of schools, including independent, Catholic and government schools. They know how schools operate. They know what is expected of behaviour in our schools and they are very good at identifying those sorts of triggers that can give rise to extremist behaviours.

They also consist of trained psychologists—school counsellors—who are again very experienced in working in the school environments to ensure that if that sort of psychological issue arises we have people who are ready and available to assist. It really is predominantly around awareness and building resilience so that our students, no matter what school they are in, do not succumb to forces, usually from outside the school, that may seek to ingratiate them into different ways of thinking than would be acceptable to most people in New South Wales.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Are these religious extremist elements, or does it also include the far Right and groups like that?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We use the term "countering violence and extremism". We have the two together: violence and extremism. Extremist views could be far Right views. They could be religious fanaticism—anything extremist which is then linked back to a potential violent act.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Have you had any reports of principals being reluctant or resisting the 25 staff members coming into their schools?

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, I have not.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, you recently announced major changes to the Higher School Certificate. Can you explain how they will work?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes, I certainly can. Probably the most significant change is the minimum literacy and numeracy requirement that will begin next year. To essentially prequalify for the HSC, students need to have achieved a band 8 in their year 9 NAPLAN, in all of their year 9 NAPLAN tests—that will be year 9 next year. If they do not meet that requirement, students then have two occasions in year 10, year 11 and year 12 to do a literacy and numeracy test that the board is preparing. This will be the equivalent of band 8 for year 9 NAPLAN. This is so that people can be confident that, if you have left year 12 with that Higher School Certificate, you have met that functional numeracy and literacy requirement as a minimum. Indeed, for five years after you have finished year 12, if you have not the met that standard, you can convert your Record of School Achievement [RoSA]—which is what you will get if you do not meet that standard in year 12—into an HSC by making subsequent attempts at the literacy and numeracy tests.

There were other changes to the way that the maths HSC subjects are assessed on a common scale. This is to discourage students from choosing easier mathematics subjects on the understanding, well placed or misplaced, that they are better off getting a better mark in a lower subject than a lower mark in a tougher subject—because we want to encourage more people to do higher level mathematics. We have also now included, or will include, an extension science subject—in the same way as extension history is offered. It will not be extension chemistry or extension physics; it will be extension science. If you are doing physics and chemistry, the extension subject you are doing may include a bit of physics and a bit of chemistry. Again, this is to encourage those high-performing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics [STEM] students, to extend them even further.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That is enough information for me, thank you. Minister. What proportion of year 9 students in 2016 will fail to meet that band 8 requirement?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The president might correct me here, but it is about 50 per cent.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** A bit less, most likely.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** A bit less than 50 per cent will meet that year 9 standard?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** A lot less or a little bit less?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** The formal standard is the Australian Core Skills Framework level 3. That approximates band 8 for NAPLAN—that is the nearest equivalent. If you achieve band 8 in the NAPLAN, then you have definitely met that standard. So depending on what you are measuring against—band 8 on NAPLAN or the Australian Core Skills Framework level 3 [ACSF]—it is a bit less or about that. But we are hoping to have the online test available immediately, as quickly as possible. We are not committing to that. We are hoping that the Australian Core Skills Framework level 3 test will be the measure. The other point I would make, if I may, is that we are being careful with our wording. It does not constitute a failure of any sort; it is in fact a prequalification for the literacy and numeracy attainment.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The board has looked at the experiences of Western Australia, where they introduced this a couple of years ago. They saw an almost immediate improvement in their year 9 NAPLAN results—and not just in year 9 but in year 7 as well. Part of that is that students start to take the NAPLAN test more seriously. Anecdotally, up at Singleton High School recently, both teachers and students said that students do not really take year 9 NAPLAN very seriously. That is a problem for the students, but it is also a problem for teachers. Teachers get most satisfaction when they have engaged students. Based on that Western Australian experience, we would expect to see an improvement. But I think employers and parents also expect the HSC to have a rigorous standard behind it and that the document should mean something in regard to your basic literacy and numeracy when you present it to an employer.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I would like to return to the gentleman from the Board of Studies. You used the phrase "failure".

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** No, I used the phrase "not a failure".

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Can you please elaborate on using "not a failure"?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** It is not a failure at all. The policy is for all students that are able to achieve the minimum literacy and numeracy standard. The standard describes a nationally agreed level of functionality in literacy and numeracy that is needed to function effectively in society. The Government's policy represents a belief that every single student that is able can achieve such a level. The NAPLAN test is the first opportunity to show that you have met that standard. Our expectation is that standard will be met by all students by the time they do their HSC. It is not our expectation that they will have met that standard by year 9. It will simply be their first opportunity.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Let me get this straight: if you do not meet the standard, that is not a failure?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No, it is not. NAPLAN is an assessment.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** If you do not meet the standard, that is not a failure. What is it then? If you are not meeting the benchmark—if you miss the benchmark and are below it—that is not a failure?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No, it is not a failure in regard to your ability to get an HSC. It is a standard that we set. We say, "If you want an HSC, you need to meet this standard." The first chance you get is in year 9, then you get multiple occasions to do it again in years 10, 11 and 12. Once you have met that standard, you are prequalified. If you get band 8 or higher in numeracy, you do not have to do the numeracy component in year 10; you only need to do the literacy component—until you pass the literacy and numeracy components. We think that people in New South Wales want to know that, when you get an HSC, you have met a minimum standard. I know there are people who want to say that a particular student was the first in their family to get an HSC, but it does have to have meaning. It has to have more meaning than just a certificate for turning up.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** But, Minister, under your reforms, if you do not meet the minimum standard, the benchmark, that is not a failure?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is not a failure, no.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What do you see it as then?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not describe those things as a failure. We try not to describe students as failures because, no matter what they get, people achieve at different stages of their lives. A lot of students have very unfortunate lives. As Bob Carr once said, for many people life is an incredibly disappointing experience. Things can turn around in your twenties and you can go on to do very well. Some of our most famous Australians did not do very well at school. So we do not categorise people as failures. Even if people do not get an HSC, they are not failures. They can be successful in many other ways. So, no, I do not describe it as a failure.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I am glad of that policy.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** That policy is a pass.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Our policy is that where they are is where they are. It is not pass or fail. They are where they are. If you get a band 7, that is where you are. The point of this is to provide that motivation. The point of this is actually for the students, as well as for the teachers and the schools, to say that this is the literacy and numeracy benchmark—a benchmark that business and education have agreed upon—that you need in order to be able to function in society. You cannot do your driver licence test without having functional literacy and numeracy. You cannot fill out a tax return. That is what it is saying. It is pointing us to where we should be aiming for as a minimum. Some are going to go and do brilliantly academically, others in sport, music, drama—all kinds of things. But it is difficult to play for the Swans if you cannot read and write. That is the point of having a standard like this—and we have seen it work successfully in places like Western Australia. We are not the first State to do it. We are always happy to pinch a good idea off somebody else.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, I will return to the gentleman from the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards. When the Minister said "about half" and you said "slightly less than that", what is the figure you were referring to?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** It depends on the behavioural effect of having the NAPLAN in place because the experience in Western Australia was that there was a substantial improvement in the results of students when they knew that this would pre-qualify them for their credential. Depending on the bounce we get, and there are different patterns here than in Western Australia so we cannot predict it absolutely, I would say something like 45 per cent of students, I would expect, would pre-qualify for the standard in their year 9 NAPLAN assessment.



**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** You are talking about band eight?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** That is right.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Would you agree that about 47 per cent of students would not meet band 8 in NAPLAN?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** What I will give you on notice—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** In numeracy.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** A number of students met the band eight requirement in this year's NAPLAN. We can show you the data for Western Australia for the year they begin—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** We are in New South Wales.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Sure, but to show you the effect in Western Australia, the number of band 8s before this began and after it began. Nobody is trying to trick anybody here. The board has given Government advice around changes to the HSC to improve performance. I am happy to provide that information.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I put it to the gentleman from the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards that 47.2 per cent of students would be below band 8 in numeracy. Does this accord with your data that, for writing, 65 per cent would not meet band 8 and, for reading, 49.1 per cent?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** That is not inconsistent with my recollection of the numbers. I do not have them before me but, as I say, we would expect an adjustment to that based on the fact that NAPLAN is being used on this occasion to meet the standard, and we also expect that the number in writing, which differs generally from the others, has been the one that has varied the most from State to State, on the basis of issues such as the genre of writing being used and marking, et cetera. What you have just said is not inconsistent with our expectations.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, how do you feel that almost half of students and more than half of students are falling below the line in writing?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is a number, that is for sure.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** It is a number, for sure?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is a number. It is a number like, say, 100 per cent getting band 10s.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Of course.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is why we have changed the policy. We have looked at what other jurisdictions have done to try to improve those results. Western Australia has done that. It seems to have improved it, not just in year 9, but in year 7 and year 5. It has focused the attention of schools on minimum literacy and numeracy in those schools and I expect it will do the same here. It aligns perfectly with our funding model. It will not surprise anybody that a proportion of high schools with the lowest proportion of students meeting that band 8 requirement will be lower socioeconomic status schools. They are the biggest beneficiaries out of needs-based funding. The funds flow to the schools that are going to need them to provide the most support to students to meet this standard.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What is going to happen to this data? Will this data remain in the department? Will it be shared with parents? Will it be shared with school communities? What will happen to this research?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** NAPLAN data is available on the My School website. Individual student data gets sent to schools and also sent to parents. Parents get a NAPLAN report, so they will see it. I would certainly hope that no-one would misuse data like that. As we said in a previous answer, it is not about pass and fail. It is about doing an assessment of where a student is up to with literacy and numeracy, and the schools looking at what they need to address, what components of literacy and numeracy they need to address. We started basic skills in New South Wales for this purpose. That is what the data is meant to be used for. The only problem I have with My School and NAPLAN is when that data is misused—used inappropriately—to inaccurately compare schools. When it is used for the right reasons, it is powerful data.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, I want to bring you back to some of your statements. You said the reason you are implementing this is that it would increase pressure on students and on teachers to achieve in the NAPLAN results, but at the same time you say it is not a pass/fail system.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** How is it increasing pressure on students, but not giving them a pass or fail?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** There is a lot of discussion about teaching to the test. The NAPLAN test, particularly when you get to year 9, is a test of your literacy and numeracy abilities.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I would hope all NAPLAN tests are a test of literacy and numeracy abilities.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is right. It is testing students' core abilities in literacy and numeracy, particularly when you are talking about the bottom four bands. There is a 5 to 10 band in year 9. It is testing your abilities in literacy and numeracy. That is what schools should be teaching as a minimum. They then teach science and history and other things. In that sense, focusing students' attention on learning literacy and numeracy, answering a literacy and numeracy test correctly, being able to write answers to a written assessment is absolutely, as a minimum, what schools should be doing. I recognise not every student is going to get a band 10. Some will and some will excel in other things, but the minimum literacy and numeracy is the core business of every school. If it focuses the attention of high schools, particularly, on minimum standards for literacy and numeracy then that is a good thing. Primary schools, certainly predominantly literacy and numeracy. Then you get to high school and you start going into individual subjects, but they still need to focus on literacy and numeracy.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, you did not use the words "focusing attention". You used the words "increasing pressure". They were words deliberately chosen by you. I am interested why you specifically used those words, "increasing pressure". That is a different context to simply directing their attention.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** We want students to do well in literacy and numeracy. We want to be able to assess them and we want them to take the year 9 NAPLAN test seriously to show us what they are capable of doing. Again, anecdotally, I have students say to me, "This is a just test that the Government wants done and we don't care." We want students to have a different attitude. Again, this is the experience in Western Australia, students start to take it more seriously and it is then a more accurate assessment of what they are capable of doing in literacy and numeracy. Teachers use multiple other ways of determining how their students are going in literacy and numeracy. This is one test in one day. They need to know where they are up to in order to be able to address whatever weaknesses they have in literacy and numeracy. It is about actually saying, you know, you need to take this a bit more seriously.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Are you forecasting the same proportion of the year 9 cohort not achieving minimum band 8 NAPLAN results next year?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As much as you might hope that they do not—I know that Labor often hopes for crisis.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I take objection to that.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** You go to bed at night dreaming about crises in various areas.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, I asked you a question.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I certainly hope every year, even before this, I always hope that NAPLAN results go up. Can I guarantee it? No, I cannot. Based on the experience in Western Australia, they have seen an improvement. Education reform is not easy. This is not a silver bullet to anything. This is one component of a multi-faceted approach to literacy and numeracy. We have the literacy and numeracy action plan in kindergarten to year 2. There is this in year 9. We have made changes to the HSC. Indeed, if a student does not meet the numeracy standard, they have to do a numeracy subject in year 11 and 12 until they meet that standard. There will be further announcements about literacy and numeracy in the next couple of weeks to target all of those aspects of a student's schooling career to ensure we remain focused on literacy and numeracy.

I will end on this point: Early intervention is one thing. What we see with early intervention is if we intervene early and then stop, the effects of that quickly dissipate. It is early intervention and continuing to intervene until a student finishes year 12. That is why we have a K-2 strategy. Many schools have extended it to year 6. Then there are things that are happening in early high school. Now we have year 9, which is essentially another literacy and numeracy check, and then the measures we have taken for the HSC in year 12. This is about early and continued intervention in literacy and numeracy.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, how do you differentiate between students who are not achieving because of their attitude rather than their ability?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is a very difficult thing to do, but, as I said, NAPLAN is only one assessment that students do. Teachers should know the abilities of their students, and not wait for the NAPLAN test results to come out, because they are constantly doing assessments of where their students are up to in literacy and numeracy.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** But there will be no differentiation in the minimum requirements. If you do not meet the minimum requirements then you do not get in.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is the nature of a standard. You might think you are a great driver but you have lost your licence 10 times. You do not have your licence; that is the nature of a standard. You have to set a benchmark, and that is it. Students have to know that that is the benchmark. If they want an HSC they have to meet the benchmark. The first time they get to meet it is in year 9.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** You said that they will have the opportunity—you said it would be frequently—to revisit it. How often will they be able to revisit it?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** My advice from the department is that they can do that two times in year 10, the same in year 11 and in year 12—and, I presume, for the five years after that.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** It will be for the five years after that. It would be at least that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** At least twice a year they will have the opportunity?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes. The purpose here is to get them to that level. It is not to deny them. The absolute purpose is to give them every opportunity to meet that standard. We succeed when students leave year 12—we want 100 per cent so we are going to give them every opportunity—at that standard.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** The time for Opposition questions has expired; we will move to questions from the crossbench, starting with Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Following up on my earlier questions, do you believe that the Safe Schools Coalition course is aimed at preventing bullying—that that is its main purpose?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Again, a look at the My School hub certainly points to that. Yes. It links to all kinds of resources for teachers and provides teaching resources about bullying.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** The Minister has already made it clear that it is not a course.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes, that is right.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** It is called the Safe Schools Coalition course.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I said, there is a Safe Schools hub. The Safe Schools Coalition has separate websites. For example, when two people talk about chest binding, that is not on the Safe Schools hub. It might be on some other web site but it is not on the Safe Schools hub. Issues about using gender-specific language might be on some other site; it is not on the Safe Schools hub. I certainly could not find it there. I am just saying that you have to define what Safe Schools is in this context, and what is on the hub.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I am just trying to get you to explain to me what you think it is.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I think it is what is on that Safe Schools hub.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Do you think it is a course—a program—to prevent bullying?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Amongst other things. It has links to mental health services like beyondblue and various other things.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** They are separate. I have no problems with them.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** In that case, it is about lots of things, bullying being one part of it.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Are you aware that the co-founder—I mentioned her name before, Roz Ward—of the Safe Schools Coalition course, told a Melbourne symposium that the program was not about stopping bullying, at all?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I cannot vouch for her words.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** She drafted this.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I had a good look on the Safe Schools hub and at the resources there. As a parent myself they were what I would expect schools to be able to access. It had links to resources to support students.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** She explained later that what it aims at is social engineering. Are you in favour of a school course with an underlying ulterior motive?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I said, the Federal Government did a review of the material that was called Safe Schools material. They put that material on a Federal department web site, and it is called the Safe Schools hub. I am not going to pass comment on other things that might be on other web sites, or commentary made by other people. As far as I am concerned, when a school is using the material from a Safe Schools hub, that is the web site I am talking about.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Are you aware that a survey has been conducted by professionals Yau and O'Reilly—of 105,000 Canadian school students? It found that the most common reasons for being bullied were their body shape, size or general appearance followed by school grades, race or ethnic background, religious beliefs and family income. Same-sex attractions or transgenderism did not even come in the top seven reasons for bullying. The question is: why have the program in our schools if it is not to do with bullying at all?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** My personal view is that if one student is bullied and commits suicide then it is worth doing.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I am not against a program that addresses all forms of bullying—the ones that I have just listed. That is what the focus should be on—not on sexuality and transgenderism.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Schools, to their great credit, do a lot of work around bullying. That is not to dismiss the fact that same-sex-attracted students are the victims of bullying. To what degree compared to other reasons—race, weight and various other things—I do not know. But if awareness around the bullying of same-sex-attracted people saves one student from committing suicide—it could be my son, one day—that is a good thing. I say that as a politician and as a Christian.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** But it will not be your son, because your sons attend Catholic schools, which prohibit the Safe Schools program.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I think it is best for me not to answer that question.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Point of order: I know it is expected that wide-ranging questions will be asked in budget estimates, but I do think it is inappropriate to ask Ministers about their own children.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** I agree. I uphold the point of order.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** It says how much confidence you have in the programs when your children attend schools that do not have it.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I make the same point of order.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Reverend Nile, do you have another line of questioning with regard to the budget?

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** An analysis of scientific literature by Dr Mayer and Dr McHugh published this month shows that the gender and sexuality theories promoted by the Safe Schools Coalition course are not based on scientific evidence. Are you aware of that research?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am not aware of the report.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I will send you a copy, because I think that as Minister for Education, you and your staff should be conscious of it. I know you want to protect that one child you are talking about but we have to look at what we are doing to all the other children going through this course.

Another area that concerns me is the pressure on the school chaplaincy and Christian scripture classes. Are you and your department giving your full support to securing the future of Christian chaplaincy in New South Wales and Christian scripture classes in our State?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The Government is not changing the policy around scripture classes.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** And chaplaincy?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is a federally funded program. We administer it, and will continue to do so.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** The other question relates to ethics classes. I get the impression sometimes that there is more sympathy for the ethics classes in the department than there is for scripture classes. Are you aware that in the course for the teachers who conduct the ethics classes they are instructed not to teach the children what is right and wrong?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Sorry, can you ask that question again?

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** In the instructions for the teachers or leaders of the ethics classes, they are told not to teach the children what is right and what is wrong in discussion groups. Did someone disagree with that?

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** No, all I said was that it was moral relativism. I was just paraphrasing your question.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** It is not imposing the values of the teacher.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Order! We have a question before the witnesses.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not have an answer to that question.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** The other question relates to homeschooling. Many parents take up that opportunity. It has been raised in the past that there is financial support for non-Government schools— independent schools. Has there been any consideration of financial help for parents who may have very low incomes to assist them financially with homeschooling?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No, not that I am aware of.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Would you give some consideration to that proposal?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am sorry, just ask me the question again.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** There are parents involved in homeschooling for conscientious reasons who are poor and do not have financial resources. It is a struggle. I am not suggesting it is for parents who live in North Sydney and who have plenty of money but, rather, those parents who are working class. Would there be any consideration of providing financial assistance for those parents who conduct their own homeschooling?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No. They can go to a public school, and we provide that free of charge.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I said "for conscientious reasons".

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** But that is a decision that they make.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** They believe they should teach their own children.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is a decision they make for good reason, I presume, and they make that on the understanding that it is going to cost them.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** You are concerned about bullying that goes on, or could go on, in State schools.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** And in non-government schools too, I would remind you.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Yes. Are you aware that there is a development now of holding Purple Day in government schools when children are supposed to dress in purple, which relates to the homosexual movement?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I am aware of Purple Day, yes.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** The girls who do not dress in purple are now being bullied in those government schools.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I would hope that that is not the case.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** It is the case.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I know that there are allegations and certainly I would hope that that is not the case. I would expect schools to do everything to prevent that in the way that they prevent every type of bullying.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I hope you investigate that.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Including the school that my children go to.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Again, it would not happen in a Catholic school, you see. Your children are safe. They do not hold Purple Day, as far as I am aware.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is very difficult to be restrained, given the line of your questioning, but the Catholic priest in the school where my children go to said that children born from in-vitro fertilisation [IVF] are a sin. Having some friends who have children that are IVF, they love their children as much as I love my children. You know, there are inadequacies in every area of human endeavour, Reverend, and I would hope that my children in a Catholic school are protected from bullying as much as any student in a public school. I send my children to a Catholic school because I was raised a Catholic and I believe in the Christian ethic. It does not conform with the view that where children are born through IVF, despite the best efforts of their parents to conceive naturally, that child is a sin and that a newsletter should be sent out in the schoolbag of every child reminding those children that if they have a friend who is born of IVF, that child was born as a sin. I just point that out. We have a long way to go, Reverend, in supporting all children.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Yes. I am not suggesting that Catholic schools are perfect. I did not state that.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Well, you did. You said that they are 100 per cent protected from bullying.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** They are.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Order! Let us get back to questions that relate to the budget.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is my restrained answer.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** The other issue that has been brought to my attention again—I did raise it last year—was that there is concern in the department over some of the Muslim prayer groups operating in State schools that were tending towards promoting radicalism. Outsiders were coming into those groups and influencing students, so the department, rightly, issued a directive covering that whole area and making it very difficult for outsiders to come into the group and to identify all the names and addresses of students who attend that group. A directive was put out by the department dealing with that issue, but the directive never made clear what groups they were talking about.

The concern was those Muslims school prayer groups. It has been interpreted in many of the State schools as also referring to the peaceful Christian fellowship groups, which have had no reports of radicalisation and so on. But all the rules and regulations are that a new child cannot attend that group unless somehow there is a record of their name and address and all of that. People are now enforcing those rules for the Christian fellowship groups, which is having a big effect on their success in operation.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You want it applied on a discriminatory basis only against people of the Muslim faith.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I am asking the questions and the Minister is answering, not you, Mr Shoebridge. There should be a new directive making it clear that it was referring to Muslim prayer groups—they are called prayer groups—not to the Christian fellowship groups.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I will take that question on notice.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Another concern—and obviously you would be aware of it—is that there is some concern among parents with children in State schools as to the practical teaching ability of some of the State school teachers. What has been done to improve their standard of teaching? Maybe it is a lack of the teacher training colleges and so on resulting in their not having had enough practice classes. Some of the teachers seem to lack that practical ability. They know all the theory, but in terms of the practical ability of teaching children, how do you help those teachers?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is an issue across all schools. I think it is wrong to characterise it as being an issue at State schools. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL] sets the national teaching standards, which were really the New South Wales standards made national. The board oversees those standards, and registers and accredits teachers. There were new scheme teachers, which were teachers who began after 2004 when the new student teachers legislation was introduced. We as a Government are now in the process of bringing all teachers under the Board of Studies—under the new Education Standards Authority. All teachers, both government and non-government, will have to do 100 hours of professional development every five years to meet those standards. Every five years they will be reaccredited.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** GTIL, which is the Government's policy of Great Teaching, Inspired Learning, has established for the first time an agreed framework for quality practicum. It is agreed by all sectors

and implemented across all schools and implemented by all universities. There are minimum standards of what is required for practicum in terms of length but also, importantly, in terms of quality as a result of the Great Teaching, Inspired Learning policy.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I am happy with that.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** We will move now to questions by Mr Shoebridge.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, the New South Wales Education Standards Authority was your recent announcement. Can you advise when that authority is expected to start operation?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It will begin on 1 January—subject to legislation because there will need to be some legislative changes. Presuming the legislation passes this year, which we hope it will—it will be introduced—that will begin on 1 January.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** There have been some concerns that, given statements by the gentleman who undertook the review, the current Board of Studies duplicates some of the curriculum work done at a national level and that this is representing a withdrawal from the curriculum in part by the New South Wales education authorities and a weakening of the New South Wales curriculum. Is that the case?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No, certainly not the case. I think we certainly consider ourselves here in New South Wales to have the gold standard in terms of curriculum and syllabus development. In fact, the previous Government took a very strong stance. Minister Firth and Minister Della Bosca before her took a stance in terms of development of the national curriculum that was supported by the Opposition at the time in that they would not sign off until it was as least as good as the existing standard in New South Wales. Tom Alegounarias was involved and we certainly supported that and, essentially, we have continued that. We have made it very clear that we would not see any watering down of the quality in New South Wales.

What the review recommended was an approach to speed up the review of the various curriculums. But also, the development of the national curriculum, which is pretty much finished, was for New South Wales to get involved earlier in the process rather than get a national curriculum and go through the whole consultation process again. So it is certainly no way to water down the approach in New South Wales, but it is to streamline that approach a little bit. Mr Alegounarias might want to expand.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** The board's legislative responsibility to advise the Government ultimately on the appropriateness of the mandatory curriculum for New South Wales schools will remain as is in the legislation, so that will be the board's responsibility. There is an agreement across all sectors and stakeholders with the board that in a modern world a nimbleness and responsiveness to changes that arise from technologies, et cetera, need to be reflected in the board's processes.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Some parts of the curriculum need to be updated more than others—information and communications technology [ICT] obviously more regularly than English, mathematics or history. It is a recognition of that and where we can speed up the process without losing any quality.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** In the exact words of Professor , he was critical of the current board of studies for "needlessly duplicating" national reforms. He said the board's regulatory processes "are currently administratively burdensome for schools, teachers, employers and indeed for BOSTES itself". What duplication, if it exists, is going to be lost?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Professor Loudon's recommendation around curriculum was with respect to the national curriculum, so there is a whole lot of consultation that goes in and the national curriculum comes out and then the States like New South Wales take it into another round of consultation. He said there was some duplication there and the recommendation was that New South Wales, which had been involved at the front end, needed to be more involved in shaping the national curriculum so that when it comes out it is much closer to what we would expect to have in New South Wales. Around administration, teachers raised issues about the teacher accreditation process—the paperwork, et cetera, and it was the same with principals as the teacher accreditation authority. There was some duplication there that can be gotten rid of to reduce red tape.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** If we do not have a very clear consultation process when the national curriculum is changing, how can we be sure that we are getting the best education minds, the best high-quality teachers, the best university professionals involved in the curriculum so that we do not see New South Wales standards slip to a lowest common denominator nationally?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** We and the board certainly will not allow that to happen. The board is an independent statutory authority. It has as an organisation, a curriculum committee, whose role it is to review the

curriculum, et cetera. It will be its focus to make sure we have the most robust curriculum possible in New South Wales.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** It works best not because there is a small committee. The board of studies works well because it brings in that extraordinary field of experienced teachers and resources to look at the curriculum. We are not going to shrink to a committee, are we?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** To go to the governance arrangements, the board currently has 23 members. The department has three members, the Teachers Federation has two members, the Independent Education Union [IEU] has a member, various sectors have members. There are 23 members, a very large board. The recommendation is to reduce that to 12 to 14 members. That is the board and then there are five committees, I think. Mr Alegounarias might go into the five committees.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** A curriculum committee will be established on a permanent basis with delegated authority that the curriculum committee will include within it the full range of interests and perspectives to help assure the quality of the New South Wales curriculum. The ultimate measure as to whether it will be effective is in the fact that the formal legal and ethical responsibility of the board—and delegated to that a committee under the auspices of the board—is to advise the Minister on one broad criterion only, and that is whether this is the most optimum curriculum for New South Wales students. It is the legislative provision that the responsibility of the board in that is maintained.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** How many people will be on that committee?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** The subcommittee? The review does not specify that. We are currently working on that and will be consulting with stakeholders and the board, once it is established, on the range and number of people. But there is no limit set in the review on the number of people to be on that committee.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Given how many subjects there are and the depth of knowledge needed just to get your head around one—modern history or ancient history or chemistry—how could there possibly be sufficient expertise on any one committee to adequately test whether or not the change in the national curriculum is going to meet that standard that you have set? Surely you have to engage with a broad range of quality teachers, current and former teachers, to make it work. Is that structure going to be imposed?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** Yes. We do not expect that committee to attest to the quality of content in each subject area. We expected to attest to the quality of the process. The process, therefore, will be on the basis that the appropriate level of input at the appropriate stages will be included.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The committee or the board is only a part of the process. The amount of consultation that goes on with every other person interested in every component of that piece of the syllabus—and there are some out for review at the moment—

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** That is right. By way of example, we are currently consulting on New South Wales syllabuses following the Australian curriculum. From memory we have about 3,500 individuals who have so far attended consultation forums.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But currently the board signs off on the quality and the content of the curriculum. It sounds like, from the answer that has just been given, the concerns are quite valid. Instead of signing off on the quality and the content of the curriculum, indeed it is going to be a review of the process as opposed to the final outcome, unless I misunderstood your answer, Mr Alegounarias.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** No. Currently the committees and the board assure the quality because, as you said, individuals on the board are not in a position to attest to the veracity of the content with regard to calculus, for example. We rely on—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** That is what you consult on and that is the duplication that is being removed.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** No, that consultation will necessarily, in order to meet the legislative requirements and responsibilities, need to be included. What can change is that when there is a national consultation process and we foresee that some of our issues may be addressed through that national consultation process, we can proactively include our issues in that national consultation process in order to facilitate an efficiency, but not to the extent that it absolves the board of any responsibility to attest itself to the quality of the curriculum and the syllabuses when they are developed.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, come 2018 there is going to be a serious shortfall in Gonski funding from the Federal Government. What is the extent of that shortfall?



**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Those are the fifth and sixth years, so New South Wales is contributing and has budgeted for our contribution to those years. The Commonwealth has said it is reducing its contribution in those years.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** What is the extent of the shortfall from the Commonwealth? You must know.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I probably do have the dollar numbers here. The dollar figures have been made public and I am happy to answer that on the record if somebody has those figures immediately to hand.

**Ms LOBLE:** The last two years of the agreement is a \$1.2 billion funding loss—that is, for 2018 and 2019.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** If that funding is not available, what is that going to mean in real terms in terms of teaching kids, particularly the kids who most need special support who have been targeted through Gonski funding?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** To make it clear, as I said, the New South Wales Government is contributing funding for the fifth and sixth years. We continue to lobby the Commonwealth about its contribution—so we are lobbying it to make good the agreement we signed with the Government. As I said before, we did not sign the agreement with the Labor Party but with the Government. I met with Minister Birmingham a few weeks ago about this and I am sure funding will come up at the next ministerial council meeting. We continue to urge the Federal Government to make that contribution in the national interest. It is important to explain that funding goes up for the four years—the joint contribution, one-third State, two-thirds Commonwealth. At the end of four years, instead of going up as much as it was, it is still going to go up because we are making our fifth and sixth year contributions.

The Commonwealth is indexing its funding by 3.6 per cent, so it still goes up. Even at the end of six years it does not go down to where we were pre-Gonski. At worst it continues at some indexation rate. Some schools are concerned that, at the end of six years, it goes back to where it began. We have moved away from that point of block funding to a sustainable funding level. Individual schools might change depending on enrolment and the nature of the students, but essentially funding will keep going up until the sixth year and beyond that the increase depends on indexation—but it certainly does not come back to where it was pre-Gonski.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** The primary legislative obligation you have as a Minister and that the department has is to provide quality universal public education for students in New South Wales. Do you agree?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You could meet the entirety of the Commonwealth Government shortfall to Gonski in 2018 and 2019 by delivering just half of the \$1.15 billion that the New South Wales Government gives to the independent private schools. Why is that not on the table to ensure that we meet the obviously identified needs under Gonski?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The New South Wales Government supports choice. Funding for non-government schools has been around for a long time. We are not proposing to change it.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But it has not been at \$1.15 billion per annum until your Government. It is a huge amount of public money going to some of the most wealthy and elite schools—schools like The King's School. Why are we putting scarce public funding into a school that has eight sporting fields, endless rifle ranges and indoor sporting fields? Why is it getting any public funding when we have schools in Western Sydney that are not air-conditioned and that have kids in demountables?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The non-government school funding now is all incorporated under the National Education Reform Agreement and it is needs-based. Funding of non-government schools is also based on the ability of parents to pay—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** You are not suggesting The King's School is a needy school.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Essentially, the wealthier the school, the less it gets in State and Commonwealth funding. You and other people have the view that wealthy non-government schools should get zero—

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I have a view that The King's School is not needy. Absolutely—that view might be different to yours.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is not the measure of the arrangement at the moment, and the New South Wales Government is not planning on changing it. But that number goes up because of enrolments. We are noticing a boost in enrolments not only in public schools but also in non-government schools—mostly, I think it is accurate to say, in low-fee non-government schools.

**Ms LOBLE:** Yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Do you believe any private school should be getting scarce public funding from the New South Wales taxpayer when it is building its second indoor performing arts centre?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** We have longstanding financial arrangements with non-government schools, and they are not going to change. [*Time expired.*]

**The ACTING CHAIR:** We will now move to questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, what is your current position on a public high school in Medowie?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I know it was an election commitment made by the Labor Opposition, and I know the previous member lobbied me about it, as has the current member.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Your secretary earlier referred to a 15-year plan for new schools. Does Medowie figure in that plan?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not want to give all our secrets away at estimates.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** You can give just one.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I said, there are 22 projects that have not been announced yet, plus most of the billion dollars set aside for schools under the poles and wires transaction. They will be announced in due season as someone once famously said.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** We will watch this space.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** To go back to the issue of capacity, I have an update on the question you asked me earlier. The figure I have, which is the percentage of schools over 100 per cent utilisation, is 7.11 per cent. The highest reached in the past 10 years was 9.73 per cent, and that was in 2010.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** My next question is regarding school maintenance. From the latest set of budget papers we can see that the State Government failed to spend \$26 million out of the maintenance budget. What would you say to the students at Great Lakes College Forster Campus—I declare an interest because it is my alma mater—which is the worst school in the State with an outstanding maintenance bill.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** What damage did you do while you were there?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I would not on the record say how long it has been since I have been at Great Lakes College.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** If I am correct, the figure was in last year's annual report, which picked up the removal of TAFEs from the education cluster. That is why there is that \$23 million discrepancy, but I will ask the acting secretary to expand.

**Mr RIORDAN:** That is about the right number. In regard to the particular school, I am not fully au fait with it. We undertake lifecycle costing across all of our asset areas to ensure that they are maintained in a good condition. Issues come up from time to time that result in a higher backlog at one of the schools, and we have to look to see what is planned for the future. We are allocating more money for maintenance over the next two years to deal with some of those issues.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Do you have any specific programs for schools like Great Lakes College Forster Campus, which has in excess of \$3.5 million worth of maintenance, which are suffering such a large backlog of maintenance?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We are looking at prioritising all those projects, so those that have the highest priority will get the money first. We have a two-year funding envelope here with \$330 million for backlog maintenance. We are looking at assessing across all of our schools where the greatest need is, and those will be the first schools targeted. I am not sure what the issues are at Great Lakes College Forster Campus. We would need to look very carefully to see what that is. We are looking at schools across the State, so it is not targeted at

a particular area. We are working across the State to ensure that those schools with the greatest need get the earliest attention.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And when you say "the greatest need", is that in regard to the total amount?

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, it will be in regard to the issue—for example, if a school needs a roof replaced because every time it rains water gets in and damages the carpet, we replace the carpet. Getting a roof redone might take priority over a school that has a leaking windowsill.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Minister, what are we up to now with Learning Management and Business Reform? What is the cost as at this moment?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is \$752 million.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Is that correct?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Total cost.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Total cost as of when?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is the total cost of the program. I am just looking for—

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Is that the cost to date or the projected cost?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No, that is the total cost up until completion.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So it is the projected cost.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Total cost, yes.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** When is completion?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** All schools will have their systems rolled out by the end of next year.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I understand that 5 September, next week, is the new tranche date. Is that correct?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That is correct.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What steps are you taking regarding the concerns of teachers and principals that there will be a crash in the system?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I met this morning with the executive director who is in charge of the rollout, and he told me everything is proceeding well.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Minister, can you confirm whether the coverage from the blowout of the cost was covered by the Education budget or by general revenue?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not accept the characterisation that you use. As I have said many times in Parliament, this was originally signed up to 10 years ago, as it should have been. It was well and truly overdue to have all the systems updated, so it was not an incorrect decision to update them. But when that decision was made, there was no factoring-in of the implementation costs, and the Auditor-General has acknowledged this. The build was in a period even before iPads became available, and what was factored in was the cost of the build. They could not predict the cost of implementation, which was the training costs and all of the other costs of rolling it out to 2,200 schools. Yes, that is a cost that was not budgeted for originally. However, it was acknowledged that it would be a cost. That is often characterised as a blowout. We cannot produce a system and then not expect there to be costs for implementation and training.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** The question was whether it came from the Department of Education budget or general revenue.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** The Department of Education gets a budget every year, and it is in the budget that we get every year.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** So it came out of the budget.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Yes, it has come out of the New South Wales budget.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** No, I meant the Department of Education budget. My colleague's question was very clear. Was it from the New South Wales Department of Education budget or general revenue?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** In regard to the technicalities about which budget it comes from, I will invite Mr Riordan to respond.

**Mr RIORDAN:** The program in its entirety has been funded from the Department of Education budget.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Will there be cuts? How will you make up this \$752 million?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We budgeted the expense of the program.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Have you set up a unit? Where are you looking to make these savings?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We manage the money made available by Treasury in such a way that we can afford to complete the project.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** How many projects or initiatives have been delayed?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** None; the secretary said there were none.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** He did not give that answer; you did.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** There are no savings required to fund it; it is funded separately in the budget.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** It was a different question and the Minister chose to answer it.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** How many departmental staff are assigned to the LMBR implementation team?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I will take that question on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** How many staff are on stress leave as a result of the LMBR?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I will also take that question on notice.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** I draw the Committee's attention to the tree audit announced in 2014. The audit was announced after the tragic case of Bridget Wright, who was killed by a falling tree branch. What is the status of that tree audit?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Following that tragic incident the department required all schools to undertake a tree audit. That involved engaging qualified arborists to review all trees. The expenditure on the exercise was about \$32 million. It was an extensive audit and it provided a starting point for all schools. As a further consequence of the tragedy, the department also developed explicit tree-management guidelines for all schools. Principals are required to undertake an annual review of trees on their school sites, particularly those in proximity to student activity.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Was that \$32 million spent on carrying out the audit or was it spent on tree lopping?

**Mr RIORDAN:** It was a combination. It covered the full cost of both the audit and the removal of many thousands of trees and the lopping of many branches. That was the total cost.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Principals have reported to the Opposition that the cost of tree removal has been taken on by local school communities.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Historically tree maintenance has also been part of a school's budget allocation. Principals are required to maintain trees. We took this particular action in response to that tragic incident. We wanted to put a baseline in place. It has always been a school responsibility to ensure the safety of trees on their school site, and that continues to be the case today. However, after that incident the department invested \$32 million to ensure that every tree was examined and appropriately managed.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** Do you have a number for the trees in schoolyards that are deemed dangerous?

**Mr RIORDAN:** We do not believe there are any dangerous trees. Every tree is potentially dangerous and we cannot predict these things. However, we have put in place arrangements to ensure the safety of students and teachers. We do appropriate risk assessments and principals are required to undertake an annual tree review. There are very detailed tree guidelines to assist them in that process. If they wish, they can bring in an arborist to address any concerns they find on the site.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So the \$32 million program has been completed?

**Mr RIORDAN:** That is correct.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And local schools are now required to use their maintenance budget to pay for the ongoing removal of trees as required?

**Mr RIORDAN:** If there is damage to a tree, or a tree is showing signs of wear and tear that make it a risk, the school would in the normal course of events rectify that problem.

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** What is the status of the language school at Randwick that is being closed?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** On the Coogee Public School site?

**The Hon. WALT SECORD:** No, it is the Saturday School of Community Languages at the Randwick centre. It teaches Turkish, Serbian, Polish and Chinese languages.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is on the same block as Coogee Public School. A significant amount has been spent to expand the capacity of the school. If I recall correctly, the school is being relocated to Petersham, and I know that some people are not happy about that.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Parents have raised another issue with me about the Safe Schools course. I have been told that the course is providing schools with a Safe Schools Coalition poster depicting a boy wearing a dress. I assume the idea is that the poster will be displayed at schools. What is the Government's policy with regard to posters such as that being displayed at schools?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Is it from the Safe Schools hub? It depends on whether it is from that hub. As I said, there are millions of websites, and we do not regulate them all.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** My question asked whether you would support the poster being displayed in a State public school.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I have not seen the poster, so I am not in a position to answer that question. I am not an educationalist, nor am I in a position to make such a determination. Schools must do things that are age appropriate and they must take into consideration all of their legal requirements. It is not my job to micromanage schools. I have not seen the poster, so I cannot pass any judgement.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** It is simple; it depicts a boy wearing a girl's school uniform.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is not simple for me to give an answer as the Minister for Education.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Would you have any objection to it being displayed?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** That was not my answer. Until I see it, I cannot respond. I do not know whether schools are displaying it; it is a claim you are making. I am happy to take the question on notice.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** That then raises the issue that has become controversial in the United States, involving governors and now the President dealing with whether boys can access girls' toilet areas in government schools. This raises the same possibility if boys are allowed to wear girls' uniforms. What toilet will they access? What is the Government's policy?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** No policy changes are being made with regard to toilets in New South Wales government schools.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** What is that policy?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It is about who can use toilets and having gender-neutral toilets.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** What is the policy?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I understand that this material is not part of the Safe Schools hub. I again return to what is "Safe Schools". Safe Schools is what is on the hub. It is the program that is funded and endorsed by the Commonwealth Government and what schools in New South Wales refer to as "Safe Schools". It is what is on the hub; it is not what other people say it is. This is what other people say Safe Schools is. It is my understanding that some of this material is not on the Safe Schools hub. In Griffith, where I live, there was a recent discussion about Safe Schools and about how it promotes chest binding and so on. As far as I have seen, that is certainly not on the Safe Schools hub. There is no reference to it on the hub. There is a campaign to link every gender issue with the Safe Schools hub. All of those issues are out there. However, I recommend that the member look at the hub website. If he did, he would see that this material has nothing to do with it.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** That poster is definitely from the Safe Schools program.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** Coalition. There is a Safe Schools Coalition website and it has other material that I understand people get a bit worked up about. Of course there are a range of views. But the Safe Schools hub is the material that is endorsed by or has been considered by and endorsed by the Commonwealth. That is why one of the actions from the review was to put all of the endorsed material onto the one website so there could be no confusion as to what is Safe Schools and what is not.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Because with the promotion of transgenderism, we have just had a controversial case in New South Wales of a schoolgirl aged 14 who wanted to have both her breasts removed. Apparently if she was over 18 years of age she would not need court approval, but because she is under the age of 18 she had to get court approval—which she did get from the Family Law Court. Obviously that is permanent and that was approved by the Family Law Court. That is one of my concerns—whether these seeds are being planted in the way this course has been presented to high school children.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I take you back to the Safe Schools hub. There are materials on there. Anything else that is not on there is not endorsed by the Federal Government and not part of what the department would call Safe Schools.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** But transgenderism is in the Safe Schools hub.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I do not know in what context. There may well be an explanation of what that means. There are materials there for teachers to understand. There are definitions. If a student comes to a teacher and says, "I am transgender," or, "I am intersex," what does it mean? Surely that is advice worth providing to teachers. I do not have a problem with that.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** Advice is different from promotion.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I agree.

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** My concern is about promotion.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** We move to questions from Mr Shoebridge.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Minister, what is there to stop a private school that gets recurrent funding through the State budget using that recurrent funding to get other savings—offsetting parent income and then effectively delivering that money to upgrade its capital works? We know it is happening. You cannot use State recurrent funding on capital works, but there is nothing to stop a private school getting State recurrent funding and therefore using that to offset operational income and diverting other income to capital works. What is there to prevent that happening?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** I would have to ask the secretary for advice there, given that the department is the one through which the funding for non-government schools goes. There are requirements under the Education Act around operating for profit et cetera. The board also has a responsibility in terms of its registration requirements for all schools and particularly non-government schools. I might say one of those additional powers recommended in the review was unannounced checks that may well deal with some of these kinds of issues.

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** I could only say from the board's perspective that the governance requirements would entail that the school's records be subject to audit in the appropriate fashion and any misrepresentation would transgress the governance requirements for the school.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Perhaps you can provide the answer to this on notice: How many of those audits of private schools have actually happened in the last two financial years?

**Mr ALEGOUNARIAS:** There are normal, standard requirements for all schools, but we will identify the appropriate data.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** In fact, and the secretary might expand on this as well, we have established a non-government schools committee to consider issues around—I will let the secretary or Ms Loble explain much more eloquently than me—

**Mr RIORDAN:** With my flu I will ask Ms Leslie Loble if she would not mind answering, please.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** We take this seriously. There have been a couple of publicised cases of non-government schools using money inappropriately or that have certainly been alleged to have used it inappropriately. We have taken additional measures, some of them at the recommendation of the Association of Independent Schools.

**Ms LOBLE:** Yes. We have established under section 83K of the Education Act the not-for-profit advisory committee. It sets out quite specifically what roles and responsibilities that committee has, which is principally to advise the Minister on individual school compliance around the issue of for profit, which is expressly prohibited, as you know, under the Education Act. That committee is chaired by Elizabeth Crouch and has representatives of the Board of Studies, the department, independent schools and Catholic schools. It can not only have findings regarding not-for-profit status but can also make recommendations regarding any sanctions in terms of any finding of non-compliance. We have published through that committee a series of guidelines to try to make it clear or transparent to schools what sorts of things the committee will be looking at and to assist them in understanding how to make sure that they adhere to the law and not become for profit, in order to receive funding. I should suggest that if a school wants to be for profit, that is a separate decision. This is an issue that goes to what public funds are provided.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Will that committee, as the Minister suggested, be working with the new authority?

**Ms LOBLE:** Yes.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Will it be subject to the direction of the new authority?

**Ms LOBLE:** No. There is representation from the current Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards. The new authority will also be represented on that committee.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** How many for-profit schools are there in New South Wales?

**Ms LOBLE:** There is only one school that has been found in the past to be for profit.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Which school was that?

**Ms LOBLE:** Malek Fahd.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** It was not supposed to be for profit.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** That is why it received vast sums of State and Federal funding, despite being for profit.

**Ms LOBLE:** As you are probably aware, that is subject to a court action where we are seeking to recover those funds.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But my question was not just about for profit. My question was about the capacity of some of the most well-off public schools. Trinity Grammar, which receives \$11 million in public funding, and Knox Grammar, which receives about \$8 million in State and Federal public funding, are using that public funding to offset capital works. And 20 wealthy schools who received \$111 million in public funding in the last year used it to offset some \$61 million in capital expenditure. What are you doing to stop public money going to build these lavish facilities for a wealthy minority?

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** As I said, the funding of non-government schools has been in place for a long time. Schools have to use the funds appropriately.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** But they are not.

**Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI:** They are required by law. Certainly when they are audited or when we are made aware of allegations of improper use of funds then they are investigated.

**The ACTING CHAIR:** Time has expired for questions. I thank the Minister and his officers for appearing today. That concludes the hearing on the portfolio of Education.

**(The witnesses withdrew)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**