

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Wednesday 3 March 2021

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas

EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

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The Committee met at 9:30.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Wes Fang

The Hon. Scott Farlow

Mr Justin Field

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Daniel Mookhey

Mr David Shoebridge

PRESENT

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, *Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning*

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**

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The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the inquiry into the budget estimates 2020-2021 initial hearings. Before I commence it is the custom of the Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. I do that with all due respect, as well as acknowledge other important contributors to the history of this site—those who constructed the Parliament House building, very often working in a dangerous industry, and the parliamentary staff who over many decades have supported MPs and made our work and representative role possible. We acknowledge and thank them all. I welcome Minister Mitchell and her officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Education and Early Childhood Learning. Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of their filming.

I also remind media representatives that you must take responsibility for what you publish about the proceedings. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat. All witnesses in budget estimates have a right to procedural fairness, according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. There may be some questions that a witness could answer only if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In those circumstances witnesses are advised they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days—but not as many as Steffen Faurby on Monday, which was a tad excessive. Minister Mitchell, I remind you and the officers with you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Any messages from advisers or members' staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the committee secretariat. We expect the transcript for this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Everyone present should turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing.

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GEORGINA HARRISSON, Group Deputy Secretary, School Improvement and Education Reform Group, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

MARK SCOTT, Secretary, Department of Education, on former oath

PAUL MARTIN, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, affirmed and examined

LISA ALONSO LOVE, Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, Department of Education, sworn and examined

RUTH OWEN, Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

LEANNE NIXON, Deputy Secretary, School Performance North, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

MURAT DIZDAR, Deputy Secretary, School Performance South, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

YVETTE CACHIA, Chief People Officer, People Group, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

ANTHONY MANNING, Chief Executive Officer, School Infrastructure, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

DAVID WITHEY, Chief Operating Officer, Operations Group, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

MARNIE O'BRIEN, Executive Director, Health and Safety, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. with the Minister and from 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. with departmental witnesses, with questions from Opposition and crossbench members only. If required, an additional 15 minutes is allocated at the end of each session for Government questions. As there is no provision for any witness to make an opening statement before the Committee commences its questioning, we shall begin with questions from our friends in the Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Good morning, Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good morning.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming. Minister, how many schools currently have friable asbestos on their grounds?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for that question, Ms Houssos. I will ask Mr Manning to make some comments in relation to those specific numbers that you have requested. What I will say—being an issue obviously that we have canvassed at budget estimates before—is that we know asbestos is a common building product that was used for many years. Many of our schools do have asbestos, but of course we have very good asbestos management registers and appropriate processes. In terms of specific numbers I will ask if Mr Manning has that or we will take that on notice.

Mr MANNING: There are currently 352 schools that have friable asbestos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Three hundred and fifty-two? Three hundred and fifty-two with friable asbestos, Mr Manning? That is a significant increase since we last met. Minister?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, we have asbestos registers in place to manage the risk of asbestos in the schools. I have full confidence in the processes that we have available. We have an Asbestos Management Plan and we keep up to date on where these issues occur at schools so that we can manage it accordingly, in line with relevant legislation that is in place in terms of the management of asbestos in schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, when we met 18 months ago there were 109 schools with friable asbestos. You have just informed the Committee that there are over three times that amount of schools with friable asbestos. That is significantly worse than what was reported 18 months ago. What are you doing to fix the problem?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I have said before in questions that you asked me in this forum a few years ago and I think in the House quite extensively as well, we have very strong systems in place to manage asbestos in schools, as we do with all hazardous material. We have appropriate processes, as I said, working under relevant legislation, including work health and safety [WHS] obligations. We are bringing in independent hygienists. If there are occurrences of asbestos in schools, we manage it appropriately. As I said in my original

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answer to your question, Ms Houssos, asbestos is a common building material that was used for many decades, in many schools, in many public buildings and in many homes. I would say that probably even in this building there is asbestos present. It is about how we manage it, and I have confidence in the management and in the way that we run our asbestos registers in public schools. I do not know—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, let's just be clear, though—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —whether the secretary wants to add any more to that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The question that I asked you this morning—

The CHAIR: The Minister was wrapping up, but I urge those asking the questions to give the Minister the courtesy of completing her full answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: But also, the Minister was seeking to—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The Chair has ruled. You don't need to take up more time on this.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, don't speak to me like that, Courtney. I am saying: The Minister was seeking—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is 9.33 a.m., Wes.

The Hon. WES FANG: The Minister was seeking if there was any further—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Have you got a point of order?

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes, I do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What is the point of order?

The Hon. WES FANG: The Minister was seeking if there were any other points that could be added to by the—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you seriously going to carry on like this today, Wes?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. WES FANG: Now I will take a point of order on what Courtney—

The CHAIR: It is not a dispute across the table. I will set the rules of engagement nice and early. I will play the role of head teacher on this. I think it is fair to say I try to be a very independent, fair-minded Chair. You would have seen on Monday that I reprimanded a witness for taking too many matters on notice. I take an attitude that filibustering and time wasting can go too far and I will intervene. I believe that up to the point of the Minister completing the answer, the questioner should listen and pay that courtesy. To avoid the time that will be absorbed throughout the day with that type of exchange, I ask the Committee to trust in my capacity to keep order and keep the meeting flowing and get the available information that we need in budget estimates.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you, Chair. Minister, just to be clear, though, the figure that I asked for was friable asbestos. Friable asbestos is the asbestos that is breaking down. It is the decaying asbestos that is currently releasing fibres. Why has this not been removed from schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think it is important that we clarify what you have said there because I do not agree with the premise of your question. I will get Mr Manning to talk in a bit more detail about what that is actually measuring.

Mr MANNING: Yes, absolutely. I think your understanding of friable asbestos is not correct. All the elements of friable asbestos that we have identified are things that are encapsulated in other products. They are not loose and breaking down, as you have described. These are things that are encapsulated in things. More than half of the elements are things within things like kilns, heaters and those sorts of things. Other things are encapsulated in other products, like vinyl floor tiles and a whole range of others. So, they are not simply hanging around decaying and getting into the atmosphere. They are actually encapsulated in a whole range of other products. And so, that is kind of where we get to with this.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, that is not entirely correct, because a number of the encapsulated products that you have talked about are encapsulated in ceilings. They are infill in ceilings. They are infill in walls as well. Is that not correct?

Mr MANNING: They are, but—

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes. So, some of them are in kilns and some of them are in heaters—

Mr MANNING: Absolutely, and some of them are in vinyl tiles, and some of them are in cement sheeting, and some of them are in insulation material. The important thing to factor into this is that the work that we do around the asbestos register when we identify evidence of friable asbestos is actually—we get advice in terms of the safety of it, the condition of it and where the material is, and we manage it from that process forward. If there was evidence that we thought it was airborne then we would seek a hygienist's advice and we would work our way through how we would solve that problem. But all of the elements that are listed on the asbestos register are there for a purpose: so that we can keep an eye on them. We can keep monitoring the condition of them and if they get to a point where we believe they are dangerous and we have independent hygienists who support that view, then we would intervene at that point.

Mr SCOTT: Can I simply add: Often the advice is to leave it. That is why there is not a remediation program to pull asbestos out of half the houses in western Sydney that supposedly have asbestos built in them because they were built in that time frame—or part of this very building here that was built in the time frame when asbestos was used.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Thanks, Mr Scott—

Mr SCOTT: What we have done, though—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We have got time with you this afternoon.

Mr SCOTT: No, no—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have limited time with the Minister.

The CHAIR: We will allow Mr Scott to finish his answer.

Mr SCOTT: I just conclude, Chair, by saying: We are taking this very seriously. We have an asbestos register. We have run an asbestos re-survey program. We are identifying asbestos and categorising it appropriately. Where there is any suggestion of risk, we are engaging with the health experts, who are not just guiding us but are guiding Transport and Health and all other government agencies that have to deal with this reality. We have a sensible and purposeful program that is underway in managing this complexity.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Minister, when will all of this friable asbestos be removed? I am not asking about the asbestos that is encapsulated—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that is friable asbestos that is encapsulated—so you are, in a sense. As Mr Manning very rightly said—look, again, we have canvassed these issues quite extensively in the past. As the secretary just said, the advice of the independent hygienists in many of these cases is that it is actually safest to leave it where it is, and that is why we do it. I think the fact that we have the asbestos management register that we do, we have advice to schools and we have independent experts who help us manage this issue actually shows that we are doing a good job in terms of making sure our students and staff stay safe. I think any kind of scare campaign around asbestos is really unfortunate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, have you read the registers?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have looked at some of the registers online, yes, and I have looked at some of the individual schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Have you read the registers that say that it is a high priority for removal?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, the registers and the advice around what we need to do for removal comes through the work that our assets teams do and the advice from independent hygienists.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: A number of those independent hygienists have rated that friable asbestos, which is, as I said, infill in ceilings and infill in walls—for example, an infill above a science classroom. Do you really think that is the safest way, when it has been rated by an independent hygienist as a high priority for removal—that that is a safe place for asbestos? We are not talking about houses in western Sydney. We are not talking about things that are encapsulated in concrete. We are talking about decaying friable asbestos in ceilings above science classrooms, which can easily be perforated and rain down on students, as has occurred in the past in New South Wales schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I think the tactics around a scare campaign around asbestos is really not a true reflection of how we manage—

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This is not a scare campaign; these are accurate figures.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order, Chair. You have just ruled on—

The CHAIR: Point of order?

The Hon. WES FANG: Now, the Minister was providing an answer. The Hon. Courtney Houssos may not like the answer about her scare campaign but she is going to have to listen to it and then ask another question.

The CHAIR: Okay. I call the Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I also say, Mr Chair, if the member—you are using an example of a science classroom. I am not sure what school you are talking about. If you are happy to provide that information, I am happy to look at that particular issue. I think the conversation—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, they are on your registers.

The CHAIR: Order! I call Courtney Houssos to order for the reason that the Minister is only part way through—maybe only 20 seconds or so into her answer and has got the right to give a more complete answer before the next question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr Chair. As I said, there are 2,200 public schools in the State and extensive registers in terms of the asbestos that is present. If there is a specific example that you are concerned about or that anyone in the community is concerned about, please let me know, because we would be happy to look at that and also provide advice about that specific school. But it is very difficult when you are mentioning a hypothetical to know the circumstances that you are referring to. I think if you do have a genuine concern about the safety of any students in that school it would be great if you would share that, rather than use it as a bit of a political pointscore exercise.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am going to take you up on that point.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have a serious concern about the fact that there is asbestos across New South Wales schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but is there a specific one?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have read the registers—

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, the question is allowed to be asked.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have read the registers that are publicly available and have been prepared by your department. Your department should not rely on an Opposition backbench MP to read their documents and raise issues with their documents back to your bureaucrats for them to take action.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but if you have a concern and you want to raise it—

The CHAIR: What is the question?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Your independent hygienists have rated this friable asbestos as being a high priority for removal. When will it be removed?

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: I am going to raise—

The CHAIR: No, no. There really is no point of order.

The Hon. WES FANG: There is, but—

The CHAIR: The Opposition has got 20 minutes. They can ask lengthy questions if they wish; that is their prerogative. But, in the end, the member did get to a question, which the Minister can now answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Thank you, Mr Chair. I will ask Mr Manning to respond in terms of that process.

Mr MANNING: Yes, absolutely. So, if a hygienist had advised it to be removed, it would have been removed as part of that process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The rating is "high priority".

Mr MANNING: "High priority" does not mean it needs to be removed. "High priority" is a notification to us for us to be aware of it and keep an eye on it. If we have any concerns, we bring the hygienist in. If the

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hygienist's advice was for it to be removed, we would have removed it on that advice. "High priority" is not the same as "it needs to be removed urgently". We are aware of it. We are keeping an eye on it. That is what "high priority" means. As and when we get an opportunity through any maintenance task, it may well be that we deal with that as part of that process, but it is not—if the hygienist had asked for it to be removed, it would have been removed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. This is like an episode of *Yes Minister*. We have got—high priority does not need to be removed from schools. Minister, have you got a deadline—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is the advice from the independent hygienist.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am just going to ask you one last time: Have you got a deadline for when asbestos will be removed from New South Wales schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As Mr Manning said, we monitor the asbestos that is in schools. We have the register. We take the advice of independent hygienists, as he also indicated. If we are doing maintenance work at a particular school, if there is the advice that it needs to be removed because there is a safety risk, we do it. That is what we have done for a number of years in terms of our management of asbestos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Minister, I am going to move on. Minister, on 10 March 2019, just weeks before the last State election, your Government promised that every family would have access to before- and after-school care by 2021. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We made a commitment that we wanted to increase the amount of before- and after-school care that was available for families—those who needed for it to be available to them.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Those who needed for it to be available to them?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. That is correct. And your department's website actually says you will be ensuring available spaces in all public primary schools in Sydney, Newcastle, Illawarra, the Central Coast and major centres?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. As I said, we had a commitment to significantly expand the before- and after-school care that was available on our school sites where there was demand and where parents needed to access those services. That was our commitment. There is a rollout underway in terms of that election commitment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. What is a major regional centre?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously, we will look what we need in terms of our profiling of major regional centres. We will look at where the demand is there. We are also looking at some bespoke solutions for smaller regional communities as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a definition of a "major regional centre"?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might ask the secretary to respond to that, or Mr Manning looks after before- and after-school care.

Mr MANNING: I will have to take that on notice. I do not have that with me.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can you see if you can come back to us during the course of the hearing? Minister, how many before- and after-school places have been added since the election?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I can get that figure for you—when I find the right piece of paper that I am looking for, sorry. Apologies to the Committee. I can tell you that as of 10 February 2021 the program has resulted in an increase of 123 before- and after-school care services, and 13,797 new places across New South Wales since July 2019.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. When we are calculating places—13,797—we are calling one before-school and one after-school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice because, obviously, services run in sessions as well. They do a morning session and an afternoon session, so I will just double-check unless someone can clarify that at the table.

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Ms HARRISSON: Yes, that is correct, and it is linked to the Commonwealth's definition in terms of the childcare rebate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, which means that if your child attends before and after, it will actually be counted as two places, not as one. That is correct?

Mr SCOTT: It is a standard national way of counting.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, but that actually means that the spaces that you will be giving are for roughly 7,400 students.

Mr SCOTT: No, not necessarily at all because families have different needs. There will be some families who will use that in the morning. Some families will use it in the afternoon. Of course, some families will use it for both, so that is the capacity that we are creating and it is absolutely our standard. Now we have more than 130,000 places in before- and after-school care in New South Wales out of more than 1,700 before- and after-school care services that are in operation.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a total figure on the spaces that are available, Mr Scott?

Mr SCOTT: Yes. My figures show we have 1,736 before- and after-school care spaces with 130,000-plus places on offer. I think we have a good story to tell here.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks, Mr Scott. I just asked for the figures; I did not ask for the story. Minister, are you—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We can have the story this afternoon.

Mr SCOTT: Thank you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, how many places are projected to be provided by the end of 2021?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice. Obviously, we are working to fill that demand where it is needed from parents. I know that when we did some figures in term four last year we had a significant reduction in the wait list, so we are moving through with the election commitment, but in terms of the projected figures of where we think we will need to be, I will take that on notice just to clarify the most up-to-date figures for you and for the Committee.

Mr SCOTT: Minister, I would add that we are continuing to survey, and so there will be opportunities for families to use the website to identify their demand and their needs. Also, our school principals are invaluable sources of information on this. School principals provide information on demand in their schools and also surveying their parents. Our focus has been on areas where there has been clearest demand. Of course, part of the complexity is the delivery of services in schools that have very few student numbers, and that is a hallmark of New South Wales education—in excess of 500 schools that have relatively small enrolments. We have a range of strategies in place to deal with small student enrolments and to deal with schools as well where there has not been the capital infrastructure that has allowed them to be able to deliver it, and our hub solution is an example of that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I will stop you there because my time is running out. Minister, do you currently monitor waiting lists? Does your department monitor waiting lists?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, look, as the secretary said, we survey parents and work very closely with services and peak bodies to get an understanding of wait lists. I might ask Mr Scott to provide a little bit more information.

Mr SCOTT: We monitor waiting lists and refresh them, and that is what we will be doing now. Once back-to-school enrolments are settled we will be back in the field again doing surveys and audits of where the demand has fallen.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you using the same methodology used in the previous survey?

Mr SCOTT: We are using a combination of methodologies, including opportunities for parents to indicate to us directly and also outreach, particularly through schools, and talking with other providers.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My colleague the Hon. Peter Primrose asked a question about vacancies and wait lists. He was told that the department does not maintain information on vacancies at individual services.

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Mr SCOTT: Well, we are surveying. What I cannot do today is go to a running register that is current to the minute of wait lists. What we do is we go and survey the field and survey the market, work out where the demand is falling and then prioritise our strategies in the event of that, and then we will continue to survey and refresh the information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, do you think you are on track for achieving this goal—that every parent who requires a space needs it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Look, I am really happy with the progress that we have made on this election commitment, and I think the numbers speak for themselves in terms of the number of new services, the number of new places, but also in recognition, too, that last year was particularly tough for the before- and after-school sector, as I am sure you would appreciate—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: A lot of families were learning from home, a lot of parents were working from home, and a lot of the attention that we gave last year was to really supporting services to remain open when there were concerns about numbers and viability. We did that through a range of measures as well. But, yes, I am happy with the rollout of this initiative so far. We have our new bush hubs that have started to roll out as well. We have groups of schools models looking at regional areas to improve access as well, so I am confident with the trajectory that we are on with this commitment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are confident that every parent who requires a place will have one by the end of this year?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am confident with our election commitment that we wanted to make more places available for families. We are doing that. That is rolling out. As the secretary said, we are seeing demand go down, wait lists go down through the initiatives that we are rolling out. There is more work to do, absolutely, and that is part of what we are doing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I put to you that there is much more work to be done. If you—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I said that there is more work that we are rolling out this year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you consult the average Facebook page for a school, I have been overwhelmed with—

The Hon. WES FANG: Facebook for your research—really?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —people talking about how they are unable to get a place at their local—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What we will—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have heard stories of kindy children's names being drawn out of a hat in order to get places in after-school care. I have heard stories of after-school care places having wait lists so long they are advising people to find their own nannies and babysitters, and yet your Government has promised that every parent will have access, every child will have a space—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is there a question?

The CHAIR: Yes, the question?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Is there a question?

The Hon. WES FANG: No, it is just Facebook talk.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I cannot comment on what you might have seen on a Facebook site. What I can say is that our commitment is to roll out more before-and after-school care for families who need it. We have had plenty of opportunities and continue to have plenty of opportunities for parents to let us know where they need those places.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They do not know about it, though.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There have been surveys done through Service NSW, and we have created more places. We are continuing to do that as part of our commitment as it rolls out.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thanks, Mr Chair. Minister, nice to see you, and everybody else.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You too.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I just want to wrap something up quickly. Mr Manning, you said that high priority is not related to remediation priority when it comes to asbestos. Was that your evidence?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am just going through your own department's published asbestos policy. It is very clear that, in fact, if asbestos is identified as high priority, that has a score between six and eight on the Asbestos Register Review Tool rating. You would be aware of that?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, and what it actually refers to: High priority is its remediation priority. It is in your own documents.

Mr MANNING: Yes, it is, but the question that was asked was around the fact that it must be remediated. It is a high priority for remediation, but it does not represent a danger. The hygienists, who are part of the process of updating the register, provide us that advice, and under the high-priority banner we will keep a watching eye on it. As the Minister identified, as and when there is maintenance work or any refurb work, we take advantage of that as part of that process. But, as I said, if the hygienist believed it needed to be removed, they would identify that it needs to be removed, and it would be as part of that process.

Mr SCOTT: We have received advice not to remove it. We have received advice at times that it is contained in the roof cavity and the like and the sensible course of action, on the advice of the hygienist, is to not remove it, but it is still visible to us. We identify it as friable asbestos, and it remains under close watch.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That evidence is directly contrary to your own policy, which is about the remediation priority. A hygienist has identified this asbestos as being high priority in terms of the need to remediate it. Can you provide on notice, if you can, which of the 347 instances of identified high-priority friable asbestos hygienists have said should be left in situ and not remediated?

Mr SCOTT: Sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, at the end of 2019 the fairly startling figure of \$1.3 billion of unspent money sitting in school funds because of the failure of Local Schools, Local Decisions was disclosed. It took a little bit of time to get that number out of the department and ultimately I am glad to say it is one of the reasons we have junked, at least in part, Local Schools, Local Decisions. You must have the figure in front of you now about how much is held in school accounts.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond in terms of the figures, but I will say in general response to your question that there has been a lot that we have done, as you would be well aware, particularly over the last couple of years, to help schools spend that money that is in the bank accounts, as you well know. School money that sits in bank accounts, some of it comes from government sources and government funding, and some of it is money that the schools fundraise themselves, and you would appreciate the distinction between that. I know it is something that you and I have spoken about before. We have been very actively working with our school communities to make sure that the money that is allocated for that school year is spent on the students to whom it was allocated.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: A good test of that is the figure.

Mr SCOTT: The numbers are much the same but if I can just give you a bit of a breakdown and context of that—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can we start with the figure that I asked for? That would be really helpful. It is not unreasonable that within the first 3½ minutes of answering my question you actually give me the figure I have asked for.

Mr SCOTT: The figure is made up of two numbers, in effect.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the figure?

Mr WITHEY: Apologies, Mr Shoebidge, I could not hear over the—which figure are you seeking?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Last year, at the end of 2019, the amount of money held by schools in their accounts, unspent, was \$1.3 billion. Sitting here today—

Mr WITHEY: So that was at the end of 2018?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: At the end of 2019. This being 2021.

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Mr WITHEY: The figure at the end of 2018 was \$1.3 billion. The figure at the end of 2019 was \$1.5 billion—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry, my mistake.

Mr WITHEY: —and the figure at the end of 2020 was \$1.49 billion.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So it has gone from \$1.5 billion, with all of the work, down to \$1.49 billion.

Mr SCOTT: I would really appreciate the opportunity of explaining that to you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Withey, is that correct?

Mr WITHEY: That is correct.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That has been the achievement of last year. A \$10 million difference.

Mr WITHEY: There are a number of factors that are going into that conversation. We have put a range of tailored and targeted support with schools to drive that number down. What has happened—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To drive that number down? It has gone from \$1.5 billion to \$1.49 billion.

Mr WITHEY: Which is a drop for the—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is that driving down?

Mr SCOTT: But let us look at it because there are two factors—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That's not driving to the local corner store.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! I think Mr Withey has a point to make and then we will go to Mr Scott. Okay, I will go to Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: There are two elements to this. There is money the schools raise themselves. About half of that is money schools raise themselves. Schools, through P&Cs, fetes and sausage sizzles on election day are raising money. I do not criticise them at all and I would be shocked if you criticise them for having fundraising and community activities.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Let me be clear, my criticism is not directed—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! Mr Scott, it is not a genuine answer to question the integrity of Mr Shoebridge and the question. He is not criticising any form of fundraising. He is asking how much of the money sits there and what efforts are being made to get it spent for the benefit of students. Let's not get into sausage sizzles, which are a tangent from the point that is being raised.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: The point of order is that Hansard is going to struggle to capture this with people talking over the top of everybody else. We need to have one speaker at a time for the benefit of Hansard, please.

The CHAIR: Yes, I understand that and that is what I am trying to organise. Mr Scott, please proceed.

Mr SCOTT: Half that money is money raised by school communities for their schools and that money has, in fact, increased in the last year. I do not think we are critical of that. The other money—there has been a significant achievement from schools. As you have identified in previous conversations, some of the money that had gone out to schools as part of their school funding allocation had been underspent to the tune of \$100 million or several hundred million dollars. Last year our schools did a tremendous job—

The CHAIR: What is the exact figure there? Is it \$100 million or several?

Mr SCOTT: Last year our schools were given \$11.7 billion and they came in to spend that to the tune of only \$17 million being left unspent, out of \$11.7 billion. That is one-fifth of 1 per cent of the budgets allocated to schools was left unspent. That is a tremendous achievement if you look at their performance in previous years. It is on the back of significant work with schools on their priorities of spending their money and a new budgeting system that was rolled out to schools. So the trendline on that has been very, very positive. As you know, Mr Shoebridge, the figure was increasing, year on year.

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That school budget figure has, in fact, not increased in any material terms in the last year at all, and the percentage retained by schools is now below 1 per cent. I think that is a highly satisfactory, incredible result and a tribute to the work that is done by our school principals and their admin teams. If, in fact, we say that there is still a quantum of money that is there that has been raised by the community, then we do have policies in place now to help spend that money and that was a budget initiative in the last budget. Mr Withey might be able to speak to that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, why don't we just let me direct the questions rather than you, Mr Scott, if that is all right. If the Government wants to have questions, they have got their own time. Do you adopt Mr Withey's characterisation of you having driven down that figure from \$1.5 billion to \$1.49 billion?

Mr SCOTT: The figure that is driven down is the level of underspend in school budgets. The level of underspend was \$100 million or, at times, \$200 million or more underspent each year. The fact that that has now dropped to \$17 million, that has been significantly driven down and that is a great achievement on behalf of our schools.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So something else has been driven down, I understand.

Mr SCOTT: And I suppose the questions would be the other way if in fact they had dramatically overspent the budget.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why don't you let me do the questions, Mr Scott. It would just be much quicker. If instead of you asking Mr Withey questions and asking me—

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge, your question?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You said it is made up of two figures: the amount of State funding and the amount of local school funding. What are those figures?

Mr WITHEY: The two packages are the funds that come directly from government from a combination of State and Commonwealth governments and then non-government funding, so P&C funding, deductible gift receipts et cetera. With the State-Comm fund number, that increase had been in excess of \$200 million or \$300 million year between 2017 and 2018. It increased by nearly \$100 million from—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could I now have the figures that I have been asking for a little bit of time now. You have said it is made up of two components. One is the State and Federal funding amount and one is the schools' own fundraising amount. What are the figures, Mr Withey?

Mr WITHEY: The total figures for 2020? Or the increases from previous years?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why don't you give me the total figures from 2020, which is what I have been really just trying to get for the last 3½ to four minutes.

Mr WITHEY: The total figure for State-Comm funds in 2020 was \$756 million, and for school and community funds, \$710 million.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And what were they the year before?

Mr WITHEY: For State-Comm funds the year before, it was \$739 million and the year before that, \$643 million.

The CHAIR: We will have to come back to that, Mr Shoebridge. Could I take up the questioning on a related school budgeting and reporting issue. Minister, are you satisfied that sufficient action is being taken to act on the recommendations of the Auditor-General's report in this term of Parliament about the absolute shambles of school annual reporting on their equity fund spend? Schools were underspending or spending the money in the wrong category or had no evaluation systems in place to see if it was even being spent effectively. It was a very damning Auditor-General's report. What has been done since to rectify this huge problem of effective expenditure and accountability?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I would say in response to that, Mr Chair, is obviously, as you would be aware, at the end of last year we made some changes in terms our School Success Model policy, which is looking at setting targets for all of our schools. We are working with our school communities to have that lift in student outcomes and, as part of that, we are looking at sharing that accountability and responsibility, making sure that we are providing support to our schools to, as you say, spend money on the sorts of programs that we know need to be in place to lift student outcomes. In terms of the annual reporting of schools and how schools are talking through or explaining to their communities how they are spending that funding, I might ask Mr Dizdar to provide some comments about that, given his role in terms of school performance.

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Mr DIZDAR: At the moment every school is producing a new four-year strategic school improvement plan that is due by the end of term 1 and will be public facing on every school website. We have given greater clarity around the requirements for that to feed into the annual report. So every school will have a mandatory strategic direction around growth and attainment in which their student performance targets will be there.

The CHAIR: I am aware of that, but I was asking about the Auditor-General's recommendations. Have they all been implemented?

Mr DIZDAR: And that is why I am trying to get to that.

The CHAIR: Okay, thanks.

Mr DIZDAR: To respond to the Auditor-General's recommendation we have tightened and strengthened the strategic improvement plan, which then becomes a key feature in the school's annual report about their progress back to their school community. So you will find, from here on, that the annual reports will talk to the progress on those strategic goals of a school, including growth and attainment. We have taken note of the requirement for increased rigour around reporting on progress with the equity loadings, so we are making that a feature of each schools' school plan so it can feed in tighter and better in reporting on outcomes for student growth and attainment and student progress.

The CHAIR: So this is now a mandatory standard, is it? I read the Auditor-General's report with a sense of disbelief. And then I thought, "Well, I will do my own sample of schools." I went to the schools that are run by the people on the primary and secondary principals associations to see what they had to say. They are representatives of the principals so they must get it right at their schools. They were the biggest shambles of the lot. The taxpayers of New South Wales would be insisting that it is mandatory to meet the requirements set out by the Auditor-General. What does the department plan to do about schools that still cannot get that right?

Mr DIZDAR: We are responding to that and we have strengthened the architecture for every school to utilise. Like I was saying, Chair, to the Committee, by the end of term one—we are only about four weeks away from that—every school will have a new four-year strategic improvement plan. We have been working with our schools since term three last year on the development of this plan—

The CHAIR: Yes, but will they spend their money in the right categories with some evaluation and accountability?

Mr DIZDAR: Yes, they will.

The CHAIR: And what you are saying is that in the next round of annual school reports you are expecting almost complete compliance with this new system as recommended by the Auditor-General?

Mr DIZDAR: What I want to point out to the Chair and the Committee is that we are confident with the architecture we have put in place—with the support we have put in place—for every school to have greater clarity and focus around student growth and attainment. That is the core operation of our schools. That is where our student performance targets will also sit. Every school will have that strategic focus and, Chair, that will then feed into what is required to report back through an annual report.

The CHAIR: Okay, we will check on those reports, but the architecture looks more like a pile of rubble, I have to say. So there is a long way to go but we will check on the next round of annual reports.

Mr DIZDAR: I just point out, Chair, they will be the 2021 annual reports for each school.

The CHAIR: Yes, we look forward to them. Minister, we hear about overcrowded schools and we know the amount of demountables in south-west Sydney. Can I ask you about two invisible schools? Two years ago you and the Premier announced a new selective high school for south-west Sydney. It is the fastest-growing part of New South Wales with a huge number of significantly migrant aspirational families wanting to get the very best competitive selective education for their children. How is it that the Government can announce that two years ago and essentially nothing has happened other than a vague statement of "early stages of planning"? Is this fair dinkum or are there forces in the department that do not like selective schools and we are never going to have another one in New South Wales?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Look, Mr Chair, it is absolutely fair dinkum. We have every intention to build the new selective school in south-western Sydney.

The CHAIR: Well, where is the school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can share with you and the Committee that we are currently in the early stages of planning for that selective high school. The department has identified some potential land opportunities for that new fully selective school, which will service that growing community in south-western

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Sydney. As you rightly mentioned in your question, there are a lot of aspirational families who want to have that opportunity for their children. We are also working with other government agencies to ensure that where we locate that selective school serves the growing community of south-western Sydney as well. I am not sure if Mr Manning wants to add any more to that.

The CHAIR: When do you expect to announce a site?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is absolutely still on the agenda and work is progressing towards that with that project.

The CHAIR: When do you expect to announce the site? That would be significant.

Mr MANNING: As the Minister said, we have a number of sites in question. There is a process that will take a bit longer—

The CHAIR: No, when are you expecting to announce a site? This is grossly unfair on the families out there who heard the announcement two years ago. They want the best for their children. This Government, with a huge capital works budget, is unable to advance past early stages of planning for two years in one of the fastest-growing, needy parts of the State. It is a disgrace. When do you plan to announce the site?

Mr MANNING: As the Minister said, it is in early stages of planning. We are in discussions with a number of potential sites. That process will take a little bit longer to work our way through. When it is done we will be able to provide the Minister with the answer to that question.

The CHAIR: Okay, another invisible school: In March 2017 the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, and your predecessor, Minister Rob Stokes, announced that by 2019 a new science, technology, engineering and mathematics [STEM] Catholic high school would be constructed at the Celestino Sydney Science Park at Luddenham. The Government were very happy to be part of this announcement. Where is the school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might ask the secretary to—obviously, as you said, Mr Chair, it predates my time as Minister.

Mr SCOTT: I think it is a question for Catholic Schools NSW.

The CHAIR: The Premier and the education Minister were part of it, and part of the announcement was that there would be State Government capital funding to assist the new STEM high school in the Parramatta diocese. Greg Whitby was there as part of the announcement at Luddenham.

Mr SCOTT: I believe that if there is a delay that will not be as a result of the support of the Government; that will be to do with the planning and prioritisation by Catholic Schools NSW and Parramatta diocese. We are happy to take the question on notice.

The CHAIR: Well, four years later, Mr Scott—and the Minister—and no capital applications were sought for the construction of the school.

Mr SCOTT: From Catholic Schools NSW?

The CHAIR: No, they are not even off first base; they are not even at the pitching mound.

Mr SCOTT: I suppose that answers the question, though, Chair, doesn't it really? I mean, an application would be considered in line with the usual non-government school capital funding protocols.

The CHAIR: Okay, but have the Premier and the education Minister carrying on from Rob Stokes done anything about saying, "We went out there four years ago and were part of the announcement—where is the school?"

Mr SCOTT: I can take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Where is the school for the people in western Sydney, given that the Premier, in particular, was part of this promise and announcement?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, Chair. We can check whether there has been any correspondence or questions raised by Catholic Schools NSW in the Parramatta diocese. But it is a Catholic school and I believe that the Government will be in a position to provide the support that was committed. But in order for that to happen, the plans—

The CHAIR: Okay, if you can check for me if the Premier has followed up asking whether four years later, "Where is the school?" I raise what I think is a very important ethical question on top of that: Is the Government aware that this mob Celestino—I do not think the most ethical land development process I have ever seen in western Sydney at the Sydney Science Park—is still advertising this STEM school to attract investment into their site, families, building it all up, using the publicity delivered to them by the Premier and the then

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education Minister for a school that just does not exist? Would the Government feel used in this process for land development promotion and advertising around this Sydney Science Park? Minister, will you give an undertaking that you will never be involved in this sort of shonky arrangement in the future where the Government is used to promote land development and a school facility that clearly there is no intention of ever building?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair, what I will say is that I do think you raise a very good point in terms of commitments or public commentary by developers when they are looking at the development of their land. Obviously, as I said earlier, this announcement predates my time as Minister; I am not across the issue.

The CHAIR: I know. But what I am saying is that the Government was used and used badly by these people. The community out there that heard the announcement from the Premier—and four years later the school is invisible—would feel very let down that it was all a complete fraud. This Government was party to it and, seemingly, has not done anything to reprimand these developers and give a commitment that this sort of shonky practice would never happen again.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think, as the secretary said, obviously it being a Catholic school build, we will take on notice the details of that particular project. I do think there is an important point to make in terms of commitments that might be made by certain developers. I am not familiar with the developer that you are referencing in your question, but I think for families, particularly when it comes to building government schools—which is obviously something that I can speak with more authority about—the source of truth on that should be us, the Department of Education, and the School Infrastructure website.

The CHAIR: Absolutely, but I am talking about non-government schools and land developers who have a lend of the government—use up the government's image, the Premier's profile—for absolutely delivering nothing to people.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And do some due diligence before you do that again.

The CHAIR: Yes, check it is going to happen before you get wrapped up in advertising brochures to say, "Here is the school, the Premier announced it, come out here in invest in our land development project"—it is not a science park, it is a land development housing project, with now what I consider to be fraudulent advertising off the back of a Government announcement.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, your Government takes its election commitments seriously, does it not?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So when you became Minister, I am assuming you received a briefing about the commitments in terms of infrastructure commitments in schools that your Government had committed to? Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have a lot of briefings with the department about a range of issues, including school infrastructure. That has happened all the time since I have been a Minister.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that not something that would have happened when you first became a Minister? You did not take a special interest in the commitments that your Government had made around school infrastructure going into the election?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I have a lot of briefings as the Minister, including when I took on the Education portfolio and, of course, that would include in relation to school infrastructure projects.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So do you take a special interest in election commitments?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am not sure what you are getting to.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: The Hon. Anthony D'Adam has asked the same question in a roundabout way three times.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, it is a different question.

The Hon. WES FANG: He is trying to set up for something. Just get on with the questions, please.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is not a point of order.

The CHAIR: In relation to the point of order, the set-up is a time-honoured path of estimates in Canberra and here.

The Hon. WES FANG: I get it. It is a bit of theatre. I get it.

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The CHAIR: I do not mind the set-up. I have to say at this stage, knowing the high capability of our fine Minister, she is not rattled or broken or shattered by any of this so far. I have every confidence that whatever is coming, she will handle it with a élan.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To the point of order: This is a repeated pattern from the Hon. Wes Fang that he complains about the Opposition or crossbench asking the same question in a different guise a number ways—

The Hon. WES FANG: You keep doing it!

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —to try to get the same answer. It has never once been ruled as a valid point of order.

The Hon. WES FANG: It should be.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: He may want to change the standing orders and rabbit away over there about it. Perhaps he could be given a general direction, and when makes such a knowingly unworthy point of order again in the future it should be shut down immediately.

The Hon. WES FANG: That characterisation is a bit rough.

The CHAIR: Just to give a ruling, I do not support frivolous points of order. My advice to Wes Fang is, you have got a very capable Minister from your party there. I think we will have confidence in her capacity to handle just about all questions. I also advise questioners that sometimes it is better to let the Minister talk than to interrupt, in terms of your purpose. I give that advice on both sides of the Committee here. We are at the point of the so-called set-up question, so over to Anthony D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Back to me. I suppose my point is, I want to clarify that you take a special interest in the commitments that your Government has made. That is a higher priority, I suppose, than perhaps other projects, given that your Government has actually gone to the election and committed to the people to do a particular thing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As Minister, I take an interest in everything that we are doing in the Education portfolio. That is my job.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You receive regular briefings on the election commitments. That is correct, isn't it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I receive regular briefings, as I said, on a range of issues related to education, as is par for the course. I am not quite sure—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You are on top of the detail in terms of infrastructure projects.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There are a lot of infrastructure projects we have got in government. I would say that I am across a lot of it, but I also rely on the experts sitting around this table in terms of some of the detail—again, as all Ministers do, particularly in portfolios where there is large infrastructure and capital spends going on.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask you about Westmead Public School and this proposal for a new public school to be built in Westmead. That, I think, was announced in the 2018-19 budget. Is that your understanding? You are on top of the detail, aren't you, Minister?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will agree—I am happy to go with that figure.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you consider that to have been a commitment that the Government took to the election in 2019?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to get some advice probably from Mr Manning about that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, you do not know whether your Government committed to build a public school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You are telling me it is in the 2018-19 budget. I would like to check that but, yes, we are—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is what I am trying to clarify. Is it an election commitment?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There we go. A commitment to plan for the new primary school was an election commitment, I have just been told.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it fair to say that it was a commitment that your Government took to the election to build a public school in Westmead?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get the secretary or Mr Manning to answer that specifically.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, Minister, this is a question that you should be capable of answering.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am also allowed to—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is about the Government, it is not about—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: No, I've got it. It is not in order to reflect on the Minister's capabilities and so forth. The Minister is doing her best to garner the information and the officials have got it, is that right?

Mr MANNING: There was a commitment to plan for a new primary school in Westmead, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Taken to the election. I mean, it is not really something a public servant should be asked about, whether it was a commitment of the Government. That is my question: Was it a commitment of the Government to take to the election?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To plan for a new school at Westmead? Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So why has there been no action on that to date?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not accept the premise of your question. There has been action on that school to date. We are going through the planning process for that school. It is in the assurance review phase, and we are preparing the business case to go to Treasury for that school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How much money has actually been spent on the planning stage to date?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you have a site?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have got a lot of school commitments and a big infrastructure portfolio rolling out, as you know. It is part of our commitment to 200 new and upgraded schools, with more than \$7 billion being spent. We will take the figure on that specific planning money for that school on notice and provide that to the Committee.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I will tender a document.

The CHAIR: If staff can grab the document and hand one to the Minister and one to me. Thank you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, I want to ask you about the status of this document. This is the protocols for schools where recess, closure, amalgamation or other educational provisional models are to be considered. This document is still current, isn't it? This is the policy of the department.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want to confer with the secretary on that.

Mr SCOTT: I just want to check on that, Mr D'Adam. It is date lined December 2014, so let me just double-check on that. I have a later version of it here.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that a later version? What date is that, Mr Scott?

Mr SCOTT: It is hot in my hand, but you can see that there are some differences. I just want to check the differences. Some of the terminology has changed and the department has actually changed. We have new positions like the director of educational leadership and other roles.

The CHAIR: This is dated December 2014. What is yours dated?

Mr SCOTT: This actually does not have a date on it. It just has the material on it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that why it is not on the department's website?

Mr SCOTT: I can take that on notice and find out for you. But my advice is that this is not the latest document.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Perhaps you could tender the document that you are referring to.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, we will take it on notice and come back to the Committee on that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You have just referred to a document. I have asked that it be tendered.

The Hon. WES FANG: Chair, the Minister is taking the question on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask about the process for consultation, Mr Scott? Is it correct to say that when the department is considering a school closure there is a process that involves the executive director and the deputy secretary consulting locally? Is that still the case?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Dizdar can take you through this. He has had experience in running this program.

Mr DIZDAR: Mr D'Adam, there is quite a lengthy process. I would just point out to the Committee that it does not start on the premise of a school closure. What it starts on is the premise of consideration for the future education provision at a particular site. That may well end up with a recommendation for a school closure. It may end up with a recommendation for the school to be placed into recess. It may end up with a recommendation for a merger. It may end up with a recommendation for the current education provision at that site to continue.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But there is a process of consultation.

Mr DIZDAR: There is quite a rigorous process, and the first step in that process is to actually provide the material and factual detail to the deputy secretary for the consideration of that consultation process to begin. Then there are detailed steps from there on, including engagement with the school community; including analysis of the forward projections and planning data; including the number of students at that school; including liaising with the NSW Teachers Federation, the NSW Secondary Principals' Council, the NSW Primary Principals' Association, the local member, and the education Minister. Those steps are really rigorous and really well explained in the procedures, and finally we come to a point of a recommendation on what that future provision at that site should be.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you, Mr Dizdar. Minister, can you explain why you did not follow this process in relation to Murwillumbah?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In Murwillumbah we are redeveloping the high school site to create the new education campus for Murwillumbah. There is still going to be education provision in Murwillumbah.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The question is about the process of consultation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We are in a process of consultation. That new school is not opening until 2024, so we will have years of consultation with the community.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Dizdar just outlined quite a detailed process of considering all the options about whether you would close or whether you would take a different model, there would be extensive community consultation and consultation with the local member. That did not happen in Murwillumbah, did it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think you are conflating two very separate issues, if I may say. What we have done in other communities—Armidale, Ballina—is we are bringing school communities together on one site. You used the terminology of closing schools. It is a redevelopment of the Murwillumbah Education Campus to give that school community a state-of-the-art facility with better educational outcomes and opportunities for their students. As I said, I think you are conflating—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, the point is not about the model that you are proposing; it is about how you arrived at that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Chair, the Minister was giving her answer. The Hon. Anthony D'Adam continues to talk over the top of her. We have had this discussion already.

The CHAIR: Will the Minister complete her answer please?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think I have done that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The question was about consultation and why that consultation process has not occurred. It has not occurred, has it, Minister?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr D'Adam, again I do not agree with the premise of your question. What we are talking about in Murwillumbah is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest more than \$100 million in that community in terms of the educational outcomes for those kids. We will have extensive consultation that will take place as we develop that new school and that new education opportunity up there with

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families. That work has already started—it started prior to the announcement of consultation with the school principals about the best way forward, looking at, first and foremost, the educational outcomes and opportunities for those students but also the infrastructure needs. We have seen it has been a great success in other communities—Ballina, Armidale. This is something that we know will have good outcomes for the students and that is why we are doing it, and, as I said, I do not agree with the premise of your line of questioning.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, have you been to Lismore since you made the announcement around Murwillumbah?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I have.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And have you sat down with the local community, with the P&C representatives—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In Lismore or Murwillumbah?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In Murwillumbah.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have been to Lismore since I made the announcement; I have not been to Murwillumbah since I made that announcement. I will be heading up there very soon. It is something that we are actively looking at doing shortly. Part of the reason why I want to go back is because we have recently had community surveys, getting feedback from the community about that project, and there has been quite extensive consultation with the teachers around what they would like to see from the new school campus and education campus that is being built there. All of that is being collated at the moment and I want to have the opportunity to assess that feedback and then we will go up and meet with the community.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It has been a long time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have said very publicly when we were up there making the announcement when I was in Lismore not long ago—obviously, a shared media market there—that I am very happy to meet with the P&C; I know that the department has. I am happy to throw to the deputy secretary to provide a bit more information about the consultation.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is fine, we can wait until the afternoon for further information. I will throw to my colleague now.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am just going to table some documents that we received under a Standing Order 52 that you returned to the Parliament, which include a list of your election commitments. They also outline the projects that are in early planning and then they outline the projects that have been delivered and the projects where upgrades have been delivered.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: A pretty good list of our infrastructure projects.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let us just break it down, Minister. Of those projects that were committed to on page 16—32 major upgrades and—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, I am just getting the page in front of me so the secretary can see it as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: On page 16—and these are the 2019 election commitments—are you aware that over half of those projects have had their dates changed on the School Infrastructure website?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to ask Mr Manning to respond to that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Their completion dates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: He does not have the document. It is a bit hard—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: To assist, I am happy to table a table of the 20 schools that are now up to 18 months late that have been promised.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I will say more broadly—and I am happy for Mr Manning to provide a comment on the specifics—and as I have said many times, we have got a record infrastructure building program underway in the State; we are delivering more schools than any government before us and I think the community can and does judge us on our track record. We have delivered more than 100 new and upgraded schools since we have been in government. In terms of the timing of particular projects and the numbers that you are referencing, I have not seen this document before. Is this one that you have created?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is right. We have worked off your list of election commitments.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I would say—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am just providing you with some information which is on the School Infrastructure website.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I can just say, this is a document that you have created which has only just been placed in front of me and other members of the Executive here today. What I will say in relation to some of the dates that you have got here—we can happily talk through the specifics—I would refute the premise of some of the schools that you have here in terms of the delays. With all due respect, a document that has been created by the Opposition at budget estimates—I would like to have the time to see whether what you have put in front of me is correct, to be honest.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I am happy for your bureaucrats to go away and look at this and we can talk about it more this afternoon, but I can assure you that it has been created from publicly available information on the School Infrastructure website.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but I would like to check that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Then let me just draw you to page 7 of the projects in early planning—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Page 7 of the original document that you tendered?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Page 7 of the original document. This is a key messages document, so you might have a more up-to-date version of this, but according to this, in August last year on the list of 33 projects in the early planning stages, the south-western selective school is not on that list. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Manning, do you want to make a comment on that?

Mr MANNING: I cannot see it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have an updated version of this list, the projects that are in—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We can take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many schools have been promised that are not on this list, that are not even in the early stages of planning?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: All of the commitments that we made—as I said, we have a lot of election commitments and school building commitments. We have delivered many of our record school builds and, as I said, the lists that are in the budget papers are the schools that we are working on as part of our school building initiative.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This is your own internal working document, Minister. The south-western Sydney selective school is not even on the list for early planning.

The CHAIR: You said it was fair dinkum, Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is fair dinkum, Mr Chair. That is why I said I just want to check because, as you would be well aware, this is a document that has only just been placed in front of me and I just want to check what is on the site.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, Minister. It was placed in front of you in August last because it is actually your internal working document.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order: The Minister has outlined that the document has been placed in front of her today in the hearing. She needs to, of course, be able to verify that document and see if there are any other new documents. It is reasonable for her to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: It is the Government's own paper as part of the SO 52 process. The Minister said this school was fair dinkum. It is not on the list. It is a major concern, is it not?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are there any other schools that are not on the list that you have committed to, Minister?

Mr SCOTT: We will just check. My understanding of the selective school issue in south-western Sydney—the critical question about that, which is currently just being finalised now by the department, is the appropriate location for that site.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Scott, I am going to stop you there because I did hear that answer to the Chair's question earlier. I am just wondering if there are any other schools that are not on this list.

Mr SCOTT: That is the material difference, I think, to many of these schools on this list, where a site has been identified and located and now planning work is underway: the selective high school has an additional complexity to it, I think, more than almost any of the other schools we build; many students will travel significant distances to go to that selective school, the transport links are significant, and the impact that the selective high school can have on enrolments in surrounding schools is also quite material compared to other schools that we develop.

The CHAIR: You are building the youth capital of Australia out there, and Leppington rail station and those vast open spaces around Leppington, as I advised the Minister's chief of staff 18 months ago, is probably the only logical place for train access for this school. The catchment is vast, the opportunity is obvious, the train station is sitting there underutilised, especially in this period right now—none of this is rocket science.

Mr SCOTT: And the commitment to building a new selective high school in south-western Sydney is clear. It is going to be built, Mr Chair.

The CHAIR: It is a lack of intent, is it not? It is a lack of commitment—backsliding. There has been some resistance somewhere about the idea of a selective school. That is why it has disappeared.

Mr SCOTT: No, it has not disappeared.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I want to take that on notice and check why it is not on that particular list in that particular document. As I said, the commitment is there for that school.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Abigail Boyd?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you, Chair, and good morning to Minister Mitchell. I wanted to start off by talking to you about the Australian Securities and Investments Commission [ASIC] review of school banking programs. As you are aware, this is something I raised in the Chamber previously.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Given the scathing report from ASIC, what more do you need to step in to ban these exploitative banking programs in our schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for your question and, again, I know it is an issue that you are very interested in, having had some debate on it in our House just recently. What I would say as a general remark to begin with is that obviously the report came down towards the end of last year. I know that the department is looking through that report. I am expecting to receive advice and recommendations that may come from that in due course from the department. I would say more broadly in relation to these programs—as you know and as I think was raised in the House during the debate on your motion—we do not endorse any particular financial institution to run those programs in schools. It is a matter for individual principals and schools. There are guidelines in which they need to operate if they do engage any of those institutions to run programs, but ultimately they are decisions that are made on a local school level by principals. I am not sure if anyone else wants to add to that.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, I will just pick you up on that, because I understand you do not specifically endorse them, but you do allow them and you could step in to stop them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is a matter for individual schools, principals and school communities. There are guidelines that these programs need to operate under. I might get the secretary to respond a bit further. But, as I said, we are looking at the advice that came from ASIC and I am waiting for some more advice from the department about that.

Mr SCOTT: Yes. The department is yet to finalise the advice. I would simply add that the criticisms of ASIC were significant, as you have identified. School bank accounts have been a feature of our schools and school systems since all of us were at school. For decades, schools—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: When we had a publicly owned bank rather than a commercial, profit-driven set of banks, yes.

Mr SCOTT: But that is still going back several decades—since the publicly owned bank became a publicly owned bank in a different way. The thing I would say is that school banking has been a feature of the school system in New South Wales and school systems around the country for decades. ASIC brought down a critical review. At the moment there has been no requirement for schools to run school banking programs.

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Schools have done that and we will be providing advice to the Minister when we have completed the consideration and evaluation of the ASIC report.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: With respect, why are you taking so long to ban school banking programs when both the Victoria and ACT governments were able to step in really quickly?

Mr SCOTT: I note that they have done that. The majority of States and Territories have not yet taken action. We will be providing advice to the Minister on that and then the Government will make a determination.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Are you aware that ASIC released preliminary findings much earlier last year, which enabled a number of banks to pull out of their programs, taking into account the not just critical but scathing report from ASIC in relation to the—and I will just quote one aspect. It says:

Young children are vulnerable consumers and are exposed to sophisticated advertising and marketing tactics by school banking program providers.

Why would you be allowing that in our schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said in response to your earlier question, the final report only came down towards the end of last year. As the secretary has said, advice is being prepared in relation to that and it is a matter for individual schools and principals in terms of whether they have that program.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Have you read the report, Minister Mitchell?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have had a look at it, yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Because it is pretty short. It does not take a great deal of time to look through and the recommendations are very clear.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Why does your Government think that it knows better than our national securities regulator?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I would like, and what is happening, is advice from the department in relation to that matter of a report that was only handed down towards the end of last year. I will receive that advice and the Government will consider that in due course.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is there a time frame for when you get that advice, given the significant concerns that have been raised?

Mr SCOTT: We will be looking to get advice to the Minister shortly and I am sure that she will be in a position to make that decision. Siri backs up our view.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Siri has not been sworn in, so we will have to scrub that from the transcript.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: My apologies. I have a new phone.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: New phone?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes.

The CHAIR: That is where all those Greens questions come from. I knew you had a researcher there on the side.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: It is all from Siri, Chair. Oh my goodness, now it is calling someone.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They are very helpful.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Phone a friend.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, so we got to "shortly". What does that mean? What sort of time frame are we looking at?

Mr SCOTT: I will get some advice. I will see the status of the advice, but we are onto it.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Alright, I will follow it up with you again in due course in the Chamber, I am sure. Just turning to something a little bit different, you may have seen a number of other jurisdictions have made moves to end period poverty in schoolchildren. You will be aware that the Young Australian of the Year recipient for 2021 was Isobel Marshall, who received that award for tackling period poverty. Has your department done any investigation into the cost of providing tampons and pads in our schools?

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for raising this issue, because it is one of which I am aware and I know that other jurisdictions, as you rightly say, have moved in this direction to provide those items to young women in schools. I might ask the secretary to respond.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we are developing work on a pilot program around this. I think details will emerge on that shortly. We are aware of what is happening in other parts of the country. We understand the merits of that and so we are looking to test how we would effectively roll this out in schools as a pilot.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That is really positive. I am hearing from you that you are committed to a pilot program. Would that be some sort of a trial or would it be spread across—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As the secretary said, we are doing some work now in terms of what the pilot program may look like. There will be more to say about that in due course when that work is finalised.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay. Thank you. I will follow that up with you in due course as well then. Finally, I wanted to ask you, obviously given the really alarming reports that we are seeing into the rates of sexual assault and harassment amongst schoolchildren, what is your Government doing in terms of primary prevention strategies to put an end to this?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, that is an important question on an important issue. It would be remiss of me not to start my answer by not acknowledging the incredible bravery of the young women who have come forward to share their experiences. I have been on Chanel Contos' petition site and read through some of those accounts, and they are harrowing. What many young women are sharing is really disturbing. The fact that we are now having a conversation about what we need to do to improve that early prevention, as you say, and support schools around conversations about consent and respectful relationships but also more broadly looking at cultures at specific schools, how parents can be a part of the solution and what we all need to do as a society in terms of making sure that people understand consent and respect in relationships—one of the things that I think is encouraging, if that is the right terminology to use, is that a lot of these young women who are sharing their stories were at school—going through that website, there are quite a few from 2013 or 2014, or that period of time.

In 2018 we actually did quite a significant update of our personal development, health and physical education [PDHPE] curriculum, putting in more explicit content around things like consent and respectful relationships. We also have the Life Ready program that we run in government schools. Again, I think that was brought in 2019. It is compulsory for all year 11 and 12 students. It is a 25-hour course, but it addresses issues around respectful relationships and consent. So it is really embedded in the curriculum and I think that is important. I think things have improved since many of these young women were at school, which is obviously a step in the right direction. Of course, we are undertaking a curriculum review at the moment as well. As part of that the PDHPE syllabus will be looked at and if there are things we need to do to strengthen the teaching and what is in the curriculum, then that is an opportunity as well.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I know that it is incredibly hard to capture the impact of primary prevention programs in a short time period, but what does your department do in terms of trying to assess the effectiveness of those programs?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, the new curriculum having only been in place for a couple of years, I think it is encouraging and it shows that—when we developed that new curriculum in PDHPE, it was after consultation with students and staff, making sure that we were addressing these issues. In some sense we are ahead of the curve, which is positive. But, again, I think it is part of what we need to do more broadly and the conversations that we are having with other school sectors about what they teach in their schools. We have offered to share the resources through Life Ready with the Catholic and independent sectors as well. I know the heads of independent schools are having various meetings this week.

I had a conversation with the head of the independent schools in New South Wales last week about that issue, offering again to share resources, knowledge and see what we can do because this really is—yes, this is an issue that we can address in our schools in terms of education, but it is a broader issue than that as well, as I am sure you well appreciate. I feel confident with what we are doing in schools to support our students and staff, but again it is important that we are having this conversation in a respectful way at the moment. As I said, I am just in awe of the bravery of young women like Chanel and others who have come forward to tell their stories. It is really important.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR: Just on that, is the department in liaison with the police Minister's office and the schools undertaking an audit, if you like, of the seriousness of the allegations and their status and the responses that have

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been made either by the schools or by the criminal justice system in New South Wales? I understand the accounts are harrowing and, if valid, of enormous moral and behavioural concern in our society. But we are getting to an unusual place of trial by media and trial by internet. I am just asking what the evidence base is and what verification has been undertaken.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the Secretary to make some comment about that. I will first say that obviously I know that the heads of the independent schools are meeting with the police this week. I think that was in the media today or yesterday. I have also reached out through the police Minister's office to sit down with police and talk about those exact issues. If there is more we need to be doing in a school setting then we absolutely need to be looking at that, but I would also like to get a read from the police in terms of their view on the issues.

The CHAIR: Yes. Parents contacted me from some of those schools and they said that other than Chanel Contos, the accounts are anonymous on the website.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, and they are designed that way.

The CHAIR: They are designed that way, okay.

Mr SCOTT: She has deliberately constructed the site in that way and I understand that there are more names going forward. Our role is to support students and to actually give them a context. What is interesting in some of the information that has come from some of those young women is that as the Minister said, some of them went through school a little period of time ago now. Some of the education that they have subsequently had around consent has made them reflect more on their own experiences. As you will have seen in media reports, New South Wales police have a senior officer who is engaged in those meetings. I believe that senior officer is meeting today with principals from the schools that have been named in the initial report. The department is not directly involved in that. There will, however, be a meeting on Friday with the Human Rights Commission to discuss some of those matters. I understand the Human Rights Commission has previously had engagement with the armed forces and some of the university colleges to work those things through. There will be representatives from the independent and Catholic schools there, but also representatives from the department.

The CHAIR: So you will be seeking a list of school responses and the status of the complaints they have on record and within the policing system.

Mr SCOTT: I think they are criminal matters and so the police are engaged with this. They have a senior officer who is involved and of course we will cooperate with any requests for information from the police.

The CHAIR: And you will liaise with them.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, exactly.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Mr Manning, could I ask that after the lunch break you bring to the meeting your early, planning stage documentation about the new selective high school in south-west Sydney so we can ask some questions about the detail and what you have there in the early so-called planning stages?

Mr MANNING: Okay.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, I will take you to your statement in a newspaper article in the Channel 9 newspapers earlier this week where you said:

I expect all bureaucrats at the department to back the secretary and the executive team, and focus on doing their jobs. They must stop hiding behind ideology as a reason to oppose change, and recognise that these policy reforms are about students and student outcomes. Get on board—or get out of the way.

Is that an accurate quote?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The CHAIR: Who, if anyone, in the department is not backing the secretary to cause you to have to say that publicly?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That comment was made in response to an article that was in *The Sydney Morning Herald* earlier this week. There were comments from anonymous sources within the department saying that there were concerns about some of the policies that we had in place or some of the reforms that were underway. I was asked what I thought about it and I gave my honest assessment.

The CHAIR: Do you know any detail beyond the anonymous statements in the newspaper? In your role as Minister, do you have evidence of departmental officials who are resistant or refusing to implement the Government's agenda?

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. As I said in that comment, my expectation of all of our staff at the department is to support the secretary and the Executive—those sitting around this table and here with you and the Committee today, Mr Chair—to deliver on the reforms that the Government has in place. I have made it very clear as education Minister that my focus is on improving student outcomes. You and many of the Committee members would know that we have introduced a range of new policy initiatives and reforms, particularly over the past six months. The expectation is that we deliver on those because it is about student outcomes. I do not apologise for that, Mr Chair. I think that is my job.

The CHAIR: Okay. I understand that is your expectation, but what is the reality? What is the ideology people are hiding behind? Who is opposing change and why?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, those comments were made in response to anonymous comments that were made to *The Sydney Morning Herald*. I gave my response that I think it is important that everyone gets on board and is part of the reforms that we want to see as this Government.

The CHAIR: Was that your first encounter with this particular problem or has it been happening over a period of time?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, that was a comment in response to a newspaper article in relation to those matters.

The CHAIR: But my question was whether this is your first encounter with this particular problem.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have made it clear as Minister that I want to see the reforms that we have set as a policy agenda put in place. I think I have made that very clear to the secretary and to the Executive on many occasions. That is what I see as my role as the education Minister, Mr Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I certainly commend you on the refreshingly evidence-based approach that you have taken and the focus on student outcomes, which one would have thought is the only real purpose of a school system. It seems strange that we even have to say that, but congratulations on what you have done in that regard. But on the evidence base, what was your take-out from the very important and extensive research that was commissioned on wellbeing and behavioural change programs in the Telethon Kids Institute report in 2019?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That report has obviously been done to inform the work that we are doing around our behaviour strategy, which has been out for consultation. The final strategy is due to be released very soon and there will be guidelines that go with that to our school communities later in the year. I will be honest, Mr Chair. The issues around behaviour and particularly high suspension rates have been addressed by this Committee in previous estimates hearings. In relation to the number of students in kindergarten, year 1 and year 2 who are suspended and the high proportion of Aboriginal students and children with disability suspended, it was about making sure that we do better as a school system. I do not think suspension is always the answer. If there is violent behaviour then of course it needs to be part of the toolkit that principals have available to them, but I also think we need to have better early intervention and better support to deal with some of the complex behaviours that we see in our school communities and in our society as well.

The CHAIR: But the research survey and the metadata analysis went beyond student behaviour issues. It went to whether we can bring programs into schools that have positive net impacts for wellbeing and behavioural change. It is not just student behaviour. We heard earlier on about how schools can play a role in changing the behaviour, outlook, values and attitudes of students. My reading of the conclusions of the institute's report—particularly at pages 88 to 92—is that they talk of zero to small effects and an uneven evidence base and they are mostly ambiguous about how much those wellbeing and behavioural change programs can ever achieve. Does that not point to the reality that, while schools can try to do a lot of well-intentioned things, not every problem is soluble and not every program gets a result? Off this evidence base, would we not have reasons for scepticism about the wellbeing and behavioural change programs—of which there is a proliferation in our school system—actually getting high positive impacts?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not have a copy of the actual report in front of me. I might ask Ms Harrison to provide a bit more commentary. But to draw you back to your earlier question around the School Success Model and having those targets, Chair, it is something that I think it is important that we track and measure. As you and I and others in this Committee well know, if there are issues with student wellbeing then that impacts on their education and their ability to learn. We certainly hear that from teachers and principals. That has to be part of what we are looking at in terms of that holistic school experience: Are there things that we need to be doing to support students so that they can be focusing on their learning?

The CHAIR: But do they also have to have an evidence base that they can actually get a positive result?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Ms Harrison to talk in a bit more detail about that.

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The CHAIR: We can try to do lots of things but unless there is clear evidence that it is worth doing because it gets a result, it becomes a waste of time and money and can even be counterproductive. Ms Harrison?

Ms HARRISSON: As the Minister has said, one of the things we can very clearly see is that strong student wellbeing is correlated with strong student educational outcomes. That is why we think it is an important thing to continue to focus on. The Telethon Kids Institute report does look at the international evidence and international policies around those issues and we have drawn from that. Where the evidence base is not strong enough, we also need to make sure we continue to build an evidence base. That is why we are very open to testing different opportunities in the system and different programs—to evaluate them very closely to make sure we build that evidence base and only continue with work that has a positive impact.

The CHAIR: But did you conclude from the report that the evidence base is ambiguous or tenuous and certainly not clear and positive?

Ms HARRISSON: I think what we see when we even look at John Hattie's research is that there are many things and they all have lots of small impacts, and those can add up to a significant impact overall. We will take a small impact and we will look for the cumulative benefits that we can get from a number of initiatives, but we will also seek to build that evidence base by monitoring very closely the new programs that we put into place in our schools.

Mr SCOTT: And the School Success Model, I think, will help us do that, Chair. Again, invoking Hattie, Hattie says to Ministers and secretaries—I think we talked about this the other day—"You don't need to travel the world. There are great insights you can draw from within your own system." As we analyse the data that we can now get on the schools that are very successful in school attendance—looking at suspension patterns over time, looking at wellbeing metrics and then looking at what are the programs that schools are implementing that are underpinning outstanding results—that again helps us build the evidence base that allows us, in a sense, to migrate the system towards embracing those policies and interventions that are having a marked effect around student wellbeing, because the evidence is that the link between wellbeing and educational outcomes is absolutely clear. Therefore, we are in the market for insights on what works best and there will be strong insights that come from the evidence within our own system.

Ms HARRISSON: If I could just add, if you look to our ambassador schools—the first three launched this week—Fairvale High School has a very clear focus on the wellbeing of its students as well as the academic outcomes. I urge the Committee to visit that school if you have not had the opportunity to see what they have in place and the way that they look at wellbeing issues, alongside the academic improvement that they are seeking for their students.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I will just jump in on that issue. I was interested in your comments, Ms Harrison, about wellbeing being correlated with improved results. In relation to the School Success Model, how is this different from the stretch targets that were announced two years ago? Is there any substantive difference in what is proposed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to start with that one. The short answer is yes. Obviously we put targets in place a couple of years ago—I believe you are referring to the Bump It Up targets that we rolled out across the State. If you are referring to others, I am happy for you to be clear.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There was a range of targets that were announced I think—

Mr SCOTT: They were the initial targets.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —in 2019.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, the initial targets.

Mr SCOTT: The initial targets have been rolled out and now that has been expanded.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that has been expanded. Effectively, what we are doing with the School Success Model is building on some of the work that has already been underway by us and by our Government in terms of working with schools to set targets. As I said, Bump It Up was one that comes to mind with literacy and numeracy. We started with a select number of schools and had good outcomes, so then we rolled that out to every school across the State. That might be what you are referring to. But this is a broader look at how—I guess there are two parts to this too. This is about how we put targets in place in conjunction with our school communities, looking at statistically similar schools to set targets that we know are achievable, but also important for our schools to obtain to see that lift across the system.

The other part of it is, as I said, replacing the Local Schools, Local Decisions model that we previously had. That gives us and the department that policy lever to come in and provide extra support in areas where our

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data clearly shows that schools need support to a very granular level, down to the data that we are collecting. To pick up on the earlier points around school spending and underspends, this is about making sure through the School Success Model that we are able to tie everything together and be very targeted in the support that we are giving schools, and sharing that accountability from principals across through to our Directors, Educational Leadership [DELS], through to the executive and up to the people sitting around this table. We have record funding going into schools, as we know. We have really hardworking teachers. This is about making sure we bring all of those ingredients together, have those targets in place and really be able to track that data and work towards lifting school improvements and student outcomes across the system. That is the intention of the School Success Model.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: One thing that I seem to have picked up, from the difference with the stretch targets that were announced, is that the wellbeing and equity targets seem to have disappeared.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Wellbeing and equity is still part of the School Success Model.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: They are not in the documentation that your department—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, they are. If I could just clarify, what we are looking at are, as I said, NAPLAN results, there is HSC and there is attendance. They are the targets that we are working on with our school communities to be in place by the end of this term.

Mr DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Many are already in place and Mr Dizdar is doing a lot of that work, as is Ms Nixon. We are also looking at a wellbeing target. So we are looking at the methodology of how we are going to calculate that. We had the Tell Them From Me survey, but we want to do some more work with our school communities as to how we will measure wellbeing. We are also looking at pathways—tracking where students go for five years after they finish school. Again, that is another way to establish the success of the school and where students go post-school in terms of their career and further study destinations. And we also have the phonics trial coming in as part of that as well. So wellbeing and equity are absolutely part of the School Success Model.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But you announced both of those targets two years ago and neither of them have been developed and neither of them are reflected in the documentation that you are communicating to schools, so what message does that send to schools about the priorities around welfare and equity?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Mr Dizdar to talk through them all.

Mr DIZDAR: We explained this to the Committee last time as well, Mr D'Adam. We started this work of systematically setting targets in every school with their school context in term four 2019. The first two we started were the Premier's Priorities around the top two bands in reading and numeracy, as well as the Premier's priority around HSC attainment for our Aboriginal students whilst maintaining their cultural competency. What we did with our principals and school leadership teams at that time also was show them the work that we were doing around attendance targets and around equity targets. You would know that equity is really important in our system. And expected growth for students—a student; all students—is really important. We showed them targets around HSC top two bands and top three bands.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But my point, Mr Dizdar, is that you have announced a range of targets that you have communicated to schools, and equity and wellbeing are not there.

Mr DIZDAR: And I am trying to get to the fulsomeness of your question.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Why are they not there?

Mr DIZDAR: No, they are there. We showed them the wellbeing target as well. The system measure we have for that is a survey instrument called Tell Them From Me. From this year's Tell Them From Me it is our expectation that all schools will now undertake that survey. It was optional before that. That is going to give us a stronger baseline to work off. You have to have a good, rigorous measure for a system before you can then mandate that—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Dizdar. We have a lot more questions on this, but we just do not have a lot of time with the Minister.

Mr DIZDAR: But if you would just let me finish because I want to make sure that I cover what you are asking, Mr D'Adam. By the end of term one in every school plan under that first strategic direction, "growth and attainment", will be the attendance target, will be the equity targets I spoke to, will the Premier's priority targets and from next year onwards it is our expectation that the wellbeing target will also be there. We need to have further work with our schools on that this year and have a stronger baseline.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: We will come back to this, Mr Dizdar.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, why wasn't Gregory Hills public school fast-tracked under the COVID-19 recovery funding?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In relation to the COVID-19 funding that was available, it was about fast-tracking projects that were effectively ready to go, that we have been in a position where the planning and work had been done. I received advice from School Infrastructure and the department as to which schools should receive that funding, and those were the schools that were funded under that program. Does Mr Manning want to—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And you approved all of the ones that were recommended by the department? You did not deviate from that list at all?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I didn't deviate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So why then was Picnic Point High School prioritised?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning to talk through that. As I said, that was the advice that came from the department.

Mr MANNING: Picnic Point was one of the projects we have been working on for a while in terms of that catchment. There are a whole range of issues going on in that catchment area really around kids from other catchments coming down into those schools, so we saw an opportunity for an upgrade to begin to alleviate some of the issues with that. That was part of the planning work that we had undertaken and we felt that was advanced enough to be considered as part of the stimulus.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, why wasn't Gregory Hills fast-tracked? It was first earmarked in 2013. Six years later you were looking for projects to fast-track—there is an empty site waiting there. There is a school community that is crying out for a primary school. The next closest school where most of the kids are going is Gledswood Hills and it has 18 demountables.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And a second stage approved for funding to be built shortly.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, they have 18 demountables in their second year of operation. You have an empty site sitting there. Why didn't you fast-track that school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, the advice from School Infrastructure was to proceed with the projects that have been funded and I took that advice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you are telling us that, after it was first earmarked in 2013, the appropriate planning was not in place for an empty school site? You own the site, you have the site, but the planning has not been done over a period of seven years to commence construction.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning to talk through the specifics of that particular school project. Again, I do not necessarily agree with the premise of your question in terms of the timing and commitments that have been made. That school is in the advanced planning stage. I understand that the business case has been lodged. But you are asking about stimulus money that was provided in the budget. The projects that were funded under that are the ones that have been approved by me after advice directly from School Infrastructure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Before we go to Mr Manning, you said that it is now in the advanced stages.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is the advice that I have.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When did it move to the advanced stage?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning the comments. The advice I have is that advanced planning—and that the business case has been lodged for the new primary school in Gregory Hills. Mr Manning might want to add more to that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When was that lodged, Mr Manning?

Mr MANNING: Let me just refer to my notes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you need a bit more time, Mr Manning?

Mr MANNING: Yes. Sorry, I cannot find—

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Why don't I come back to the Minister and then you can let us know?

Mr SCOTT: We can come back after lunch with that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, I just want to confirm the Government has not committed to a new school in the development at Box Hill. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning to respond.

Mr MANNING: Yes. So, we—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You have not? The Government has not committed?

Mr MANNING: We are not aware of a commitment, no. Absolutely not.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. But you are aware that the developer is advertising that a K-6 public school will be built in The Gables, in a development that is expected to house 42,000 residents?

Mr MANNING: Yes, the developer is advertising something. I do not know what plans the developer has to fulfil those obligations.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, what action are you taking to alert the community that there are no Government plans to build a school in Box Hill? There are families who are purchasing blocks of land thinking that there is going to be a local school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think what I would say is in line with earlier comments I made when the Chair asked about this. For families who live in those areas, the source of truth in terms of school builds should be the Department of Education and the School Infrastructure website. Again, for developers—it is important that communities listen to the Government advice in terms of new school builds and that should be their source of truth.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Minister, I drew this to your attention in January. There is a developer that is out there. Are you not going to direct your department to go and correct the record or to speak to local communities or to maybe contact the development company to say, "This is not accurate. We have not committed to a school"?

Mr SCOTT: It is not actually the department's responsibility to go around and monitor advertising claims. There are agencies of government that have precisely that responsibility around truth in advertising, consumer affairs and the like. That question is fundamentally a consumer affairs question. I think the question is appropriately put to the Minister there. We are not in the process of monitoring advertising across the State on anything that makes a reference to education or educational claims, be it tutoring, be it capital development, be it anything else—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, that is not what I am asking. There is a development company out there that is promising families a local school. I have drawn this to your attention.

Mr SCOTT: And that is a question for those that monitor and regulate the work of developers, I think, fairly.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, let us move on.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is nobody's job in New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is exactly right. I am not even going to waste my time with that Minister. Minister, are you aware that year 7 students who commenced at Ryde Secondary College just weeks ago are being let out of class early so they have a chance to use bathrooms?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am not aware of that.

Mr SCOTT: We will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will take that on notice, yes. It has not been brought to my attention.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: There are children who cannot go to the toilet all day because they do not have access to toilet facilities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I want to take that question on notice. It has not been brought to my attention and I do want to check the legitimacy of the claim that you are asking. That is why I want to take that one on notice.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, Minister, this is a site that has 11 demountable bathrooms. My office has received correspondence from a concerned parent at that site because their child, who has just started year 7, is being let out of class early. Despite the 11 demountable classrooms—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, 11 demountable bathrooms or classrooms?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Eleven demountable bathrooms. I apologise; there are a number of demountable classrooms as well. They are being let out of school early in order to use them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Look, as I said, Ms Houssos, I will take that on notice. It is not an issue that has been raised with me. I am happy to look into it and report back to the Committee.

Mr SCOTT: Nor has it been an issue raised with me, nor has it been a matter raised with Ms Nixon, who is responsible for the schools in the State's north. If there are issues like that, then we appreciate them being drawn to our attention and we will investigate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But you would be aware, Minister, that students at that site have access to just two square metres of play space per student, instead of the Government's recommended 10 square metres?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Mr Manning to talk in a bit more detail about the play space and those requirements in terms of new school builds and developments.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We have canvassed that extensively before. I am asking you specifically about this site.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am able to answer the questions as I choose and I would like Mr Manning to provide a comment on that.

Mr MANNING: When we plan for new schools we do have a—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is all? You just want to talk about the planning for new schools? We have covered that extensively before.

Mr MANNING: We have a basis on which we provide for schools and play space and bathrooms is part of that commitment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, and that does not apply to existing schools?

Mr MANNING: It is also a building code issue for new schools. It is a guideline that we try and achieve for a whole range of other schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, but it does not apply to existing schools.

Mr MANNING: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is correct, is it not? Okay. Minister, when will female students at Yanco Agricultural High School receive their permanent dormitories?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for the question. We are in the process of planning for the upgrade at Yanco. Can I say in relation to that particular matter: I visited the school with the Hon. Wes Fang, actually, to meet with the students and staff. The local member also came. Mr Dizdar was with me on that visit, and also a former senior executive from School Infrastructure as well. There were clearly concerns from that school community about those female dormitories. I went and had a look myself and I agree that they need to be updated. That is why, as I said to that community, we will look at what we can do in that space. We are in the planning stages for that particular project and that will run its course so that we can get that upgrade for the female students, which is important.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That was promised at your visit in July last year? Is that right?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. The visit in July last year was an opportunity to have a look at the issue firsthand and also to see what we could do in that space. I think I made it quite clear to the school community—and, again, Mr Dizdar was there—that it was not a project that was currently on the agenda in terms of what we were looking at. But I think we could all very much see for ourselves that the need was there. So then, when we were back from that visit, we have had some conversations and started about what we could do to plan. That is why we made the announcement that we were planning for the new dormitories there and that planning is underway.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When was that announcement made for the planning?

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to take that on notice. You might remember, Wes; you were there. I cannot remember. I will take it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you give me a rough idea? Perhaps someone can come back to us with that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to take it on notice. I do a lot of visits, especially in regional communities.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The female students wrote to you because they have demountable dormitories—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I know. I have been there. I have seen it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —and the male students have permanent dormitories. Have you responded to their February 2021 letter yet?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to check. I will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps you can come back later in the day?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. I mean, it is only early March, so I will have to check in terms of whether that document has made its way to my desk yet. But, as I said, I met with students at Yanco, including female students, when I visited the school. I am very happy to respond to them.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, and they would like to know not just when it is going to be planned but when is it going to be completed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. As I said, I will respond to that letter.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It appears on the document that I gave you earlier, on page seven, as a project in early planning. Has that progressed beyond early planning?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get Mr Manning to answer that one.

Mr MANNING: It is still in the planning phase. So we are working through—had a number of conversations with the school about the range of options that we are working to, including the total number of boarding capacity that the school thinks is appropriate to work its way through. We are getting pretty close to being clear on the preferred option—the recommended option—and then it will go through an assurance process to make sure that we have answered the questions right and we have considered all the options. Then it will be available for government.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Based on our conversations this morning about different projects in different stages, it sounds as though it is still in early planning. Is that correct?

Mr MANNING: No. I think it is closer to the end of the planning phase than it is to the beginning of the planning phase, subject to the assurance process that it goes through and whether that raises any issues that we have not dealt with in the process we have gone through to date.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Has it moved off this early planning list yet?

Mr MANNING: In my characterisation, it would have moved off early planning. We have got a clear line of sight of the options that are available to us and we have had a good set of conversations with the school about what they think their requirements are, so we are getting pretty close to being able to make some recommendations around the way forward.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, are you able to provide us on notice with an updated version of which projects are in the early planning stages?

Mr MANNING: Yes, I think we can do that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, we can do that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can you outline what are the options that are being considered by the school?

Mr MANNING: For that one specifically?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

Mr MANNING: Yes, absolutely.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, can you tell us now?

Mr MANNING: No, I cannot. We will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The options that are being considered by the school?

Mr MANNING: Yes. A lot of it is about: What is the total number of boarding capacity that is the right capacity to build? So there are a range of options available in that. That is the piece that we have now just got to settle with the school, to make sure they are comfortable with that. In terms of provision of accommodation for boys and girls and complete separation, we are comfortable that we have landed on the right outcomes for that. It is just, then, the volume.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, when will the demountables be removed from Northbourne Public School? Sorry, let me be specific: When will the pop-up school be closed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning to talk through that.

Mr MANNING: Northbourne Public School is expected to be ready for day one, term three, at which point we will be able to remove the pop-up school following that opening.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Day one, term three?

Mr MANNING: Yes, it is a mid-year delivery, rather than a day one, term one.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many demountables are projected to be required on that day one, term three?

Mr MANNING: The new school has a capacity of 1,000, so at this point in time we are not projecting the need for any demountables on that site.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, so you are saying that term three, day one, the pop-up school is going to be closed and removed from the site.

Mr MANNING: On the current trajectory, we are expecting the school to be finished and available and operational day one, term three, at which point we will be able to begin to withdraw the demountables.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, excellent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is fairly normal practice in our school infrastructure builds. That is what we do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes. I am sure we will keep a very close eye on that one. Minister, I want to ask you about the capital expenditure over the future years of the budget. I am sure you have a copy of the budget papers with you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I do not.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Oh, okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is alright. You still ask me the question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps someone behind you can get you a copy. Let me refer to the Infrastructure Statement 2019-20, page 1-9. The Education capital budget is actually projected to decline over future years. Can you explain why that is the case?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might get Mr Withey to talk through that, seeing he is the Chief Operating Officer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But you do not—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want Mr Withey to answer that question.

Mr WITHEY: The way the Education capital budget is set out is through individual projects. Unlike some other parts of government, we do not have a 10-year capital planning limit which sets an aggregate level over that period. What we have is a series of individually funded projects that are set out in that aggregate amount.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. I think we might come back to this this afternoon because my time has run out. Can I just ask one final question to Mr Manning? Is there a guarantee that the project at Yanco will not be new demountable dormitories?

Mr MANNING: We are planning a permanent solution to Yanco, yes.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, thanks.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thanks, Mr Chair. Minister, are you aware that out of the 10 members of the department's executive, on my understanding, only one has actual teaching experience?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond, but, no, that is not my understanding. We have several.

Mr SCOTT: No, that is incorrect.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright. I have the organisational chart as at 19 January 2021.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We have Deputy Secretary Chloe Read and Lisa Alonso.

Mr SCOTT: Lisa Alonso-Love.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Lisa Alonso-Love, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes. They do not have teaching experience?

Mr SCOTT: No, they have extensive senior public service experience. Ms Read has been with the department for a long period of time, and Ms Alonso-Love came from community services where a lot of her work was working with children, children's wellbeing and children at risk.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes. They do not have teaching experience?

Mr SCOTT: They do not have teaching qualifications, no.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ruth Owen, a newly recruited deputy secretary—

Mr SCOTT: Senior public servant recruited out of the UK and a very experienced program deliverer, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: She was recruited most recently after four years in Ernst & Young, was she not?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, after, I think, a considerable—some decades with the UK senior civil service.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We might go into that at a later point in this hearing. No teaching experience, correct?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I believe that is right.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In fact, straight out of a consulting firm.

Mr SCOTT: Well, recruited out of Ernst & Young, where she was a partner, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Group Deputy Secretary Georgina Harrisson—no teaching experience?

Mr SCOTT: No, senior public servant, including times with Family and Community Services.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Deputy Secretary, School Performance, Leanne Nixon—no teaching experience?

Mr SCOTT: Well, can we pause here for a minute because I think that is where we are going? Ms Nixon is one of the country's most experienced educators and a former school principal—I think in three separate schools, Ms Nixon. She has experience in Queensland—deputy of the system, as a senior executive in the Queensland Department of Education—a former deputy in Northern Territory education. You cannot find a more experienced educator and school principal than Ms Nixon.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I accept that. Thank you for clarifying that about Ms Nixon.

The CHAIR: And Mr Scott, a former schoolteacher.

Mr SCOTT: We will get to that. I am hoping we will get to that soon.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: He wants to build up, Mr Chair.

Mr SCOTT: I am hoping we are getting to that. There are more surprises ahead.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do not stop.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, no, no, I understood—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That was another century ago.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Last century you were a schoolteacher. Is that right, Mr Scott?

Mr SCOTT: I was indeed a schoolteacher. One of my former students is in this Parliament.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I actually did not know that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, we all make mistakes, Mr Scott.

The Hon. WES FANG: You make many.

Mr SCOTT: And Mr Dizdar, an experienced school principal and educator.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was going to get to Mr Dizdar. He clearly has experience.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, he does.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: He does.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So that is two.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Three.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Plus yourself, three.

The CHAIR: Three.

Mr SCOTT: Three. Are there any more? Do you want to find more?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Chief Operating—

Mr SCOTT: I think we can find more.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, let us find more. Chief Operating Officer David Withey.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we recruited our Chief Operating Officer out of Treasury, which seemed a good place to recruit him, and we are glad he has joined us.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No teaching experience?

Mr SCOTT: No teaching experience, no.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Chief Financial Officer Gerard Gieseckam?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, again, he is a finance person.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No teaching experience, though.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Which is probably appropriate for a finance person.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Chief People Officer Yvette Cachia?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we are glad she has joined us. She has a background in the law but she started her career as a teacher at Dunheved High School with experience teaching in western Sydney high schools—

The Hon. WES FANG: Oh that is four!

Mr SCOTT: —and also working in departmental offices.

The CHAIR: Do you think you have too many teachers?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Chief Executive, School Infrastructure, Anthony Manning.

Mr SCOTT: Anthony Manning. Now, look, I have heard this criticism. You might make a view that Mr Manning, to run a \$7 billion school infrastructure project, should have been an industrial arts teacher, but he is not an industrial arts teacher. Actually, he was the deputy of Health Infrastructure NSW and is one of the most experienced builders of public sector infrastructure in New South Wales. Let me add to that because you have been asking about the mix of this executive: I am very proud of this executive. I think it has the perfect mix to run one of the largest organisations in the country. We have a chief operating officer who has come from Treasury. We have a clear leader in infrastructure who has come from Health Infrastructure to join us. Clearly, we have the voice of experience of schools and school leadership in our system here—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The 10 names that we have addressed—that is the executive team?

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Mr SCOTT: That is the executive team. Yes, that is right, and four of them have education degrees and education backgrounds.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many of them have worked in consulting firms?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to take that on notice. Ms Owen clearly has. Ms Cachia, after her time at the New South Wales bar, spent time in Health and spent a few months in a consultancy firm or a professional services firm. I am not sure of everyone else.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Rather than guess—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will take it on notice.

Mr SCOTT: We will take it on notice—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you can get that provided later today, that would be useful.

Mr SCOTT: —but I believe there are far more educators than there are consultants on that team.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much has been spent on international recruitment?

Mr SCOTT: On international recruitment? We spent money—I can get the detail on notice. We did do a search when we were filling these executive positions because we were keen to find the best, most experienced people we could find to fill these positions and these roles. Can I say I was delighted—overwhelmed—by the calibre of people who applied to not just join the New South Wales public service but join us in senior positions in New South Wales education.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question was how much, not your latent delight. How much was spent?

Mr SCOTT: Well, the bottom line is we did executive search. Those executive search firms will look internationally, but we did not launch an international search for these roles.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will make it easier for you: How much was spent on executive recruitment in the last calendar year for 2020?

Mr SCOTT: Ah right, so that is your question. I will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And how much was spent in the year before, the 2019 calendar year?

Mr SCOTT: I will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much has the department spent on consultants in the last calendar year?

Mr SCOTT: Let me see if I can access that information quickly. If not, I am happy to get that for you on notice as well. I will get the precise detail for you, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I know the executive team has spent the last couple of weeks preparing for budget estimates and preparing this kind of information—

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I will look for the number.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —so if it could be found throughout the course of today, obviously that would be useful.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, okay.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In the middle of 2017, according to the department's annual report, there were 234 senior executives in the department. In 2019 that had gone up to 307 senior executives in the department. As at the middle of last year, which is I presume when these figures are done—at the end of June—how many senior executive positions were there in the department?

Mr SCOTT: Can I go back to your previous question because I found that information here after on consultancies. I have got a figure through 2019 on that for you, which was \$8.3 million on consultancy engagements. That is for 2019. That was up about \$1 million on the previous year, in the context of a \$20 million spend.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And last year?

Mr SCOTT: I do not have the 2020 figure immediately to hand. That is the last published figure we have.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So, there were 234 senior executive positions in the middle of 2017. What is the current number?

Mr SCOTT: Again, I will check that number and take it on notice. We have had an expansion which is which is due to the—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I asked about the number. It has gone up. Is that my understanding?

Mr SCOTT: This is exactly the point I was coming to: because we have expanded School Infrastructure significantly for all the reasons that have been identified now. A few years ago School Infrastructure was operating as part of the general operations part of the organisation, and we came to a view—the Government came to a view—that it was significantly underinvested, given the enormous scale of activity that was going to take place in school infrastructure, given the \$7 million of constructing new and renovated schools, given the big investment that has been made in maintenance. That is where a lot of focus has been.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We know that between the middle of 2017 and the middle of 2019 the number of senior executive positions increased by a quarter. Are you saying that those 63 additional senior executive positions in that period are all doing the infrastructure work?

Mr SCOTT: I am saying that, if I look at where there has been in my time a significant change in growth, it has been with the creation of School Infrastructure NSW. Can you give me the figures you have got previously on the public service senior executive [PSSE] numbers and I will check it against the detail?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: As at 30 June 2017, 234; as at 30 June 2018, 304; and as at 30 June 2019, 307. And I was asking—

Mr SCOTT: I have got a figure on 30 June 2020 which is 296. So that is a decrease. The other area that we have seen significant change—and again, unapologetically—is the expansion and change of the role of the directors of educational leadership in our New South Wales public schools. When I arrived—and I worked through this extensively with Minister Stokes—our directors out there responsible for schools were looking after, on average, 34 schools. Many of them had 40 schools that they were looking after. We created an additional in excess of 40 new directors to reduce the average number of schools—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Scott, my final question before I hand over to Mr Latham is: Between 2017 and the middle of 2020, the number of senior executive positions in the department grew by over 25 per cent. That was roughly four times the rate of the growth in the number of teachers.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, because we had growth in two key areas. One was a massive expansion—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Senior execs growing at four times the rate—

The CHAIR: There was another round, David, you will have to come back to it.

Mr SCOTT: I want to check those numbers, Chair, but can I say the massive expansion we have talked about today in school construction to deal with the largest growth in school enrolments that we have seen in generations here led to a significant expansion of that capacity to spend the \$7 billion allocated. Also, a deliberate strategy to increase the number of directors of educational leadership to make their work manageable, to my mind, anywhere you would look where you had a line manager looking directly after 40 school principals—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Just to assist—

The CHAIR: No, you will have to come back to it, David, I am sorry.

The Hon. WES FANG: Chair, noting that we started quite a few minutes early with the witnesses—

The CHAIR: Do the witnesses need a convenience break?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I wouldn't mind one, Mr Chair, I'll be honest.

The CHAIR: Let's reconvene in five minutes time.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Minister, since we last convened, is it fair to say that mental health has become a higher profile, more pressing issue in our schools? Would it be your expectation that, as consultants come into schools to run mental health courses, events and programs, they would in fact have mental health qualifications, given the importance of this issue and its impact on young people in our schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I would say, Chair, is that obviously you are right in terms of the increased importance of mental health support for students. It is something that we are committed to in terms

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of the professional workforce that we are rolling out in our election commitments around extra counsellors and support officers. Obviously they need to have relevant and appropriate qualifications. In terms of more broadly external providers coming into school communities, I might ask the secretary or Ms Harrison to make a comment in relation to that.

The CHAIR: No, but on those external providers, as Minister, is it your expectation that they will have mental health qualifications?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think depending on the program that is being offered and what is being run—it is a little bit hard—

The CHAIR: Well, a mental health program is designed to improve the mental health of students. It would be a dreadful thing, would it not, if they have no mental health qualifications and they are just random people from the entertainment industry or somewhere else going in and making money out of the system and perhaps doing more harm than good?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If there are any specifics that you want to raise, I am happy to do that.

The CHAIR: We will come to that. But I am asking about your general expectation, given the importance of the issue.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I think it depends on the program that is being offered, the context and how it supports what is happening in the school community.

The CHAIR: So you can envisage circumstances where the people providing mental health courses do not have those qualifications?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think if there are mental health courses being provided and schools engage, you know, if there are people who are well-known sportspeople or entertainment people who can draw attention to the issue as part of the work with those programs—I know that happens in the community more broadly. If somebody does have a profile and they can raise awareness about certain issue, I think that is fairly commonplace.

Mr SCOTT: I think, Chair, if I can just parse it a bit—and the Minister is referring to this—the question around qualifications, the areas here that I think add the complexity of what you are drawing out are: What is "mental health" and what is wellbeing training? What is the training that people might have in contrast to the qualifications they might have? So we will have ambassadors who will be in schools through organisations like Beyond Blue or headspace and the like. Some of the most powerful people we will have in schools working with kids will be people who are well known in the community and respected by kids. They may not have mental health qualifications but are they working with organisations that clearly have higher training and expertise—

The CHAIR: I am not talking about that; I am talking about external consultants brought in by schools.

Mr SCOTT: That is what I want to make clear.

The CHAIR: Can I come to you then, Secretary, on this question: I saw on the website that the Department of Education has established a panel of external service providers for student engagement and so forth. What is the accreditation process for that?

Ms HARRISSON: We can provide the details of that accreditation process on notice. We invite people in as part of a tendering-type process and assess the evidence of the programs they provide, the quality of the provision and I think, as the secretary has indicated, the range of programs that can operate in this space—from outdoor education, where we would see the resilience of young people being built up, through to specific mental health provision. I just want to make sure that we are really clear that we would expect that provision that is working directly with students on mental health issues that they absolutely be—

The CHAIR: Right, so you can only get into New South Wales schools if you are on the panel of external providers?

Ms HARRISSON: It is part of the transition we are making as part of the School Success Model where we are providing much clearer guidance and expectations around the support that schools draw on. As part of that we want to make sure that schools have a clear menu of options to draw from, including an assessment of the quality of those external providers.

The CHAIR: Well, Georgina, would it not be advisable that they had an evidence base, rigorous evaluation programs and proper accreditation system around their mental health qualifications? Is that not all sort of accreditation 101?

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Ms HARRISSON: If their program is designed to go and work in depth with students around their specific mental health issues, we would of course expect them to be psychologist trained. However, a number of these programs are broader wellbeing programs, not specific one-to-one student support for mental health issues. I want to make sure that we can draw—in a sense, we are capturing a broad definition here of programs to support students in schools. Not all of those are specifically mental health provider services.

The CHAIR: Okay. Let me come to a specific example. I think it is healthy in our system to have the voices of students heard in front of the Minister, secretary and other senior officials. Tomorrow Man runs what is supposed to be a mental wellness program for young men. Here is the account that was given to me of their efforts:

Last year we had a whole day where boys had to do a talk about domestic violence and how we were potential perpetrators and we needed to be helped not to do so.

All the girls had normal classes and I was behind for a week as I missed a full day's work ...

We feel marginalised by society but we are told we are violent and in a privileged position ...

Tomorrow Man, run by Kayne Tremills—

who, I can add, seems to have the only qualification of coming from the ABC—

was all about how there is a domestic violence epidemic and we are threats to society ...

They talk about suicide which I agree is an issue but they say that domestic violence is more important and that masculinity is the real issue that causes suicide and is the same reason for domestic violence ...

They got on my mates for calling another of my mates an idiot for a small thing. Like it was a joke but we spent an hour or so talking about how that was toxic masculinity and a reason for suicide.

this is a year 11—he is now in year 12— verbatim account of this course at a Sydney high school—

I feel like the aim for the whole thing was to make us feel sad or show remorse for stuff we didn't do.

It did more harm than good.

Minister, are you concerned about this sort of thing happening in our schools when we have all this valid talk about mental health, that this outfit for this boy—and he says his cohort of friends—did a lot more harm than good?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am not familiar with that particular provider. I am not sure if the secretary or Ms Harrison is.

The CHAIR: Can someone tell me about Tomorrow Man? I have looked up the eight or so people involved there and only one of them has any sort of mental health or educational qualifications.

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to look into that and provide you details on notice, Chair.

The CHAIR: Can you also look at Gotcha4Life? Their principal is Gus Worland, who lists his qualifications to go into our schools and talk to our students about mental health as a TV and radio personality, award-winning Toshiba salesman and friend of Hugh Jackman.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We can look into that, too.

The CHAIR: I know, Mr Scott, there are reasons to smirk about that and it is a question of do you laugh or cry? But are we really at the point where random people from the entertainment industry—and I do not think many senior students would know Gus Worland from a bar of soap—get to go into our schools and inflict this sort of material upon students who should have their self-esteem built up, not ripped down.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Point of order: The question seems to be conflating a course done on domestic violence and teaching young men about domestic violence—

The CHAIR: No, it was a course on masculinity and mental wellness for young men. I explained that when you were out of the room.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I heard it. With a totally separate course, you said, done by a celebrity.

The CHAIR: No, he is a funding partner of theirs who goes in and does similar work.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is unfair to this witness to conflate those two courses. One dealing with what I would hope we would all join around and celebrate—telling young men, year 11 students, about concerns about domestic violence—and this other course. It is unfair to the witness.

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The CHAIR: There is no point of order on the basis I am asking about their qualifications. David, you mentioned earlier about where are the teaching qualifications. I am making the point quite simply that it must be accreditation 101 to insist that people going in—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are attacking the department—

The CHAIR: —to talk about mental health and wellness have relevant professional qualifications—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —talking to teenagers about domestic violence.

The CHAIR: —and a record of getting things done.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: I have said there is no point of order. I have asked my question and I would like an answer.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is outrageous.

The Hon. WES FANG: Hansard cannot record this.

The CHAIR: Oh, it is outrageous?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is outrageous that you are attacking the department.

The CHAIR: You have no sympathy for this young man and his account.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: That says a lot about you. I would like an answer to the question, please.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, let's deal with domestic violence that way! It degrades this Committee.

Mr SCOTT: Chair, we will look into Gotcha4Life. I am sorry for that student if that student felt that it was an unsatisfactory day spent and he did not get benefit out of it. I would not want to speak for all students and I would not like to speak for all who experience that program. You mentioned Gus Worland. I do note that Gus Worland has quite a high profile out there and has spoken extensively about men and suicide, and that he is available as a speaker and has spoken in schools. We have many people with a profile who go into schools and speak about the issues that are of importance. But let us do some work on Gotcha4Life and the work of Mr Worland and come back to you on notice.

The CHAIR: Just on the basics of feedback, is there any surveying of students to see what they thought of the session and whether it was beneficial to them or harmful?

Mr SCOTT: We can see if that happens. That is not unknown in our schools to get student feedback because we want—

The CHAIR: Should it not be standard practice?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I think it is a fair point, Chair. Let us see what the custom and practice is. We want these programs to be meaningful and effective for students. I think you will find, almost invariably, on any program that is put on offer you might find some students who found it was wonderful and appropriate to their needs and you will find other students who were dismissive of it.

The CHAIR: Yes, but should this not be part of rigorous evaluation—to try to find out what they are saying? What evaluation reports have you got about Tomorrow Man and Gotcha4Life?

Mr SCOTT: Let me check on that, Chair.

The CHAIR: Can you take it on notice?

Mr SCOTT: I think this is what the School Success Model helps us to do. It helps us to identify what are those interventions that are being made at a school level that are helping us see demonstrable lift in areas like wellbeing, student attendance, student engagement and the like. I think that will help us help schools to be discerning in the selections that they make.

The CHAIR: I am not saying do not run these programs, but I am putting to you proper accreditation arrangements, evaluation and the evidence base that we are trying to apply in other parts of the system because this stuff is critical. This stuff is important.

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Mr SCOTT: I take that on notice, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Opposition?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, can I take you back to page 2 of the document that Ms Houssos tabled earlier in the proceedings. Can you see at the top of the document it talks about the number of permanent, temporary and casual teaching staff?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And it lists that there are 42,674 permanent teachers and 24,127 temporary and casual teachers. Can you see that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I can.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Down the page, under the heading "school admin", it says there are 9,622 permanent staff and 10,119 temporary or casual staff. Minister, does it concern you that more than one-third of the teaching staff and over half of the school admin staff are in insecure employment?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary and possibly Ms Cachia to comment in a bit more detail.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, the question was—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You asked whether it concerns me, which was the question that you put to me. I think that it is fair to say that for many years there has been a mix of permanent and temporary and casual staff in the education system. That is not something that is new, and that is a reflection of the need for schools to have that flexibility in terms of their staffing entitlements.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, we are not talking about some casual staff; we are talking about over one-third of your teaching staff in insecure employment and more than half of your admin staff in insecure employment. That is not just a strategy around managing contingent arrangements. That appears to be a policy decision that your Government has implemented to casualise the workforce. Do you agree with that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I do not agree with the premise of your question. As I said in my earlier comments, having a mix of permanent, temporary and casual staffing has been a feature of the education department in New South Wales for a number of years. I will get the secretary to respond in relation to that.

Mr SCOTT: Let me take you through a bit of the data.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Actually, Mr Scott, my questions are—

Mr SCOTT: You wanted to talk about the numbers. I am concerned—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, my question was to the Minister about her concern.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And I am allowed to answer the question as I see fit.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am not after further detail. I will ask Mr Scott about this later on in the proceedings.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am allowed to ask him to make a comment in my answer to you. I believe that is my entitlement as a Minister.

The CHAIR: You are indeed, Minister.

Mr SCOTT: If you take a 10-year look at the data we have actually a higher percentage of staff who are in permanent teaching roles today than there were in 2011. We have 69,000 FTEs, and the overall proportion of permanent full-time teachers in schools, according to the advice I have here, is 93.24 per cent. We have had a change in the mix. We actually have fewer casual teacher FTEs now—over the last decade—because there has been a change from those who are casual teaching to those who are undertaking more temporary and permanent work. This is a reflection of how Gonski money has worked in practice in our schools.

We have put very significant money into schools—over \$10 billion. You heard Mr Withey talk about that earlier. How schools use that discretionary Gonski money—often they have gone and employed teachers and they have employed teachers for a full year as permanent or temporary teachers who are working in their school base. There are many teachers who actually for a period of time were dealing with perhaps instability as to whether the phone would ring and there was a casual slot available for them this week who have now received

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blocks of work from the department for terms or even the full school year under the Gonski reforms. But the overall pattern of the percentage of permanent roles today compared to a decade ago is almost virtually the same.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am going to direct my question to the Minister. Are you saying that you are comfortable with this arrangement, with this proportion of casual and temporary teachers to permanent teachers?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the secretary has just highlighted it very well in his response to your question in relation to how we manage that mix of permanent, temporary and casual teachers and the fact that the Gonski funding and the additional support going to our schools has given more security to many teachers across the State.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I move on to the Gallop report. Minister, have you read the report?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I have.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There is a section in the report that talks about average workload. At page 103 of the report there is a suggestion that full-time classroom and specialist teachers, on average, are working 55 hours per week, 43 in school and 11 at home. Do you accept that is the case or do you contest that suggestion?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I accept that is what is referenced within the—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a fair reflection?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I answer your question? I accept that that is what is referenced within the Gallop report.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has the department or have you received any advice around the average workload of classroom teachers being in the realm of what has been described in the Gallop report? Is it validated by the information that has been provided to you by the department?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will get the secretary to make a comment about that. What I will say more broadly though in relation to the Gallop report is that it was obviously released recently. I am meeting with the Teachers Federation—I think it is tomorrow—to talk through a range of matters which I am very confident will also include the recommendations in the Gallop report. There is a lot of work that we have done as a system to provide support to teachers in terms of reducing that admin burden, looking at workload. Again I think the secretary can probably comment on that a bit further.

Mr SCOTT: I think it is important to recognise what the Gallop report is. The report commissioned—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Scott, I have limited time. I have asked specific questions. I want a specific answer.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: You are getting a specific answer on the Gallop report that you asked questions about.

Mr SCOTT: I got half a sentence out, Chair.

The CHAIR: We will give Mr Scott 30 or 40 seconds.

Mr SCOTT: Thank you. It does not purport to be a precise science. It reflects that it was commissioned by the federation. The federation asked their members to provide the submissions, and they provided their submissions. So it is an estimate, it is not a precise analytical piece of science on the workplace.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, my question is not about the specifics of the Gallop report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it is. You asked—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is about the advice that the department has provided on this particular issue.

Mr SCOTT: The most detailed piece of work we have done on it goes back to the Deloitte review we did on principal workload that we commissioned that showed, yes, principals work demanding hours and part of the response to that was a strategy to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The example was about classroom teachers, Mr Scott, not principals.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect—

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to know whether the department has the same information.

Mr SCOTT: The report actually canvasses both.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a simple question. Does the department have a similar or same answer in terms of the number of hours that classroom teachers are working on average? It is quite straightforward.

Mr SCOTT: We do not have a precise number but nor do I think the evidence in the report is a precise number. It is a reflection of the statements and descriptions made by those who made submissions.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You do not know, on average, how many hours your staff are working in school or outside of school?

Mr SCOTT: No, no. What do we know? We know that it is a demanding and it is a complex job. We know that good teachers will spend significant time beyond the time of their classroom allocations to prepare their classes and to be able to deliver compelling teaching and learning. We know there is some flexibility that has long been built into the teaching profession that comes through school holidays and the flexibility that comes with that. We have as part of a deliberate strategy an attempt to reduce the bureaucratic demands on teachers to free up their time to teach, which is an important part of the strategy that I am happy to talk to you about at length.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, how many hours is reasonable for a school classroom teacher to work at home?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think in relation to that, as I said, the hours and things that are part of the Gallop report as you referenced in your earlier questions are based on the submissions that they have received. Every teacher that I have met since I have been education Minister is very dedicated to what they do. I think any misapprehension in the community that a teacher works from nine to three I know is not correct and you know is not correct. I know you have family who are teachers, as do I. I think what is important is that we are doing everything we can to support the teaching workforce. As the secretary said, there is a range of things that we are doing in terms of reducing teacher workload.

It is interesting that you raise the point in relation to hours that teachers need to work from home. I will give you a practical example of something that occurred a few weeks ago. You might be familiar that we have got a Rural Access Gap policy that we are rolling out for more than a thousand regional schools. Part of that is upgrading the digital connectivity and capacity for our regional schools. I sat with two teachers in a classroom in Dubbo. It was week one of school; they were back for their school development day. Because of that system upgrade that we have been able to do, they were able to work to plan for the new school year in a much faster way. Their systems are talking to each other.

Two working mothers both said to me how grateful they were for the rollout of that project because it was a significant impact in a positive way on the time that they were able to spend with their families and in preparation for the new school year. So there is a lot that we are doing in the space. I think that what is encouraging about some of the recommendations that have come out of the Gallop report is that they very much align with work that is already underway by the department as well.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you think it would be discouraging for teachers to hear you, as the Minister representing their employer, refuse to acknowledge that they are working at home in their own time and that you will not specify what is a reasonable amount of time that you would expect an employee to work in their own time?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Mr Chair, that is not what I said. I did not in any way say anything discouraging about teachers. I think the evidence that I have given today has been that I think teachers do an incredible job and work very hard. I said to you that I have not met a teacher since I have been education Minister who is not very dedicated to what they do. So I do not agree with your question in the way that you phrased it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that not a symptom of the fact that teachers do not have enough time during their workday to do the work that is necessary to—

Mr SCOTT: Mr D'Adam, the teachers I speak to, and I speak to them often, are professionals. One of the things that they have urged us to do is to provide them with some flexibility in how they work. I know for many teachers it works best for them that they leave school pretty soon after the students go and they will come back and do their preparation work later on. That suits them; it suits their family. So I think the suggestion that you seem to be making, that it would be inappropriate for these professionals to do work at home, it might suit many of them to do work at home. One of the things we are trying to do, as the Minister outlined, is provide them with the flexibility to complete the work as best they can.

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What we are focused on is what are the unnecessary bureaucratic burdens that we put on them that put more work on them, that take them away from teaching and learning. That is something that is identified in the Gallop report, that is something we have identified, and the Minister has set a target for the department for a 20 per cent reduction in the workload that the department, and almost like the regulatory requirements, place on teachers. So we are at work on that, just as we have done that work with school principals. But they are professionals.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have got limited time, Mr Scott, so I am going to move on. Can I ask you just finally on the Gallop report, do you intend to provide a formal response to the report and when do you propose to do that?

Mr SCOTT: I think, as the Minister said, she is meeting with the Teachers Federation. We have also sent a message that we are happy to have discussions with Professor Gallop on the report and we expect—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a straightforward question, Mr Scott.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: And he is giving you a straightforward answer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you going to provide a formal response or not? It is a yes or no question. It is very straightforward.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, it is not. You might want—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you going to provide a formal response? When are you going to do it?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: He is telling you—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is not an invitation for a long diatribe.

The CHAIR: The witness will answer the question.

Mr SCOTT: We are still considering that. What we expect will happen is that the recommendations from the report will be brought forward by the Teachers Federation. If you look at the previous reports like this that have taken place in the past, the Teachers Federation will then take up these recommendations as an industrial agenda—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Scott, you are clearly not prepared to give me an answer. Can I move on?

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

Mr SCOTT: I have said we are considering it but we will be discussing these matters with the Teachers Federation as they are brought forward.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Mr D'Adam should withdraw that comment.

The CHAIR: Which comment is that?

The Hon. WES FANG: That Mr Scott is not answering the question. Mr Scott was clearly answering the question; it is just that Mr D'Adam does not like the answer.

The CHAIR: Next question please.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Just moving on to the curriculum review, I want to seek some clarification from you, Minister, about the status of untimed syllabuses. Mr Martin, in a speech to the *Sydney Morning Herald* summit, seemed to suggest that they are still on the agenda, that they are going to be trialled and that potentially they have got a second life. Can you give us some clarity around what your position is on the untimed syllabus proposal from the Masters review?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Absolutely, and I am happy to also let Mr Martin speak to this given that you have referenced comments that he made at *The Sydney Morning Herald* summit. I was pretty clear about this in the House when I was asked a question about it a few weeks ago. The Government supported that recommendation in principle but wanted more advice from the NSW Education Standards Authority [NESA] in terms of whether or not that was something that should be rolled out in New South Wales schools. The advice and the evidence that came back was that that was not the way forward, which is what is happening. We have, however, as I said in the House, agreed to do a small trial of that. I think one of the schools in Lindfield is one that we are looking at doing, just to determine the efficacy of that, but it is not something that we are doing as part of the

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rollout of the curriculum review over the next four years. Mr Martin, do you want to just add to that? You made comments and I think you should give him the right to respond.

Mr MARTIN: I did make comments at *The Sydney Morning Herald* forum. I indicated quite unequivocally that the advice provided by the board to the Minister was that untimed syllabuses was a reform that was unnecessary, given the other significant reforms that the Government is undertaking in education, particularly in the reduction of syllabus content, which would do the job that Professor Masters asked us to do in terms of either extracting students or making sure that they were not falling behind. However, there were also some arguments that untimed syllabuses, having not had a significant amount of evidence behind it—there were a number of schools and students and teachers, and perhaps around the board, who thought that some pilots might be undertaken, voluntary and on a small scale, to see whether anything could be gleaned from that information.

The CHAIR: Could I just ask about an example. You are at the Lindfield school in the pilot for untimed syllabuses; you are a year 10 student who has got to year 7 work level, untimed. Your parents, for whatever reason, move away. You have to go to a different New South Wales government high school that does not have the trial in place. What do you do when you arrive in your year 10 class elsewhere when your level of attainment is only at year 7?

Mr MARTIN: The sorts of details that you are requiring will obviously need to be taken into account in a pilot, but we are—

The CHAIR: I know the pilot is at Lindfield, but obviously students are a fairly mobile society these days. How do you account for the needs of that student? Will they not be left stranded when they go to the new school?

Mr MARTIN: Any student would have to be dealing with the New South Wales syllabuses, which would be organised in a way that all of the New South Wales syllabuses are. Professor Masters' views of untimed syllabuses were to break the syllabuses up into units—

The CHAIR: Paul, I know what they are. I have read the report several times, but in this example I have given you does it not make the trial unfeasible?

Mr SCOTT: I am not so sure, Chair. I think the reality is that that student—the thinking behind untimed syllabuses is to really push teachers to focus on individual differences.

The CHAIR: Mr Scott, what is your solution for that student?

Mr SCOTT: That student, I do not think under that trial it is fair to say that that child will have been neglected under the Lindfield trial.

The CHAIR: I am not saying that. Not neglected, but progressed at their own level.

Mr SCOTT: I think what would actually happen with this—

The CHAIR: I know what the scheme is.

Mr SCOTT: I think what the advice would be, and I think the real test is for any student leaving school, that good information on that child's level of attainment is being passed on from the school they are leaving—in this case Lindfield—to the new school they are going to.

The CHAIR: Okay, so there is no solution. They have not done the 8 or 9 year work, so that is it?

Mr SCOTT: We know that a lot of these areas, particularly with the focus around literacy and numeracy, the focus is on the child's levels of educational attainment in particular. They will still have been doing a range of subjects; they will still have been doing history, they will still have been doing geography—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I am going to stop you there. We are going to come back to it this afternoon. Minister, can you provide an update on the condition of the permanent classrooms at Wee Waa High School?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, sure. Wee Waa, obviously, as Committee members would no doubt be aware, at the high school there we have had issues with mould at that school building.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It has been determined that it is mould?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mould has always been the cause of concern; it is the source of the mould that we have been investigating, and Mr Manning can provide some more technical advice about that. I visited the Wee Waa High School community towards the end of last year. They are operating on the public school site at the moment as we are doing the work on the existing high school site to see if we can finalise the

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source of the mould, and, again, quite extensive work has been done in relation to that. Also, at the same time, School Infrastructure are doing some preliminary work around what options might be available if we need to build a new school on a new site.

I gave that undertaking to the community, the principals and the P&C members that I met with when I was out there towards the end of the school year last year because, obviously, this is quite a unique and unusual situation, the level of mould that is coming and recurring. We have done extensive work with that school community over a number of months, but if we reach a point where the best course of action going forward is to build a new school on a new site, that is what we will do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I do not think that is the understanding of the community.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, it is. Again, I refute the question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Was the local MP with you when you met with the community?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not on that day, no. I did tell him that I was going out to Wee Waa. Sam Faraway was with me, but, as I said, I met with the principals of both Wee Waa Public and Wee Waa High. I met with the P&C representatives for both Wee Waa Public and Wee Waa High and a member of the local media was there as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And when were you first made aware of issues?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will probably have to take that on notice. It has been for some months. As I said, there has been a lot of work that we have been doing out at that school with cleaning the mould, repairing areas that we thought were the cause of concern. It is not far from where I live, so obviously I am aware through local channels when there are issues at schools within the north-west given that I live in Gunnedah, but I have known about it for some months.

Mr SCOTT: It is fair to say that we have got 50,000 school buildings out there. I do not think we have encountered a case quite with the complexity of Wee Waa. There are issues with mould in any building. Some of the earlier remediation attempts were not successful. We have now done quite sophisticated analysis and planning.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will come back to this, Mr Scott. I just have a couple of questions for the Minister and my time is about to run out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How long are the students learning remotely for?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice. Obviously last year there was a period of about seven weeks where we had a lot of students across the State learning remotely although schools remained open.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I mean at the end of last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice in terms of the specific days, but between when we moved them from that site to the Wee Waa Public School—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide us with any information on whether additional digital devices were provided to students—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can take that on notice, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —and additional internet access?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will obviously look at what devices might have been lent out from the school as well, but we will take that on notice. I will see what I can get for you. That is fine.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sure. What medical assessments have been undertaken of students and staff?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I think I will take that on notice. Obviously we have engaged with Health and relevant work health and safety experts in relation to that particular school. If individual members of staff or students have had their own health concerns or medical treatment, that is a matter for them. But I will see what I can find out in terms of any advice we have in relation to that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is there anything that the department is doing to do any systematic screening or long-term screening? The exposure to mould can have some quite serious long-term consequences for both students and staff.

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Mr SCOTT: Yes. We are in touch with NSW Health on the situation at Wee Waa and we will be following its advice. If the advice of NSW Health is that it wants to set up more of a longitudinal health-tracking project, then of course we will fully cooperate with it. But we have engaged with NSW Health in our engagement around this.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you, Mr Scott. I will come back to it with you later this afternoon. Minister, how many students have left the school since the mould was discovered?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I will have to take that on notice. I do not have the figures. I would also probably pre-empt that response by saying that we would need to have a look at whether movements were based on that or what normal school movements would be in terms of enrolments. You would understand that that fluctuates from time to time in communities anyway, but I will take it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Have exit interviews been conducted with those families?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice. I do not think we have got that information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that a policy now—that exit interviews should be taken with families who move from schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Leave a school?

Mr SCOTT: We have a lot of migration of families from school to school. As a general course, we are not conducting exit interviews as students migrate from school to school across the State.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But this is not a general migration. This is—

Mr SCOTT: Well, you are asking if we have a policy—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you are also making an assumption. That is why I said I would like to look at the figures of the numbers of students who have left. You have to be a bit careful to make the assumption that they are leaving for that reason, but we will take the figures on notice and have a look.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is why I am asking you if you conducted exit interviews.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Whether they are dramatically different—as I said, populations fluctuate. School numbers fluctuate from year to year in terms of enrolment across all of our schools. You just have to be careful there not to conflate two issues, which is why I want to look at the figures and come back to you on those.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have been told that quite a few have left the school as a result of this situation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, I want to get the facts in relation to that by taking those numbers on notice, because I am not privy to what you have been told.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps you might want to take this on notice as well: What is the net reduction in school funding as a result of the loss of these students?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will take that on notice as well. It is all related in terms of the funding models and the numbers of students, so I will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, of course, and obviously there are flow-on effects if siblings are lost as well. This is a serious concern for the school community. It has been raised with me and that is why I am raising it with you, Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, I will take the numbers on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, why was Berry Patch's service approval not immediately suspended as is permitted under national laws following the death of Arianna Maragol?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I say in relation to Berry Patch, firstly, the deepest sympathies and condolences to the Maragol family. This is an incredibly serious and tragic issue. As the member is well aware, this matter is currently undergoing various legal proceedings. I will ask Ms Owen if she wants to provide any comment, but what I will say before that is clearly there are coronial processes in place. I do not want to have anything said in this Committee hearing prejudiced or have any impact on that, so we may need to take some of these questions on notice and seek some legal advice given the very serious nature of the incident but also the ongoing and complex legal processes that are underway. I am not sure if Ms Owen can add any more to that.

Ms OWEN: Thank you. I do not think I want to say too much about that specific case, but I would—

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, then I will come back to it this afternoon in my policy questions, Ms Owen. Thank you very much. Why did it take the Department of Education two years following Arianna's death to put in place additional conditions on the approval?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said in my earlier response, Ms Houssos, this is a very serious issue and incident. It is one that we take extremely seriously. There are legal proceedings are underway, including coronial inquests. I am not going to put this Committee or the department in a position where commentary is made in a budget estimates hearing about something that is incredibly complex and serious, so I will take that question on notice and get legal advice in terms of how much information I can provide the Committee in line with that due process.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, you have made some commitments on preschools and free preschool for three- and four-year-olds. How long until all three- and four-year-olds have access to free preschool?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have got more than 700 community preschools across New South Wales and there are also our mobile preschools. We have a commitment in place for services. If they wish to opt in to our free preschool program this year, they are able to do that. I think the take-up rate is incredibly high. In excess of 600 of those services are taking up the offer to receive that funding to cover parent fees so that they do not charge fees to parents for the 2021 year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How long until all three- and four-year-olds have access to free preschool?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is eligible for the community preschools that we fund. As you would be well aware, Mr Shoebridge, early childhood education is quite complex in terms of the funding model. The Federal Government has responsibility in part as well. For community preschools, which are the service types that we fund in New South Wales, every community preschool is eligible to apply for this funding should they choose to offer free preschools for the children who attend their services.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What proportion of three- and four-year-olds currently access those services for free preschool?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice. Obviously parents have a choice when it comes to the early childhood services that they use. As I said, we have got more than 700 community and mobile preschools. There are also long day care services, where a lot of families also send their children. Some do a mix of both. My family does a mix of both.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So you do not have a target?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But obviously they are funded by the Commonwealth as well. As I said, it is quite a complex area of funding.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So you have no target date for ensuring that all three- and four-year-olds have access to free preschool?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, that is not right. The program that we have in place, as I have said, is available for all of our community preschools and mobile services that we have responsibility for funding to opt in to that program to offer it to the families who use their service. That has been in place—it actually started in April last year when we brought in our free preschool program and extended it through to 2021. I can tell you that 690 preschools have opted in. That is over 90 per cent of our services.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, are you going to step up and provide support for the Walgett community, and particularly the students and parents at Walgett Community College? They have been under attack of late. Have you made contact with them? Are you going to stand up and help them?

The CHAIR: What is the attack?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to answer.

The CHAIR: Do you know the nature of the attack? It is just not known to the Committee.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I do. I am very well aware of the issues at Walgett. It is a complex community, as you and I know. I know you have made some comments about that in local media up in the north-west recently, Mr Shoebridge. There is a range of supports available to that school community. I can get Mr Dizdar to talk in a bit more detail about that, but can I say that it is very important that we support all our schools, and particularly Walgett. As I said, it is a complex community and the school is a big part of what we are doing in that community.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Do you accept that, to address the concerns that have been felt at the school and by the students, it is going to require Education, Health, Justice and most likely all of Department of Communities and Justice [DCJ] coming on board and agreeing to meet with the Elders in Walgett?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I can say—and again I am happy for Mr Dizdar to provide more comment either now or later in the session, depending on time—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We might do that later.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As you would be well aware, Walgett is one of our Connected Communities schools. As part of that, we have Elders very much engaged in the education at the school. To pick up on comments that I know you have made in the local ABC and other stations, this is about broader community issues and what we need to do to support that community. If you want to put questions to Health and Justice about what they are doing at Walgett, feel free.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have put questions to Minister Ward. He said he would be willing to sit down with other departments and Ministers and with the Elders. Are you going to make the same commitment?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I would be very happy to do that, David.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The community has also been seeking a variety of data—the OCHRE data. I think they have not got the tables 12, 13, 19 and 20 from the OCHRE reports since 2016. Will you assist in providing that data?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Look, I am happy to take that on notice. Obviously as a former Aboriginal affairs Minister, I am well aware—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —of what you are referring to. That OCHRE data—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am okay if you take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take it on notice. If there are things that we can do to provide support or information to the community, we are happy to look at that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand. Minister, some of the media reporting suggested that you could compare the funding per student given to Walgett Community College with the funding per student given to Sydney Grammar. Do you accept that, given the dreadful difference in privilege and starting points and health, that kind of comparison between funding to Sydney Grammar, where the kids come with privilege and all the advantages in the world, and the funding going to Walgett Community College is a totally inappropriate matrix?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I am not aware of comments that might have been made in the media like that or who made them. Obviously Walgett is one of our Connected Communities schools. There is significant funding and support going to that school community, as is appropriate.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright. Minister, is there a vetting process to ensure that extremist views are not communicated to schoolkids through special religious education [SRE]?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Ms Harrison to comment on that process.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Screening processes.

Ms HARRISSON: Firstly, I would say that the contentious issues policy covers all the activity in our schools including SRE. Yes, we have a process by which we determine whether or not SRE providers are allowed to operate in our schools.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How did Vishva Hindu Parishad, which is a right-wing Hindu organisation that is considered a military extremist religious organisation by the CIA, find themselves in New South Wales public schools?

Ms HARRISSON: I am not aware of that provider but I am very happy to find that information out for you, see what we have and provide it on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, what response do you have to the fact that this extremist right-wing organisation, listed as such by the CIA in their world handbook, is currently providing SRE courses in Toongabbie Public School and William Dean Public School?

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As Ms Harrison said, we have taken that question on notice in terms of the specifics of that particular service provider. It is not one that I am familiar with either and I would like to check the validity of that and come back to the Committee, if that is okay.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given the concern about attacks from extremist right-wing elements in the Hindu community on members of the Sikh community and other minorities in western Sydney, will you treat this as a matter of urgency?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Absolutely. We have said we would take that on notice and get advice in relation to it. I am very happy to come back to the Committee in due course and to yourself as soon as I can access that information.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright. Is there anybody vetting what SRE providers are actually saying to schoolkids at Toongabbie Public School and William Dean Public School? Is anyone checking whether or not extremist, hate-filled material is part of the course?

Ms HARRISSON: I think Mr Dizdar might be able to give you some practical examples of how SRE operates in those matters in our schools. Teachers are present in those classes. Murat, would you like to provide some information on how SRE classes operate in our public schools?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What monitoring is available?

Mr DIZDAR: Mr Shoebridge, I think we have taken the specifics on notice and hopefully we can get that detail to you. As you are aware, in normal operation we have to provide no less than 30 minutes and up to an hour of SRE opportunity for our students. Families have the opportunity for their children to take part in that. We do require our principals to oversee that program, as Ms Harrison indicated. It is not an unsupervised activity. There is often an SRE coordinator or a staff member in charge so that we can make sure that it is meeting all necessary requirements.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you saying that there is always a staff member sitting in every SRE class? Are you saying that is the policy?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: That is not what he said.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It was what the Minister said.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I did not say that.

Mr DIZDAR: What I was saying is that there is a supervisory requirement from the principal or a staff member, depending on the school. We are not prescriptive about what that looks like. We leave it to the principal to determine what it might look like for large schools or small schools. In the school I led when I was a principal here in New South Wales, for example, I had one of my languages teachers who had room in their timetable to be able to oversee the SRE provision in the school.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Perhaps you can provide on notice whether or not there was any of that oversight of the SRE that was being "taught", if I could put that in inverted commas, by Vishva Hindu Parishad in those two public schools in western Sydney.

Mr DIZDAR: Let us definitely take that on notice. I wanted to also add that we have expert personnel support in the State office that principals can also contact for advice around SRE.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Then how on earth is this organisation allowed to teach SRE in public schools? How did that happen?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, Mr Shoebridge, we will take the specifics of that particular provider and those details on notice and come back to you as soon as we can with an update.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, how many New South Wales public schools ran tenders to operate out-of-school-hours [OOSH] care?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Manning but we might have to take that on notice.

Mr MANNING: We will definitely need to take on notice the exact number.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We do not have the figure with us but we will get the exact number.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is there a policy to prefer not-for-profit operators?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will again get Mr Manning to talk through the tendering process.

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Mr MANNING: There is not. The way the process works is, if there is a P&C organisation that wants to run the service, then we do not run a procurement process. If the P&C does not want to run the service, then a procurement process is run and both not-for-profit and for-profit operators are open to apply to that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But under the *Community Use Of School Facilities Selection Guide*, which I think is what is used—is that right, Mr Manning?

Mr MANNING: In some cases.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why is there no specific reference to the quality of the service in the tender process?

Mr MANNING: In terms of an OOSH service, the quality of the service is absolutely part of the tender process. The OOSH service is specific to the broader community joint use process that we might go through around, say, the local karate club.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given the scandals we have seen in the for-profit sector in aged care, why is the department not taking a policy position that we will prioritise not-for-profits when talking about caring for kids outside of school hours? Why do you not take that policy position?

Mr MANNING: The tender process that we run is open to all approved providers. It is a tender process run through eTendering. It is an open process but you have to be an approved provider to put a bid in. That is the process that we rely on.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So it does not matter whether or not they want to take a profit out of the school and out of the kids or not. That is not part of the requirement.

The CHAIR: Time has expired. To my questions: Given the matter that Mr Shoebridge raised and the concerns I raised about Tomorrow Man, Minister, can I start by congratulating you and Mr Martin for the prompt action to overcome the chaos of the 42,000 professional development courses that were unverifiable and uncheckable. Do you think something similar needs to happen now to construct a proper accreditation system—qualifications, evidence, evaluation, the feedback loop—for all those externals coming into the schools? There are many more of them coming in.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the Secretary to comment about that. I think he might have alluded earlier to the work that we are doing with the School Success Model, looking at that evidence-based best practice and sharing it across the system. That of course is making sure that we are giving schools good advice in terms of providers. I do not know whether Mr Scott wants to add more.

Mr SCOTT: Clearly central to the School Success Model is providing evidence and advice to schools to shape the expenditure of the discretionary money that they have locally. Ms Harrison is overseeing that for us.

Ms HARRISSON: Specifically in relation to special religious education, our providers have to provide an annual assurance declaring that they will provide the authorised and age-appropriate curriculum, scope and sequence. It is the responsibility of the approved provider to ensure that its SRE provision and its teachers are teaching the curriculum with appropriate sensitivity and in an age-appropriate manner. Approved providers are required to provide online access to their curriculum, scope and sequence and ensure that the curriculum is delivered appropriately. They are required to give the content of those lessons to any parents or caregivers who request it.

The CHAIR: Sure, but like with the professional development, isn't the issue here that those groups had accreditation and assurances given but nobody really knew what they went off and did? The Teachers Federation ran courses on becoming a union organiser and on gender fluidity, which was way outside the scope of what they had given the assurance about. Do we not need a checking loop here—feedback and evaluations—to make sure that what they have given the assurance on is actually being fulfilled and that none of these problems, the one I have raised or the one Mr Shoebridge has raised, can occur unnoticed by the system?

Ms HARRISSON: As you commented on earlier, Chair, we are going through that very process for a number of the providers of wellbeing services and behaviour support into our schools. We will be looking to do that for more of the services provided into schools over time.

The CHAIR: Okay, that is good to hear.

Mr SCOTT: And we are doing systematic tracking of feedback on the professional development that has been provided.

The CHAIR: I was not asking about that, Mr Scott. We will leave it in Georgina's capable hands, then, to sort this system out and get best practice and assurances fulfilled in the system. Minister, congratulations on

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the phonics focus that you have brought to the system, which is one of the best developments we have seen in living memory in our schools. But on the year 1 phonics issue, can I raise two matters? If a student does not go very well in the year 1 phonics check, should we not recheck them in year 2 as a matter of course to see that correction has been made and they are now up to standard?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think in relation to that—I agree in terms of the importance of the phonics check. That is why we did it as a trial. That is why it will be mandatory for all schools in year 1 from this year. Again, that will form part of the targets that we have in place for our School Success Model, once we have been able to set that benchmark with all of our schools. What it does is it is a really good indicator, as you well know, Mr Chair—I am sure you have read a lot of the research behind that phonics assessment and check. It gives a good indication of the awareness that the child has in terms of phonics, and it is a good indicator in terms of where they will be in terms of their reading capacity going forward. So it is a good place for us to get that baseline measurement, as I said.

The CHAIR: Sure, but the year 2 recheck?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The point of doing it, as I said, in year 1 is based on the evidence. Again, I might get Ms Harrisson or the Secretary to provide some more comment about that. But there are also other measures that we can use, as we do, as the child progresses through their time at school to check their proficiency in areas such as reading.

The CHAIR: Why don't you do a year 2 recheck?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So this is about getting the baseline and giving us an indication in terms of the school as to that early reading instruction, how it is going and how it is happening in that school, and making sure that we have the right measures and the right professional development in place. Again, I am sure that you have seen the statistics. When we did the phonics opt-in, something like 97 per cent or 98 per cent of teachers said that they found it beneficial to their teaching practice and to the professional development that went alongside it.

The CHAIR: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It was really useful. So this is about improving teaching practice and helping our teachers when it comes to the teaching of phonics.

The CHAIR: I will come to the question of the opt-in. It is still only an opt-in for non-government schools. Shouldn't we be applying this across all sectors?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously it will be in place in all of our government schools as part of our School Success Model. We did have a number of Catholic schools that wanted to issue the check and assessment as well. My understanding is that we shared that with them. I do not have the exact numbers off the top of my head. Ms Harrisson might know.

Ms HARRISSON: We can absolutely provide that further detail on notice.

The CHAIR: Why don't we have a system like NAPLAN where it is universal, government and non-government?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, we made the decision to do that in government schools. If non-government schools also choose to take up the check and assessment—

The CHAIR: So you are not going to push that beyond opt-in?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My responsibility in this space is what we deliver in government schools. As I have said, we shared that resource with—I know a number of Catholic schools that chose to take part in it as well. I am very happy to share that resource with them as well.

Mr SCOTT: We are hopeful that the evidence that comes from the rollout of the phonics check in government schools is absolutely compelling. We have looked carefully at what has happened in South Australia. That is why we have embraced it here. My expectation will be that if we can demonstrate through what we learn from the phonics check, but also I think the word of mouth of the practitioners in the field—that this is a valuable opportunity—then I expect that the non-government sector will strongly embrace it. And parents will want that to happen.

The CHAIR: Let's see how that goes. I have a two-part question to wrap up. What is the progress with the introduction of Teacher For Australia? And something related: Wouldn't we facilitate more—and I have heard of people complaining about this—talented older people from successful areas and career paths so they could make the transition to teaching through the one-year Diploma of Education that we used to have, instead of the

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two-year master's, which was adopted on the Finnish model? I do not know why that was done years ago. The second question to Mr Martin and the first question to the Minister. So Teach For Australia and streamlining others coming in under similar ways with the one-year Dip. Ed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. If I can also finish one of the questions that you asked earlier, Mr Chair, about phonics. The other point that it was remiss of me not to make is that of course it will also be integrated into the new syllabus documents that we are developing as part of the curriculum review, which goes to all schools. Moving on from phonics back to Teach For Australia. Quite timely—I actually met with representatives with Teach For Australia just yesterday to talk through the work that they are doing for the Government. A big part of that conversation was around what we can do to do exactly what you suggested, Mr Chair, around attracting mid-career professionals to consider a career in teaching. That is what we have asked them to work with the Government on and to provide their advice based on their experience.

So, different to what they do in other States, we want to look specifically at what we can do to attract people who might not currently be teaching to come into the teaching profession in New South Wales. That work and that partnership with Teach For Australia is underway. More broadly I think that there are a lot of opportunities in this space going forward, tangentially also linked to—you may have seen recently that we have done a review of the regional and remote incentives for our rural schools, looking at what it is that can both attract and retain teachers to regional communities. As a big part of that I want to look at what we can do to effectively train our own.

We know for a lot of communities that if you are moving from a different part of the State to regional New South Wales, if there are things that we can do to look at our workforce that exist, look at people who already live in and know the wonderful things about living in regional New South Wales—Mr Chair, I could go on about that for many, many hours—then we need to look at ways that we can make teaching an attractive profession for people who already live in the regions as well.

The CHAIR: What about the one-year Dip. Ed.?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is part of the work around what Teach For Australia will be doing for us as well.

The CHAIR: I have heard successful people say, "A two-year master's is a bit too long but I would do a one-year Dip. Ed. and come on."

Mr SCOTT: Chair, it is an issue that we have started discussion with the federation on.

The CHAIR: Which federation?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Teachers Federation.

The CHAIR: Not the Teachers Federation. Seriously? They won't help you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, they will.

The CHAIR: No, they won't.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, they will.

The CHAIR: They don't want external people coming in breaking the sheltered workshop that they have set up over generations.

Mr SCOTT: What I said to some of them in response to the Gallop review—

The CHAIR: Show them up.

Mr SCOTT: —is that if in fact there are questions around supply of quality teachers into the teaching profession, we need to look differently than we have looked previously. I think a more assertive look at mid-career entry for people who have had careers in one area and are then looking to transition in, we need to make that easier for them while keeping our standards high. I would agree with you that the current configuration of two years out of the workforce to do a master's degree is a high bar for many of those people. I have said to the federation, "If we are trying to change the pattern here, we are going to have to look cooperatively at trying to find different pathways in for accreditation," keeping our standards high but recognising that the kind of constraints that someone has in their 40s—family, mortgage and everything else—is very different to an 18-year-old starting an education degree. So we need some flexibility in how we engage with that.

The CHAIR: What did the federation say?

Mr SCOTT: They are open to that conversation.

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The CHAIR: Thanks, everyone. Time is up. Thanks to the Minister for her successes in the portfolio and for her answers today.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Pleasure.

The CHAIR: We will pursue the other matters after lunch with the officials.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks, everyone.

The Hon. WES FANG: The Government cedes its time.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

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The CHAIR: Thanks, everyone. I will reopen the hearing. The secretary has just indicated some follow-up information from this morning, before we go to the Labor Opposition.

Mr SCOTT: Thank you, Chair. Just some items to follow up—of course, other matters will be dealt with on notice. Regarding the selective high school in south-western Sydney, as the Minister said, the Government is committed to building a new selective high school in south-western Sydney. Work on the project, including development of a service needs report to understand the demographic demands and assessment of the options. South-western Sydney, as we all know, is a growing region and the implications are broader than the provision of simply education infrastructure—the other infrastructure that will be around the development.

Leppington has been identified as the most likely venue for the school. Its precise location will be contingent on a number of other planning decisions still to be finalised. Discussions are ongoing with Landcom and other government agencies. They have been undertaken in very recent times, as well. Consultation with other developments and agencies, including the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and Transport for NSW, is ongoing to ensure that any new schools are built with connection to critical infrastructure and in proximity to emerging residential communities. Building a new selective school is not like building a new comprehensive high school; it requires a greater emphasis on public transport connectivity to ensure it is accessible to all students.

On asbestos, I am informed that the number referred to by Ms Houssos in her earlier line of questioning this morning was incorrect. As per the response provided in March 2020, the number of confirmed instances of friable and non-bonded asbestos was 332, not 109 as the member inferred. Further activity on school sites—in particular, our ongoing maintenance program—has identified additional instances, which is where the new figure of 352 comes from; so, moving from 332 to 352. Every instance of asbestos is managed in accordance with the advice of independent hygienists, which may include encapsulation rather than removal. Action is per the independent expert advice. The safety and wellbeing of staff and students remains the department's highest priority.

The Minister was also asked, Chair, about the definition of "major regional centre" by the before- and after-school reform team, as per fulfilling the Government's commitment. It has been identified by finding those locations outside of the Sydney metropolitan area, ranked by the highest population numbers according to the last Commonwealth Census. We have taken the top 20 and these locations are: Albury, Armidale, Bathurst, Blue Mountains, Bowral, Mittagong, Cessnock, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Foster, Tuncurry, Goulburn, Griffith, Lismore, Maitland, Nowra, Orange, Port Macquarie, Queanbeyan, Tamworth, Tweed Heads and Wagga Wagga. Thank you, Mr Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just ask: Did you have any additional information on Gregory Hills—on the status of that?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Manning, do you have anything to add on that?

Mr MANNING: The business case for Gregory Hills was finalised mid last year. The advice that was provided to the Minister was that Gledswood Hills, stage two, had been funded. That was really the first port of call for us, and the Gregory Hills project would follow on from that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And you said mid-2020—

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —the business case was lodged?

Mr MANNING: It was effectively finalised, ready for lodging with Treasury.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And has it been lodged now?

Mr MANNING: It is with Treasury for review, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Was that lodged—and I am happy for you to take this on notice—prior to August 2020?

Mr MANNING: I would need to come back specifically on that one.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is perfectly fine.

The CHAIR: Okay. We will start the Opposition questioning, where we have been joined by the Hon. Daniel Mookhey.

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The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Thank you, Chair, and greetings, Mr Secretary. Thank you to the officials for taking my questions, as well. Mr Secretary, can you just outline in brief how the department has been reducing expenses incurred by senior executives—your senior executive expenses?

Mr SCOTT: Well, Mr Withey might want to join us at the table on this. We operate under the budget constraints and disciplines, as you would expect for a public service organisation. We have quite tight budget constraints on at the moment as we are looking to prioritise our spend on supporting teaching and learning in schools. We have a series of guidelines that we are looking to deliver, including delivering on significant budget savings as we look to prioritise our spend.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Are you in a position to quantify how much you think you have saved in senior executive expenses in the last 12 months or in the last budget cycle?

Mr SCOTT: I could take that on notice.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That would be helpful. Do you have a target for the next year?

Mr SCOTT: Yes. We have our own internal budgets that we are working towards. That does, in most things, include constraint around expenses and expenses growth; I think we can talk to that generally. Of course, on issues like travel, there has been significantly less travel that has taken place in the last 12 months. I think some of the opportunities that have opened up for us to be able to use technology like videoconferencing technology presents opportunities for us to make further savings, as well. I am not sure if Mr Withey has anything he wants to add to that, at this point.

Mr WITHEY: No, I think we—

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Do you mind using the microphone, Mr Withey?

Mr WITHEY: Yes, of course. Apologies. The internal budget process that we run sets aggregate targets for component parts of the organisation. As the secretary has said, the Government has indicated to departments that there is a desired focus on areas of corporate spend, including travel, legal costs, et cetera.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Thank you. Does your plan to reduce expenditure include reducing the number of Senior Executive Service [SES] executives, Mr Secretary?

Mr SCOTT: We have done a restructure that has brought some changeover in SES executives. We continue to monitor our SES executive numbers as a consequence of that. As I have said previously, there have been a number of commitments that have been made in recent years by Government that has seen an increase in SES numbers with the creation of School Infrastructure and the extension of the Directors, Educational Leadership roles, but there have been other roles that have come out as a result of the restructure we put in place, as well.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I am just going to ask you a couple of questions about that restructure, if you do not mind.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, sure.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Before I do, I might just table that—one copy for the Chair. I have got a copy for the witness, as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: You mentioned that you have been engaged in a restructure. How many SES executives were asked to leave their positions throughout that restructure process?

Mr SCOTT: Well, I do not think it is quite as simple as being asked to leave. Thanks for the question; I appreciate it. Let me put a bit of context on it. As members of the Committee here know because we have discussed it in the past, we are one of the largest organisations in the country as far as staffing and budget is concerned. It is the largest education system in the Southern Hemisphere. It last had a major restructuring in 2012. The restructure this time came after discussions with Government, Premier and Minister about our desire to make sure that we were aligned to deliver on school improvement and skills reform—also recognising that, since the election, the Skills portfolio had come into the Education cluster.

And so the realignment was more about roles and focus and tasks, rather than individual people. It was a functional review. That did mean that we did spill positions across the department at band 3 and band 2 level. Roles were filled according to government policy on the best capability fit; capabilities for roles were created and then we ran a structured recruitment process on the back of that. That is where the new team came together. So, it was not a case of people being told to go. People applied for their jobs and many people in the department got

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either their jobs back or new jobs as part of the restructure, but there were some people who left as part of the restructuring, as well.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That is very helpful context, Mr Secretary, and I do appreciate that. You made mention that executives—there were changes at band 3 and band 2 level.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I will unpick that detail with you shortly, but the documents that I just tabled show—they are extracts from your two last annual reports that are public: annual report 2018 and annual report 2019. I think 2018 is document B, if you are following along.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Look, to be fair, I am always hesitant to do maths in front of the Department of Education. But, as I total it, it is 304 in 2018 and 303 in 2019.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: So is it still 303? What is the latest available figure?

Mr SCOTT: I think it is close to that; 303 or maybe 305.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Do you have the exact number?

Mr SCOTT: Let me see. I believe it is 305. I think Mr Shoebridge may have said 307 this morning. I am advised it is 305.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Yes, so either way it is higher. So the result of the restructure has been the SES has increased. Do you accept that?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I accept it is 305.

Mr SCOTT: Thank you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I could not read my own handwriting.

Mr SCOTT: That is fine. As I said, the focus of this structure was about delivering on the Government's priorities to see improvement in every school and to see strong integration of early childhood education into schooling, into vocational education and post-secondary education. It was about delivering on commitments that have been made to see improvement. The question that was being asked was not around delivery of a restructure to reach a certain budget target; it was delivery of a restructure of the largest education system in the Southern Hemisphere to ensure that we were aligned to be able to deliver on the Government's priorities, and that is why we made these changes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Mr Secretary, I am not disputing your motive at all, and I appreciate—

Mr SCOTT: And intent.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: To be fair, I am not doing that either. What I am asking is: You accept, though, that the current level is 305, which is an increase? That was the actual question.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I do.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Great, thank you. Do you have any further information about the aggregate number of band 3 and band 2 SES executives that did not continue in their positions after that restructure?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I have that material here I think. I believe it was 17 staff. That is the advice I have. There were some resignations, but 17 I am told.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Was there a departure from the department affected via section 39 of the Government Sector Employment Act 2013?

Mr SCOTT: I am not precisely sure of that. I am sure you will have that section for me.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That is the part of the act that says an SES executive can be terminated for no reason.

Mr SCOTT: Yes. Look, you sign up to the SES here, your employment can be terminated with a payment that is spelt out in the contract and under the agreement, and they would be the circumstances that were

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put in place for these executives whose positions perhaps were abolished or whose positions had transformed in a way that they were applying for a new position and they were not successful in getting that position. I must say what we did here was absolutely standard as you see all through the New South Wales public service.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Look, to be fair, Mr Scott, I am not inferring or accusing otherwise.

Mr SCOTT: No, no, so that's right, yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: It is just a technical—that was the matter in which the contract was terminated.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that is my understanding, yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Yes, and so as a result of section 39, section 39 in conjunction with the regulation made under that Act says that any person who is terminated for no reason is entitled to 38 weeks severance payment.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: And that is the minimum. In addition, there are additional entitlements paid out as well, which is fair—

Mr SCOTT: To be fair, some of those will be entitlements like long service leave, which have been accrued over time.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Yes, and there is no dispute about a person's entitlement to that. But we have established that there are 17 SES people in the past year who got paid the 38 weeks.

Mr SCOTT: I believe that is right. That is my information.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Do you have a total cost as to how much that was for that 38?

Mr SCOTT: I will get that information for you.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Could you?

Mr SCOTT: I will put that on notice.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: You will take it on notice—great.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I might be able to just start to go through at least the level 3s, if you do not mind, because these are publicly available as to whose these positions were, and just by comparing the charts you can see who is no longer there. Can I start by asking, the deputy secretary—well, in your 2019 report—I think this is document D, if you are following along, Mr Secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Do you see that you have a deputy secretary for skills and higher education who reported directly to you?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That was Ms O'Loughlin.

Mr SCOTT: That is correct.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Is she one of the people who was not continued in her role?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that is correct. Do you want me to explain to you the rationale behind that structural change in alignment to delivering on the Government's priorities?

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I am happy to, but I may as well put two others to you—

Mr SCOTT: Sure, you roll it out and then we can discuss it.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: You may want to do it at the end. But I do not want to be rude. If you feel like you want to do it now—

Mr SCOTT: No, I do not want to be rude either.

The Hon. WES FANG: Why stop now?

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Mr SCOTT: So, you roll it out, and then I am sure the Chair will be generous in letting me explain the rationale in detail.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Well, I will give you the opportunity as well, Mr Scott. Do not worry; you do not have to rely on the Chair. The Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Mr Riordan—did he continue?

Mr SCOTT: No, he did not.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Did the Deputy Secretary, People and Culture, Ms Mulkerin, continue?

Mr SCOTT: She resigned.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Right, yes.

Mr SCOTT: And she is now a secretary in Queensland. We breed them well here and send them around the country.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I did see that she has appeared in the Queensland public service.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, indeed. So, she resigned.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: The Deputy Secretary, Strategy and Delivery, Ms Downey—what is her status?

Mr SCOTT: She left as part of the restructure as well.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: The Deputy Secretary, Education Futures and Governance—Deputy Secretary Loble?

Mr SCOTT: Leslie Loble, yes, she resigned.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Okay, so there are two resignations and three departures out of eight. So, five of the deputy secretaries—

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: —had left in some form.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Would you like to explain why?

Mr SCOTT: Sure, let us talk. I want to pay tribute to all of them. I think they are outstanding professionals, and some of them had long and distinguished service in the department. Leslie Loble had been in the department for two decades. She retired. We were sorry to see that, but she has retired now. She is now on a number of educational boards around the country. If I go to the other resignation, Ms Mulkerin—she was appointed a Secretary in Queensland. We were very sorry to see her go as well, and we wish her well. On the others, these were structural changes. One of the things you can see under the new structure is we have created intra-band reporting. There are four dep secs under the new structure that report through to Ms Harrison.

Intra-band reporting is known in the New South Wales public sector. It is not the case in every agency, but we thought it was important here—I thought it was important here—to ensure that we had that alignment and that focus on all aspects of our service delivery: early childhood's connection with schools, schools' connections with vocational education and the skills market. That is why the Premier brought Education back into the cluster—to have those working together. In my discussions with Minister Lee, for example, as he is very keen to push vocational education in schools, he wants to make sure our skills people are working closely with our schools people and that there are not inhibitors in place for the successful development of vocational education in schools.

These are issues that the Chair raised at our estimates hearing on Monday. Intra-band reporting was an important part of that. So, we created a new position—education and skills reform—that brings that together under Ms Harrison. So, there was not a standalone skills and higher education position in the new structure and, similarly, strategy and delivery is not a position that exists in our new structure as well. There are elements in transformation that report through to Ms Harrison, but basically the strategic work of the organisation is rolling through from a number of people in our team, including the Chief Operating Officer, Mr Withey.

On the corporate services role, we have recast this somewhat, I think, with Mr Withey, including bringing in the strategic resource management capability, which is an important part of that, which now exists under that. We are elevating risk. We have a Chief Risk Officer, given the scale and operations of the department, that is

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operating as well. I can say that Mr Riordan's role has changed significantly over time. When I started in the department, school infrastructure was operating as part of the corporate services role. We took that out and created a complete new school infrastructure capability, which was a vital and important decision for the department. Similarly, employing as many people as we do—the New South Wales public service is the largest employer in the country and the single largest subset of that is the New South Wales Department of Education, I am told—I thought people are so important to us, we need to have a people capability at the executive table. That is why I created that.

Ms Mulkerin filled that position first of all. Ms Cachia fills that position now, but, again, that was part of the corporate services role. So, the corporate services role that Mr Riordan had done had been significantly diminished over time because of the new capabilities we needed to develop. We advertised that position, and I am delighted we were able to recruit Mr Withey out of Treasury for that. So that is some of the background in the context of the changes. Can I say, I am delighted by the talent we have been able to recruit to come in and join us at the senior team of New South Wales Education. As we pointed out to Mr Shoebridge this morning, there is a great mix of educators around that table and people with deep, specialist understanding of their areas—human resources [HR] experts, finance experts, infrastructure experts—and that mix is just what you need to be able to develop, to lead an organisation as complex and demanding as this one.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I am glad, Mr Secretary, that you think—I appreciate the explanation. But the three deputy secretaries—your annual report says that their average remuneration was \$415,392. Again I hate to display my maths to the Department of Education but, at 38 weeks, that means that the severance packages a least for those three to taxpayers was circa \$1.5 million.

Mr SCOTT: Again, I am not going to do the maths on the back of an envelope but, yes, they were—

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: It is not that complicated, but do you have the figure?

Mr SCOTT: I do not have the figure precisely here, but if the thrust of your question is were they paid 38 weeks as is their—

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Minimum.

Mr SCOTT: —entitlement under their contract, they were paid the entitlement under their contract, as you would expect to be the case.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Can I just ask, did that come from the schools account?

Mr SCOTT: It came from the education budget.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: It was not paid for by Treasury or the central agencies.

Mr SCOTT: No, it was paid for out of the \$20 billion department budget.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: So it was internalised from the Department of Education.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, it was.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Fair enough. Can we just move on to the level 2s. As a process of deduction—unless there have been other deputy secretaries that I have missed—therefore, 14 of them must have been removed through that or at least not continued in their positions. Is that accurate?

Mr SCOTT: I believe that would be right based on the numbers we have discussed. Sorry, it might be band 2 and band 1. I am not sure about that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Well, is it band 2 and band 1?

Mr SCOTT: It is 17 across bands 1 and 2.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Are you able to break them down by band 2 and band 1?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I can do that on notice for you.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Great. I am just going to concentrate on some of the band 2 positions, if you don't mind. The executive director of performance and conduct, were they one of the people who were made redundant?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that is right. Yes, we have restructured that role.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: What about the executive director of engagement?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that is true. It is communications and engagement.

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The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Sorry, I might not have used to exact term. What about the executive director of policy, coordination and governance?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that position has gone too.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: What about the executive director of employee performance and conduct?

Mr SCOTT: That is the same as the first one.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Sorry, I may have repeated that. Forgive me on that one. I meant the executive director of the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE].

Mr SCOTT: No, that was a resignation. That role has changed to a group director role, but I am delighted that the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation—the original executive director there has now been appointed to the head of the national evidence institute, which, again, we talked about with the Chair earlier. That is why that CESE has been the envy of the country and now there is a national evidence institute as well.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That is helpful to know, but that is at least three or four of the band 2s.

Mr SCOTT: Again, I would say this was the first restructure of this scale in the best part of a decade. We have a big and important remit to see improvement. We need to make sure our structure—structure follows strategy. That is what everyone says. We have a clear strategy around improvement. We needed a structure to deliver on it. We needed the right people in the right jobs. Some of these were difficult decisions. Some of these are loved and respected figures, but was the fit right for the role and demands of the role now? No. So some of these staff left us. That happens in every organisation from time to time. I am glad it does not happen in New South Wales education too often, but it did happen last year as part of a very deliberate strategy to restructure the organisation for increased effectiveness.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Of course, again, Mr Secretary, no-one is disputing that you have that power. Just one question to finish this line if that is possible, Mr Chair?

The CHAIR: Yes, that is how we do it.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Thank you. These band 3 positions' average remuneration for that year was \$295,000.

Mr SCOTT: The band 3 or the band 2?

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That is just band 2s, sorry, that was my mistake. Those four redundancies alone would have cost at least \$862,000.

Mr SCOTT: You are dealing with averages there, but I will—

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Sure, it could be higher, it could be lower. If you want to give me the exact figure—

Mr SCOTT: What we did—and I am sure you will want us to do this—was we paid people out their contractual entitlement.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: To be fair, Mr Secretary, I do not think you had a choice but what I am wondering about is that is \$2.7 million just on the seven positions that I mentioned to you. Is this actually worth it to taxpayers?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that is a really good question. I can tell you it is not something I entertain lightly at all. But there is a burden of responsibility carried by me, the Minister, clearly, and the executive team to see improvement in every school, to make sure we have this great handover from early childhood education to schooling to vocational education and skills. The expectation we have to see improvement for every student, every teacher, every leader, every school is a vast organisational challenge and a vast operational challenge, given the fact that we are running 2,200 schools and regulating 5,000 early childhood centres, and given the fact that in excess of \$2 billion is being spent on schools in this State.

If you asking me whether the expenditure of a few million dollars, once in a decade, when we are spending \$20 billion a year, to make sure we have the right people and the right structure and the right job is something that may need to be done from time to time—yes, I think we looked at it seriously, we carried that responsibility seriously, but I feel that this was the right thing to do.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Shoebridge.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thank you, Mr Chair. Mr Scott, you sent an email to all staff recently about the people matters survey and the 2020 results. Is that right?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think you said that for 2020 your overall engagement score improved slightly to 69 per cent up from 68 per cent in 2019. You said some other things after that. Do you remember that?

Mr SCOTT: I do.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What do you think of the response rate where just 27.9 per cent of education employees actually responded to the survey, compared to the public sector average of almost half or 47 per cent? What do you think that says about the engagement of staff and their engagement with you and your reforms?

Mr SCOTT: A couple of years ago, when the people matters survey began to move in the New South Wales public sector, there was a view that you would never get a response rate in education. Disproportionally overwhelmingly our staff are out in schools and the feeling was that you would not get a strong response. We have lifted that response over the last few years, pleasingly. But it was lower this year. I think we can attribute a number of things to it. You will be hard pressed in the last hundred years to find a year of such complexity in our schools. When you think about what our teachers did in the last year, just pivoting to learning from home and then bringing the schools back again, with all the complexity that exists in the community, we had provided a lot of information out to our schools and put significant demands on our schools.

I can understand if there was not great enthusiasm about filling in a survey that came from the department. I was pleased with what the results showed us, however. There were some who anticipated that there would have been a real hit to the results because people were just so tired and jaded by the end of the year—the survey came later in the year—but that is not what the results showed us at all.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They did not even fill it in.

Mr SCOTT: I would have been pleased to have a higher participation rate. Still, 26,000 people filled in the survey. That is hardly trivial.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is almost half the rate of the public sector average for last year and all of those other agencies were facing similar challenges. You are just willing to gloss over the fact that only just slightly over a quarter of your staff filled in the people matters survey.

Mr SCOTT: It was lower than the previous year but it was an exceptional year. I must say, I think there were a few areas of government—health would be one, clearly—where we asked more of our professionals through the complexity of managing COVID-19. I am pleased that our engagement rate was pretty strong at 69 per cent and I am glad that there were a number of areas where we showed a significant lift this year, but if you are asking—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sixty-nine per cent of 27.9 per cent—it is in the teens.

Mr SCOTT: I do not want to get into lies, damned lies, and statistics, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, you should not have sent that email.

Mr SCOTT: No, I was pleased that 26,000 members of our staff responded to a survey. That is a very big crowd at the old football stadium; you would know if you were standing in the middle of the ground and looking around at 26,000 people—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You would be wondering why they spent \$1 billion knocking it over and rebuilding, I agree.

Mr SCOTT: That is a lot of people. In the cricket ground, we will say.

The CHAIR: More than the Dragons get these days.

Mr SCOTT: Twenty-six thousand is a good crowd; it is very good crowd—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Okay, let us have a look at the data—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: There is no way Hansard can record this.

The CHAIR: Okay. Mr Shoebridge, is there a question?

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Only 32 per cent of teachers—less than one-third of teachers—who responded to the survey agreed with the proposition, "I have time to do my job well." What are you doing about that?

Mr SCOTT: Thank you for that question. It goes to the issues that were raised in the Gallop review that we talked about this morning. We are conscious of the work pressures and workload of teachers. The Government has made a clear strategy and policy intent to me and members of the executive team here that they want us to interrogate all the demands that the department puts on teachers and to find ways of lifting those demands over time. Mr Martin is here from NESA. One of the things that NESA is doing with its curriculum review is decluttering that curriculum to ensure that teachers have more time to teach the elements of the curriculum that are most important. So all of these things are things that we are focused on and working on. We appreciate that teachers work hard and we want to engage with them on streamlining and simplifying the time that they have so that they can work on the things that are most important.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Less than 30 per cent of teachers actually had the time to fill in this survey.

Mr SCOTT: Or a desire to fill in a survey.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Or desire. But you said that they were more time poor and had so many other demands that that explained the low filling rate.

Mr SCOTT: And had a lot of other things on their mind.

Ms CACHIA: And there were increases, in some areas.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We will come to you, Ms Cachia. Less than 30 per cent of staff filled it in. Of those, 32 per cent said they had time to do their job well and you have not got a single concrete reform, not a single additional hour you are giving teachers for staff preparation, not a single additional allowance for continuing professional development that you can point to?

Mr SCOTT: Let us focus on that a bit.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The additional hours?

Mr SCOTT: One of the things that the Minister said at the Herald's summit was to provide five hours of time for teachers—accredited hours—for professional development; time that they do not have to spend on professional development, which is an acknowledgement of the time that they had spent on preparing on learning from home last year. Our track record on lifting demand for our professional staff starts with the principals. I have a list of lifts here in excess of 50 improvements that we brought about systemic changes that we brought to bear to lift time demands on principals, including allocating \$50 million for principals to help them fund additional support for them. So we have a track record of being able to focus and deliver on that. We understand the concerns of the teacher workforce, we understand the issues that have been raised by the Gallop review and we will engage with those over time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But the Gallop review is not the first time we have seen figures like 54 hours is the average work week. There was a 2018 University of Sydney report on teaching hours. You have now had three years to respond to that. That found an average of 54 hours being the working week—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is 55, David.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —for teachers. Are you going to truth test that? Are you doing any of your own analysis to find out just how many hours teachers are working, mostly unpaid?

Mr SCOTT: Well, hang on, most of it unpaid?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: One-third of it unpaid.

Mr SCOTT: I think we really need to unpack that statement. One of the things we provide teachers—let us preface it. Teaching is a very demanding job and overwhelmingly our teachers work very hard and our teachers do a great job dealing with the complexities they face in our schools. It is a profession and our teachers know and understand it is a profession; they do not bundy on, they do not bundy off.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, they definitely do not bundy off.

Mr SCOTT: Well, many of our teachers also appreciate the flexibility that comes to bear with them being able to do work in their own time—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Fifty-four hour/55-hour working weeks.

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Mr SCOTT: —and the flexibility that comes to bear under the agreement—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Again, Hansard is going to struggle to capture this.

The CHAIR: They should be okay.

Mr SCOTT: I believe it is right. I believe that there are seven weeks of the year—which, they are working weeks, they are not holidays—that give them flexibility to work from home under the industrial agreement we have with the federation. I believe that is the right figure. So there is flexibility that comes with the profession.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am not talking about working from home or working—

Mr SCOTT: I am sorry, you have been talking about working from home.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am talking about the sheer number of hours—54/55 hours a week, one-third of that not effectively remunerated beyond the 40 hours that you would expect to be a working week. You say the answer is, "Well, they can do it at home." Is that your answer to the teachers—that overworked teachers can work from home?

Mr SCOTT: No, I am saying they are professionals. There is flexibility in how they do their work to gather the requirements and that is something that in custom and practice teachers have sought. Part of that flexibility that comes under their operational agreement as teachers goes to the way that we deal with the period of time when students are not at school. As I understand it, teachers get four weeks annual leave and there are seven other weeks where they are not required to be in schools. So part of that is the flexibility that comes with teaching as well.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I asked you if you had done any of your own departmental analysis to understand just how overworked teachers are and if you have anything to contest—either the 2018 University of Sydney report or the most recent Gallop report that says that your teachers are working, on average, 55 hours a week. I am going to ask you again: Do you have any evidence or study to challenge that?

Mr SCOTT: I do not have data to confirm or deny that. What I do know is that we are at work now on a range of policies and strategies to reduce teacher workload in the way that we can do it most effectively. One of those is to look at the administrative burdens the department lays on teachers, and there is clear commitment from the Government to reduce that. We are confident that the work that is being done on the curriculum review—and taking what Professor Masters found was a grossly overloaded, overburden curriculum—and streamlining that will be of benefit to teachers as well.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But do you accept that that is a reasonable amount of hours?

The CHAIR: No, you will have to come back to that, Mr Shoebridge, because time has expired, sorry. Mr Scott, the department spent \$35,000 on a culturally safe yarnning circle at its head office at Parramatta. Who in the department was culturally unsafe?

Mr SCOTT: Thanks for the question. As you know—I am not sure if you have been there, Chair—we have this relatively new building in Parramatta. We have moved out of the offices here at Bridge Street and moved to Parramatta. It is a 12-storey building. When we are all able to be there we have well over 1,000 staff who work there and we have significant Aboriginal students and Aboriginal staff all across the department. One of the things that we have looked to do, we are developing a reconciliation action plan, which is a reflection that is being used in government agencies and organisations all around the country to come to a deeper understanding and deeper acceptance in creating a strong and supportive environment for our Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal students. So, as part of that, we made a decision that one conference room should be designated for use from time to time—not always—as a yarnning circle—

The CHAIR: Culturally safe. Would it not be concerning if anyone in the department felt culturally unsafe? Would it not be one of the safest places in New South Wales?

Mr SCOTT: Let me just put it to you this way, Chair: The people who have been most delighted with this one conference room—out of, I think, about 100 conference rooms we have in that building or different meeting rooms—that is decorated with Aboriginal motifs or Aboriginal design and some furniture that can be configured from time to time, the strongest possible support we have had for that has been from our Aboriginal staff who work in the department.

The CHAIR: But you have not identified anyone who felt culturally unsafe? Can I further raise: If you are spending \$35,000 on Indigenous education—which, all other things being equal, is commendable—would Walgett high not be a higher priority; and dealing with the total breakdown of social norms, discipline and

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behaviour at that school, to the point where the teachers are being spat on, attacked, their cars vandalised and they walked off the job?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Point of order: That characterisation of a total breakdown at Walgett community school is not fair to the school. It is not a fair reflection on the community, and I think we should be extremely careful about how we talk about that community, given the challenges they face.

The Hon. WES FANG: To the point of order—

The CHAIR: There is no point of order. My question stands.

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Shoebridge, you described it as, I think—and I would have to check the Hansard—

The CHAIR: They were under attack. The teachers were under attack.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, no. I said the school was under attack. I said the school was under attack.

The Hon. WES FANG: You made comments in the last session.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, about the school being under attack, and the community being under attack.

The CHAIR: You raised it. I am asking the secretary: Wouldn't the \$35,000 be better spent on Indigenous education at the coalface, where obviously there are some horrendous problems?

Mr SCOTT: I think the expenditure which you have identified there needs to be looked at in context. The fit-out for that Parramatta building, given it is accommodation for a thousand-plus people was—I think \$5 million was the figure I heard. So it is \$35,000 out of \$5 million. It was symbolic, actually. I appreciate it was symbolic but it was valued by our staff, and it is in keeping with the Public Service Commission's Aboriginal employment strategy—

The CHAIR: To be symbolic? I am sure that the commission is always in favour of symbolism. That is all they ever do. But we will move on to another issue.

Mr SCOTT: No, let me tell you about Walgett because I think the Walgett question is a significant one and we did not really cover it completely this morning.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr SCOTT: Our Aboriginal staff have been very affirmed by this decision. I do not think it is just symbolic; they have been affirmed by it. But I can assure you that there is no school in the State that has got more attention from us than Walgett High, one of our connected community schools. You were talking this morning about linking up with Communities and Justice and other government agencies there. That is what a connected community school is all about. Mr Dizdar has made numerous visits to the school. We are appointing new executive principals now. And I can tell you, on a per capita basis I suspect there is not a school in the State that is attracting more dollars per student than Walgett High School. I would think that would be right. I could stand corrected.

The CHAIR: Yes, but isn't it also true that spending money doesn't always solve system failure?

Mr SCOTT: Well, yes.

The CHAIR: And isn't this one of the problems with the department that we get a lot of verbiage about things that are happening but the outcomes reflect very poorly?

Mr SCOTT: I think if you look at connected community schools, we have had some great successes in connected community schools but not in all of them.

The CHAIR: Not at Walgett. Okay.

Mr SCOTT: Not at all of them. Mr Dizdar, do you want to speak further to Walgett?

The CHAIR: I will move on to another aspect of evidence base, given the limited time. I have raised this previously and in questions on the *Notice Paper*, about the evidence base for the methods of school design. The Minister obviously opens up a lot of new schools. Many of them are described as new age, space age, state-of-the-art, and so forth. They all seem to be based on principles of open plan class design. Given that this is

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a multibillion-dollar capital works program, what is the evidence base for saying that having two or three or four classes in the one space is the best form of education?

Mr SCOTT: The focus we have now, Chair, is about flexible spaces. I think the new buildings we are planning and executing now are very much predicated on the fact that there will at times be benefit for having students together. There will also be times for benefit for students in smaller groups and they are being designed accordingly. We have a team that work on this. Mr Manning can speak to it.

The CHAIR: Mr Manning, what is the evidence base? Somebody has obviously got this as a nice idea, a light bulb moment. But what are you relying on in terms of the evidence for what it means for educational outcomes?

Mr MANNING: We have a unit within School Infrastructure—School Learning Environments and Change. They are predominantly educators. They work with a whole range of institutions, including Melbourne University and a whole range of others, to look at the modes of teaching and how the infrastructure can support those modes of teaching. Further to the secretary's comment, the designs that we are rolling out now provide flexibility so that classrooms can—

The CHAIR: No, no. I heard that, Mr Manning, but you still have not identified the evidence base—the medium effect on education, the higher level of effect. What is the literature search, the research background, the metadata analysis that says that these spaces, for all the money we are spending, actually get best results?

Mr MANNING: We can come back to you in a—

Mr SCOTT: But can I ask, Chair—

The CHAIR: No, hang on a sec. Mr Manning, you are the head of the infrastructure section. You are spending billions of taxpayers' dollars in New South Wales on these new schools which are opened with great fanfare and you cannot come here to an estimates committee and explain the evidence base on which this is going to deliver superior student outcomes for New South Wales. Is that what you are telling this Committee?

Mr MANNING: No, that is not what we are telling this Committee at all.

The CHAIR: What are you saying then?

Mr MANNING: There is a specialist unit within School Infrastructure that came from—

The CHAIR: Well, where are they? Who represents them?

Mr MANNING: There is an executive director who runs that unit underneath, in the service planning space. There is a lot of research that goes into the designs that lend themselves to that. But as Mr Scott said, what we are rolling out is flexibility. So we are not providing just large open spaces and forcing teachers to use just large open spaces. They are spaces that can be closed into single classrooms. They are spaces that can lend some flexibility with some activity spaces in addition to the classroom space and allow the teachers to work on the flexibility they need to. So for the right methods of teaching which are in that classroom environment, we can provide directly a classroom environment. For those who need a little bit more space or want to do team teaching or a whole range of other things, the flexibility is there to allow them to do that. So we are not precluding single classrooms and, in fact, all of the models that we are rolling out allow that.

The CHAIR: Okay. Can you provide to the Committee on notice the research documents that make these points?

Mr MANNING: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: And in terms of horse and cart, wouldn't it—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What's the name of the unit?

Mr MANNING: SLEC.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What does that stand for?

Mr MANNING: School Learning Environments and Change.

Mr SCOTT: Chair, we can pull out some of that information for you, but we have two demands here. One is to get a classroom for students, which is clearly part of the drive for school infrastructure. But secondly, as I said at the beginning, what we are now fundamentally building is flexible spaces where full, alternative modes of teaching, irrespective of the evidence—

The CHAIR: Yes, I have got that, Mr Scott. I have got that. That is crystal clear. Crystal.

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Mr SCOTT: But if it was the other way and your question was, "Why aren't we rebuilding classrooms that are like the classrooms that we learned in?"—

The ACTING CHAIR: No, I am not saying that. I am saying in terms of horse and cart, wouldn't the analysis be to say this is the teaching method and environment that gets the best results? So we will build schools according to that high effect outcome?

Mr SCOTT: And that is what we will show you.

The CHAIR: Why would you build flexible spaces where teachers might use it for the worst possible learning environment? Wouldn't you be doing things to preclude the lower negative effects?

Mr SCOTT: There are a number of things in response to that, Chair. We are building infrastructure for 50 years here. Research may change on us over time too. What we are trying to do is build classrooms that can be used in a variety of different settings. If the research is strong that basically you should never have more than 30 kids together, then the classrooms that are currently in design and execution will enable us to do that. If the research is strong that you would only do that for some of the time, there are great learnings that can happen with broader groups, then the flexible design allows you to do that. As you can understand, at senior levels of high school I think there are strong arguments around—you know, if Mr Martin is giving a class on *Macbeth*, why couldn't a number of year 12 classes hear him do that and then work in smaller groups? So it is the flexibility of the system.

The CHAIR: There is as much chance of the research changing on the basis that if you put three or four classes in the one room most of the kids cannot hear what is going on. I don't think that is rocket science.

Mr SCOTT: But what we are saying now is that the designs we are rolling out can be used in different ways.

The CHAIR: Okay. The Labor Opposition?

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Secretary, if you have this information, that would be most useful, otherwise perhaps your Chief People Officer might be in a position to help. Do you have any member of the senior executive service who is working for the department retained via a sponsored visa?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to take that on notice.

Ms CACHIA: Take it on notice. I believe not.

Mr SCOTT: Not on the executive. We will check on the full SES, but I do not think so.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Right. Can I ask specifically about one, Mr Marc Kidson? Is that a person who has been retained through a sponsored visa arrangement?

Mr SCOTT: I believe he has, actually.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: So you have at least one.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, sorry. I was not aware of that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Why is Mr Kidson being retained through a sponsored visa arrangement?

Mr SCOTT: Well, I must say he is an absolutely outstanding executive and we are delighted to have him working with us. Ms Harrison might be able to speak more to it.

Ms HARRISSON: We went through an open and transparent recruitment process for the role which Marc Kidson holds. He was the successful candidate—by far the best candidate in that field. His reference checks and all the other parts of the process supported that, and so we made the decision to recruit him to do that role from overseas.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: To be fair, I want to be very clear that I am not making any personal comments or reflections on Mr Kidson whatsoever. So no questions or inferences should be drawn about Mr Kidson.

Mr SCOTT: I am glad that is on the record because he is an outstanding executive.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Yes, I place it on the record. It is not to do with him. But let's just establish some facts here. He was engaged last September, is that correct?

Ms HARRISSON: No, it was not last September. He joined us I think it would have been in 2018, but I can provide the specific details on notice.

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The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: So he has been retained on a sponsored visa for two years.

Ms HARRISSON: He is on a sponsored 457 visa. We can provide the details on notice. I do not know the specific end date of that visa.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: He is on a 457, you said?

Ms HARRISSON: I believe so, yes. But I can confirm that on notice.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Just to be clear, he works in the office of Transformation. Is that correct?

Ms HARRISSON: He does, yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: And that reports to you, Ms Harrisson?

Ms HARRISSON: It does, yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Is he the executive director of that department or is he—

Ms HARRISSON: He is not. He is a director in that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: He is a director in that department. You say that he is on a 457, which means that in order to qualify for a 457 you would have to have skills tested the Australian market before he was in a position to apply. Do you accept that that is the law?

Ms HARRISSON: I do, and that is what we did by going through the open recruitment process and the advice that we had through that process was able to be applied.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: To be fair, I think the 457 is that you are meant to do a skills test process separate to the open recruitment.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Not in the recruitment.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Not in the recruitment process. That is pretty clear guidance from the Federal Department of Immigration. Can you explain to us, how did you skills test for the appointment here?

Ms HARRISSON: We can provide the details of that recruitment on notice. We followed the advice from HR and worked closely with the Department of Immigration, as you would expect us to do, in ensuring that that was an appropriate visa. The visa was granted by the Department of Immigration and Mr Kidson has been an asset to the department since he arrived.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: A 457 is a temporary visa and if Mr Kidson has been performing in this role for three years why is he continuing in this role on a temporary visa?

Ms HARRISSON: I do not believe he has completed three years at this point. At the point his visa expires that will be the end of that visa unless he is successful in securing a different appointment or the same appointment through the appropriate processes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Is the department eligible to sponsor people?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, we are eligible to sponsor people, otherwise we would have not been able to do so.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: When you say that you are eligible, did you get legal advice as to whether the department can be an applicant sponsor?

Ms HARRISSON: I had advice from our HR department and we went through the application process to become a sponsoring agency at some point and that enabled us to, therefore, complete the recruitment and to recruit Mr Kidson.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Just to be clear, the employment contract with Mr Kidson is direct from the department.

Ms HARRISSON: That is correct, yes. I believe so.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: So you are not retaining any labour hire arrangement or anything that has acted as the sponsor of Mr Kidson.

Ms HARRISSON: No.

Mr SCOTT: No.

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The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Are you absolutely sure of that?

Ms HARRISSON: That is my understanding, yes. I am happy to check that and come back to you, absolutely.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Could you take it on notice and check as to whether any labour hire arrangement was used in that respect?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, of course.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Is it intended that Mr Kidson will move to a permanent visa or not, or is that a matter for him?

Mr SCOTT: I think you will find that is a matter for him, is it not?

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: It is just because there are limits on the ability of the public service to engage temporary labour, as I understood it, but I could be wrong.

Mr SCOTT: We are happy to take these questions on notice and check them out and come back to you.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I have asked for you to take them on notice.

Mr SCOTT: We will take them on notice.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: He has to renew his visa and that requires at the point of renewal that you, as the employer, are meant to go through another skills test process. Has he renewed the visa since his original engagement or not?

Ms HARRISSON: Mr Kidson's visa for the period of his employment, I can provide the appropriate details of that on notice. Obviously he is only eligible to be employed by us while he has a suitable working visa and we would not expect him to work for us at the point that that had expired unless he had either arranged personally an alternative visa arrangement or had secured an alternative role with appropriate sponsorship in place, but I think they are hypotheticals for the future rather than the situation we are in now.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That all depends on how long you sponsored him for as to whether this is hypothetical or not because if he has to renew his visa since his engagement in 2018 then you would probably be required to go through another labour market testing process.

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to take that on notice. I do not believe he has been required to renew his visa yet. His visa was for a period that extends past today's date.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, prior to Mr Kidson's employment has the department ever previously hired someone under a 457 visa?

Mr SCOTT: I cannot recall. The department has been going for the best part of 150 years—I have been here for four. I am not aware of another case, but—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Could you take that one on notice?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we can take that on notice for sure.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: For the internal approval processes, Mr Scott, do you have to approve that application to sponsor?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I was aware of Mr Kidson's recruitment. I know he came very, very highly regarded out of the UK. I think I may have had a conversation with him on a video call at one point as part of the recruitment process and I thought he was clearly a talented and outstanding executive.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: But was it you who signed the application form?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to check on who signed off the paperwork; I am not sure of that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: But, to the best of my knowledge, Mr Kidson is the only person in the SES—

Mr SCOTT: I am not aware of another, but if you have one by all means let me know.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I might.

Ms CACHIA: We will investigate and come back on that.

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The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Thank you. I appreciate that. Do you have secondment arrangements in place with any management consulting firm in which you have seconded staff from any management consulting firm?

Ms CACHIA: I have one at the moment.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Who is that from?

Ms CACHIA: Through Deloitte. She is the acting executive director [ED] for People and Culture.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add—

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: No, we will come to you.

The CHAIR: We will stick on the specific.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Can you just repeat the position?

Ms CACHIA: There is an ED role sitting under the deputy secretary role, which is me, obviously. So sitting under the Chief People Officer is an ED People and Culture.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Is that one of the positions that were made redundant?

Ms CACHIA: It is a new position as part of the organisation's redesign.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Sure, but was its predecessor position made redundant prior or the like position? Was a person made redundant—

Ms CACHIA: I joined the department on 30 November. The person who was acting in the ED role was on probation. She experienced a number of family issues and she decided to resign within the probation period and that role then subsequently became vacant.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: So why then have we seconded someone from Deloitte?

Ms CACHIA: Because we are currently in a position of recruiting. There was nobody who was deemed suitable to step into that role from the team. They had undergone enormous change through the restructure and were very focused on delivering as part of their ordinary work, so I made the decision—with Mr Scott and the team—to bring somebody in for a very short amount of time while we were doing that so that we would have continuity of work in delivery.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Just to be clear, that was your decision.

Ms CACHIA: It was a joint decision. I consulted with Mark, obviously.

Mr SCOTT: She advised me on that and I was happy to do that because I am advised, again, it is a new position in the structure. The first appointment had not worked out for a variety of reasons and so we did feel we needed to expertise quickly, so we contracted that in. Contracting in that kind of staff is not a regular occurrence for us. From time to time we will bring in individuals from consultancy firms on contracts; they bring expertise, they are usually for a fixed period of time. So that will happen; it is not atypical.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Again, Mr Scott, I am not suggesting that there is anything improper or, for that matter, outside your power to enter into such arrangements. How long is this secondment lasting for?

Ms CACHIA: The role is currently being worked through. I cannot give you an exact number of days but it will be a matter of weeks rather than months.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I ask because these are not cheap arrangements. What is the cost of this secondment?

Ms CACHIA: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: If you can take that on notice and if you are in a position to provide us a common agreement that would be helpful too.

Ms CACHIA: I will be.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Is that, to the best of your knowledge, the only secondment that is currently in place from a firm like Deloitte?

Mr SCOTT: We will have to take that on notice. We have got to balance all this up because I think, yes, there will be a cost involved in having a staff member but there is a cost involved in not having an Executive Director of People and Culture. We are undergoing a lot of change and significant pressure on the organisation,

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so we have to balance that up as well. The only thing I would say in commenting on that line of questioning is that, yes, a short-term contract will have its costs involved, but there are times, though, that we have been able to take up people out of consultancy firms and we are not paying them any additional money to what we would normally be paying to fill that position. Sometimes the firms can feel that it is of benefit for that staff member and for us. At times we can be looking to fill a position and we have had access to some outstanding executive talent for periods of time from consultancy firms, paying them no more than we would normally pay for those positions.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I appreciate that context. On notice, if we are able to get for the last two years the number of secondments akin to that arrangement that the department has engaged in that would be helpful, if that is possible, Mr Secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Sure.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Thank you very much. Can I just turn to another matter? You recently hired an Associate Director of Media. Correct?

Mr SCOTT: Yes. We have had a number of changes in the media and comms area, that is right.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: And that Associate Director of Media reports to the Executive Director of Reform and External Relations. Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: I will have to check the organisational structure on that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Could you? And that Associate Director of Media was appointed circa November last year, is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: Yes. I think I know what you are referring to here, yes. It was about November, yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: What was the process used to identify the successful candidate?

Mr SCOTT: As I recall it, we had a vacancy in that area. We decided we needed to fill that position, so we advertised it through the I work for NSW website. Look, I think there had been—as you will be aware if you have watched it. The department generates an enormous amount of news, social media traffic and media attention. We felt that we needed to scale up the attention that we had on media, so we were creating some new positions and we have had some terrific new recruits who have come through. We could also see an enormous increase in volume of media traffic around COVID that had not diminished. We ran an open, external and competitive merit selection process. That included interviews and psychometric assessments, and there was a preferred candidate who was chosen due to the very substantive media experience and relative sector knowledge that they had. They were appointed to do the job.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Can you provide to us on notice a copy of the advertisement, when it was advertised and when the advertisement was removed? Is that possible?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, sure, we can do that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That would be great. Was it you who made the decision to employ, Mr Scott, or is that delegated down?

Mr SCOTT: No. I was aware that the media staff now report through to the executive director who runs my office. There was a selection panel that was convened and they made the appointment. I do not sign off associate director positions and the like. I am more involved in signing off the senior executive staff, but I am aware that the appointment was made.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: But it is technically made under the auspices of the secretary's office, is that right?

Mr SCOTT: The Office of the Secretary, yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Therefore it is within your direct—

Mr SCOTT: I am saying that if you look at the structure of my office there is the team that I work with, the audit capability, a media capability and a lot of the parliamentary liaison and government capability. So in the organisational structure there is not an insignificant team of responsibilities and duties that fall in under my office, but that does not mean I am signing off—

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Were you on the panel?

Mr SCOTT: No, I was not.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Was your executive director who runs the office on the panel?

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Mr SCOTT: Yes, I believe she was.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Was that the most senior officer on the panel or who was actually—

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I believe she was the most senior officer on the panel.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Great. The successful candidate previously worked as a political adviser to the current Minister. Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: I think she was a media adviser to the current Minister.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Previously the successful candidate had worked as a media adviser. Yes, you are correct.

Mr SCOTT: A media adviser, yes. My understanding is, and having seen her in action a bit, a media adviser to two Ministers. Previously she had a kind of strong media track record in Australian newspapers and in media outlets, including I think *The Wall Street Journal* for a period of time in New York. So we were pleased to get a strong recruit.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Again, I am certainly at this point in time making no value judgements at all about the merits of the candidate or otherwise. It is not about that.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, good. Because I was delighted in our ability to recruit her. I thought she was a strong candidate.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I am sure. Look, it is not really for me to judge the merits of the candidate. To be fair, it is for you to judge.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, good

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: The successful candidate had immediately worked as a media adviser to the current Minister. Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: That is true. She applied for the job and went through the process out of that office and we followed an absolutely standard recruitment process.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Sure. Prior to that, that person had worked for the skills Minister. Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: That is true. That is where I first met her. She was the media adviser to the skills Minister.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Did your office or anyone speak directly with the Minister or the current education Minister about the appointment?

Mr SCOTT: No. As I recall it, their office was aware that she had applied but there was no detailed conversation with me about her application at all.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Did anyone from the Minister's office make any contact with anyone from your office about this appointment to provide—

Mr SCOTT: No. My only recollection was the understanding that we were running a full and competitive open recruitment process around the appointment of this position.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Just to be clear, Mr Secretary, you are saying that no-one from the Minister's office spoke to anyone from your office, to the best of your knowledge.

Mr SCOTT: I can speak for myself here and what I can say is that my only real conversation, I think, with anyone in the Minister's office about it was the fact that we were running an independent competitive process on it and there was an understanding that someone in the Minister's office was applying but we were just following the usual protocols and processes on an appointment like this.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Okay, Mr Secretary, can you check for me on notice as to whether or not there were any conversations between anyone in your office and anyone from the Minister's office?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, sure. But I should also reflect on the fact that there was strong support from the Minister's office and clear understanding from the Minister's office that we were running a standard open process on this.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: I am sure. Did anyone from Minister Lee's office speak to you about this appointment?

Mr SCOTT: No.

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The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Are you certain about that?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Did anyone from Mr Lee's office speak to anyone from your office about this?

Mr SCOTT: No, not that I am aware of.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Do you mind checking?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But there was probably a character or reference check at some point in the recruitment process. I assume that would have happened. I am not criticising that, but—

Mr SCOTT: There certainly will have been a reference check, but did Mr Lee or anyone from his office speak to me about it? Certainly not. And anyone in my office—well, I can check that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Finally, your chief operating officer was seconded to work as the Treasurer's chief of staff last year. Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: That was for a period of six months?

Mr SCOTT: Let me give a bit of context.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: We know a bit of context.

Mr SCOTT: Well, we love a bit of context; context is important. Mr Withey was seconded to work from the department. He had done a terrific job spearheading the Treasury work around the response to COVID-19 and, as we were looking to have someone fill the chief operating officer position for a period of time, we were delighted to get Mr Withey and in the six or eight weeks he was with us he had an immediate impact in the department. I was somewhat disappointed when the call came back from Treasury that the secondee that we had taken in good measure was being called back up the road. He did come back up the road back to Treasury and then was seconded into the Treasurer's office for a period of time, but I am very pleased to say that we ran an open recruitment process for the chief operating officer position and Mr Withey was the successful candidate and has returned back to his rightful home here in NSW Education.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: To be fair to you, Mr Scott, perhaps Mr Shoebridge and I owe you an apology for some of why perhaps there was a vacancy in terms of the Treasurer's—

Mr SCOTT: I could not possibly comment.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think you owe him an apology for more than that.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: To the extent to which it created an inconvenience for the department, we take some measure of responsibility for that. But can I just ask was that secondment—did you approve the secondment to work as the chief of staff?

Mr SCOTT: No. The way it worked was he was on secondment to us from Treasury. Treasury recalled him back home and then—

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: They recalled him.

Mr SCOTT: —what happened was what happened. We were not involved in seconding to the Treasurer's office.

The Hon. DANIEL MOOKHEY: Great. Then I might pursue this in Treasury. Thank you very much.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I wanted to ask about the Cooler Classrooms round two assessment process. Are you able to tell me how that process is different to the first round of assessments?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, Mr Manning might be able to talk about Cooler Classrooms.

Mr MANNING: Yes, absolutely. The Cooler Classrooms Program is progressing at a pace. Of the 918 schools—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Manning, my time has just expired so I am just going to ask you specifically how the assessment process in round two is different to the assessment process in round one.

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Mr MANNING: There were a lot of lessons learned in the round one process, particularly around availability of energy and complexity of the systems, that informed the sort of due diligence we need to do for the round two process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sounds like we need to come back.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Dizdar, it is a complex issue at Walgett. The Elders group have communicated to not just your Minister but two other Ministers and are seeking a multi-agency response to the issues and a meeting with the Elders group. What, if any, plans are there in relation to Walgett to meet with the Elders and bring those different government agencies in to help the community and the school?

Mr DIZDAR: Mr Shoebridge, you are spot on when you say it is a complex issue and I welcome your earlier comments because it is a school I have visited a number of times in different roles that I have had in the department. I want to acknowledge the tremendous work that is happening on the ground from our staff at the school. I have seen it firsthand—our teaching and non-teaching staff. In fact, I did a Zoom hook-up with our acting executive principal at the high school, Mr David Bowey, yesterday afternoon to see how we are travelling. On my visits there, Mr Shoebridge, I have met with the Dharriwaa Elders. They are very passionate and committed to Walgett and our children. They remind me, and I think all public agencies, of the primacy of the Connected Communities Strategy around interagency support. These are 15—as you know, and I know that you are right across this—of some of the most complex school communities in this State.

Education is a pivotal fillip to changing life trajectories but it cannot do it on its own, so Health, Justice and all the agencies working together in these contexts is really important. That is part of the Connected Communities Strategy and we need to strengthen that at Walgett. We need to work together. Certainly we need to support our people on the ground inside the school gates, but we do need to work together and the Dharawal Elders have reminded us of that.

Mr SCOTT: Can I just add that we feel the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [AECG] are important partners in this work. Anne Dennis is the deputy president of the AECG and she lives in Walgett. We meet regularly with them and she brings us great insights on the complexity in the site. We know that we need to work in partnership with the AECG to see the sustained improvement we need there.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The concept of Connected Communities, the concept of different departments working together to deal with the complex needs in a community like that, is great. But as we have seen in Brighter Futures and a series of other projects that were meant to bring together multiple agencies, when it comes to changing the resource mix and to genuine inter-agency cooperation, it seems to fall down on the ground. It is not working in Walgett right now. What will change?

Mr DIZDAR: Mr Shoebridge, our evaluation of the Connected Communities Strategy shows that in some locations it has worked really strongly and there are lessons to take there. We are in the process of recruiting for an executive principal. It is my intention to visit the school in the near future and meet with the Dharawal Elders as well as introducing our new executive principal to the school community, pending a merit selection process, and then to help the school reference group work with the inter-agency partners in that location. We have a good mapping of who those partners are, so it is important that we bring them together and focus on working together for the benefit of our young people in that town.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Those are all good statements. The problem is there is no mechanism in place for any of Education, Health or DCJ to be the lead agency and to direct the resources where they need to go. Yes, you can bring people around the table and have a chat but this is not working and there is no redirection of resources. If the only answer is recruiting another executive principal—who will join a list of some 20 in the past 20 years—that is hardly a solution for Walgett, is it?

Mr DIZDAR: The certainty of the leadership in the high school context is really important. We have been able to do that at the primary school. Our executive principal at the primary school, now in their second year, is getting good traction in that school context. I am not proclaiming that is the only thing that needs to be done to help progress our adolescents in the high school to where they need to be. What I am saying is that it will certainly be important to be able to then work with the school reference group and with the agencies in the town. Our Connected Communities directorate, our executive director and the directors there have mapped that really well. We will come together and we do need to come together to make sure we put our efforts together.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Okay. Given the time, if there is anything that is going to change then could you provide that on notice? That is what I am really asking.

Mr DIZDAR: Sure.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Scott, in response to the concerns I was raising with you about the 55 hours worked per week by teachers on average, you said that one of the responses has been the reducing administrative burden process that is gone through. Is that right?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, I have said that we have had a big focus on that for principals and now the Minister has identified that that is a priority for classroom teachers.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That was a three-year program that began at the beginning of 2018 and there was a report on it at the end of last year, was there not?

Mr SCOTT: I will just have to check the precise status of that report.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I might help. The report in December 2020 suggested that that program had saved teachers the grand total of four minutes on average a week.

Mr SCOTT: No, the report—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And I think it saved principals 10 minutes a day. That is right, is it not?

Mr SCOTT: Let me check it out.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Four minutes a week for teachers and 10 minutes a day for principals?

Mr SCOTT: Let me—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is not helping.

Mr SCOTT: No, let me check—

The Hon. WES FANG: It is not helping that you are talking over the top of him.

Mr SCOTT: Let me check the detail on that for you. The first focus absolutely has been around the workload of principals. That was the focus of the Deloitte report and, as I have said, we have worked on 50 initiatives in order to reduce that load. We have worked strongly with secondary and primary—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Scott, I am asking you about the claims that your own department made in December 2020. I will give you the figures: Per principal, 105 hours have been saved from January 2018 to December 2020. That works out at 10 minutes a day. For a teacher, 35 hours have been saved through the same period. On a generous calculation, that works out at four minutes per day. That is not fixing the problem, is it?

Mr SCOTT: It is a start to fixing the problem. That 100 hours is the equivalent of two weeks time saved by administrative savings for teachers.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Over three years.

Mr SCOTT: But two weeks is two weeks. We are continuing to work on this as a priority and we are continuing to interrogate it. Perhaps Mr Dizdar can talk about some of the initiatives that we have worked on. If you want to know how we are doing it and how we are focusing on it, we are happy to go into the details.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am testing you on your own metrics. If four minutes a day for teachers is your solution, you will not help them. You could double it and you would not deal with the 55 hours overwork a week.

Mr SCOTT: In fairness, the focus in the first instance has been around principals on the back of the Deloitte report. That calculation does not take into account the \$50 million we have allocated annually to school principals to employ additional staff to alleviate some of their administrative burden. I am not sure you are making a like-for-like comparison.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have been asking you repeatedly about teachers and you keep referring to principals. That is okay, but your answers will stand in *Hansard*.

Mr SCOTT: The intent of the policy was in fact around principals at that instance and that is why I am happy to talk about them.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will read through. It talks about strengthening and streamlining support for our teachers and principals and freeing up time to do the work that matters most. That was the announcement that you made, Mr Scott, in December 2018.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Support for our teachers and principals, in your own words.

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Mr SCOTT: A series of initiatives is now underway. As I have said, the Minister has instructed that we reduce red tape to reduce principals' and teachers' burdens by 20 per cent. Things like the Digital Restart Fund will be significant, to make an injection of technology to make teachers' lives easier, particularly in regional and rural areas.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But I was asking you about reducing the administrative burden.

Mr SCOTT: You have asked us what work we were doing. Our teachers believe that an upgrade of our technological infrastructure and the ease and facility of using our systems will lift the administrative burden.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They are not real chuffed with the four minutes you have got them so far, are they? The Teachers Federation delivered a report only a few weeks ago detailing the massive amount of overwork that teachers have and your answer is that you have saved them four minutes.

Mr SCOTT: I have details here and I am happy to come back on notice on the initiatives that we have in place that have saved hours across the system for principals, for teachers and for admin staff. The further work on reducing the administrative burden, the task force we have had on that and the initiatives we have put in place have been very well received by our staff. I am happy to put those on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Okay, and you can detail how they go over and above the four minutes that you have claimed at the end of last year. Mr Scott, the other thing you said about the 55 hours a week was that teachers have seven weeks a year where they can work from home. Are you suggesting that teachers do not work in that period or it is not part of the calculation for 55 hours?

The Hon. WES FANG: They never made that suggestion.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You kept referring to it as though it was some concession.

Mr SCOTT: No. What I am saying, and I will repeat, is that our teachers are professionals. Our teachers work to get the work done that they know they need to. You talked a bit about teachers working from home.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think you did, Mr Scott, to be quite frank.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but I think you will find you also talked about teachers working into the night and issues like that. I am happy to stand corrected. I am saying that there is some flexibility in how teachers can work outside of traditional classroom hours. Part of the flexibility that is offered up to teachers is how they work in the year when the students are not there at the schools. I appreciate that many teachers spend a significant amount of time while students are not at school preparing work for when students are there. That is how the school year works for them, but it is not a requirement for seven of those weeks that they be at the school and in the school grounds. I am saying there is some flexibility in how teachers work but I do accept, as I have said earlier today and as I have said previously, that our teachers are dedicated and hardworking and very committed.

Is it a complex and demanding job? Yes. I think there are arguments it has got more complex given the changes that have taken place in society. Are we looking to relieve the burden on teachers? Yes, we are in many different ways—through the curriculum review, through better targeting of support that they can use through the School Success Model, through the appointment of counsellors and other experts in mental health to work in and around schools. These are all things that we hope will relieve some of the burden that exists for teachers at the moment.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr Scott, I have questions relating to the future plans for education facilities in the Milton-Ulladulla area on the New South Wales South Coast. I have a vested interest here as a local parent. You may be aware that the community was quite anxious after a big red auction sign appeared out the front of Department of Education land on Garside Road at Mollymook a few weeks ago. A community campaign has led to a change of decision-making by the Government here. I want to understand on what basis was that land determined to be surplus to need? I understand that decision was taken in September last year.

Mr SCOTT: Let me give you a bit of detail. Perhaps, Mr Manning, you are in a position to talk about the changing circumstances as we see them down at Mollymook.

Mr MANNING: Yes, I would be happy to. In terms of establishing our needs, we regularly review demographics to look at where we think demand is coming for schools. We look at the existing schools that we have in place and understand the capacities that we have available to us. Historically—I think that site dates back probably to the mid-eighties from an acquisition perspective—they were running a different set of strategies. We have not seen that we have needed that site since that point in time. We think there is capacity at existing schools to manage that process. So that site was identified as surplus to requirement some years ago and we have

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been working our way through the divestment of that as part of that strategy. We have done relatively recent reviews to look at where we think population is going, but I understand from a local community perspective there is an anxiety that what they might be seeing is a different thing to, effectively, the plans that we have in place.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: They are very much seeing a different thing. The primary schools in Milton and Ulladulla are full. Their playgrounds are covered in demountables. The high school is full. Obviously the Shoalhaven Anglican School [SAS] site was in part bought to allow for the expansion of the high school, but people are concerned about the expansion of primary schools. We have also had a very obvious COVID boom on the south coast in the last 12 months. I wonder if your information is out of date. That is certainly the feeling of parents in our region.

Mr MANNING: The demographics is something that we look at on a very regular basis. It does from time to time change. Part of withdrawing that site from sale was to do a review so that we could make sure that we could be comfortable, but also so that we could consult with the community.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So you are going to do another review or have a look again at those figures?

Mr MANNING: We will have another look at those figures. We have undertaken to consult with the community about what they are seeing versus what we think we are seeing to see if there is a difference there, and the plans that we have in place that allow us to respond to that. At the moment we need that individual site. But that is a process we have undertaken to go through and we are working on that, but as a consequence we have agreed to withdraw the site from sale.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Hopefully the community engagement around that review process will be quite broad. I understand that people are frustrated that they have not been part of the discussions around the future of the SAS site. I was at the announcement of the purchase of that site and the community very much had the expectation that, as well as being for the Budawang School, it was going to be for the expansion of the high school. But that community consultation has not happened in the way people were expecting. What is now changing to ensure the community is aware of the future plans for the SAS site?

Mr MANNING: The first priority with the SAS site is Budawang. That process is now starting. We hope to be in construction very soon. Once we have got that process underway, we can begin to start that consultation process in earnest to understand, again, what do we think the demand looks like and how do we think is the most appropriate way to respond to that. The master planning for the use of that SAS site provides for Budawang to exist and for that site to be re-energised as a school, if that is what the result looks its way to be.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It seems like that is a fair way down the track?

Mr MANNING: Our focus for the moment is really getting Budawang underway. That is quite a complex process in itself.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am sure you have got lots of schools you are planning for in the future. We can do more than one thing down there at the same time.

Mr MANNING: Sure, but Budawang is funded and running—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: There were people from the high school at that announcement. The expectation was that community discussions would start straightaway on how that was going to be used for the expansion of the high school. All of the schools are full down there, is the view of the parents. I am sure that is the view of parents in a lot of places but that seems to be very much in evidence in the community. They were shocked to see the letters provided by the Minister—I assume written with the guidance of the department—that suggested we did not have a problem with capacity at the schools on the South Coast.

Mr MANNING: Certainly the sites that we have got are pretty big-sized sites for the schools on the South Coast. We need to do the work to understand what we think is the best way to respond to the growth, so that we can make sure that we can meet it. That site is one of those options. We are working with our colleagues in School Performance in terms of actually what they think the right way to facilitate that growth is as well.

The CHAIR: Mr Manning, have you visited the Oran Park Public School?

Mr MANNING: I have visited the Oran Park Public School, yes.

The CHAIR: And when you look out over the sea of demountable classrooms and demountable toilets, do you ever ponder, "How did we ever get it so wrong"?

Mr MANNING: It is true that there have been a lot of demountables on that site, but we have been working really hard on a range of projects to provide capacity to reduce those demountables. That has been—

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The CHAIR: But in your demographic planning, when you look at a place like Oran Park, with thousands of housing lots and more to come—working middle-class families, mortgage-holders. Young families are inevitably moving in—the State Government building the youth capital of Australia. How can the demographic planning be so bad that you end up with as many demountable buildings as you do permanent ones?

Mr MANNING: I cannot comment on decisions made by my predecessors.

The CHAIR: No, please do. Tell us how the department got it wrong and how you are learning from that error and it will never happen again?

Mr MANNING: But certainly the approach we have today, particularly for those new and upcoming communities, is to work to secure sites within those communities that we can move on as quickly as we can.

The CHAIR: Did your predecessor assume that retirement homes were being built there?

Mr MANNING: No. I cannot comment on the planning around Oran Park.

The CHAIR: No?

Mr MANNING: I know that we have been working hard to open additional schools around Oran Park to make sure that that works. Barramurra was one that was opened this year. We are expecting to see more kids move into the Barramurra Public School as it comes up.

The CHAIR: Speaking of new schools in south-west Sydney, your document search on the Government's announcement of a selective high school, what does it show for when the first piece of work commenced on this?

Mr MANNING: From memory, the announcement was mid-2019 and the service need report was started towards the end of 2019 across the school community group.

The CHAIR: The Premier announces it in May 2019 and it takes six months to start any work?

Mr MANNING: There is quite a lot of work in a school community group service need report. It is not that we can simply hit the print button and a report comes out. It is quite a complex set of documents to work its way through.

The CHAIR: But when the Premier announces a new school, is there not an impulse to think, "We had better get cracking with that"?

Mr MANNING: Yes, and we did. The Service Planning team got into action and they produced this service need report to establish exactly how that would fit and work.

The CHAIR: How good a report was it, given that by 19 August 2020—and this document was produced in a call for papers directly from the Minister—it had fallen off the list of new schools?

Mr MANNING: I do not think it had fallen off the list of new schools.

The CHAIR: Where is it on the list?

Mr MANNING: It was a project that we were working on. I do not know what list you have there in front of you.

The CHAIR: New schools.

Mr MANNING: It was an active project that the service planning team were working their way through. The service planning team needed to finish their work before we would move into an infrastructure planning phase.

The CHAIR: So you got this report at the end of 2019. What happened then?

Mr MANNING: It went through an assurance process at the beginning of 2020 to make sure the data had been put together in the correct way and had led us to the right outcomes. That is then our firm ability to move forward in terms of site identification and moving it into an infrastructure planning space.

The CHAIR: When was the assurance process finished?

Mr MANNING: It was early 2020 that the assurance process was undertaken.

The CHAIR: What happened then?

Mr MANNING: That verified that we could understand how that school would fit into the catchment and fit into the needs. We began to look for an appropriate location for the school. Initially an existing site was

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identified that had been acquired under a voluntary planning agreement [VPA], but in continuing to consider that site, given the selective nature and the specialities that go with that, particularly around the transport links—

The CHAIR: Where was the existing site?

Mr MANNING: The existing site was in Emerald Hills. That was one of the existing sites we had that was appropriate for a high school. But given the—

The CHAIR: Given that there is no train station within cooee of Emerald Hills—

Mr MANNING: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: —was that not always a dumb idea that needed to be discarded within 10 seconds?

Mr MANNING: It was one of the sites we had available to us. We have subsequently been working, as the secretary said, with Landcom around some other sites that are available to us that would make much more sense from a selective perspective.

The CHAIR: Okay. Given that the catchment for this new selective high school would be Bankstown and Fairfield local government areas—Liverpool, Campbelltown, Camden—then obviously location to a train station is highly desirable. Given that you are looking at either Edmondson Park or Leppington for vacant land near a train station and Edmondson Park is perhaps too close to Glenfield, hasn't the Leppington location been staring at us for two years now?

Mr MANNING: As I said in my earlier response to your question, we have identified a number of opportunities. There are some sensitive commercial elements to how we might go about acquiring the site that we would need, so we are working our way through this to get to the right result.

The CHAIR: Right, but there are vacant paddocks at the moment at Leppington and I know there are zonings in place which developers have not taken up. What is the restraint there in acquiring the site?

Mr MANNING: The appeal of working with an organisation like Landcom is for a school to be considered as part of a precinct. There are a whole range of other—

The CHAIR: Yes, sure. You have got Leppington public there, within walking distance of the train station.

Mr MANNING: Not necessarily just schools; there are a whole range of other opportunities in that space. Rather than just, if you like, provide a site and put a traditional school on, there is an opportunity to look at how close we can get to the station and how we might integrate it with other things. And so there is quite a series of conversations about how that might work.

The CHAIR: What other things?

Mr MANNING: There will be a range of government needs in and around that location—not just education. Health needs and a whole range of others—

The CHAIR: Eventually you will have a Service NSW office there.

Mr SCOTT: Exactly.

The CHAIR: We would like a public hospital and lots of good things, but—

Mr SCOTT: Which goes, essentially, to the planning decisions. Chair, in fairness, if we look at your comments originally this morning, you suggested that forces in the department were blocking this happening. That is clearly not the case. The Minister this morning committed to the Government building the selective high school in south-western Sydney. Negotiations are continuing with Landcom and other government agencies. I understand that there were meetings on this as recently as two weeks ago. We are waiting for the final pieces to lock into place around the precise location of that school, given other developments and other planning in that area.

Where best do you put it? We appreciate that there is land there now. A community will grow there and we think that is a good location, as far as access in is concerned. But we are at work on it and we have indicated today that it is set to be Leppington. We are hopeful for further announcements and further details around that—

The CHAIR: Well, that is good. It is set to be Leppington. That is news today and I am very grateful for that—

Mr SCOTT: The other news, if you had any doubt at all, Chair—

The CHAIR: —but, Mr Scott, you have also got to look at these issues through the eyes of the community.

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Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The CHAIR: If you know south-west Sydney as well as I have been privileged to know over the years, the thing that matters more than anything else are new families moving in. They are very often new arrivals in our country who look at public education—they cannot afford private—and think that a good government school is the chance for their children to lead a better life and enjoy the great things about our country. So when you see crowded existing schools and when you look at the rezoning maps for hundreds of thousands of people slated to move into this south-west corridor, any delay whatsoever in the provision of top quality government schooling—it may be five or six years before this school is open. There is a whole cohort that missed out on going through a selective government school in south-west Sydney. The demand is high, the population levels are astronomic and the aspiration level is acute. If we are here for one purpose, it is to serve those people more than any others.

Mr SCOTT: I am just glad today we have been able to put on—

The CHAIR: I just want them served as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Mr SCOTT: I accept that.

The CHAIR: We have come to this meeting and we have got out of it that Leppington is identified, but that is the conversation that I had with the Minister's chief of staff 15 months ago.

Mr SCOTT: The other thing you have got out of it—there was that sense this morning that this is not going to happen. This is going to happen. Work is underway and we look forward to updating you further.

The CHAIR: Okay. I am relieved by that, but I just think urgency in serving these communities is critical. If we have not got urgency for them, what are we urgent about? Okay, that is that matter handled satisfactorily; that is good news. I would now move on to ask other officials more generally: What kind of quality assurance has been undertaken to ensure the tutors recruited in the COVID intensive learning program have the up-to-date skills and expertise required to support children who are struggling with literacy and numeracy? Given the Minister's welcome drive towards synthetic phonics, have all these new tutors got that level of expertise?

Mr SCOTT: Ms Owen is looking at this for us, so she will come and speak to these matters.

Ms HARRISSON: Just while Ms Owen is taking her seat—we have, for the Committee's information, given \$330 million to schools to deliver targeted small group tuition for students in 2021, building on the report that the Grattan Institute put out last year that this was one of the most targeted interventions we could provide to our students following the disruption in COVID.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Literacy?

Ms OWEN: As you are aware, we have hired just over 4,000 tutors under this program so far. I think you are aware there are a number of streams through which teachers or principals can hire these tutors. They are qualified teachers who are either retired, in career breaks or already working with us in a casual way. They are future teachers—so students who are at university being educated to be future teachers—or they are university postgraduate tutors with teaching qualifications. Each of those I think you would recognise as having the right qualifications to be tutoring our people.

The CHAIR: But I asked about literacy. Are they trained in L3 or phonics?

Ms HARRISSON: The specific training of the individual tutors will depend on the needs of the school. This tutoring program, yes, will go to literacy. In high schools it will also be in specific subject areas where teachers may have assessed that there is a need for a particular student. So it is not one size fits all in this tutoring program. We are working to make sure our schools are embedding phonics in their early years instruction and we are hoping and working with our schools to make sure that when they use this tuition program they will embed their practices—which will include synthetic phonics—into that tuition program.

The CHAIR: Thank you. The Opposition?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much. Following on from that line of questioning, can you provide on notice a breakdown of the tutors? How many are retired teachers? How many are casual teachers? How many are tutors? How many are university graduates? I think that is all of them.

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to come back to you on notice with the information we have on that, Ms Houssos. Thank you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thanks very much. I am going to try and whip through a whole bunch of things rather quickly. Referring back to this key facts documents that—I think I gave a copy to you earlier, Mr Scott. On page 19—

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Mr SCOTT: I think the Minister got a copy and I am not sure—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Oh, sorry. I have got another copy for you coming.

Mr SCOTT: Tremendous.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I got ahead of myself. On page 19 it talks about an out-of-school-hours care census.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I just wanted to ask: Is that the survey that you are referring to?

Mr SCOTT: Firstly, this document comes from where? What am I looking at?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand it was a document that was provided under a call for papers—an SO 52—from the upper House.

Mr SCOTT: Oh, a Standing Order 52? Okay.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: From the Minister's office—or it may have come from the department. But I understand that it was prepared by your department for the Minister's briefing on key issues or key facts.

Mr SCOTT: Sorry—your question, then?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: On page 19 it refers to an out-of-school-hours care census. Is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: Yes. I think this is the survey that we were running last year and I think we will be doing further outreach again this year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Do you have a date for that?

Mr SCOTT: I think—in the first term.

Mr MANNING: The beginning of term two.

Mr SCOTT: The beginning of term two, sorry.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The beginning of term two. Okay. Are you able to provide on notice what the questions are that are asked?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, if it has been finalised, but it really is an attempt to identify any unmet demand.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, excellent. And so I do notice that in the inaugural one there were 1,259 of roughly 1,600 services that participated, but that went down to 809. Are you able to provide figures on notice, if needed, of how many participated in term three 2020?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me, do you prepare a report for the Minister on this?

Mr SCOTT: Well, what it does is it informs the work of the planning of the before- and after-school care work. It gives us insight—almost like a heat map, if you like—for where the attention needs to be. And then, in the troubleshooting we have done around it, this has identified the capital challenge that we have had, which the hubs are there to deliver on; some of the challenges in smaller schools; and also where other focused work needs to take place, either at the school or with other providers in and around the school. In a way, it is not a report; it more informs the activity and then we act on that activity.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How is that activity reported to the Minister?

Mr SCOTT: We have regular meetings with the Minister, which before- and after-school care forms part of. We have regular executive meetings, and it will be an agenda item for that, and I meet with the team monthly now, I believe, on the before- and after-school care commitment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can you tell me the criteria for determining where the hubs are going to be?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, Mr Manning might be able to talk a bit more about the hubs.

Mr MANNING: It is where there is perceived to be most demand but where the school does not have an ability to meet that demand within its existing infrastructure.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Why is one at Macarthur Girls High School, given that the Minister has previously told us that there is no need for after-school care at a high school?

Mr MANNING: I will need to take that specific one on notice, but it may well be that it is serving a whole range of primary schools, and that may be the most appropriate place to put it on the site.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, it might just be where there was space, I think you will find.

Mr MANNING: Yes, absolutely.

Mr SCOTT: And I think if that school said they had space and they had the ability to support the commitment that we are making around provision of before- and after-school care, then that is a good use of that asset, and our thanks to that school.

The Hon. WES FANG: Hear, hear!

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I ask you about some projects under the regional and metro renewal programs?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Specifically I want to ask you about the Coonabarabran High School toilet upgrades. In fact, I understand there is a series of toilet upgrades. I am informed that they are going to cost \$600,000. How many toilets are we getting at Coonabarabran High School for \$600,000?

Mr MANNING: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps you could tell us how many are going to be at Gladesville Public School for the same amount?

Mr MANNING: Sure.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes. Let me see—I think we might have a few others.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am sure you do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They seem pretty expensive toilets.

The CHAIR: At least they have them.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, and it might well be—I think in our answer on notice we will provide detail about exactly what is being provided. I imagine it is a fairly broad descriptor for the work that is taking place.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps at Padstow North Public School. I might have a few more on notice.

Mr SCOTT: Sure.

Mr MANNING: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will move on. Mr Manning, are you able to provide us, on notice, a list of the schools that have had business cases prepared and lodged with Treasury?

Mr MANNING: I think earlier we undertook to update you in terms of the priority planning list.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, that is right, and so—

Mr MANNING: So, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would, when you take that on notice, refer to some questions that were provided to me, which I just cannot seem to locate right at the moment, but when I did ask for a list of these previously—I think it might have been in July last year—

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much to my colleague. I asked how many school infrastructure business cases had been approved by the Premier. I asked a series of questions about business cases, and I was referred back to how individual projects will be communicated to school communities through regular project updates. It talks about looking at the school infrastructure website. We have had a very close look at the school infrastructure website. We cannot find a list on there of schools that have been promised upgrades that

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have had those lodged with the business case, so I just implore you to please provide that list as a list of schools on notice?

Mr MANNING: Sure. I will provide that on notice. I think the advice you originally received was that there were nine business cases that have been completed?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, I did not get a number in any of these that I have asked.

Mr MANNING: I am happy to provide that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In fact, they referred back to an earlier non-answer that I got, so if you could provide us with a list of those, that would be very helpful.

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who manages the school maintenance backlog?

Mr SCOTT: Mr Manning. He is a very busy man.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, can you explain to me how the school maintenance backlog currently sits at zero—I am informed on a question on notice—but yet I am also provided around a similar time with a list of schools that have extensive maintenance liabilities, including four in excess of \$1 million?

Mr MANNING: The maintenance backlog was cleared last financial year, and so maintenance going forward is current program. We are working our way through that. So the maintenance backlog was cleared, and that was the election commitment that was made. I do not know the exact information you have in front of you, but it may well be projected maintenance liabilities during this year, and those projects are being worked on.

Mr SCOTT: I can add to it, and Mr Withey might want to join the conversation too. We had a backlog and a Herculean effort to get rid of that backlog in the financial year 2019-20. Notwithstanding COVID and everything else, the team just ploughed through. I suspect no more maintenance work has been done in any State or Territory at any time since Federation than has happened in New South Wales last year. But as you know around maintenance, that does not mean that come 1 July there are no more maintenance chores to be done. So there will be some schools that now have significant maintenance work that needs to be done. That is what has fallen due. That is what they need to go to work on. So more maintenance continues to need to be done now, despite that overarching backlog being cleared away. There will be some schools having successive—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, but, Mr Scott, if the work—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Mr Scott is providing a detailed answer. I would ask that he be allowed to finish.

Mr SCOTT: Part of maintenance of this kind of infrastructure is that over a period of time rooms will be done, gutterings will be done, all sorts of other work will be done. There will be some schools this year that will turn around and it will be time for their roofs to be done. That is what the maintenance timetable will mean: That even though the backlog has gone—stuff that maybe should have been done in 2014 or 2015 has been cleared—the stuff that needs to be done in 2021, that is the work that we are doing now.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is it actually your testimony, Mr Scott, that at Randwick Public School the \$1.5 million of maintenance liability simply popped up this year?

Mr SCOTT: I think the question is around the word "liability" there. Do you want to speak to this?

Mr MANNING: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely, it is this year's liability. The model we have looks at all the fabric components across a school, works on an average life expectancy of that component, and that then projects the work that we need to do in any particular year. It informs the asset management team to go and have a look at that piece of work and see whether actually it is ready for replacement. Just because a roof may have a life of 25 years, it may be 24 years old or 25 years old—it does not necessarily mean it is failing. But, absolutely, that is then the liability that is projected to be looked at in this financial year. So in that case, yes, there may well be a significant number of roofs that are due to be replaced under that model, and that liability represents that, absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have not come to the most egregious example, which is Bulli High School—

The Hon. WES FANG: Saving it for last, weren't we?

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —which apparently now has an example of \$6.2 million projected maintenance liability. It is genuinely your testimony to this Committee that none of that—that was at zero at 2019—

Mr MANNING: Absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —and then it magically popped over to \$6,248,716?

Mr MANNING: Okay, I would need to take that exact one on notice, but if that school was built or the entire school roof was replaced 30 years ago, then that school roof would be due to be replaced now, and that may well be that cost, absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So really what we are finding here, Mr Manning, is the way that they cleared the maintenance backlog was pretty tricky accounting, not by actually spending the money on schools.

Mr MANNING: Absolutely not. That maintenance was not due, it was not backlog. It is projected maintenance into the future.

Mr SCOTT: That is how it works.

Mr MANNING: That is how anybody manages estates. It is how you would manage your home. That is exactly how you would manage your own house, and so we are doing no different to that. So, no, I absolutely refute the fact that it is—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So you hope we manage—

Mr SCOTT: No, no, no. Look, I think that is very unfair.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, let us stop the debate.

Mr SCOTT: No, no.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let me just simply ask for some details on notice—

Mr SCOTT: But no, no, let us make it clear—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —so that we can get to specifics.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

Mr SCOTT: The phrase used was that is "pretty tricky accounting". I think that is unfair and unreasonable, and I just provide an example that hopefully we can all relate to. If you are doing maintenance around your own house, even on a regular, cyclical basis, some year the bills will be bigger than others. If the roof needs to be repaired one year, you do not flatline the maintenance around your home over a 10-year basis. Some years the bills are bigger than others, and they fall due in different years, just like some months the car insurance will be due and that is more than the other months. So the way we are working this through, we had cleared the backlog of maintenance work that needed to be done in previous years. That is not to say that there will not be some significant bills in some significant schools that become due this year, and that is the process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I am not going to get into a hypothetical debate about how you can better—

The Hon. WES FANG: You started it!

The CHAIR: Order! As to the point of order—because I have to make these judgements—I sense that Mr Scott handles the more robust parts of the Committee deliberations. He might even enjoy them and might one day sit at this end of the table. He is very skilled in that aspect of it, and I do not think he needs a lot of protection from the Chair or others, so let us proceed.

The Hon. WES FANG: It is not about offering protection.

The CHAIR: I know. I think he is going quite well in handling it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, I have limited time. Perhaps just to end the debate and the back and forth, can you provide on notice a list of the projects that come under Bulli High School. Actually, I am not going to provide specifics. I will say any school that now has a maintenance liability in 2021 above \$1 million—if you can provide me with a list of those and a breakdown of what those projected liabilities are for?

The Hon. WES FANG: But we are not doing hypothetical arguments.

The CHAIR: Order!

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Mr SCOTT: Chair—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Withey, did you want to provide a—

Mr SCOTT: The liability will be crystallised at the end of the financial year, then we will be in a position to answer that question for you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In the meantime, perhaps you can provide me with the breakdown for Wollongong Public School, Maroubra Junction Public School, Manly West Public School, Randwick Public School and Bulli High School? I will move on. This might be a question for Mr Martin. Can I say at the outset that I commend the work done by the people who work in your department in terms of evaluating the need to address the question of writing. But I am interested to know what is actually going to be done to improve our writing stats. I think you said at the schools summit a couple of weeks ago—you talked about how the proportion of year 9 students, up to one-quarter of them were below minimum standard. I am very interested to know what the latest is on that.

Mr MARTIN: I made those comments in relation to changes to the syllabuses as part of the curriculum review of kindergarten to year 2 due in 2022. The foundations of writing are taught there. It begins with things even like posture and holding the pen grip and so on and so forth then down to sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, et cetera. So they will all be much more explicit in the syllabuses going forward. We have also been able to sequence that from kindergarten right through to year 10. Then there will be an opportunity, I think, as we redo the syllabuses to build writing into the other key learning areas [KLAs] in the other subjects. So the specifics of writing in science, maths or history, which are slightly different in generic style, and that might be creatively built into those subject content areas.

Mr SCOTT: Can I add to that, Ms Houssos? We have established a Best in Class teaching team. We have identified outstanding teachers from schools across the State, led by Stacey Quince, who was formerly the principal at Campbelltown Performing Arts High School. Part of what they are doing is looking at the schools that are outstanding in the way they are delivering writing instruction and the outcomes we see using that best practice across the State. That is an area of their focus at the moment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Martin, are you able to tell me, obviously under the new requirements for professional development writing part of those requirements—

Mr MARTIN: Under the curriculum, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, under curriculum—that is how they will be training? Because obviously your report found that almost half of New South Wales teachers, including two in five high school English teachers, felt poorly equipped to teach writing—

Mr MARTIN: They lacked confidence in the teaching of writing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is right. So what is being done? Will that be covered by the new professional development courses? Is that the idea?

Mr MARTIN: The focus of a lot of the professional development will be across the subject KLAs, but they will include writing, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, excellent, thank you. But teachers will not be required to show that they are doing the new professional development [PD] for five years, is that right?

Mr MARTIN: Across five years they have to do 100 hours. But most of them do not do it all in the last year, they progressively do it across the five years.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you tracking how much teachers are doing as you go?

Mr MARTIN: We can track that via—they each have a space on our site where they log their own PDs, I guess.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, you talked about Best in Class teachers. Can you tell me what the difference is between a Best in Class and a "highly accomplished" teacher?

Mr SCOTT: Yes. I will start and then my colleagues on either side can give you more detail. The Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher is an accreditation process that is run through NESAs. It is a national arrangement and, in order to do that—to pass that standard—a very significant body of work needs to be completed by the teachers to the specification of the requirements of the scheme administered by NESAs. Best in Class is somewhat different. We used our data and various analytical frameworks to identify teachers who were achieving remarkably sustained high performance of their students, particularly in the HSC—real outliers in our schools. Why, in this

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school, are the geography marks so high and sustained over a period of time; why in biology at this school? We then went in search of who the teachers were behind that sustained success were. What was really very interesting to us was that some of these teachers were not particularly high profile—we did not read about in them in the papers all the time or see them on Twitter—but they just really delivered. So what we did was pull them into a team, our Best in Class team, and what they are doing is driving a lot of the professional development that we have in the department around those subjects—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, I am just going to stop you there because I only have two minutes to go.

Mr SCOTT: It is just such a great story.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, I am happy to hear more—perhaps you could provide some more on notice about the number of Best in Class schools.

Ms HARRISSON: There are 66 teachers.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Great, thank you. Can I just ask you who is conducting the review of the rural incentives scheme that was recently announced?

Mr SCOTT: Is that—

Ms CACHIA: Yes, that is my team.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So that is an internal review?

Mr SCOTT: It is the workforce—people and culture.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Have the terms of reference been set?

Ms CACHIA: They have issued a broad paper at the moment, which is terms of consultation we have referred—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that the internal discussion paper that was referred to?

Ms CACHIA: I am sorry?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that the internal discussion paper that was referred to or is this a new discussion paper?

Ms CACHIA: Referred to with what, sorry?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In the media—I think it was *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Ms CACHIA: I think it was a Teachers Federation media announcement.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: We might need to ask you to come forward to speak into the microphone.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let me just ask a really quick series of questions before my time expires. Have the terms of reference been set? Will they be publicly available? Are you taking submissions? When will it report? Will it be released publicly?

The Hon. WES FANG: I think, on indulgence, Chair, the Hon. Courtney Houssos can be given a little bit of extra time to ask these questions so that the witness can actually come forward and hear them.

Ms CACHIA: I can answer it in part and then I will take the rest on notice and get back to you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sure.

Ms CACHIA: We have consulted with the Teachers Federation, the principals association—the secondary principals and primary principals—and so they are aware of the terms of reference. We are talking to all of those parties. The question of whether those terms will be publicly available, I will have to come back to you on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And are you taking submissions?

Ms CACHIA: Yes, potentially.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. And when will you report?

Ms CACHIA: I do not know that at this stage.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a general idea?

Ms CACHIA: I will come back to you on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Will the report be released publicly?

Ms CACHIA: I will come back to you on notice on that as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me what the title of the internal discussion paper was?

Ms CACHIA: I will have to come back to you on notice on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sure. Can you provide me with—

Ms CACHIA: Sorry, I actually think it is something, a name like its terms of reference or a paper regarding the very name of the exercise, which is rural and remote incentives review.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sure. Can you provide me—I assume this will need to be on notice—a breakdown of the total cost of incentives provided to rural teachers under the different categories that is currently available for the past three financial years?

Ms CACHIA: Yes, I will have to come back to you on notice on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Just to be clear, this is the internal government discussion paper that was referred to in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 21 February 2021. Are the professional development courses to accompany the phonics rollout mandatory?

Mr MARTIN: The hours of professional learning are mandatory but the types and style of professional learning are up to the teacher in consultation with their school or the system or the sector. So, no, at this stage they are not mandatory.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can I just ask if it will cover how to administer the test and how to interpret the results?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, we provided that training for schools that undertook the pilot of the phonics check last year and the training will be available for other schools taking part in the full rollout this year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, but it is optional?

Ms HARRISSON: We would expect schools to participate in that training if it were as part of effectively implementing a phonics check.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That counts for professional development, does it not?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, that is my understanding. But I can clarify that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Scott, are you aware that there is significant community disquiet about the proposed site for the Bungendore high school?

Mr SCOTT: I will ask Mr Manning about Bungendore high school, if I can.

Mr MANNING: Absolutely. We have been working for a while in terms of the location for the Bungendore high school site and there has been community consultation around the location. So, yes, I am aware that there are a number of people, but not a huge number.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware that the department is touting the fact that 74 per cent of the people consulted support the school, but that was 74 per cent of just 75 people?

The Hon. WES FANG: It is overwhelming.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is probably overwhelming for Wes. He is an easy man to overwhelm.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am easily impressed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is 74 per cent of 75.

Mr MANNING: The consultation was done around the 75. It may well have been that actually it was a community consultation session and it was 75 people that turned up and they were interested enough in the location.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This was a fast-track proposal. How was the deal struck with the local council, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council? How was that deal struck to provide some \$12 million to the council for the land? Was it independently valued?

Mr MANNING: Yes, it was independently valued. We did quite a bit of work around potential locations. We saw that close proximity to the public school was a really good and obvious positive to that. The playing field around that was also kind of really valuable to us as well. So we spoke to council to talk to them about what was available to us and how we could make it work.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Squeezed between the railway line, the war memorial, the main road—the site is so constricted you are having to close one of the roads in the town to make it work.

Mr MANNING: But I do not think that is necessarily the view of a whole bunch of people in the town. I think they see that as a really strong positive that the school is right in the middle of the town.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you provide on notice what the actual community consultation was for this?

Mr MANNING: Sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Could you also provide on notice what, if any, role the Deputy Premier had in terms of negotiating the deal between the council and the department?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Thanks. It is probably to you, Mr Scott, regarding the School Success Model. Why are there no targets in that model for success in incorporating and supporting students with a disability into schools?

Mr SCOTT: I will get Ms Harrison to talk about that. I think the success of students with disability is kind of central to a lot of this work, but I will get Ms Harrison to speak to it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is just not mentioned in the School Success Model. Why?

Ms HARRISSON: The School Success Model is for all our students, and 20 per cent of our students have additional learning needs that are recognised in the system and therefore as a quarter of our students you would expect them to be encompassed by that. We are working on some really innovative world-leading practice around students with disability, particularly around monitoring and tracking their educational progress. I was at Clarke Road School just—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But you know I am asking about the School Success Model. So rather than a general chat, is this part of the School Success Model, Ms Harrison?

Ms HARRISSON: What we are looking to do is find ways to track the progress of students with quite significant disabilities in a way that allow students—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But is this part of the School Success Model?

Mr SCOTT: It could well be. What Ms Harrison is saying is that part of the challenge with students with disability is how you track and monitor improvement over time. What we have seen in place at this school is a very significant initiative to be able to track improvement, which will provide—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This answer is not responsive to my question about the School Success Model; at best it is that at some point in the future you have got something on track that may be incorporated in the School Success Model. That is what you are telling me.

Ms HARRISSON: All of our students with disability are encompassed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is just not genuinely responsive.

Mr SCOTT: No, I disagree. As Ms Harrison said, 20 per cent of the students in our schools are designated as having a disability—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But I am asking why they are not specifically identified in the School Success Model, and the answer we are getting is that they are just part of the school community and so they will be picked up somehow or other.

Ms HARRISSON: No. Obviously they are part of the school community and they are therefore, of course, picked up by objectives that we have for schools across the whole community. We are also working very closely—and Mr Dizdar can provide further information—

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is it about the School Success Model?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes—in relation to how we are supporting schools for specific purposes through the School Success Model process.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking about the broader School Success Model in comprehensive schools and public schools across the State. I am yet to understand why there are no targets in place or no specific provisions in place that support the notion of inclusive education, especially for students with a disability. Can you explain that?

Mr SCOTT: Because the targets of attendance and wellbeing and student engagement and literacy and numeracy apply to students across all our schools. You are talking about an inclusive model—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: An inclusive model that does not actually expressly mention kids with a disability, and you are saying that is a good thing.

Mr SCOTT: No, I am saying that clearly the performance of our schools, as part of the strategic plans that they develop, part of the targets that they develop, part of the achievements we are trying to recognise under the model, will absolutely include students with disability, and what Ms Harrisson was going on to say is as we look for even more granular targets and insight on improvement, the kind of assessment work that is happening at Clarke Road School and other schools will provide us with an opportunity to further evolve the School Success Model as we roll out additional targets in years to come.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am not asking about special purpose schools, I am asking about the School Success Model that is going to be rolled out in every public school across New South Wales more broadly. I am going to give the opportunity to tell me what specific targets or aspects of that School Success Model are directly aimed at inclusive education for kids with a disability.

Mr SCOTT: Mr Dizdar and Ms Nixon are involved in the rollout of this, so I will let them speak to it.

Mr DIZDAR: It is definitely a feature of the School Success Model. All of our schools, like I said earlier this morning, are setting a strategic school improvement plan for the next four years, and the suite of targets that are available to them are also to make sure we meet all our equity measures. If a school has a large proportion of students or students that they make adjustments for, they are able to factor that into their target-setting process. I did want to make this point too, Mr Shoebridge: We have got 116 special schools in our public education system and we are working with our DELs, with our principals, of those sites because they are a very unique context; they range from—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But my question was not about special schools. My question was about 2,040 other schools where disability advocates are desperately asking for inclusive education, and referring it off to special schools is not helpful.

Ms HARRISSON: Some 97 per cent of our students with disability learn in a mainstream public school. So it is absolutely right that our School Success Model would therefore encompass them.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So what targets are there in the School Success Model to help with inclusive education?

Ms HARRISSON: I think, as the secretary indicated, the targets around literacy, around numeracy, around attendance, around wellbeing, all apply equally to those students.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: "All apply equally" is the point, but I wish to move on in the short amount of time I have left.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: There is no point of order. He is moving on.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If there is anything you would like to provide on notice to add to it please do. I am giving you a broad opportunity to add anything on notice. Parents of students with disability have become so disaffected by public schooling and by the absence of support that they are increasingly moving to home schooling. Mr Scott, you would be aware of the fact that the number of parents choosing to homeschool their kids has risen by 60.5 per cent in the last four years and that a quarter of all of those parents are saying the reason they are doing it is because they need to make adjustments for their child's special learning needs. Is that not an indication of the public school system failing those kids?

Mr SCOTT: I must say it is a broad and a complex story. If you look at the homeschooling provisions and the homeschooling increase last year, it was very interesting as we monitored attendance numbers through

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the year. During COVID we were doing daily attendance counts—the Minister and I would receive them by midday each day—which also included students with disability attending SSPs, and what was noteworthy was that throughout the year of COVID-19, attendance rates at SSPs were significantly lower than other schools in the State, indicating, I think, a concern of those parents, particularly given the pandemic and given often the health risks of their own children—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But, Mr Scott, I should have made it clear—and it is my fault—this is NESAs data that is from 2015 to the end of 2019, so it does not include—

Mr SCOTT: I was giving you the 2020—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It does not include the impact of COVID. COVID does not impact that rise.

Mr MARTIN: There are around 7,000 students enrolled for homeschooling. That has increased over the last few years. A proportion of those parents indicate to us why they are moving into homeschooling and a significant proportion do not indicate any reason, but there is a proportion that say it is because of their desire to look after their students with special needs. In total it is 7,000 students out of the numbers of students enrolled in schools. So while it is an increasing proportion it is still a very tiny percentage of the total. And the numbers who are electing on the basis of special education or special needs is a proportion of that but not the majority.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Would you disagree about a quarter? That is what the data shows.

Mr MARTIN: I will take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Just coming back to Mr Shoebridge's valid point about targets for disability education, there was quite a splendid report delivered by this Committee, called *Measurement and outcome-based funding in New South Wales schools*, and the State Cabinet responded to it in August of last year. Recommendation 22 reads:

That the Minister for Education give greater priority to developing performance measures, targets and accountability in disability education and commission CESE to identify best practice, working with experts.

And the Cabinet's response was supported. So, Mr Scott, is this not one of the frustrations we have in this space and as a committee?

I know there must be a lot of information and paperwork that flows around a department like yours, but we tend to go round and round in circles. Our Committee has already made a very good, sensible recommendation in this regard supported not by some sort of high thrower down the backbenches of the Government but by the Cabinet. What has been done in the six months since to act on the support the Cabinet gave to our recommendation?

Mr SCOTT: Ms Harrison will speak to this.

Ms HARRISSON: Mr Chair, we welcome the question because we also share in the Committee's importance that it places on this issue. There is no—

The CHAIR: What about Cabinet supporting our recommendation? What has been done?

Mr SCOTT: We will speak to this.

Ms HARRISSON: For some of our students with some of the more significant disabilities, there is no standardised accepted way of measuring their progress in the same way that we have more accepted—although still contested—ways of measuring other student progress. We have been working to test new tools that will allow us to demonstrate to parents and for our teachers to see the progress their students with disability are making. I was at Clarke Road School in the last fortnight seeing that work in action. I would really urge the Committee to go and see that work in place. It will allow us in time to benchmark performance, to look at the performance of schools of students with disability and to monitor their progress.

The thing that teachers at that Clarke Road School were telling me is that this is the first time they can have a very shared dialogue with the parents of their students and that this tool that they are testing—the communication passport—indicated to those parents that the teachers knew their child and their child's capability capacity and were focused on the same things that they were focused on in that student's progression. We are really excited about that innovation in our schools and the work we are doing. We are testing it through CESE. We are evaluating that work and we look forward to seeing what it will deliver us in terms of further opportunities for the system in the future.

The CHAIR: Okay. Well, just to backtrack, under "Supported" in the Cabinet response, it reads:

The commitment to strengthen disability education performance measures was part of the Disability Strategy launched in 2018 ...

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This has obviously been going on for three years. Okay, we have not arrived at the destination just yet. A mention is made of CESE continuing its work in this space. But why was that not the answer to Mr Shoebridge—that Cabinet has supported the recommendation of the Committee and the disability education targets will be part of the new system?

Mr SCOTT: This is exactly what Ms Harrisson was trying to say to Mr Shoebridge and he did not want to hear that as the answer. She started talking about going out to Clarke Road, where a new assessment model—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You talked about going to a school with special purpose when I am asking you about inclusive education in mainstream education. I cannot believe you do not get it.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Mr Shoebridge—

The CHAIR: Hang on, not in my time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are so off the mark.

The Hon. WES FANG: Calm down, David.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is like you do not understand the whole concept of inclusive education.

The Hon. WES FANG: Chill, David.

The CHAIR: Order! We are moving because you are eating up my time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry, Chair.

The CHAIR: Recommendation 21 was:

That the Minister for Education commission the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) to develop a specific set of verifiable, ambitious targets for remote and isolated schooling.

That is "Supported". Is that happening? Are we getting targets in place for remote and regional schools, as per the Cabinet adoption of our recommendation?

Ms HARRISSON: Under the School Success Model there will be targets for all schools, Chair, including those—

The CHAIR: What about "a specific set of verifiable, ambitious targets for remote and isolated schooling"? I know it was a passion of Wes Fang to get this done for the bush.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, one of the things that we do under the School Success Model—there are two things that are noteworthy in this. Firstly, we look at targets for statistically similar schools, so again we will be looking at the performance of all our schools in rural and remote areas and will find examples of those that have achieved outstanding results—the best results. That provides the benchmark standard. Then similarly I think on other initiatives that we are doing—we talked about best-in-school earlier on. A real focus of the best-in-school work of these teachers, many of whom are found in the city, is deploying them to provide professional development in regional and rural areas. One of the things that we can see, Chair, is that some of the schools in the most remote parts of the State will not have experience at delivering HSC students to a band 5 or 6 level. They may not have had experience of HSC marking. We are bringing the expertise of the best schools to bear so that those rural and remote schools understand the standards and requirements and the expectation that should be there for those students. It is absolutely central to the School Success Model and a hallmark of the work we are doing around best-in-class.

The CHAIR: Okay, I am worried by what happened to recommendation 22. I better go through some of these other ones. Number 20 was:

That the Department of Education require its schools to seek to conduct exit interviews of parents when students leave a school.

The Cabinet response was "Supported".

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The CHAIR: So when parents leave a school, do they now do an exit interview as of 2021?

Mr SCOTT: No, they are not at the moment. That is still in development but we are encouraging principals to have those conversations.

The CHAIR: Okay. Overall in this quite influential report the Cabinet adopted 47 of the 66 recommendations but—and this was an important caveat—many were said to be "subject to operational details". Now, we do not want that to backslide into reasons for not doing them. Is it possible to get an audit of

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the progress that has been made on the 47 supported recommendations, including especially those "subject to operational details", for the benefit of the Committee?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, it is, Chair.

The CHAIR: It is? Thank you. And indeed recommendation number 1—we have been around the block on this one a few times with Mr Dizdar and others in past hearings—this question of the publication of the school performance targets and measures school by school. Is this going to happen in a publicly disclosed way that is very clear to everyone?

Mr SCOTT: Chair, there are restrictions under the Education Act about the school-by-school information that we are able to publish, but details of individual schools will be available on their own websites.

The CHAIR: Right, and—

Mr SCOTT: I am sure enterprising journalists will be able to search it out.

The CHAIR: It is like the My School site. The material will be there but there will be no calculation of league tables and the like—

Mr SCOTT: No.

The CHAIR: —outlawed by 18a.

Mr SCOTT: Section 18a.

The CHAIR: Yes. Okay, well, we were not asking for league tables but we were asking for—

Mr SCOTT: Parents will be able to find that information, Chair.

The CHAIR: Okay, good. So you will give us the audit then on the 47 recommendations?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The CHAIR: That is good. Mr Scott, what is a resilience doughnut?

Mr SCOTT: Is that a riddle, Chair? I'm sorry. What was the question again?

The CHAIR: No, it is not a riddle. It is a feature in many of our government schools. Does anyone else know what a resilience doughnut is?

Mr SCOTT: I am afraid I am going to have to take that on notice, Chair.

The CHAIR: Okay. It is a program that is run by Lyn Worsley out of Epping. She has described this as a therapeutic model and she is an "Open House human condition guru". It sounds great. I love gurus. She runs these programs at a number of government schools, particularly on the North Shore, called "resilience doughnut workshops". I am just urging we get more information about what these Hare Krishna type people are doing in our schools and get a handle on all this activity and all the money that they earn. A lot of people are getting very rich on this gear. Resilience doughnut—boy oh boy. And, you know, make sure they are properly accredited—obviously it is of concern to me that this stuff is on at least one annual report of a school that I have seen, but no-one here on the department's executive—the best decision-makers we have got—knows what a resilience doughnut is.

Ms HARRISSON: Chair, I think we covered some of this ground in this morning's session. We are—

The CHAIR: I know, but this is a specific mystery, is it not?

Ms HARRISSON: We are very happy to take specifics of this case on notice, but we are creating a panel of providers for exactly these types of services into schools which will help our schools make good decisions about the support that is available to them. There is a very crowded marketplace and we want to help our schools make good decisions for the use of their money and that is why we will be creating that panel of providers.

The CHAIR: Well, my kids always loved the doughnuts at school but I do not think you can eat this resilience doughnut so it does not sound like it is worth much. Can I get a report on how many schools are using the resilience doughnut from the Open House human condition guru and how much money we are spending on it and what the evidence base is and the evaluations and so forth?

Mr SCOTT: We will try and get that information for you, Chair, yes.

The CHAIR: Fantastic. That is very good. That is very good indeed. I was going to start up with Mr Martin, who I always feel is vastly underutilised—

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Mr SCOTT: Yes, indeed. Hear, hear!

The CHAIR: —by this Committee. I hear he is doing great work around the traps, but I might save that for my next session given I have only got 20 seconds to go.

Mr SCOTT: Chair, I have some further questions. Before the session concludes, there are some issues raised this morning that I have additional information on. I would appreciate to be able to put those—

The CHAIR: Yes, we will do that at the end. Thanks, Mr Scott.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Manning, can I ask you about the Newcastle Education Precinct? Is there a final business case for that project?

Mr MANNING: I think the commitment was to produce one; I am just trying to see whether it is completed or not. I think that was a question on notice. I do not think it is finished yet, but it is on track to be completed.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: What is the status of the business case? Is it being prepared?

Mr MANNING: It is still being prepared, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you clarify whether the initial project proposal included a new primary school?

Mr MANNING: The original proposal was for us to look at planning for a new primary school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In the current iteration of the proposal, is there a new primary school proposed?

Mr MANNING: It is one of the options under consideration, but we are working our way through where we think we finally need to land in terms of the timing of when that school might be needed.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Has the proposal gone to the Minister?

Mr MANNING: Not that I would be aware of. I need to come back to you on that one. Certainly the business case is in production. We are working our way through the finalisation of the options. We may well have provided a briefing to the Minister in terms of the progress on it. I need to come back in terms of whether we have done so.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So you have not yet provided a briefing to the Minister on this proposal?

Mr MANNING: Like I say, I need to be absolutely certain so I will come back to you in terms of that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there not a briefing provided to the Minister that makes a recommendation against inclusion of a new primary school?

Mr MANNING: Certainly one of the options that we are working through is that there is not demand at this time. We might configure a master planning process to enable a primary school to be inserted at a later date, either in line with the demographics that we are projecting or if the demographics were to change—then we can respond to a need within the existing high school site. I believe that is absolutely one of the options that is under consideration.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So you are saying there is still an option to include a primary school on the site.

Mr MANNING: Yes, absolutely. There is certainly a master plan for a primary school on the existing site. The issue is whether we think the demographics are such that there is a need to actually build it just at the moment.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In this briefing that was provided under a call for papers that suggests that option five is the preferred option, which does not include a primary school, is that now incorrect? That position has changed.

Mr MANNING: No, the final business case has yet to be produced. I will get to see that as and when it has been produced.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Why is there a change in the proposal?

Mr MANNING: I did not suggest there was a change, just that the business case has not been finalised. As and when it is finalised, I will know what the actual—

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But you are preparing a business case premised on the option five proposal that is contained in the briefing of 13 November 2020.

Mr MANNING: No, the business case looks at all of the options and makes a recommendation around which one is the preferred option to work its way through. The business case has not been finalised yet. It is yet to come to me to sign off, at which point I will know what the final recommendation is.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So you have not made the recommendation to the Minister that option five be the preferred option.

Mr MANNING: As I said, I will need to check the briefings that have been made to the Minister but the business case is yet to be finalised.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: When is this project likely to commence? What is the expectation? Do you have an expected date?

Mr MANNING: I do not know. The business case would be produced and then would be available for consideration by Government in terms of whether it wants to proceed.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Okay, thank you. Can I ask you about Engadine High School? You are building a school hall there, is that correct?

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Was there a school hall on the site before that project was initiated?

Mr MANNING: I could not say off the top of my head, but possibly.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you able to check? Are you in a position to clarify that now?

Mr MANNING: No, I am not in a position to clarify that now.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Right, okay. You can perhaps confirm that on notice. Is it correct that the existing hall on the site complied with the size requirements under the Education Facilities Standards and Guidelines?

Mr MANNING: I can take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You can take that on notice.

Mr MANNING: I think it is worthy of note from the halls program that there are lots of reasons why a school would need a hall, not least to support specific curriculum elements such as performance and a whole range of others. In the past, we have had existing halls that we have looked at to be upgraded to provide that function where the structure does not lend itself to the lighting, sounds and air-conditioning systems that would need to be installed as part of that. As a consequence of that we have actually built an additional hall, which is cheaper than knocking over the existing one in order to rebuild it to provide us with that capacity. We have also had situations where the floor structure of the hall would support a basketball game but would not support banked seating or anything else that, again, goes with a performance space.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it correct, Mr Manning, that you recommended against the inclusion of the hall proposal for Engadine High School under the school halls program?

Mr MANNING: I would need to take that on notice in terms of the documentation you have there.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Okay, thank you. Can I ask you about the planning around Wentworth Point Public School? How many demountables are currently at Wentworth Point Public School?

Mr MANNING: I could not tell you off the top of my head.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You do not have that information in front of you?

Mr MANNING: No, not in front of me right now.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am advised that there are six demountables on the site. That school was only opened in 2018 and it is a fairly small site already. How is it that it has that many demountables? What went wrong in terms of the planning for that school that we are in a situation now, after it opened in 2018, where there are six demountables on that site?

Mr MANNING: I do not think we would describe it as anything going wrong. My understanding of the Wentworth Point Public School was that it was designed and planned to have expansion capability. What was

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rolled out was stage one, which we delivered in our first years. But there is a stage two project that is able to be delivered to increase the capacity of that school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: A stage two project that would involve permanent buildings.

Mr MANNING: Yes.

Mr SCOTT: And there is a certain logic to that. There is no absolute precision that a school will be opened and will be filled to capacity. I think it makes sense that a school will be filled and then, particularly if additional supply comes into it and there is a sense that that is permanent, a stage two will be developed and the demountables will go and the permanent classrooms will arrive. That is the feasibility we are looking at as far as Wentworth Point is concerned.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It now has 568 students. I think it was planned for around 400-odd students initially. Are you saying that you were anticipating that number in terms of the likely enrolments in that school or is that something that was not anticipated? The development that has occurred in Wentworth Point is considerable but by the time the school was constructed most of the development would have been close to completion. You would have known the expected population and the likely demand. There are clearly some problems in terms of forward planning if you are not building the hard infrastructure necessary to accommodate the population that is likely to flow into that school.

Mr MANNING: The school was always designed to have a second stage that would add capacity as and when we needed it. That was always the plan.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: When you say it is designed to have a second stage, you are intentionally planning a school where you know there is likely to be significantly more demand than the hard infrastructure can accommodate. You are intentionally planning to put demountables in there so that you can then phase in further hard infrastructure at a later stage.

Mr SCOTT: There are a few issues on that. We have not really hammered out the demountable question today as we have here in the past, but let us be clear. Every one of those demountables is air conditioned. They are good learning spaces and teachers are happy with them.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Scott, I have limited time.

Mr SCOTT: Can you see the scenario, though? If we had built a 1,000-student school at Wentworth Point and there were only 560 students in it, you would have said that we had oversupplied the capacity there.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But that is clearly not the problem in the current planning system that is operating in New South Wales.

Mr SCOTT: We are saying it is not the least bit untoward to say, as we look at population growth and movement to the best of our ability, we think we will be able to best deliver this in two tranches. If we had delivered it all at once, there may not be the demand there. If we deliver it in its two stages, that will mean—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But you consistently get it wrong, Mr Scott.

The CHAIR: Can I just intervene at that point? The Committee is of a mind to go through to 5.30 p.m. if that is okay with the officials.

Mr SCOTT: Nowhere to go, Mr Chair. Nowhere we would rather be.

The CHAIR: We have you trapped. Being mindful of that, Wes Fang and others have said a five-minute convenience break at this time would be appropriate, after which Labor comes back with 10 minutes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I finish my questioning and then break?

The CHAIR: Okay. Yes, you can if that is convenient.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Manning, was the community ever told that this was proposed to be a two-stage approach in terms of the infrastructure at Wentworth Point?

Mr MANNING: The planning for Wentworth Point was done before School Infrastructure existed. It was effectively in construction when we started. But, certainly, for any of the schools that we have been involved in we have talked about subsequent stages as part of the development. I would have hoped they would have been told that, but it was certainly something we were aware of. It was in the design of the school and it was in our master plan in terms of the site use. So we were certainly aware of it, absolutely.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You were aware of it but the community was not. You cannot be sure that the community was aware of it.

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Mr MANNING: We were not there when the community was consulted as part of the project. It was in construction when we started.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask you about the issue around the enrolment cap and enrolment capacity? So the enrolment cap is the maximum number before you are required to decline out-of-area applications. Is that a correct characterisation of the enrolment cap?

Mr DIZDAR: I am happy to answer that, Mr D'Adam. We went to some of this in the estimates hearing last year as well. We have applied since last year, consistently across the State, an understanding of what a school's enrolment cap is. It is the maximum number of students that a school should have before they refuse out-of-area applications.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So can you provide on notice, if you do not have this information readily available, what the enrolment cap is for Wentworth Point and what the enrolment capacity is for Wentworth Point Public School?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we can take that on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Could I ask about the proposed Sydney Olympic Park high school?

The CHAIR: Hang on. We will take a break at that point and come back.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I thought I was going to get to the end of my questioning.

The CHAIR: No. You have moved on to a different school.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We will recommence.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Manning, can I ask you about the siting of Sydney Olympic Park high school? The site that has been selected is next to Wentworth Point Public School, is that right?

Mr MANNING: It is.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: When you made the determination about siting the high school, was that informed by proposed boundaries for the drawing area for that high school? When you site the high school, is there some notion that this high school will have a drawing area that is known? Obviously the boundaries of the high school drawing area will impact on the enrolments, won't it?

Mr MANNING: It is absolutely one of the considerations as part of the process of site identification, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So is Carr Street in the drawing area for the proposed Sydney Olympic Park high school?

Mr MANNING: I do not have that information to hand.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You can take that on notice.

Mr MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is Lidcombe within the boundaries for the drawing area?

Mr MANNING: Again, I do not have the catchment boundary for that school here.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am asking these questions because these are obviously sites where we are anticipating further development, further population growth and further rise in population density, but you have chosen to site the high school at the point furthest away from where the growth is. I am wondering why you made that decision. Secondly, it is also sited in a place that is actually quite poorly serviced by public transport. If you are expecting children from those locations—and presumably Newington is a suburb that will feed into that high school as well—then for all of those likely sources of enrolments it is quite difficult for them to get to the location that you have chosen for the site. I want to understand why, or perhaps you can explain the rationale that was applied in terms of determining the site?

Mr MANNING: I do not have the detailed analysis with me as to the site selection, but certainly—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is that documented?

Mr MANNING: It will be documented over a period of time because, as you would be aware—

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you provide to the Committee the documentation around that decision?

Mr MANNING: Yes, we can do that. But I think, importantly, the work we do around the catchment areas it serves, how that works and whether there might be other projects in the future in terms of capacities for high schools that are required on the way through—we do not plan schools in isolation; we plan them as part of our school community groups. If we were to place a school in an eccentric spot from a catchment perspective, that would flow through into where other demand may flow too. So that would be part of that consideration.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is fine.

Mr SCOTT: Clearly this—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have limited time, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: —piece of infrastructure will mean that other boundaries will change over time.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, of course.

Mr SCOTT: In a way these boundaries are not locked forever, but if you do put a new, big piece of infrastructure in place then the boundaries of a number of schools in the vicinity will change.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: This is going to be a high-rise high school, is that right?

Mr MANNING: It will be multi-level, yes. I would not necessarily describe it has high-rise.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How many levels?

Mr MANNING: It could be six or seven levels.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask Ms O'Brien to come to the table? Ms O'Brien, last year in estimates I asked you about the work health and safety arrangements that apply in schools in terms of the legal framework in terms of ensuring the health and safety of children. The answer that was returned was that the Work Health and Safety Act is the primary provision that applies to children attending schools. Obviously schools are unique in terms of being a workplace where you have the majority of people on the site who are neither workers, nor volunteers and nor visitors. I wanted to ask about how you apply the principles of consultation in relation to the work health and safety requirements for children. Are children consulted in relation to their safety needs and the safety arrangements in the school? Is that incorporated within the consultation structure that applies under the Work Health and Safety Act?

Ms O'BRIEN: So there are two parts to this answer. The first one is: You are right in saying that the constructs of those on our sites are not dissimilar to a train station et cetera. You know, it is not your standard workplace. However, our policies and procedures, aligned in under the legislation, are really clear that all of our operational practices take into account the safety responsibilities for staff, students and visitors. So from a policy and operational perspective, that is how it aligns back up under the legislation. In response to the consultation arrangements, the department has formal consultation arrangements in place, which are published and adopted across the whole department.

That is primarily, under the legislation, around our obligations for our deemed employees, who of course are not students. So the formal arrangements for consultation are for our workers. However, the department has a variety of consultation mechanisms available for the safety and wellbeing needs of children through the various operational policies and procedures that are within the department, which by default role back up under our safety management system. I know that sounds a bit ambiguous, my answer, but the bottom line is: Formally, under the legislation the answer is no; operationally, aligned in under our policy and operational practice, the answer is yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There are quite strong consultation obligations in relation to workers. Is it fair to say then that children have less of a say in terms of the safety in schools than the workers or the volunteers for that matter who should also potentially be consulted under the work health and safety arrangements?

Ms O'BRIEN: My answer to that, after 18 years service in the department, would be no. Primarily, from the point of view that the vast majority of school-related activities that involve safe working or safe operating procedures per se, they are really all about the kids and the students—so school excursions, industrial arts rooms et cetera. The way in which those classes are planned through classroom teachers, and with their capability to actually make those lessons engaging, by default the kids are very much engaged in understanding how they can safely operate in delivery within those activities. I think, from a technical perspective, on paper it might feel like you are suggesting, but in actual practice every day I think quite strongly that the children are heavily involved in the planning of those activities.

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The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Scott, you have been very supportive of student voice. What do you say about how student voice can be given meaning in terms of the safety of children in schools?

Mr SCOTT: Nothing is more important to us than the safety, health and wellbeing of students in our schools, of course. Student voice—as you identified, the Minister has just set up the student voice council, reporting through to her. I had the privilege of meeting with them. But I think Ms O'Brien covers it well. Look, we have 2,200 schools. They are vastly different. I am not sure we are about to put kindergarten children on work health and safety committees here, but safety is talked about regularly and often in our schools. Keeping our children safe—what students need to do, what parents need to do, what needs to happen in the environment of the school and in the environment around the school, particularly with traffic—that is important.

Similarly, a more sophisticated and engaged conversation for high school students—but I am not sure that some of this original legislation that you are referencing was more drawn up with workplaces in mind, rather than students who are attending a school. Students are a bit like customers in the school—like a customer that is in Woolworths, if you like. I think we try and manage the complexity of that well and our safety record overwhelmingly with children in our schools is effective.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Scott, with the indulgence of the Chair, if a worker fears for their safety they have got formal structures that they can go through, and legislated and legal rights to gain assurance of their safety. Children do not have those rights, do they, under the current framework that you have articulated?

Ms O'BRIEN: Well, they do not independently. But, yes, by way—they are almost more strongly represented through the legislation because the absolute obligation is on those that are operating or engaging those children in activities. We still have our obligations extend to make sure that we have that duty of care and that surety around the safety and protection of the young people in our care whilst engaging in those activities. So the legislation is very much—there are broad pieces of legislation that are actually very rigorous around what our obligations are to protect and support young people while they are engaging in school activities.

Mr SCOTT: I would simply add to that: When it comes to the safety of children, work health and safety legislation is one piece of legislation that we operate under—but only one piece of legislation that we operate under. There are a whole series of duties of care and responsibility around assault and other matters that, of course, our schools are conversant with, and a range of responsibilities apply with that as well. It is an interesting line of discussion, but I do not want it to be thought that our only obligations to students in engaging with students and education of students around these matters go to work health and safety.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Just on that issue, you touch on assault; that is a good example. If a worker is assaulted in a school, they have got a logical course of action. If a child is assaulted, that is less clear, is it not, in terms of remedy?

Mr SCOTT: Well, except for the responsibilities that exist under—

Ms O'BRIEN: The Crimes Act.

Mr SCOTT: —the Crimes Act, in particular. There are other remedies that have been demonstrated to be available, as well.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is actually a useful transition point.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sure. Over to you, David.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We might start by just getting some understanding of how many of the 2,200 schools have work health and safety committees established and how many of them actually have elected health and safety representatives [HSRs]?

Mr SCOTT: We can take that on notice.

Ms O'BRIEN: Yes, we can take that on notice, but it is important to understand that the consultation arrangements have multiple mechanisms because of the variance within our schools. We have one- or two-schoolteacher sized schools, all the way up to our very large schools. Some schools have both. Some schools will have a committee and a HSR. Some schools will have informal arrangements in place, given the size of the school—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have asked for how many, but if you want to give me granular—

Ms O'BRIEN: Do you only want them for HSRs and committees?

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, WHS committees and HSRs is what I was asking. If you want to give me some other granular detail that puts it in context, I am happy for that, too, Ms O'Brien.

Ms O'BRIEN: Sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In terms of abuse complaints made by or on behalf of students, do you have any data on how many of those were made in 2020, 2019 and 2018?

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In doing that, do you have a database that tracks the number of them, what the relevant details are and what the outcomes are? Do you track that on a database?

Mr SCOTT: Let me see what we can draw out for you there, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright. I suppose one of the particular concerns is about children with a disability. That has obviously been a focus of substantial community disquiet. How many abuse complaints were made by children with a disability last year?

Mr SCOTT: Okay, I will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright. Again, could you provide the details on the outcomes of those complaints?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Given that the department manages these complaints internally, effectively under delegation from the Ombudsman in most cases, how many matters have been referred to the Ombudsman and dealt with by the Ombudsman as against the department?

Mr SCOTT: Can I just say: We can find that breakdown. But, of course, if in fact we have any evidence of reports of, say, child sexual assault, they are first and foremost dealt with by the police. The police are our primary point of engagement, first of all. The department or the Ombudsman would only become involved with those matters at the cessation of the police investigation. It is not a case of, "We just manage that ourselves or pass it over to the Ombudsman." The police fundamentally are engaged in that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You obviously manage it, as well, if there is a—

Mr SCOTT: But when it comes to, say, an investigation—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Let me finish. I am not asking about an investigation.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: Mr Shoebridge actually interrupted Mr Scott. It is actually Mr Scott who should be saying, "Allow me to finish, please." Chair, I would ask you to ask Mr Shoebridge to let Mr Scott finish his answer first.

The CHAIR: Mr Scott?

Mr SCOTT: Of course, there will be issues of investigation that need to take place via the department. We have an internal process for that, which we have talked about here extensively. The Ombudsman can be involved in those matters too, but first and foremost comes the police investigation. Often our investigations will not be undertaken until the police investigative work is done.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No. But you would, I assume, take protective actions once a child sexual abuse matter had been referred to police.

Mr SCOTT: Yes. There will be steps to take, but often the investigation around it will take place after the police—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I accept that you do not want to prejudice the police investigation.

Mr SCOTT: Absolutely not, no.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understand that. How many complaints of abuse of a student were referred to the police in those last three calendar years? If you could also break that down in relation to children with a disability—

Mr SCOTT: We will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You must have come armed with some figures on exclusion numbers, given how controversial that has been.

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Mr SCOTT: On suspension policy, in particular? Is that what you are referring to?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am talking here about exclusions from class. So, not necessarily suspensions—exclusions from class. What were the number of exclusions in the last two years, if you have got them?

Ms HARRISSON: Mr Dizdar or Ms Nixon might be able to give you some detail about the practice within schools around this. The nature of what is recorded centrally would be suspension data. More temporary exclusions from class—a 10-minute "everybody take a break and calm down" type of exclusion—would not be recorded centrally.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So, you are not tracking the number of times, for example, children with a disability have been excluded from class, Mr Dizdar?

Mr DIZDAR: I am just thinking operationally. I do not believe we track that centrally and collect that information from schools, Mr Shoebridge, but schools will have their own monitoring systems in place.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How do you know whether or not exclusion practices are being properly exercised, particularly given some of the most vulnerable groups—First Nations kids, kids with a disability—are likely prejudiced by exclusions? How do you know schools are doing the right thing?

Mr DIZDAR: We give them guidance around our entire disability strategy, and that goes to how to most effectively provide an inclusive teaching and learning environment. So it would be through that mechanism that we support our schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can they track the data in Scout?

Ms HARRISSON: Suspension data?

Mr DIZDAR: What are you referring to, Ms Houssos?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The exclusions from class.

Mr SCOTT: I think part of the difficulty is the threshold which we are identifying here. If a child is put out of the classroom for 10 minutes because they are being disruptive and they are called back in, I am not sure we are going to be providing centralised record keeping on that. What we do have in Scout, which we are happy to talk to today, is the suspension data. The suspension data identifies exactly what you have said, Mr Shoebridge—that students with a disability are more likely on a per capita basis to be suspended, and so are Aboriginal students. That is one of the reasons—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am going to get to the suspension data next.

Mr SCOTT: Okay.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In terms of suspension data, what did last year's show in terms of the trends for the number of suspensions against kids with disability and, separately, First Nations kids?

Ms HARRISSON: Ms Owen will have some of that data for you.

Ms OWEN: The latest data I have got is 2019; I do not have 2020 data just yet. In 2019 there were 40,000 suspensions, which is roughly 5 per cent of our school population. As Mr Scott has said, we recognise those suspension numbers are too high. We are working on that, as you know, and they are disproportionate for a number of student cohorts. So, for example, coming to your point, students with a disability are twice as likely to be suspended as students with non-disability. Students from Aboriginal communities are four times more likely to be suspended than a non-Aboriginal student, which is why we are working on the suspension policy as we speak.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright, so is it true you have not come to this March 2020-21 estimates hearing prepared with the number of suspensions from calendar year 2020?

Ms OWEN: I do not have that data.

Mr SCOTT: We have the latest data on the public record here.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But I am asking you about—

Mr SCOTT: Well, if you are asking, we can try to get 2020 figures for you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —the suspensions in 2020.

Mr SCOTT: The figures will be distorted by a number of factors in 2020.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I accept that.

Mr SCOTT: Firstly, students having been away from school for a period of time. I think it is also fair to say our teachers identified a level of disruption that arrived with the return of students to school after the disruption of the year, but we can try to find 2020 figures for you. But we are happy to talk about the trendline of this data.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: And then could we have it broken down into short and long suspensions?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If we could have some actual numbers about students with disability and First Nations students as opposed to the proportional rate.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we are happy to provide that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I ask for a further breakdown on notice, David? Is that alright?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, go.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can we get it by kindergarten—so early stage 1, stage 1, stage 2, the various different stages?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And if we can get a breakdown of whether those students were suspended for under 50 days, 51 to 100 days and whatever the longest suspension was?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you.

Mr DIZDAR: There is not a 50-day suspension.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, you are talking about an aggregate, though, are you? I mean clearly—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There are two categories—short and long.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but even under the original policy at the moment, the longest suspension is 20 days.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is not 50.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand.

Mr SCOTT: You are talking about an aggregate per student. So, if a student was suspended three times on a long suspension, what does that add up to?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you have that cumulative data.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Cumulative data, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think that would be useful.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And can you give us a breakdown—boys and girls please?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: By gender. Do you track how many students with a disability were, first, initially to be enrolled in a mainstream school—a comprehensive school—but then were ultimately enrolled in a SSP? Do you track that kind of data?

Mr SCOTT: Let us see what we can find on that, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was asking earlier about inclusive education and how the overall school policy—in this case the school success policy—was dealing with inclusive education. I was repeatedly referred to practices in SSPs. Does the department understand that referring or sending children with a disability and referring disability questions solely to SSPs is 100 per cent contradictory to the whole concept of an inclusive education for kids with disability?

Mr SCOTT: I fear in answering that question—

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is that understood?

Mr SCOTT: Well, I fear you did not understand the answer that was provided by us.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I fear I did not.

Mr SCOTT: The answer that was provided by us is that, overwhelmingly, students with disability are found in mainstream settings in New South Wales education.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I understood that.

Mr SCOTT: And so some key metrics of their level of achievement and engagement in schooling will be issues like attendance and engagement and wellbeing—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I think, Mr Scott, if you are asking me about what I understood and what I did not understand—

Mr SCOTT: —and literacy and numeracy.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What I think you did not understand was how utterly frustrated and angry the inclusive education community is when the School Success Model, which deals with 97 per cent of kids with disability, fails to even reference disability.

Mr SCOTT: We have a clear inclusion—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is where I think we are having a failure to have any kind of meeting of minds on this.

Mr SCOTT: Well, I would refer you to the inclusion statement of the department that has been released by the Minister. It talks about our commitment to inclusion, but I would also say to you very much that the key measures of improvement that are identified in the School Success Model apply to all the students in our schools—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Indifferently as to whether they have a disability or not—

The CHAIR: Sorry, David, we are going to have to—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But that is okay. My frustration is far from resolved. It is not mine; it is the whole sector's.

The CHAIR: Oh well, we have raised it in terms of the Committee recommendation too.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Indeed, we have, Chair.

The CHAIR: We will see what comes back in the audit of those recommendations. So, thank you, David. Mr Martin, how are we going with the reconstruction of the PD courses for the teaching profession?

Mr MARTIN: As you are aware, the Minister announced in the middle of last year that we were to look at the process of accrediting PD courses to have fewer accredited of a higher standard. Later in the year—I have not got the exact dates, but I can provide that on notice—we began the process of disaccrediting, I suppose, all of the existing courses, but providing the three sectors with the capacity and the right to accredit for their own workforces. At the moment we have a survey out with providers. That is a very short survey, but we wish to find out views in relation to our processes of accreditation going forward, and we will have the new process up and running not before the end of this term, but before the end of the first half of the year. We have continued to allow previously accredited providers in the priority areas determined to maintain the courses for the first half of this year so that teachers have enough PD to do to maintain their accreditation.

The CHAIR: Is there any thinking about one of the vexed problems from the old system—that was people getting an accreditation for a certain purpose but then going behind paywalls and private Facebook pages to morph into a very different type of course. I know these are fee-for-service arrangements, but what can we do there to ensure transparency and avoid the problem we had in the past where some of these things are unrecognisable from the accreditation?

Mr MARTIN: We have always done audits over the top of the providers to make sure that they are fulfilling their obligations and requirements in terms of the accreditation they were given. Having said that, the sheer weight and number of the courses meant that our capacity to audit effectively was probably reasonably small. What we have always done, though, is, based on complaints or issues raised by teachers, addressed the complaints, and quite often that has led to our contacting providers to bring down courses or to change the focus or to do what is required of them. In terms of commercial in confidence, many of our providers have extremely valuable product, whether it is some of the literacy or the phonics-based cribs. Their material is behind paywalls

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and it will probably continue to be, but we will have to rely on our capacity to see what is there—so we have the right to see what is there—to make sure that they are doing the right thing.

The CHAIR: Okay, and for those who do not charge for their service, will you insist that they are publicly transparent?

Mr MARTIN: I think that will depend on whether the courses that they have are under a copyright regime of some sort or intellectual property.

The CHAIR: But you will try to?

Mr MARTIN: Yes, we will have a look at that.

The CHAIR: Okay. Do you look after the selective school qualification test?

Mr MARTIN: No, that is the department.

Mr SCOTT: The department does that.

The CHAIR: The department does that? What are the changes that have been made? I suppose I have always wondered for the kids who cannot afford the private tutoring, why do we not just base the test on the syllabus that everyone undertakes in years 5 and 6?

Mr SCOTT: I can speak to that a bit, Chair, but I think more detail around changes to the test will be released shortly.

Ms HARRISSON: Shortly.

Mr SCOTT: But we are looking to provide a level playing field for students around the selective schools test. You are trying to get discrimination in the results. You are trying to get differentiation in the results.

The CHAIR: Yes, sure.

Mr SCOTT: As a consequence of that, simply reflecting back the syllabus document—many of these children will be performing outstandingly well in the delivery of results based on the syllabus. We need to stretch them a little bit more than that.

The CHAIR: Oh yes, sure, but are we getting closer to basing the test on the syllabus? Because the old test is like an IQ test. I have got to say those private tutoring schools—

Mr SCOTT: Yes, yes.

The CHAIR: —are pretty skilled in teaching the kids the methodology and anticipating what is going to be in the test.

Mr SCOTT: Well, exactly—

The CHAIR: If you can afford that, you do get a pretty big leg-up. I have got to say in south-west Sydney—it is a little bit dated in my family circumstance—the word out was, quite legitimately, unless you do the private tutoring you ain't getting in unless your kid is Einstein.

Mr SCOTT: This is part of the concern. I think when we kicked this off a couple of years ago, I spoke to the gifted and talented global conference, which is held at the University of New South Wales—

The CHAIR: Yes, I remember that.

Mr SCOTT: —where I expressed concern about that. Also, I think our data showed we were concerned—if you look back at the history of selective schools, and I know it can generate debate in some circles, there was always a sense that selective schools provided a great opportunity for students, particularly from low socio-economic background. What we could see over time was fewer and fewer students from the bottom socio-economic status quartile doing the entrance test. We think that reflects, again, exactly what you are suggesting, Chair—the fact that you have to pay for the tutoring or the books in order to do it. I think the new test is designed to not as strongly reward that style of preparation; that there should be more in the test that will be a little less predictable, perhaps, than the test has been in the past—an opportunity to try to ascertain higher order thinking skills and capacity that students have and to try to get a good mix of students for the selective schools.

The CHAIR: Okay, well that sounds a step in the right direction. When is that announcement expected?

Mr SCOTT: Shortly.

Ms HARRISSON: The selective test will take place on 11 March, so the new test will roll through.

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The CHAIR: Okay, so very shortly.

Ms HARRISSON: And we piloted—

The CHAIR: The 11 March test is a new test?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, 11 March is the coming test under the old regime.

The CHAIR: Oh, 11 March is the last test under the old—

Ms HARRISSON: No, it is the new test.

The CHAIR: In eight days time?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes.

Mr SCOTT: In a sense, it will be quite interesting, I think, to see the results of this. We have indicated for a long time that the new test is coming. We have not provided the full and complete details that make up that new test.

The CHAIR: No, of course not.

Mr SCOTT: There will be benefits and insights that we draw from that.

The CHAIR: Okay. But your explicit objective is to level the playing field to make sure that a bright student without the resources, the money or the spare parent to drive them to tutoring after school is not disadvantaged?

Mr SCOTT: Well, we have indicated that has been the aspiration of some of the changes.

Ms HARRISSON: That was a key part of the procurement process for the new test—was to look for exactly the features that you have described.

The CHAIR: Okay, great; excellent. Back to Mr Martin: Have the HSC marking notes for this year deleted the reference to cultural appropriation?

Mr MARTIN: The marking notes have taken that out and clarified what they meant by cultural appropriation, which was stereotypes and clichés that students should avoid if they want to achieve the best marks.

The CHAIR: The Advanced English essays are de-identified, are they not?

Mr MARTIN: That is right.

The CHAIR: So it was always a silly idea that any marker could identify the culture of the writer to then say, "You have appropriated someone else's culture."

Mr MARTIN: The intent of that phrase, "cultural appropriation", was to try to provide advice to teachers that students did not write stories or essays or provide cultural stereotypes that were simplistic and clichéd in their construction. They used that phrase, "cultural appropriation". I think it was unwise and, as I said just a second ago, it is no longer there.

The CHAIR: No, that is perfectly right. Those students have to avoid those clichés like the plague. Coming to the actual HSC marking—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Which brings us to Dr Seuss.

The CHAIR: Well, someone laughed—that is good. A little bit of entertainment at the end of a long day to ramp it up. On actual HSC marking, is NESA happy with the quality control, particularly in the circumstances where two markers on an essay diverge widely in the marks that are granted and there is a system in place where if it is a differential more than five marks out of 20, then it goes to an arbitration?

Mr MARTIN: That is correct.

The CHAIR: What is the quality control to make sure that they do not try to compress the number less than five just to avoid the extra process?

Mr MARTIN: A senior marker would oversight both of the marks of the two separate markers and would determine on what criteria those two separate markers—what the basis of their judgement was—then, using the established criteria in the marking process, would come to the correct answer, not to a moderated answer.

Mr SCOTT: But it is done separately, though.

Mr MARTIN: Yes.

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Mr SCOTT: They are not sitting side by side.

The CHAIR: Can I just give you a story—I believe truthful—from a mate of mine who is an HSC marker? It is funny at one level but sad and wrong at another. They had to mark a modern history essay on the rise of Hitler. A student put in an essay—apparently quite a good essay—on Rasputin and his role in Russia. My associate gave this zero out of 20 for the reason that it was the wrong despot in the wrong country in the wrong decade.

Mr MARTIN: Sure.

The CHAIR: Fair enough. But another marker said, "Well, it is actually quite good essay. It is on the wrong subject but I am going to give it 12." The way they got out of it was that the bloke in the middle said, "Look, if you can just compress that differential to under five then we do not have to go through the arbitration process." So my mate felt coerced into upping his mark from zero to six and the other bloke went down from 12 to 10—a difference of just four. Mr Rasputin-Writer got eight out of 20, which is pretty crook, is it not? He got 40 per cent for writing about the wrong despot in the wrong country in the wrong decade.

Mr MARTIN: I will take that as an example of something I have no personal knowledge of. I will have a look at that. But that sounds to me, on the basis of—

The CHAIR: What are we testing? We are testing the ability to write an essay about Hitler on the subject of the rise of Hitler, not bloody Rasputin. That is what we are testing.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, Rasputin was hard to kill so it is only reasonable that the essay is equally hard to kill.

The CHAIR: It just seems wrong.

Mr MARTIN: Yes, it seems wrong and I will make sure that I have a look at that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Martin, I wanted to ask you about an issue that gets canvassed in one of the recommendations from the Gallop report around the accreditation of casual teachers—the initial teacher accreditation to become proficient. Are you aware of that recommendation?

Mr MARTIN: Yes, I am.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Firstly, do you think this is a genuine problem?

Mr MARTIN: It is more difficult for casual teachers to be accredited at the proficient level than it is for someone in permanent employment—yes, that is certainly the case. We have a range of policies in place to assist casual teachers, given that most teachers when they emerge from university, in fact, their first work is on a casual basis. It is easier for teachers who do blocks than it is for day-to-day casuals but we give plenty of advice not only to teachers but also to the schools where they will be employed to assist them in the process. But, yes, it is the case that it is harder for a casual teacher working across many, many schools than it is for someone doing blocks.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The vast majority of new entrants into the system come in as casuals, do they not? So this is not actually just a problem for a small group of people, it is the majority of new teachers entering the system—is that not the case?

Mr MARTIN: It depends on the nature of the casual work. The majority of casual teachers start off with day-to-day but they end up with large blocks of work. So when they are doing those large blocks of work they are in the same position as a permanent teacher would be. But a day-to-day casual working across five different schools on five different days would have to work a little bit harder at making sure that they gathered their evidence for proficient accreditation, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you think that also highlights a power imbalance? Does it not give a sort of significant power to a principal in terms of—I mean, there is a real asymmetry, is there not, if you are a new teacher, you have entered a school as a casual and you are reliant on the principal to sign off on your accreditation? It is not clear that that obligation really rests with a specific principal in a specific school. So if you are dependent on a principal for ongoing work—what do you say about that issue around the power imbalance?

Mr MARTIN: Well, the power imbalance exists for any supervisory or principal in relation to signing off on the work of a teacher at a school in their first years of teaching. But in terms of a casual teacher with less permanent employment or less regular employment, that is potentially the case. But we give a lot of advice to principals. We have meetings with principals, we provide advice specifically through the department, the independents and the Catholics, about being open to the casuals that knock on their door to support and assist them in becoming proficient teachers, because we all know that those are the teachers of the future and the ones

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who will get significant employment long term, often in those same schools where they are casuals. So, yes, there is to some degree but it is the nature of the employment process.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask about the professional development changes that you spoke of earlier? I am aware that there has been a practice where schools are able to send their executive to an accredited training course and then those executives will come back and deliver, effectively, similar content to the remainder of the staff. That is not going to be possible under the proposed arrangements that you are talking about, is it?

Mr MARTIN: It will depend on whether the training of the staff from the executive was registered with us as PD. If the department call that part of their PD program—their school-based PD—then it is potentially the case that that "train the trainer" model could be quite used.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But that would require a separate accreditation of that course by the department, would it not? They would then have to seek accreditation for the delivery of that content.

Mr MARTIN: The department have blanket accreditation for their own PD. They can make those decisions themselves.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So any professional development that is delivered by the department counts towards the—

Mr MARTIN: In the priority areas, yes, that is the case. There are 50 hours of PD that teachers can count towards their own 100 hours that is identified by themselves. It is not necessarily of the priority areas. That PD that you have just referred to could still count but it would be outside of the registered hours.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Teacher identified. On that question of teacher identified, there are going to be fewer providers, presumably, fewer courses in a narrower range. How are you going to guarantee that all teachers are going to be able to achieve that 50 hours of teacher-identified accreditation? How can you guarantee that the supply of courses is going to be sufficient to meet the demand?

Mr MARTIN: The courses do not need to be registered in order to be teacher identified. The bulk of courses that are out there that teachers make decisions about themselves will still exist.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So it does not have to be in the priority areas, the teacher identified?

Mr MARTIN: No, that is right. There are lots of PD that teachers would choose for their own personal improvement—it might be on IT, it might be in particular areas of specific personal need that they can still identify and source and count as their identified hours. The registered hours—the three sectors provide enormous amounts of professional learning as registered PD, particularly going forward over the next three years with the curriculum rolling out.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So is there going to be additional "in work time" professional learning provided around this? I think there was some reference to this, so I just seek some clarification around that.

Mr SCOTT: Around the curriculum review rollout?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Certainly just around these 50 hours of NESA-accredited courses. Given the change and the fact that it is now within a more narrow framework, is that going to be accommodated with greater allowance within work time for that professional development to be undertaken?

Mr SCOTT: I think there is a trading that has taken place here. Our teachers already have to do the professional development, so it is not additional professional development that is required; it is targeted professional development. What we are saying is in the hours of professional development you are already doing, 50 hours have to be based around these priority areas that have been identified for the benefit of the system, that have been identified for the Minister. So it is not as though this is a new burden, if you like—professional development. I do not think our staff think that professional development is a burden, but it is not as though this is a new 50-hour additional requirement on top of all the other professional development they are doing; it will replace a lot of the other professional development they are doing.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Scott, has the staffing methodology review been completed?

Ms HARRISSON: The staffing methodology review is an ongoing piece of work to look at how we staff our schools. So it is an ongoing piece of work.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Does it produce reports or is it just like an agenda item that you talk about?

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Ms HARRISSON: It is a model that allows us to test assumptions about different options for staffing our schools over time as we have a budget available to make decisions around how we might make changes to that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide me on notice how that is reported to the Minister?

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just quickly ask about L3? How many schools are still using L3?

Ms HARRISSON: I can take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And if you can tell me how many schools still use L3 after the Government announced that it will no longer support professional development?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes, we can come back to you with that information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And what action you are now taking to ensure that it is no longer taught in New South Wales schools.

Ms HARRISSON: I am very happy to come back to you with that information and some further context around the specifics of what L3 is and how it operates in our school system, or has operated—it does not operate now.

The CHAIR: Did it not have a really negative review?

Ms HARRISSON: Yes. The evaluation has shown it has not been effective.

The CHAIR: So do we not just chuck it straight out?

Ms HARRISSON: And that is what we have sought to do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Moving on, I think this might be for you, Ms Owen. I am not going to speak about the specific case but I am going to ask you is it department policy that there is an immediate shutdown and review of operational policies when a death or a serious incident occurs in an early childhood learning centre, when it is suspicious or the provider may be culpable?

Ms OWEN: Let me go to the first part of that question. Any incident that is reported to us in an early childhood setting, obviously the first and most important thing is to make sure the wellbeing and safety of children is our priority. In the instance that you suggest, two things happen. We have a choice of whether to suspend a service immediately. If we have a serious incident reported or if we find a breach, for example, on a routine visit, an option to us is to immediately suspend. We would do that mostly in the case of where we see an immediate risk to the health or wellbeing of the children in the service there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Has that ever been done?

Ms OWEN: Yes, indeed, absolutely. It happens all the time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide me on notice how many of those have been done in the last three calendar years?

Ms OWEN: How many suspensions?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many suspensions have been done in the last three calendar years.

Ms OWEN: I have the information in front of me here. We had 14 services actually cancelled and one suspended. A suspension can end up in a cancellation.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And how many cancellations?

Ms OWEN: Fourteen.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And that is in the last 12 months?

Ms OWEN: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What about the 12 months prior to that?

Ms OWEN: I will have to take that one on notice.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The 12 months prior to that would be helpful as well.

Ms OWEN: I do not think I have answered the second part of your question. That was in relation to sort of serious incidents where I think you also raised the incident of a child death. Obviously, as we talked about previously, the police would be involved first and foremost; so we work hand-in-hand with the police where there has been a serious incident related to a child death, which, of course, is a tragedy in any circumstance.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely.

Ms OWEN: The same approach applies that we can suspend the case, but mostly we would want to go hand-in-hand with an investigation into the cause of that death and then take appropriate action, which could be either about the service or about the educator who was supervising that service.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How is it that a service can improve its rating even when an investigation is being undertaken?

Ms OWEN: Again, not going into specifics, but a service can be improving its services while we are investigating any kind of breach or any kind of incident. So it is possible where we, for example, come across a serious incident, we identify with the service provider any breaches and we work alongside that provider to rectify those breaches and as we go through our assessments of the risk we look at both the current risks or quality of their service and any past history which might indicate a potential risk to children.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But you would understand that a serious incident or, shockingly, a death of a child in an early childhood learning setting, most parents would be most concerned by that and that there is just no way that they could comprehend that, for example, a childcare service could then improve their rating to the highest quality rating when recently a child either suffered serious injury or, God forbid, death at that centre. That just does not pass community standards. Do you understand that, Ms Owen?

Ms OWEN: I understand where you are coming from. It really does depend on the circumstances of that child's death, and we investigate very seriously—we do take very seriously all causes of child deaths in the early childhood sector, but not all child deaths are the deliberate cause of any kind of breach in the service.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But the question is, until you get an answer about it, until you know the answer about the child death, how could you give an increased rating?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am not saying that you downgrade them. I am not even saying that you issue a suspension, although there is a big part of me that would like you to do that. Would you not just press pause? Would you not just say, "Look, we are investigating. We are going to look at the whole circumstances and before we improve their rating and tell other parents that it is safe for them to drop their children here, we are going to investigate what happened with the death of a child"?

Ms OWEN: And that is what we do. We look at the two in parallel. We are not looking to reassess services while we are undertaking investigations because, as you say, that does have implications for our view of the quality of the service, but the two can go hand in hand. As you are aware, some of these investigations can take years, in which case we will be assessing service quality during that time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But, Ms Owen, that is not what you do. The question was, why do you not at least pause, freeze, and not increase the rating until such time as the investigation of the child death is concluded? You said that is what you do, but you then said, "But we will also sometimes increase the rating because it sometimes take a long time to get an answer on the child death and other things may happen." You cannot say both those things in the same answer.

Ms OWEN: I think what I am trying to say is that the assessment of a service goes across the National Quality Standard and we undertake regular reviews of every service, looking at all the seven criteria in a National Quality Framework. We do not assess service, particularly at a time when there has been a serious incident, but I am just trying to answer your specific sort of extreme question. This does not happen very frequently, but I know the reason you are asking this question. There can be circumstances in which we review a service against the seven principles of the National Quality Framework and a service is given that particular rating that could be separate from an ongoing investigation.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Owen—and I understand you do not set the policy. I understand the Minister sets the policy—

Ms OWEN: Well, it is a national framework.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, but it is enforced and regulated by the States.

Ms OWEN: Yes, it is.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I say that that is so out of step with community expectations. That there could be a death of a child in an early childhood setting and that that childcare centre could receive an exceeding rating from the New South Wales Government should not be the case.

Mr SCOTT: So you are arguing that there should be—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Until the reasons for the death and the circumstances of the death have been concluded.

The CHAIR: Yes, until the Coroner's findings are known—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Surely.

The CHAIR: —out of respect for the family of the dead child.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Exactly.

The CHAIR: It has set them back on their heels to think that the place where their child died just got upgraded in the ratings. Sensibly, the ratings just need to be suspended.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Surely there is a concept here of a precautionary principle, is there not?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Exactly.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Before you put your child into a care of an institution, if there has been a child die in that institution, you need answers on that before you lift their ratings.

Mr SCOTT: We note those concerns. We take them on notice. I think what Ms Owen has said is there has been a variety of responses to the death of a child. We have hundreds of thousands of children in care. Tragically, in our school settings and in our early childhood settings children will die. What we are saying is that there are a range of responses that take place due to the specific circumstances that take place. If in fact you are saying to us that the regulatory framework that is operating over that particular centre should be entirely suspended, then I note those concerns. What in fact we have been doing, if a decision is made—and we have heard already that services will be suspended. Services will be cancelled.

There will be some circumstances where the next day there is no early childhood setting. But if a decision has been made under the regulatory framework that we have for that centre to keep operating, then what you will see is that that centre is under very close scrutiny of the regulator—clearly very close scrutiny of the regulator, because other children are still attending that centre. If in fact that centre is working closely with the regulator and the regulator is seeing improved standards across a range of criteria under the national guidelines, then as a message to the other parents sending children to that centre, I think what the regulatory framework says is that we know there has been this tragedy in the centre. Every parent knows that and the community knows that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, no, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: Well, I think parents—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am going to stop you there.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How do you know?

Mr SCOTT: Let me finish if I can.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You cannot say that.

Mr SCOTT: Chair, can I finish this? I think it is an important matter.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is a very important matter.

The CHAIR: Yes, please finish but I think you have got to be careful on how this is handled.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, exactly. I think parents will often know that there has been a tragedy in that centre. They need to be reassured that the regulator is working closely with the operator of that centre and if in fact the regulator is seeing improvements across a range of criteria toward the national guidelines that are set, then that is what is being communicated. Now there might well be a view—I understand; I think we are all trying to serve the community well here—if in fact there is a view that says, "No, you should take that centre out of the regulatory system or the reporting system for a period of time whilst all investigations are complete", then I accept that view. But I am trying to explain to you how the circumstances could be that in fact you have regulators working closely and intensively with the centre and there is a desire to send a message to the community that that work is taking place and improvements are being seen.

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Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, I suppose the difficulty is this: If the regulator says, "Yes, their paperwork, their reporting mechanisms and staff training have improved but we still do not know why that child died", I cannot conceive of how you could improve the rating. That is where I suppose we disagree.

Mr SCOTT: Okay. We take on board those comments, but I am just explaining in the context of how it could happen—

The CHAIR: In terms of public reaction, what Mr Shoebridge is saying is a reality and any other approach will not wash.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just say, Mr Scott, that the expectation that some kind of informal grapevine is going to inform parents more than a formal rating system or a formal accreditation system is just not appropriate.

Mr SCOTT: No, in fairness, that is not actually what I said. I said that, if in fact there has been the death of a child at a centre, then certainly the other parents at that centre are aware of that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But prospective parents might not.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, but those parent will also be aware that a decision has been made by the regulator to keep that centre open because there will be many different circumstances as to how this death may have occurred.

The CHAIR: We are at 5.30 p.m. Mr Shoebridge has one last question.

Mr SCOTT: Then I need to answer some questions, Chair.

The CHAIR: Yes, we have got some more business from Mr Scott.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There are a bunch of questions. One last question—

The CHAIR: You will have to go supplementary.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: This is a concern that has been raised by Youth Action and I credit them for raising it with me. What stage is the rollout of student support officers at and how will the newly announced wellbeing and health in-reach nurses [WHIN] fit into that model of student support officers?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, Ms Owen may have some detail on this for us.

Ms OWEN: Our student support officers currently—we have 172. On the trajectory that we have committed to we will have around 390 by December and 464 by June 2023, which I think was when the commitment was made. In terms of your question about the relationship between those workers and the WHIN nurses—was that your question?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes,

Ms OWEN: I guess these people work within a broader team of wellbeing and support to schools, so we have around 2,000 people within school gates who support students in terms of their overall kind of wellbeing. These are just two of those roles, but we are rolling out, as you suggest, the wellbeing and health in-reach nurse. They work hand in hand because they have different skills. The WHINs, in particular, are there to connect the school and the students, in particular, to the broader health service. The student support officers generally have a kind of youth work or social work background so they are there to work with the students on a day-to-day basis. But the WHINs are there to make sure that, if there are other broader health needs, the students can be made aware of what other services and support within the health service and community could be made available to them.

The CHAIR: Okay. We are going to have to put other questions as supplementaries. Mr Scott, you have further information.

Mr SCOTT: There are four questions that I just want to come back to very quickly today, if I can. The first is from you, Mr Shoebridge, regarding the Vishva Hindu Parishad organisation. The NSW Department of Education has close connections with the NSW Police Force. We have police officers who work with us. We are informed by them that the organisation that you have spoken of today is not identified as a terrorist organisation or a terrorist organisation in New South Wales. They are not known as an organisation of concern in New South Wales. Where New South Wales police are aware of any concerns regarding any group or organisation known to be in our schools, they advise us immediately. On the specifics of the two schools you raised today, I am informed that in Toongabbie Public School there is usually a teacher with a Hindi background in the rooms while each stage of the group SRE is conducted. That information has been provided to us verbally this afternoon. The groups are held at different times so that the teacher can attend. At William Dean, there is also a teacher present at all times when that SRE takes place.

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Another matter raised involved Mr Kidson. Some of those issues were raised in Mr Mookhey's cameo this afternoon but I will still put answers on record if I can, Mr Chair. Mr Kidson was an external and international candidate who was recommended for the position of director of school reform, a band 1 role, following a comparative assessment process. There were no recommended candidates through that process for the recruitment pool. The recruitment and visa sponsorship recommendation was approved by me as secretary on 10 May 2018. He was then nominated by the department for a four-year temporary skills shortage [TSS] subclass 482 visa under the approved standard business sponsorship scheme with the Department of Home Affairs. That visa actually replaced the abolished 457 visa. All the requirements for the visa were met before approval by the Department of Home Affairs. The occupation classification of the role Mr Kidson was assigned to pre- and post-departmental realignment did not change.

Further, just on the restructure, when Mr Mookhey was in we were talking about band 1s and band 2s and the like. I want to confirm some of the numbers that were raised. There were 17 band 1 and band 2 PSSEs who left as part of the restructure. In addition to that, there were three band 3s. They are the deputy secretary level positions and we discussed those three positions this afternoon. That is the total.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So 20 in total—17 and three?

Mr SCOTT: Seventeen band 1s and 2s and three band 3s. We went through the band 3s in detail. Finally, on the material you provided today about timetables for capital works, I have been provided material here that suggests that the material you tabled contained a number of errors. Firstly, the list of 20 schools included a double entry: Monaro High School—an upgrade so good we listed it twice. So in fact it is a list of 19 schools. Of those 19 schools, 16 of them have an approved business case delivery date of January 2022. A lot of the focus of this work is around day one, term one and completion for the new school year. In addition, six of the 19 schools have already been handed over either in entirety or in stages and four of them were handed over early. We do make a concerted effort to update the community on the progress of those projects as often as possible and during the updates we provide estimated timelines for each stage of the project. I am happy to table the revised list of those schools.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Scott. We will conclude at that point. I thank the department, NESAs and the officials here. I have been through a series of estimates over the past week. You have witnesses who cannot remember anything, change their stories to the point of embarrassment or take even simple matters on notice. But I do feel that the officials here today are excellent in the way in which they respond legitimately to the Committee's questions. It is a credit to you and as a Committee that takes its work very seriously we sincerely thank you. Thank you to the secretariat staff who assist us so well. It has been a tremendous session. Thank you to the members of the Committee and we will see you next time.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.