

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO NSW GOVERNMENT'S
MANAGEMENT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

HEARING 3 – 23 SEPTEMBER 2021

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

ANSWERS TO TRANSCRIPT QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1, PAGE 23

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, how many of those classrooms have either a cooler classrooms installed air-conditioning or air-conditioning that has been installed by the P&C.

Mr MANNING: As I said, it is just a shade under 4,300 classrooms that have been rolled out through the cooler classrooms system. We do not hold accurate records necessarily on how many classrooms the P&C have funded, for often they happen without us acknowledging. I can look into our asset management system. We might have to take that question on notice.

ANSWER

To date, 4,408 learning spaces and 309 library spaces, including sealed schools, have had cooling, heating and fresh air ventilation systems installed under the Cooler Classrooms Program.

The number of systems installed by Parents and Citizens is not recorded.

QUESTION 2, PAGE 27

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Cachia, and I have also noticed the recruitment ads where you have been trying to fill some of those gaps in the workforce. So, Ms Cachia, could you tell us the numbers in the current workforce, the current vacancy and how you are going filling the recruitment gap?

Ms CACHIA: I will have to take the number as at today on notice and provide that to the Committee but, as the secretary said, it is a reasonably small cohort, given the size of our workforce. It is between a high 1 per cent and 2 per cent. You are quite right, Mr Shoebridge, in saying that we are undergoing an advertising campaign, as we always do in a department with a workforce of our size. We use a lot of different channels to advertise for various roles for both casual, temporary and full-time teachers.

ANSWER

As at 23 September 2021, there were 3,233 vacant teacher positions. This includes 1,589 new and additional Assistant Principal, Curriculum and Instruction (APCI) roles that the Department is seeking to fill over and above the seasonal trend. The addition of these new positions to better meet student need has resulted in the increase over the roughly 2 per cent vacancy rate the Department has observed through much of 2021. Even with this increase, the overall number of vacancies is low given the size of the Department's workforce.

As soon as a principal declares a vacancy for recruitment action, the Department's School Recruitment and Placement team support the principal to fill the vacancy using one of the methods described above. As described above, not all vacancy positions are advertised, with many filled by existing permanent teachers transferring to a new role, or via a number of centrally managed employment lists.

All permanent teacher vacancies (including executive teacher and principal vacancies) must be filled in accordance with the Staffing Agreement between the Department and the NSW Teachers Federation. Depending on how the last vacant position at the school was filled, a vacancy may be filled through the central appointment of a transferred teacher, scholar, graduate teacher or a teacher from the approved to teach list, or through a local choice option, which can include filling the vacancy through an open advertisement.

QUESTION 3, PAGE 28

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps you can provide this on notice for us. Of those 70,000 classrooms that have been assessed, how many of them have air-conditioning units in them?

Mr MANNING: By air-conditioning systems you mean recirculating air-conditioning systems?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, that is correct—recirculating, cooler classrooms, any form of air-conditioning.

Mr MANNING: Sure. We can interrogate our asset management system, yes.

ANSWER

As at 23 September 2021, over 70,000 spaces had been inspected. Of those, 19,255 were classrooms of which 11,716 are air conditioned.

Since then, the Department of Education's ventilation audit has been completed, with over 150,000 learning spaces across more than 2200 NSW public schools inspected.

QUESTION 4, PAGE 30

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrison, what is happening to classrooms that are designed for more than one class where you have two classes within a learning space at the moment?

Ms HARRISSON: In a variety of those spaces we have larger classrooms where classrooms have been combined and we have joint teaching in practice occurring. Those are large spaces. Many of them have dividing walls in place. Mr Dizdar can give you some specific examples in relation to combined classes in our operational setting.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My time will run out, so perhaps Mr Dizdar can provide that on notice. I will pass to my colleague and give her the opportunity to ask questions.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, are you comfortable taking that on notice and providing details on notice?

Mr DIZDAR: Sure, if the Committee wants that.

ANSWER

As part of the return to school plan a number of COVID-safe measures are in place to ensure safe learning environments for our students and teachers. This includes physical distancing and cohorting. Where teaching spaces are designed to accommodate more than one class, principals will review their uses and, in consideration of COVID-safe practices, determine the appropriate utilisation of the space.

Part of the return to school plan included an audit of more than 150,000 learning spaces across 2,200 schools. An individualised ventilation audit report has been provided to all schools and the department will work with schools to provide guidance on how spaces should be used relative to the availability of natural ventilation.

QUESTION 5, PAGE 31

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Mr Martin, my question is about the Higher School Certificate [HSC]. How many particular subject exams for the HSC have been cancelled altogether?

Mr MARTIN: I think it is 11 of the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages [CCAFL] exams, the community language exams, and that is because they are national exams and are held prior to the return-to-school date for the safe return of the HSC on 9 November. I will get the exact number on notice for you.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Will you also tell us which ones they are? I am familiar with Tamil. If you are saying there are 11—

Mr MARTIN: I will provide you a full list on notice.

ANSWER

18 Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Language exams have been cancelled. The total number of students studying these courses is less than 300.

QUESTION 6, PAGE 33

The CHAIR: Will that be by comparing the cohort in other exams? How will you be able to do a comparator potentially if you have a large number of schools that have not been able to sit their exam? How will that comparator work?

Mr MARTIN: I could not possibly explain that myself. We have a team of experts but we also use a technical advisory committee that are academic experts in assessment that come from a number of universities around New South Wales. They provide us with advice on the integrity of our methodologies. If we are talking about large cohorts, we would be looking primarily at the school-based assessment work. But as for moderators across other exams that may or may not have been sat, I could not go into detail now but we would explain it, of course, when we got to the point.

The CHAIR: Mr Martin, if you can provide on notice any further detail on either the equity measures relating to lockdown or those kind of pre-planned arrangements to deal with cohorts that cannot sit the exam, that would be gratefully accepted.

Mr MARTIN: I will happily do that, Mr Shoebridge. If I may also, the questions asked by Ms Sharpe earlier, there are 18 Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages, CCAFL, exams. They were set for 19 October nationally and there are 303 students impacted by the cancellation of those exams. They were the questions, I think, that I took on notice.

ANSWER

Advice and processes regarding further special consideration for HSC written exams will be provided to schools in early Term 4.