

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION**

**Tuesday 27 August 2024**

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

## **EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING, WESTERN SYDNEY**

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**The Committee met at 9:15.**

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Banasiak

Dr Amanda Cohn

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Rachel Merton (Deputy Chair)

The Hon. Tania Mihailuk

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell

The Hon. Bob Nanva

The Hon. Emily Suvaal

### **PRESENT**

**The Hon. Pru Car**, Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Minister for Western Sydney.

## **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 first hearing of the Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education inquiry into budget estimates 2024-2025. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today or watching us online. My name is Abigail Boyd. I am the Chair of this Committee. I welcome Deputy Premier Car and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Education and Early Learning, and Western Sydney. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent.

Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures. I welcome our witnesses and thank them for making the time to give evidence. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Deputy Premier, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament.

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**Mr MURAT DIZDAR**, Secretary, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Ms DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES**, Deputy Secretary, Public Schools, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Mr MARK BARRAKET**, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood Outcomes, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Ms CHLOE READ**, Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Ms SALLY BLACKADDER**, Deputy Secretary, Strategic Priorities, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Mr MARTIN GRAHAM**, Deputy Secretary, Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Mr SHAUN RUMING**, Chief People Officer, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Ms KAZ SCOTT**, Acting Chief Operating Officer, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**Ms LISA HARRINGTON**, Acting Deputy Secretary, School Infrastructure NSW, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

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

**The CHAIR:** Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from Opposition and crossbench members only, with 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will now begin with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you for being here today. Deputy Premier, I wanted to ask you a few questions in relation to Lurnea High School. Obviously you'd be aware of the 7NEWS investigation, and I believe you made some comments in relation to violence at the school last night. Could you share with the Committee what you said in relation to this issue yesterday?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Can I just say, in relation to what we've seen occur at Lurnea, this behaviour is clearly unacceptable. We have extremely high expectations of behaviour in our public schools. Each and every principal in all of our 2,200 schools would back me up on that. We have high expectations of behaviour. We do not tolerate that sort of violence or any behaviour of that type in public schools in New South Wales. Now, I do understand that the range of issues that have been occurring at Lurnea—the significant challenges that they have been confronting at Lurnea—have been going on for some time.

The department advises me—and I know from reading media reports and looking into this matter—that this has been going on for some time, and also under the previous Government. I'm not sure if it was ever raised with you, Ms Mitchell, when you were the Minister. I know the department is hard at work supporting the school. I'll use this opportunity to say that we've actually made it easier under our new behaviour policy for principals and deputy principals to deal with this sort of persistent misbehaviour. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that it would have been harder under your policy for the Lurnea High School to actually manage this sort of behaviour. I know Mr Dizdar is intimately involved with what is happening at Lurnea.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's all right. I'll get to Mr Dizdar later. Thank you, Minister. You just said then that you've been aware. When were you first briefed in relation to issues at Lurnea High School?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I've been briefed many times on Lurnea High School.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When was the first time?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, just let me explain. These are actually serious issues that have been going on for some time, including the time when you were the Minister. This is not a new challenge at Lurnea.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When were you first briefed?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This has been something the school has been confronting for some time, on and off. I totally understand why parents are concerned about this; why wouldn't you be? I totally understand why students and staff are concerned about this. Why wouldn't you be?

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Absolutely. I'd like to know when you were first briefed.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have been briefed multiple times on this.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you recall when you were first briefed? Was it within the last couple of weeks or—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have been briefed multiple times on this issue.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When was the first time?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Perhaps you were briefed, because some of the issue also was under your leadership as Minister. It's not a new thing.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, I'm asking when you were first briefed about significant concerns, not just behaviour but others, which I'll get to shortly. When were you, as education Minister, first briefed on issues at Lurnea High School?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do you know, I've clearly answered the question, Ms Mitchell—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I'd like a date. Was it last week? Last month? Six months ago?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I get that you're trying to get what you've got to get for Instagram. I get it, right? But I'm actually trying—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not. I'm asking a really serious question about a school.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, this is a really serious issue and I'm trying to answer it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When were you first briefed? It's not a trick question.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But I've answered it. I've been briefed multiple times.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, but when was the first time? If it's multiple, when was the first? This year? Six months ago? Three months ago?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, stop trying to use this to score political points. You well know, as the previous Minister, I'm briefed every day on all sorts of issues at every high school across the State.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thanks. Okay, Minister, I'm going to ask you the—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'd really like the opportunity, actually, for the Committee's benefit to actually pass to the secretary to explain what is occurring at Lurnea and what we are doing in response to this.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Chair, with respect, I've asked a very simple question in terms of—

**The CHAIR:** Let's get some of these procedural points out of the way. It is within the member's right to ask the Minister, at the time when we have you here in the morning, and to ask the secretary later. Please do direct your questions—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's what I would like. Deputy Premier, you won't give us a date when you were first briefed. If you can't remember or you need to take it on notice, that's fine. I just want to know when you were first briefed.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I've been briefed multiple times on Lurnea. I can assure the people—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's not an answer, with respect.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** With respect, Ms Mitchell, I can assure the people of that community that this has been an ongoing issue that we continue to monitor and deal with, working with the school community—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay, great. If you've continued to monitor it, I want to ask when you were first briefed on the alleged incident involving a teacher and at least two students in terms of a sexual relationship. That's pretty shocking, you would agree?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you recall when you were first briefed in relation to that incident at Lurnea High School?

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, this is a really serious issue, and I'll tell you—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When were you first briefed?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'll answer it. I was briefed on the day that that particular teacher was charged. Can I just say, we are dealing with a criminal investigation that is currently before the courts.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm aware of that. I'm asking when you were first briefed.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am not going to say anything to jeopardise this.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not asking you to.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are talking about potentially young victims who are at school. I am not going to use them to score political points. I was briefed on the day that—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you, Deputy Premier. Did you make contact with the local member when you were made aware of that allegation at a school in her electorate?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I was briefed about the incident the day that the teacher was charged. It appeared in the local—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you pick up the phone to the local member?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No. My concern at that point was actually instructing and working with the department to support the school, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You didn't think it was important for the local member to have an understanding of what was happening in her community? You didn't think that was necessary?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** My priority was the school. I think the people of New South Wales would understand that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you aware that the local member, Tina Ayyad, has written to you multiple times—the first time being in December last year—with very serious allegations about what was happening at Lurnea High School, including allegations of improper relationships? Are you aware of that? Did you see that correspondence?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm aware that Ms Ayyad has written to myself as Minister—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you respond?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —and she has received a response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** From yourself?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, please—I understand that you like being combative, but these are serious issues and I'm attempting to answer them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you respond to her?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We responded to Ms Ayyad on the concerns that she raised, but there have been a variety of concerns that the local member has raised, including using a late-night speech under parliamentary privilege in order to raise concerns about the school. We have investigated every single thing that has been raised with us. I want to be very clear and cut through this assertion that this is not being dealt with. We are taking this very seriously. We have the highest expectations of behaviour in our schools. That teacher in question has been charged by the police. It is before the courts and it will be dealt with.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm aware of that. My question to you, though, is that the local member raised this with you last year and you didn't respond to her. There was no response back from you.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** She received a response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Not from you, though, did she?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Did she receive a response?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did she receive it from you?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** She received a response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You said that this was very serious. It doesn't get much more serious than this, and you expect the highest standards. You are the Minister. A letter has come across your desk from a

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local member making very serious allegations, and you didn't even have the grace to respond to her directly, did you?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I will make this very clear: We expect the highest standards of behaviour—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you didn't even write back. You didn't pick up the phone and say, "This is a real problem."

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —and Ms Ayyad received a response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But not from you, did she, Deputy Premier?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** She received a response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It doesn't get much more serious than allegations like this.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Point of order—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** She has received a response. I'm not quite sure—

**The CHAIR:** Order! I will hear the point of order.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The question has been asked and answered. Repeatedly asking the same question is out of order.

**The CHAIR:** In relation to this, we will slow things down slightly so that Hansard can record question and answer. If the member wishes to ask the same question over and over and use the time, that's fine.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to be really clear with you, Minister, that you were aware of these allegations at the end of last year. You were aware of correspondence from a local member.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you did not respond to that MP.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I really want to make this distinction clear: I'm not entirely sure that the letter that was received from Ms Ayyad actually discretely, clearly outlined allegations about an inappropriate relationship.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There's certainly a lot of documentation that has been sent to you, Minister, raising several concerns.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But I don't think that letter actually outlined allegations about an inappropriate relationship.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It certainly talked about concerns in relation to the possible—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** So don't go saying to me—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —dereliction of duty by some staff and students.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —that I knew about allegations when they were not raised with me.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I've got copies here from November last year. There was more detail in writing. There was a dossier of quite lengthy allegations, including—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But not about the inappropriate relationship that is being pursued by the police.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** About serious issues at that school.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, to which she received a response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Not from yourself. You didn't think that it was worthy of a response. How can you sit here today and say to parents, "We expect high standards", when something was raised very significantly with you about concerns at this school—and we now know the extent of the issues—and you couldn't even be bothered to pick up the phone or write a letter and say, "I'm going to look into this"?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It's very, very dangerous and irresponsible of a former Minister—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Of yourself.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —to be conflating a police investigation of a very serious nature that involves young victims with standards of behaviour.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The facts speak for themselves.

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** They actually don't. Just because you say it is doesn't mean it's true.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The correspondence is clear that there was no response back from you. At no point have you contacted the local member to raise or to discuss any of these issues, which I find extraordinary. How can you possibly say it's not good enough and that you're going to do something about it when you've known about issues since November last year and you did nothing?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** In fairness, putting the police investigation to one side, because I understand it's in your political interest to conflate them, the behavioural challenges at Lurnea—if I was given an opportunity, I could tell you that the deputy secretary of public schools was at Lurnea yesterday dealing with these issues herself.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine. I can speak to her about it later. Where were you? You're the Minister.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I was instructing the department to deal with it. Can I just say—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is the point, Deputy Premier.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, this is not the point.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You instruct other people to do your job. You cannot even pick up the phone to a colleague who has raised issues with you—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is that a question?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —about a concern at your school, and I think that speaks for itself.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Point of order—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, you very well know that these challenges—

**The CHAIR:** Order! There is a point of order that I need to hear. When I say, "Order!", everyone will be quiet.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The shadow Minister is entitled to ask questions, not provide a running commentary. She needs to contain her intervention in this process to asking questions, not making comments.

**The CHAIR:** I uphold the point of order. Go ahead, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, you said that you weren't aware of any allegations of inappropriate behaviour. One of the documents that Ms Ayyad sent to you talks about an autistic boy who allegedly had his pants pulled down and was touched on his private parts. That's pretty serious.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is serious.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Why didn't you respond when you got that?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do not verbal me about this, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Why didn't you respond when you saw that?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I just said that there wasn't an allegation about the inappropriate relationship in that letter.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So an allegation about an autistic child being interfered with—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do not verbal me, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —you didn't need to respond to?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You well know that these very serious and legitimate concerns about behaviour at Lurnea were occurring for some time, including when you were Minister. You cannot rewrite history—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There are a range of allegations that came to you—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —as much as you plead for that to be the case. You cannot rewrite history.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —via the local member, including allegations of an autistic boy who had his pants pulled down and was touched on his private parts. That came to you as Minister, and you did not respond back. You didn't do anything about it.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We expect the highest standards—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They're just words, Minister.



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**Ms PRUE CAR:** —and Tina Ayyad received a response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** From your Parliamentary Secretary. You couldn't even be bothered to pick up the phone. It's appalling.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order: Legislative Council practice does state that House procedure can guide proceedings. I would suggest that that was just argumentative and not courteous to the witness.

**The CHAIR:** In the context of both the Minister and the member trading insults and being offensive at each other, I'm going to allow a little bit of latitude. If we could both perhaps bring it in, that would be good.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm going to move to a different issue. Minister, what steps have you taken to ensure that no scaffolding companies with links to Synergy scaffolding services and the CFMEU are working on construction sites in public schools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Obviously, this is concerning in the extreme. I'm going to preface my comments with this, and I cannot be clearer about this: This Government has not taken a backwards step when it comes to dealing with the inappropriate and criminal behaviour that has existed in some parts of the Construction and General Division of the CFMEU. We have passed legislation, as everyone around this Committee room knows well because they voted on this legislation to place that division into administration.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm well aware of that. I have asked you a very specific question.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It's important context, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have asked you a very specific question about Synergy scaffolding services.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It is very concerning—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are there any working on school sites at the moment?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —what has occurred at Synergy.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are there any on school sites at the moment?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have asked School Infrastructure to advise me urgently. For the benefit of the Committee, I would ask Ms Harrington to provide some detail.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can I just ask you, Minister, are you aware that Yaga corp, which is providing scaffolding services at Fort Street Public School, is partly owned by the former directors?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What have you done about that, if you're aware of it?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This was in the media yesterday, so I think everyone's aware of it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What have you done?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is an upgrade that has been completed. I think you'll find that that contract was probably let when you were Minister, so that wasn't my decision to make.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So they're not there anymore? They're not on the site?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That upgrade is complete.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you sought any further advice in relation to whether they've been engaged in any other projects?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That's what I've just answered.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is the answer yes or no?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have asked School Infrastructure to advise me urgently.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You said you've been briefed on it.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, I didn't.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So, at the moment, you haven't been advised that there are any that you're aware of?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I think you may be a little bit confused.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I'm not.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am saying that I have asked School Infrastructure to provide me with urgent advice about where else that may be.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But thus far, you haven't been advised that there are any?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Can I just, for the benefit of the Committee, state once again that the Fort Street upgrade, which was in the media yesterday, that contract would've been awarded when you were Minister, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. But I'm saying to you that you haven't been advised of any since then.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** So you actually awarded the contract to Synergy through a subcontractor.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you haven't been advised of any since yesterday is what you're saying?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, but I've asked for that advice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will you make that advice public when you receive it?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have asked for that advice. I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, can you confirm that almost \$400 million was in the 6101 bank accounts at the start of this year?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, thank you very much for asking about these bank accounts. I would preface my comments—and this is very important to put context about this. We have record funding.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's not what I asked.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have given record funding to public schools.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You have taken record money out this year, so well done to you.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We well know what we have done

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** At the start of the year, Deputy Premier, there was nearly \$400 million in the 6101.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Point of order—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Madam Chair, I am attempting to answer this question.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The Minister is in the middle of trying to answer the question. The member has then asked another question, preventing the Minister from actually completing the answer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not interested in the spin. I want the detail.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The witness needs to be given an opportunity to actually answer the questions that are put to them.

**The CHAIR:** I think that obviously there is scope for some interruptions of answers, but we do need to let the Minister at least get the first couple of sentences out before we ask another question.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm going to actually directly answer this allegation that has been put to me.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Please.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have no problem with that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Well, can you do it? Our time is limited.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I need to be given more than five seconds in order to do that, which I think is procedurally fair, Madam Chair, last time I checked. We have actually given record funding to public schools. Sure, the way that we are spending that money is different. We all know, Ms Mitchell, the way you allocated that funding was not working. What we had was all this saved up money because principals couldn't find teachers to teach children in our classrooms.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Chair, with respect, I've asked a very specific question.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It represented lost learning. I make no apologies—

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, I'm not interested in your politics. You are in not in the LA question time.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, I'm actually answering what has happened with the allocation of these funds.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, you haven't. I want you to confirm there was almost \$400 million in those funds with the 6101 balance at the start of the year. Is that correct?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, you yourself as Minister at one point—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not asking about that, Deputy Premier. Can you confirm that, at the start of this year, as of February, there was \$394.6 million in the fund 6101 balance for public schools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What I can confirm is that we have provided public schools with record funding and we are focused—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You have ripped record funding out, Deputy Premier.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It is true because I've actually got the document here.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, you well know that the allocation did not work under you.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you confirm—

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You well know it.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Chair, I think it would assist with the fair and orderly conduct of proceedings and assist with Hansard if this did operate as a question and answer session. I would suggest that that is courteous to the witness.

**The CHAIR:** I do agree with that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** To the point of order: I've asked a very simple question about four times and I have not had the answer from the Minister.

**The CHAIR:** There is a pattern here of a question being asked and then a completely different type of response being given that is not an answer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's not LA question time. You've got to be accountable.

**The CHAIR:** It might be helpful for the proceedings if we had a question followed by answers, and then there might not be so many interruptions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It would be lovely to get an answer.

**The CHAIR:** If we could give respect to Hansard to take it in turns, that would be very useful.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, can you confirm that, at the start of the year, there was \$394.6 million in the fund 6101 balance?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I would have to take that on notice, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's true. It's here in a document that you provided. When did you decide to freeze that money and not make it available to schools to use anymore?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We decided, as is a matter that is on public record, to ensure that the money that we allocate to public schools—and this is a direct answer, before someone interrupts me—is spent on teaching and learning. All of that accumulated bank balance is actually the tally of lost learning. At some point, Ms Mitchell, when you were the Minister, you even made a promise to get rid of Local Schools, Local Decisions. Even the OECD said it wasn't working and you could not come good on that commitment.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not asking you about that. This is actually really embarrassing.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have made tough decisions in order to spend the money that the taxpayers allocate—

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When did you decide to give a message to school principals that that money that they thought they had until the end of 2025 to spend would be no longer available to them? When did you, as the Minister, make that decision?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is a matter of public record. We actually—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, it's not. I'm asking you when did you make a decision.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —communicated that with principals via a webinar.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Chair, the Minister was about two seconds into answering the question.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** She's not answering a single thing.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** It's not courteous to the witness under the procedural fairness resolution to not give adequate time for the Minister to answer.

**The CHAIR:** We do need to allow time, but there is courtesy to be extended both ways. Please, go ahead.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you receive any briefings from the department in relation to that, any written briefings about the decision to freeze that money?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I've received many briefings about the fact—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Written briefings?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I've received many briefings. This is another example, I'm sorry, Ms Boyd, of me attempting to answer the question. I've received many briefings about our Government's decision to—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** To pull money out of schools.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —finally allocate the money in a way that means that we focus on teachers in the classroom, as we inherited the worst chronic teacher shortage in living memory thanks to you.

**The CHAIR:** On that topic, to be honest, I've been a little confused by it. I've spoken with principals who have told me that the problem is not that they didn't expect the funds to go but that they didn't expect the funds to go when they did. Because of that, they were caught short. For example, I spoke to one principal who was saying that he had earmarked funds for a particular project, they had signed the contract and then they weren't able to pay for that and so they had to fundraise and find money elsewhere. It was expressed to me that this has really disproportionately impacted on the poorer schools that are not able to fundraise from parents and haven't been able to plug that gap. Can you explain to us what happened with that surprise element?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Boyd, can I just say, to get to the substance of the matter of the example you used, projects that have actually already been let and contracts that have been signed are actually being honoured. I would like to take that example you have used. Ms Summerhayes as deputy secretary has been exceptional in working through some of those cases where there might be some confusion where we actually might be able to provide the funding for that project to be completed. It was very clear at the time that we communicated to principals that projects that were underway that have already been approved will be honoured. In that example, I'm not quite sure that that would actually stand.

The decision was made because of the fact that we—It's a known point and it is not up for dispute that we have falling enrolments. We inherited a system where we had falling enrolments. Unfortunately, that plays into how much money we can allocate to public schools. Separate to that, the previous Government, to their credit, also acknowledged the fact that this was not working, where schools were accumulating bank balances over time. I think the former Minister promised to bring that to an end at some time, to her credit, to be honest. What was happening was, because they couldn't find teachers because we had such a chronic teacher shortage, that was accumulating.

What we have made the decision to do is we have actually given more money to schools but the way we are allocating it is different. The money hasn't been taken away; more money has been given. We are actually building up the system so that principals don't have to spend every second waking hour, instead of educationally leading their school, scrounging around trying to find money within their budget to fund basic maintenance. For things like basic maintenance or projects at schools, like COLAs, like playgrounds—and I go to a lot of schools every day. A lot of principals were using those funds for that sort of stuff. That will now be done by School Infrastructure. We should have a system that supports principals centrally to be able to do that, instead of making them scrounge around for money.

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**The CHAIR:** I'm not convinced that there has been a taking of money on net terms.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There has not been.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There has.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There has not been.

**The CHAIR:** What I'm concerned about is the process and that that has resulted in a bit of patchiness and some things falling through the gaps. The other one I heard a lot about was SLSOs, where people had got funding for, say, 1.7 SLSOs and then they were topping up the rest of that with that local money and then suddenly had to let those SLSOs go. How does that happen and what was put in place to try and stop that happening?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That shouldn't have happened, actually. As I said before, the deputy secretary of public schools has been working through those issues. If we are aware of where that has happened, we will be able to work that through with that particular school and that principal. Where we need to get to, Ms Boyd, is that we need a situation where the entitlement of a school to say, "This is how many teachers you get. This is how many APs and DPs and SLSOs you get", is actually fit for purpose so the entitlement that they get under the previous administration is not so small that they have to find their own way of funding extra staff. That does not work. What we believe in as a government is actually funding the system to support the schools. What sets the New South Wales public school system apart? We are one of the biggest systems in the Southern Hemisphere, if not the world. We have 2,200 schools. We should use our systemic might to support what happens in schools. Principals can't be left—under the previous Government, they were left basically to fend for themselves.

**The CHAIR:** And we agree on the scrapping of the Local Schools model.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The devolution didn't work.

**The CHAIR:** In terms, though, of that funding of SLSOs, it looks like we are making a lot of progress in relation to teacher pay and teacher retention. I have a real concern—again, from that Disability portfolio perspective—that we have SLSOs that are unsure as to whether or not they are going to have a job the next year because it's dependent on how many children need them at that time.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Is there something in place to look at retention of SLSOs to have that more constant funding stream for SLSOs in the same way as we have for teachers?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You make a very good point in that so much of the work that is done to support our students with disability—increasing numbers of kids with disabilities as well—in the public school system is done not just by teachers but also by SLSOs in the classroom. We are very proud that we made a large number of them permanent. So many were temporary. That number of 20,000-plus teachers and support staff we made permanent, a lot of them were SLSOs. Now, if I hear about schools that are losing SLSOs because we may need to work through some of those issues in terms of the allocation of a budget, then we can work through that. We do not want to see that happen; I personally do not want to see that happen. In fact, with the Commonwealth changes to the NDIS, we are going to need more and more support for our students in public school systems, remembering that 80-plus per cent of kids with disability in public schools are in mainstream settings. SLSOs are actually crucial in ensuring that we fulfil our obligation to every child in New South Wales—their right to public education.

**The CHAIR:** Is that something you will be looking at in the next part of your term, then, in terms of trying to increase that workforce and give them the security of tenure to know that they are going to be at that school for a period of time, not just for the coming year?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** One criticism that you couldn't make of our Government is that we are not focused on workforce. I think in Education we are viewing absolutely almost everything through the prism of the workforce that delivers that essential work. When I talk about reviewing entitlement, it also includes things like SLSOs to ensure that we are actually providing schools with the staff they need, including support for kids with disabilities. One of the biggest challenges we face also is teachers for special education. It's another thing we inherited that's a complete basket case.

**The CHAIR:** I look forward to your response to our report that the Committee provided just last week.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, we are considering it now.

**The CHAIR:** Can I ask you about the \$1 billion in the budget that was for funding for school maintenance and minor upgrades? How much of that is for disability accessibility upgrades?

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'd have to take that on notice so you get the right information, but that is really a large injection into maintenance funding. A lot of it will be going to things that have been ignored for years and years that aren't really sexy to talk about—things like toilets.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, we love talking about toilets. They're vital—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're doing a whole inquiry into toilets.

**The CHAIR:** We are doing a whole inquiry.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** People get a bit funny when I talk about public school toilets so much, but I tell you what—I mean, there are a lot of people around this committee room who have children and know how dangerous it is if a toilet is so bad and hasn't ever been upgraded, so that children literally are holding it in all day, and the health impact of that. The injection will be used to do things like that, but let me take on notice for accessibility upgrades. Of course, when a student comes to a school with a particular need and enrolls in that school, we are obliged to upgrade the school so that child can access education.

**The CHAIR:** This Committee was lucky enough to go and visit a number of schools as part of our inquiry. We went to one particular school that was in a heritage building, and they were unable to put ramps in because of that heritage, and yet it was a special purpose school. I found that quite shocking that we didn't have full accessibility at a school like that. Is that something that you will be looking into?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have an obligation to every child in New South Wales. It's the law that they can access education. So when a child enrolls—and you're talking about a school for specific purposes. Of course we need to find a way to make that accessible. I tell you what, some of the most incredible places I've been to over the past 18 months have been SSPs. The work that they do in there is just absolutely mind-blowingly transformative.

**The CHAIR:** We have obviously not just students but also parents and carers and teachers that also require accessibility upgrades.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** And staff.

**The CHAIR:** Shouldn't those schools just be completely accessible as a matter of course?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have to find a way to do this. We are committed to inclusion. We are committed to ensuring that students and staff and parents can access our schools—their public schools.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Thank you, Minister, or Deputy Premier. Just a couple of quick questions. Have you had any stakeholders seek to meet with you in regard to section 32 of the Education Act, SRE?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I actually meet with faith leaders and people involved in SRE quite regularly. In fact, I only recently had a faith leaders round table with the secretary, discussing many issues around SRE.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you've told them that the Government remains committed to SRE, section 32 of the Act?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** And there aren't any changes being proposed at all?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No. I think this came up last time, and I answered the same way.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I didn't ask you that question; someone else might have. In relation to the review that's currently before the Law Reform Commission into exemptions to the ADA Act—and that potentially will impact independent, Catholic systemic, Catholic independent, Islamic, Jewish and other non-public schools—have you had any discussions with any stakeholders in relation to any concerns with any amendments that might be considered by the Government in relation to ADA?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Obviously that review has to take place, but I will say, Ms Mihailuk, that we are in constant conversation with faith leaders and their representatives about all sorts of matters like this. I regularly meet with stakeholders. My diary is obviously a matter of public record.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, have they specifically raised this area of concern of exemptions with you, given that independent schools heavily rely on that exemption to be able to deliver their particular faith and services to their students? Has that been raised with you directly as the education Minister?

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** People have raised that concern with me. Particular schools have raised that concern with me. I had schools, when we were at Community Cabinet in Riverstone, raise it with me. People have raised that with me.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Have they raised with you that any amendments could potentially really impact their ability to deliver—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, the stakeholders have raised this with me, Ms Mihailuk.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you're aware of the potential impact on the education system?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** They have raised it with me.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** All right, Minister. I'll come back to that a bit later. I should just ask you a couple of questions, if I may, in relation to what's going on between you and Jason Clare and this Gonski reform. As I understand, you're both at an impasse now, and you've both reached an impasse that by September the deal will be off, the potential 2.5 per cent. What's your take on this, Minister? What's going on?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I would say that it's not just New South Wales that is at an impasse with the Commonwealth Government on this particular matter. The lion's share of States and Territories are at an impasse with the Commonwealth Government also. I think I've said many times to this Committee, I've said many times in the media, and I'll say it again today: We are not signing up to a deal that short-changes the public school students of New South Wales. Minister Clare has, on previous occasions, once threatened to take money off the table. Then there was a suggestion that the deal roll over. But can I just make it very, very clear that—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I can't imagine Minister Clare threatening anyone, actually, having known him for 20 years.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What I mean is we've been having, Ms Mihailuk, a very robust conversation, both internally with each other and via the media. I think we all know where the other one stands. And I will say it's not just New South Wales. That's really pertinent to what we're saying. It's pretty much the whole of the Commonwealth of Australia. I would say that something that the Commonwealth Government fails to recognise is their offer to us is an extra 2½ per cent. If we then give an extra 2½ per cent when we have already lifted significantly—in fact, in this budget that is subject to this budget estimates hearing, we have lifted our schools' resourcing standard contribution from 72 to 75 per cent.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But I understand, Minister—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** So I would just like Minister Clare to acknowledge that we've already lifted.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, isn't the impasse more that he would like that extra funding to be tied to specific outcomes like resourcing for teachers and ensuring that disadvantaged students are prioritised? I think that is what the issue is. He is not going to give you a blank cheque, as he said in the media. Isn't that right?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, that's not an issue of contention, Ms Mihailuk. We agreed on what needs to be done. In fact, under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, most of what Minister Clare is asking the States and Territories to do—most of it, I am proud to say, we are doing.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But isn't he asking you to go back to your Treasurer and your Cabinet colleagues to ask for more funding for education as a whole?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But we've delivered that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Like what Minister Jackson did for housing.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But we've delivered that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** She successfully managed to convince her colleagues that more money needed to be allocated for housing.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, and we've done that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Isn't Minister Clare asking you to do your job as the Minister and argue amongst your colleagues that you think more money should go to prioritising the education of children in New South Wales?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But we have already done that. We have lifted from 72 to 75, so we have done that. All the things that Minister Clare is asking for us to do—in fact, it's not like Jason Clare is asking us to do it. We have agreed, across the table of education Ministers, on what we need to do.

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Then why has Western Australia and the Northern Territory agreed to this?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have agreed; we need more money to be able to do it.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** We all want more money.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But that's not the contention.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, you attended a protest on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra with the Australian Education Union last week and with your counterparts from Victoria and Queensland.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, that was in the media.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What did you achieve that day, other than yelling at a building for a couple of hours? Did you meet with the Minister? What was the outcome of that protest?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are negotiating through the agreement. In fact, we have met with the Minister—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Did you meet the Minister that day?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have met with the Minister on multiple—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Did you meet with the Minister that day?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I take it that you didn't. So you went down to Canberra to meet with the union and your counterparts—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is also a matter of public record.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** —but you failed to meet with the Minister.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mihailuk, I understand that you're trying to get your gotcha but, as a matter of public record—and I think I said it on Sky News—we didn't meet with Jason Clare that day. We met with a range of members of Parliament and with teachers and principals who believe we should have fair funding. I will say it again.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Who did you meet with? It's not a secret. You're paid from the public purse.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** My meetings are a matter of public record.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'm just trying to understand. You went down to a protest to meet with your socialist Labor Government counterpart from Victoria. Queensland is about to lose government.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am fighting for fair funding for public schools in New South Wales—shoot me.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Labor is about to lose government in Queensland. Shouldn't you be in a better position, as the New South Wales education Minister, to meet directly with your Federal counterpart and argue a better case for New South Wales?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are doing that also.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I think this is quite a pivotal issue because you made a commitment back in May 2023 when you became a Minister. It was so important for you to get the 100 per cent in funding and the Gonski reforms through. You said that was your priority. Now we are at this really critical impasse. You have seen Western Australia and Northern Territory agree to what was proposed by Minister Clare. I don't suggest he's going to change anything by the end of September.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Western Australia hasn't signed.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** The concern I have is this: Are we going to end up in a situation at the end of September where this funding will fall through?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That's actually a matter for Minister Clare.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It's actually a matter for you, Minister Prue Car.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mihailuk, we have lifted, and I am not going to let the Commonwealth Government abdicate its responsibility to fund Australian public schools.



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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But the chief responsibility is with State governments. You know that; let's be honest.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** If you want to be part of that, I won't be part of it.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'm not part of anything. I think you should sit down with Minister Clare directly.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I know him to be a reasonable Minister. He has been a member of the shadow Cabinet at the Feds for almost 20 years. He has a lot of experience in this. You could learn from him by sitting down and negotiating with him directly, Minister Car.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mihailuk, when it comes to learning things, I'm not going to be lectured at by you.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You could learn from Minister Jackson, who was able to successfully negotiate a higher pool of money for housing in New South Wales.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have already done that in education.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I don't know.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There is a lot of fake news flying around today.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You hear reports about \$400 million sitting in bank accounts and you talk about there not being enough money available. You have been offered money by the Feds with very proper conditions. Of course it's a requirement that you should meet that 2.5 per cent. I think that is—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have only been offered that if we further lift, and we have lifted.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Why wouldn't you lift it?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have already lifted.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, it's a pretty big issue.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** As much as you say, "The sky is green", that doesn't make it green, Ms Mihailuk.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It doesn't make it red either, Minister. I want to ask you a quick question about the inquiry that this Committee held into disability. Have you had a chance to read that report yet? I understand you may not have.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I've been briefed on it in a very short form. I really look forward to responding to that important piece of work.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I will leave that for my next session.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, I want to go back to the school funding issue. You said before, in response to Ms Boyd, that you would be really concerned if schools have lost SLSOs. Have you been to Parkes Public School, by any chance?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I haven't been to Parkes, no. But, can I just say, with that particular example, if you're talking about something that has happened at Parkes, if we could just get to the crux of that issue of what the allegation may be, we will follow it up; we will take that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am asking you if you have been to Parkes and the answer is no—that's fine. I have had reports from a number of concerned community members that at least a dozen SLSOs have either lost their jobs or lost significant hours because of the budget cuts. Are you aware of that?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am not sure if that is the case. I am going to say to you, Ms Mitchell, that I will ask Ms Summerhayes to take that away and look into that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you could take that on notice, that would be great, because multiple people in the community have reached out with concerns.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is very concerning and I will follow that up.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It is very concerning. Are you also aware of the very successful agriculture program that runs at Maclean High School?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** If there is an issue that you're getting to at Maclean High School, we will similarly take that away and come back to you, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But I'm asking if you have been spoken to about that program?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Just to save the Committee a bit of time, I know the previous Minister is setting up a range of questions.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm just asking you a question.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** If you get to the crux of what is happening at Maclean, we can take that away.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're not aware of the ag program—that's fine; I don't expect you to be. So \$100,000 was allocated to that program. That has now been cut to \$10,000. Parents are now having to sell raffle tickets on the weekend to raise money to run that program for their students. Does that concern you?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We will take that away.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But does that concern you as a general principle?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have just clearly committed to you that we will take that away and look at that and work through that with the school.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So will you look to reinstate that funding support?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are going to work through that with the school.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And does it concern you?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Anything that affects public school kids concerns me. I'm the education Minister.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just wanted to ask another question, following on from my colleague, in relation to school funding. Do you remember, prior to the last election, Labor saying that you would fund schools to 100 per cent even if the Federal Government didn't sign the deal?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Can I just say that, upon coming to government, not only did we inherit record levels of debt left to us by the previous Government but we were also short-changed billions of dollars by the Commonwealth's cosy deal with Western Australia to give the GST money from the hardworking people of New South Wales to another State—almost the richest State in the world.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to take you back to what you said when you were in opposition.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am not going to concede that the Commonwealth will give us a further 5 per cent. I have said that to this Committee before, Ms Mitchell. We are in the middle of negotiations; I'm not going to prejudice those negotiations.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not asking you about the negotiations.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You actually are. I am going to stand firm in the fact that we have lifted—as I have prosecuted, Ms Mitchell—from 72 to 75. That is the largest investment in this State's history.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, that's not what I'm asking you, with all due respect. Prior to the election, both yourself and the now Premier made comments such as, "Under Labor, schools will be fully funded." *The Sydney Morning Herald* ran a story which said:

... NSW Labor is prepared to top up the shortfall to reach 100 per cent if an agreement with the federal government cannot be reached ...

Is that your position?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But we are still negotiating that agreement.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But if the Federal Government does not offer more money—and it doesn't appear that Jason Clare and the Labor Party is going to—do you stand by what you said prior to the election?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am not conceding at this Committee that the Commonwealth Government will not give us 25 per cent.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But before the election you told parents and unions—and there was a lovely photo with you, Minister Clare and Mr Gavrielatos with a big signed poster saying that we will get to 100 per cent—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, because we believed that, Ms Mitchell—unlike you.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When you said before the election that you would top up the funding shortfall if you couldn't reach a deal, were you telling the truth?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, I am not prejudicing negotiations with the Commonwealth Government.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's not a yes, with respect, Minister.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am just not prejudicing it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So there is no guarantee that you will come in and fill the shortfall if you don't land an agreement next month.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This Government could not be more committed to the Schooling Resource Standard funding.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's a no. You didn't say yes.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We lifted that three years before you ever planned to.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, if I could just look at some school infrastructure issues, if that's okay, and to the team. Deputy Premier, were you part of the New South Wales Government's decision-making process to address the housing crisis by accelerating housing supply, setting housing targets? Were you a part of that decision?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Merton, I'm the Deputy Premier, and I sit on quite a few Cabinet subcommittees, and I stand by the Premier's steadfast commitment to address the housing shortage in New South Wales, which is seeing young people, including people like young teachers, not being able to afford to live in Sydney.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** As the Deputy Premier, at the table, part of the decision. The New South Wales Government, as part of this decision, announced under the National Housing Accord five-year housing target commitments. Do you recall what some of those commitments might mean in terms of the scale of housing that was committed to?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I know that the national housing targets and the targets that we have set ourselves as a New South Wales government require significant housing to be built in New South Wales. But can I just cut to the pass of what I think you're going to ask.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Unlike the one that preceded us, we will not be a government that doesn't build schools where they are needed. In fact, I would gladly go into all the communities, most of which are in the outer suburbs of Western Sydney, where housing had accelerated, and there would never—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could just redirect to the question in terms of the housing targets—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are only building the schools now, only now.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** So, Deputy Premier, in terms of the targets—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We will never, never repeat that mistake of the past.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** What the Government signed up to in terms of the housing accord was to deliver 377,000 new well-located homes across the State by 2029. That's a huge surge of population, new communities, new residents—an exciting time for New South Wales.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You may recall, at the time that the accord was entered into, Premier Minns—big pat on the back by Prime Minister Albanese: "Mate, well done." You may recall that Premier Minns leaves the room and says, "Hang on a moment. I probably should've asked for some infrastructure funding. Whoops", and put his hand in his pocket and kept walking. And as what you've just touched on—are you aware of community—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not sure. Were you there? I wasn't there. I'm not sure if that's what happened.

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It was well reported in the media, Deputy Premier, very well reported. You guys have spoken about it. It's been the big pin-up, the accord. "We've done it. Labor, State Labor, Federal Labor. We're all in on this."

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I don't think anyone's saying we've done it.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The signature to the accord, Deputy Premier.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What's the question?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could just touch back on your question about school infrastructure, community concern. What do you know about the level of community concern relating to school infrastructure, off the back of the big housing—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What do I know about the level of communities' concern in school infrastructure?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I can tell you I know a lot personally about the level of community concern when it comes to school infrastructure because what we inherited—we will never, ever repeat the mistakes of what happened in Gregory Hills, what happened in Jordan Springs, what happened in Marsden Park, what happened in all those communities where housing exploded and schools were not built. We are only now building the schools that the previous Ministers under the previous Government refused to build, and I, hand on heart, will say it's a personal priority of mine. I represent many of these communities. What I know, Ms Merton, about the level of community concern is that communities are so concerned about the lack of government investment in school infrastructure that they, clearly, can change the government if they so desire.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Existing schools are concerned when the school's full, it's bursting at the seams, and then the Government rolls out a big announcement. If I could just take the Hills shire for example, and I acknowledge the attendance here of the State member representing the electorate very well. He's been in very regular contact with you, with the department, in terms of accommodating, under the housing agreement, 20,000-plus new housing, new residents. The schools are full, and there's no new school. There's no new commitments.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We will make sure that those schools have the capacity for the students that will come. We actually, upon coming to government, undertook an enrolment growth audit that showed that actually the previous Government's calculations, in terms of how many people were moving into areas when we build new housing developments or infill, as you're referring to, Ms Merton, was all wrong. So I can absolutely guarantee this Committee, Mr Hodges, the people of New South Wales, the people of the Hills and the people of every community in New South Wales that we will not repeat the mistakes of the past. It is a personal priority of mine that we build schools where they are needed, because I know personally—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If we could just go back to the level of community concern here in terms of the absence of infrastructure, the funding, the commitments—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, and I'm addressing that. I know personally what it means when schools are not delivered.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The schools are full. The State member—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I think we're in vehement agreement.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of a reference to the Hills shire, on a question on notice, to the member you speak of fundings being set aside to support the work, in terms of funding for the purchase of the land. But, Deputy Premier, can I just say—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Land does have to be purchased, Ms Merton, if we're going to build new schools.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The concerns are still there because the community is saying, "How much funding? What's the time frame?"—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do you know, Ms Merton—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** —"What work's being done? When will it be delivered?"

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I understand these processes. But, Ms Merton, you know that when—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Housing's booming.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Communities are busting.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** And the schools are full.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes. Sorry, but the previous Government had 12 years to do this, and they did not invest in schools in growing areas. I would take the allegation that somehow we don't need to purchase land when we're building new schools. We've learnt from previous mistakes that if land is not set aside—and, of course, governments need to purchase land. So wouldn't it stand to reason that we announce that we're purchasing land and paying for the purchase of that land in order to build new schools? I understand that the Liberals and Nationals don't have much experience when it comes to building schools in new areas, but we certainly will make it a hallmark of our Government.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, if I could take you back to before the election, there was a commitment made relating to a new school in the East Hills area, in Milperra. Once again, a pre-election commitment—new high school's coming, capacity's building, housing's building.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Sorry, Ms Merton. Can I ask you the commitment. What was the commitment you speak of?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It was a commitment made by yourself, the then Opposition, before the election, of a new high school at Milperra.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Before what election?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The 2023 State election.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** When was that? Was that an election commitment, Ms Merton? I don't think it was.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, at the last estimates, both Madam Chair and myself have asked about the Milperra high school.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It was not an election commitment. Okay. I'm going to—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You tell us about upgrades, to the adjoining schools, that were committed to and funded by the previous Government. The question remains unanswered—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** About Milperra?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** —about the new high school. We're not looking for more upgrades. They were funded under the previous Government. We're looking for your commitment: a new high school in Milperra.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** And I'll answer this question directly, Ms Merton. This also goes to the issue of land available. I think, at the time that we made those comments as an opposition, there was a proposal to dispose of that land that previously belonged to the Western Sydney University. In that time that intervened, prior to us coming to government, the deal was already done with WSU, signed and enabled by the previous Government. So that land is no longer available. So we could talk about a high school at Milperra, but the land is being used, and the previous Government ensured that—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The commitment was made, and if, upon investigation, we've realised what you've just detailed here—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The land has gone.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If, upon investigation, we've realised what the difficulty with land availability is, there's nothing else? No further investigations of other land, no new high school? That's it? "We got it wrong"?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The land has gone, thanks to—I'm not sure—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** "We got it wrong"? "We made the commitment on false pretences"?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Merton, I think you're either extremely confused or you haven't done your research properly. That land has gone. The previous Government signed a deal.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The question is about the new school, nothing else being under consideration. The land, the promise, the acquisition—it didn't work.

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** The previous member for East Hills could have resolved this by not doing the deal to get rid of the WSU land for anything—the deal has already been done. It's a moot point.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you, Minister. I wanted to ask you some questions about the Manufacturing for Schools program. But first I just wanted to ask whether you could confirm the media reports about allegations in relation to School Infrastructure, including the former chief executive, Mr Manning, having been referred to ICAC. Is that correct?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I actually am not going to jeopardise any investigation that may or may not be happening.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not asking you to. But there were media reports and there were comments from you at the time about wanting to have the highest levels of integrity, when that program was cancelled. I'm just asking whether a referral has been made, that you're aware of.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm going to be very clear with the words I am using because if there is an investigation underway—which may or may not be underway—I am not going to jeopardise anything.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that. But did you or the secretary make a referral?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am not going to jeopardise any investigation that may or may not be underway. Of course, the comments I made on that occasion stand. We have the highest expectation of integrity because that arm of the department—which we're currently ushering through quite a lot of reform, bringing that arm back into the department—is responsible for doing the things that Ms Merton was talking about and building the schools that are required.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am well aware of what School Infrastructure does; it was set up under our Government.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Well, what a raging success it has been.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What was that?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I said, what a raging success it has been.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Right, so all the schools that the team at School Infrastructure have built over the last decade are not a raging success?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, I mean that I have made it very, very clear that I, as Minister and on behalf of the people of New South Wales, want School Infrastructure to go in a different—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. I hope Ms Harrington's team were listening to what you said about all the work that they do.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That's not what I said, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You did. Last time you were here and we asked about Mr Manning, you said that he decided to move on to other opportunities. Were you aware then of any allegations or concerns?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Any allegations or concerns that have been raised with me, the secretary or the department have been referred to the appropriate authorities.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Right, but were you aware of that when we asked you about that during the last estimates in February? You indicated that he has moved on to pursue other opportunities. You didn't give any indication that there were any allegations or concerns raised with you. But had there been prior to him moving on?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Look, I am just not going to jeopardise any investigation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So you can't give us an indication as to—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am not going to jeopardise any investigation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With respect, I am not asking you to do that. I completely appreciate how ICAC operates and also that allegations are just that. I am not asking you to go into that, with respect. But last time you basically gave the Committee an understanding that Mr Manning had moved on to other opportunities and there had been a restructure.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is all correct though.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's right. I am not saying it's not. But I am asking, prior to that decision being made, were you aware of any allegations or concerns, and is that part of the reason Mr Manning was moved on?

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am happy to answer this.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am trying to find out if you were telling the truth.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Obviously the nature, the reasons and the circumstances around Mr Manning's departure are most definitely—and I am not attempting to abdicate my responsibility here—an operational matter. But I would say that I have made it very clear from my time in opposition and from pretty much my first day as Minister that we want, as a Government, for School Infrastructure to go in a very different direction. It was not working for the people of New South Wales who needed schools to be built in growing areas, in particular.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We built more schools than ever before. Can you advise me then about the "modern methods of construction" approach? You are on the record talking about how it's a great process.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It is.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There's been media. Are you still intending to use that to build schools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes. In fact, I think we announced this morning that we are letting out 85 tenders for the public preschools. We are very proud of that investment. That also includes modern methods of construction.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It only took two years. So even though you're still going ahead with modern methods, you have terminated the APP contract?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I want to make it clear with the APP contract that it was terminated on commercial grounds. That actually—and I will get to this straight away—wasn't a construction contract.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that. But why did you sign it and then literally months later terminate it? What was the change?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Basically, what we did—and I think the people of New South Wales would expect us to do this, and I am constantly asking School Infrastructure to find the fastest, most efficient ways of delivering on our very ambitious program of school delivery. Once we actually ran a—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That is fine, but you signed a contract, Minister, and months later you cancelled it.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am answering you, Ms Mitchell. Once we ran a really close eye over it, we actually found that we could do it in house more efficiently.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But why didn't you run a really close eye over it before you signed the contract a few months previously?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This is another example of how—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Don't you think it's bizarre to sign a contract and then months later come out and say, "Oh actually, there is a better way to do it. Whoops." How much did that whoops cost the taxpayers—a few million?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mitchell, you well know that the beginnings of this contract with APP actually began when you were Minister.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But it was signed under you, Minister. And then a few months later you reneged on the contract. It cost millions of dollars. I was a pretty big whoops moment.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You can't rewrite history.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** Order! I will hear the point of order.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We actually make no apologies for asking School Infrastructure—

**The CHAIR:** Deputy Premier, a point of order has been taken.

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**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I have raised this point of order before. Ms Mitchell insists on speaking over the Deputy Premier when she is trying to provide an answer. It is impossible for Hansard to be able to keep an accurate record of what is happening in the proceedings if two people are speaking concurrently.

**The CHAIR:** For the sake of Hansard, I uphold the point of order.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Absolutely, Chair. How much did the cancellation of the APP contract cost?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The APP contract was terminated on commercial grounds.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How much did it cost?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am answering the question. The contract was terminated as per the agreed terms of the contract.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How much did that cost?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. That's all you had to do.

**The CHAIR:** Deputy Premier, I wanted to ask you about the department resource that was sent out called *Supporting the school community during the current conflict in the Middle East*. Are you aware of the discriminatory way that has been put into practice in some schools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I don't know the exact resource to which you are referring, Ms Boyd, to be fair. I am not sure if Mr Dizdar knows or I can take it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** This is one I asked a question on notice about in July. This is a resource that was put out by the department, *Supporting the school community during the current conflict in the Middle East*. It is instructing principals and schools to be neutral when it comes to the conflict in the Middle East. I have heard from many students who have told me that the result of this have been, for example, that Palestinian students have not been able to wear their keffiyeh at school, they haven't been able to have a Palestinian flag on their bag, and when they have sat up all night watching the conflict and grieving for family and friends, when they go to school they are not allowed to talk about the fact that they are Palestinian. This has all been brought home to this policy that was issued by the department. Are you aware of that? How does this occur?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This is obviously very difficult terrain for principals and teachers to manage at this current point. I would say that I know that they are managing this in a context where we have students and staff who are impacted by this conflict in many different ways. They might be—and I loathe to use this word—on different sides of the conflict. Everyone, regardless of whether you are a student or staff member or family member in the public school system, has a right to feel safe and belong in the public school system. I am not aware of the particular issues that have come from that policy, but let me take that away. Our intention to ensure that public schools are neutral and that everyone can belong is one we take very seriously. I take it very seriously personally, as Minister. As public schools, we open our doors to absolutely everyone.

**The CHAIR:** That's right.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That means everyone needs to feel like they can belong. But let me take that on notice personally about that particular policy. But that is the intent of everything we do. That is the intent.

**The CHAIR:** The conflict in the Middle East is not a football match. It's not about teams and sides.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I know and I didn't want to use that word, but I did not know how else to describe it.

**The CHAIR:** I know that isn't what you were saying. But the idea that all conversation about the nuances and the complexities in region have been silenced has caused a real issue for many, many students and teachers. Do you think in hindsight the reaction from the New South Wales Government and in particular the Department of Education was hasty?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Look, I really, really don't want to see a system or situation where any student or staff member feels that way in a public school or in the system. Everything we do is aimed at public schools being a neutral place. For everyone—and I know this will be the case—that you may have spoken to, Ms Boyd, who feels maybe uncomfortable or that it could be done better, I know there are thousands of classrooms where teachers are navigating this very difficult terrain expertly every day. There is nuance in this, as there is nuance in so many other things that kids come to school with. Kids aren't coming to school in a vacuum; they are coming from home and what they see on the TV, as you said. They are talking to their teacher, who is often the most-trusted adult



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outside of their parents or even in their life. They are communicating with their teacher, principal or person at school, who have to navigate that terrain.

**The CHAIR:** That's right.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It is being done in schools anyway and, where people are uncomfortable, we'll take that away.

**The CHAIR:** Because what teachers are telling me is that ordinarily they are left to their own devices to use their own judgement in terms of having those discussions with their students. But, because of this directive from the department, I've heard of teachers being basically disciplined for talking about these issues in their classes. Are you aware of how many teachers have been disciplined?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have to take that particular concern that you've raised on advisement from the department because that's a particular set of circumstances if teachers are being disciplined. Mr Dizdar would probably have an update on how we're managing that with staff.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think it's a good topic you talk to, Ms Boyd. I do want to thank our school communities who have been working through distressing and difficult times around this, because we're not cut off from global events. But what I can tell you, in a series of communication we did put out—and maybe your line of questioning is a good reminder to us that we should reinforce this with the ongoing nature of the conflict. We did put out material in a November communication around our school leaders, teachers and support staff—how they can best address student wellbeing and address this difficult topic in facilitating communication with families. So you are spot on. We had lots of feedback to say, "Look, I'm a geography teacher. I'm a science teacher. But these are the kids in front of me. I want advice and help about how to help support kids in this situation."

**The CHAIR:** Advice and help is very different to a directive and to something that then has resulted in principals disciplining teachers for just having a discussion. Do you think, in hindsight—I know that things got politically heated in November. But, now that we are as far down the track as we are and we can see the devastation that's occurring—we've heard from Jewish students, from Palestinian students. They want to have proper discussions about these issues. This directive of having to treat something as being neutral when it is clearly anything but is upsetting for students and teachers. In hindsight, do you think it was a mistake to issue this guideline?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't quite concur around "mistake". In speaking with the range of stakeholders in my role and in speaking with the principals' association and the Teachers Federation and in the vast visits to schools across the State, we've done our best to communicate and support our people. Since 1848 the might of public education has been that we do have to be neutral, that we do have to be thoughtful, that we do have to be balanced.

**The CHAIR:** Well, we're not neutral on murder. We're not neutral on most crimes. Why would we be neutral on war?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** These are very difficult global events which have impact on our school communities and we're going to continue to give guidance around that and support around that. I think your line of questioning is fair because it was November advice. It might be timely again—

**The CHAIR:** It's still having a really severe impact on a lot of students and teachers. Deputy Premier, would you look into—I did ask this on notice and I didn't get an answer—how many people have actually been disciplined and how many children have been suspended or expelled because of a breach of this policy?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Let me take that on notice. But I will note the secretary just made some comments about how maybe it's timely to look at this. I just want to make it clear again: Everything comes from the standpoint of ensuring that our public schools are neutral places.

**The CHAIR:** But neutral doesn't mean ignoring that a war is occurring.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, and you're—definitely not from us. You're not hearing anything that is anything other than just trying to protect the wellbeing of our staff and students.

**The CHAIR:** Can I ask you something completely different. As you know, private schools have an exemption from the Anti-Discrimination Act. I wrote to you in July about one of the people who contacted me—their negative experience of disability discrimination in a private school, where their child with disability was not provided with adequate support. As I mentioned in my letter, that's just one example of the multiple people I get coming to me with these experiences. I haven't heard back from you in relation to that particular letter. But do you have any intention to stop this discrimination in private schools against children with disability?

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** Let me take that particular issue that you've raised about the correspondence on notice and get back to you about that. I will get back to you about that. That's not good enough. I believe, if I'm wrong—I've only been briefed in a short form, as I said, about the parliamentary inquiry, but this may be part of what the recommendations are. Is that correct—about the anti-discrimination?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Read the dissenting statements, Minister.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Of course there were dissenting statements. God love the upper House!

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, it was fairly—

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are obviously, as I've said before, considering the recommendations of that. That will come as part of that. And I will get back to you about your letter.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** I'll just ask the secretariat to hand up a document to you, Minister. While we're doing that, I'll ask the first question. Do you consider your department to be a model government employer or is that something you strive towards?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I would expect the Department of Education to be a model employer. And if there are examples of where they are not, I would like that to be raised with me, please.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Let's raise them with you then.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Let's do it.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** What you have before you is a case before the Personal Injury Commission of New South Wales. It relates to an incident where a principal was demoted from that role to a classroom position because of an asbestos in soil incident and what preceded that was a fairly vicious online campaign led by a former member of this place—but that's not the issue. If you go to clause 43 in that document, it states that Ms French, or French, being Ms Jenny French—she was a former principal who was now investigated with PES—would have been aware that the applicant bore no responsibility for what occurred at the school. Yet she was still demoted from principal to classroom teacher. Then if you go to clause 63, it says, "I've had cause to consider employer investigations over a number of years. I've rarely seen exhibited, if ever, such an egregious failure of fairness and process as was visited upon the applicant." Now, Minister and Mr Dizdar, Darryl Curry is the secretary's representative in these matters and was the decision-maker. What conversations have been had with Mr Curry and, in particular, Ms French as an investigator in terms of this judgement and these comments being made that you are clearly failing to be a model government employer?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Can I just respond immediately, because this is obviously something that's just been shown to me. I will need to ask the secretary to respond but, of course, I understand what you're referring to in terms of needing the Department of Education to be a model government employer. I actually am not across this particular matter that's occurred and the PES investigation, so I'll ask Mr Dizdar to—

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Are you across the investigation, Mr Dizdar?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm across the particular matter, Mr Banasiak. I'm not across the particular documents where you reference, but I'm across the matter.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Were you aware of the Personal Injury Commissioner's comments around your department failing so egregiously in fairness and process?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What I can say on public record here is—you'd appreciate, Mr Banasiak, in your time EPAC, Employee Performance and Conduct directorate, when you were an employee with us and now the Professional and Ethical Standards—there are allegations put to our former employee. These were very serious allegations. They were thoroughly assessed and there was an outcome. Then there was an injury—workers compensation claim here. What I can tell you and the Committee is that I employed Mr Chris Wheeler, retired former deputy ombudsman, who came in and worked with our audit directorate, to do an assessment of where we're up to in the Professional and Ethical Standards.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Are you prepared to table that report?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Maybe let me give you this detail. Under a former secretary there'd been a Tedeschi review, which you'd be across.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** I'm aware.

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** Under my tenure—and it was about 14 months in—I wanted to just get an expert lens on where we're up to. I was briefed by Mr Wheeler, as was PES. PES fully cooperated with that. Can I tell you, Mr Banasiak, this was one of the cases, which is completed, that Mr Wheeler looked at—amongst about half-a-dozen cases—to see if all of our efforts had been aligned with what was required. He indicated that he was comfortable across those half-a-dozen cases, including this one that you've tabled.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** So he disputes what the Personal Injury Commission stated in saying that it was an egregious failure of fairness and process?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, he briefed me to say, on the material evidence on file in this case, that he was comfortable with what the outcomes of that case were. Mr Banasiak—

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** All the outcomes? What about the outcome for that worker, who now won't work for the department or probably won't ever work again?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** You'd appreciate the privacy and sensitivity of the individual. If you're open to it, I'm more than happy as secretary to come and brief you outside of the Committee on both Mr Wheeler's work—

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Are you prepared to table the Wheeler review to this Committee?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me take that on notice and see what I'm in a position to be able to table. It was an internal review for the purposes of assessing where we're up to.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** But the Tedeschi review was quite public. I'd be interested to see how we actually improved ourselves from the Tedeschi to the Wheeler review, because the reports I'm getting anecdotally from teachers and principals are that we haven't.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me take that on notice and see what I'm able to do.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** How many cases has the department lost in the Fair Work Commission over the last five years against teachers and principals?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm happy to take that on notice. I don't have that data in front of me, but I'm happy to come back to you and the Committee.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** Sure. When you're coming back to us, can you come back to us on the total cost in terms of settlements in those cases that you've lost in the Fair Work Commission?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** With what we're able to provide, we'd be able to, Mr Banasiak.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** And if that requires you to go to Treasury to get the answer, I'm happy for you to do that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're happy to give you what we're able to.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** What is the average time it takes to resolve an investigation by PES, and how does that compare to the EPAC days and the Tedeschi report recommendations around this?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That one doesn't have a black and white answer, unfortunately, because—

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** I'm happy for you to take it on notice. I've just noticed that my—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't think I have to. I can help you, I think.

**The Hon. MARK BANASIAK:** I'm just conscious that I'm going to pass to Ms Mihailuk to give her the last three minutes. I'm happy for you to come back and give me more detail—or we can discuss offline.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Maybe we will come back, because I think I can answer it here and not take it on notice—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You can answer it on notice. Is that all right, Madam Chair?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, back on that issue of the inquiry that handed down this report last week in disability, I do want to make the point and ask you to read the dissenting statements—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Okay.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** —and to be fully aware and cognisant that recommendations 24 and 25 did not have any specific evidence put to it throughout the inquiry. The terms of reference at no stage referenced any suggestions that we would amend or seek to amend the ADA Act. That means a number of very critical

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stakeholders to you in the Catholic independent, Catholic systemic, Islamic, Jewish, and other Christian religious institutions and schools did not participate in this inquiry because they didn't think they had to beyond providing access to their schools, for example.

We only heard actually good, positive feedback about the non-public sector schools. We had only one representative that was invited to the inquiry to speak at the hearing, and only glowing information was provided to them, that the feedback we mostly received was positive about children and their families, or children with disabilities and their families with their experience with non-public sector. I just want to put it to you to do that, but I'll leave that because otherwise I think the Chair and I will go back and forth all day on this issue. I direct you to a serious article. As Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Minister for Western Sydney, are you concerned with the article today about ICAC twice having written to the Premier and to your Cabinet about the need to tighten up lobbying reform in New South Wales?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes. I mean, this is most definitely a matter for Minister Graham, which I believe that he is onto—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It's a matter for the whole Cabinet, right?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, of course. We take the issues of integrity in government very, very seriously. My advice is that Minister Graham is dealing with that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** How many lobbyists are on the books with the Department of Education, for example? Mr Dizdar might be able to give me that answer on notice. Do you have a regular pool of—there are 170 lobbying firms, apparently, in New South Wales that are all registered. How many of those does the department—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mihailuk, I tend to get lobbied by students and teachers, not by lobbying firms.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I imagine there might be some lobbying firms interested in some of the land that you have, for example, or be interested in some of the services that the department actually—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** If we had land, we'd be using it to build schools.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It's a serious question. You can take it on notice. I'm sure you'll find that out of 170 lobbyists, I'm sure some of them have had something to do in the education space. If you can take that on notice?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm happy to.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, we've got 2½ minutes each.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, I wanted to ask about some of the changes to distance education, particularly in the Northern Rivers. You'd be well aware of some of the community concerns around what's happened at the Southern Cross School of Distance Education?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Of course.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you able to provide any information for the community today about why decisions were made to stop those outreach services, which impact and service some of the most vulnerable communities?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What has happened, Ms Mitchell, at Southern Cross is a pretty unfortunate set of circumstances because of some serious enrolment irregularities that were found via an audit. That is being investigated by the department at the moment. It's just very unfortunate. The enrolments were inflated and, as a result, we have had to make changes. We cannot have a situation, obviously, where we audit a school and we find that the enrolment figures that are given are different to the actual, because we have to—and I think the people of New South Wales expect us to do this—allocate resources, including teachers, based on the need of that particular school based on their actual enrolments.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. But my question to you, then, is there are obviously real students who have been benefiting from that school?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Some of whom are highly disadvantaged, who now don't have access in the same way they used to. What are you going to do for those actual, real students that benefited from that way of learning to ensure continuity for them? That's the concern that's coming through from the local member, Richie Williamson, and others as well.

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** I appreciate that. My answer was about putting it in context of the issue that we are dealing with at Southern Cross.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that, but what are you doing for those who are there?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Let me take that away and take that on notice. But we are dealing with a significant set of irregularities at Southern Cross, which obviously has an impact on what is delivered.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. I'm happy if Mr Dizdar or Ms Summerhayes can answer, but for those students there now who can't access that service anymore, who aren't enrolled and aren't actually getting an education at the moment, what is in place today for those students?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm happy to ask Mr Dizdar to give any information that we might have at hand.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Like the Deputy Premier said, an audit of the school has shown what appears to be significant enrolment irregularity.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've been working with staff at the school. I understand, and I'm being fully briefed, because there's a number of staff who are distressed by the outcome that they're working through. We're making sure we can support them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What about the students, though, Mr Dizdar, with respect?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We haven't changed the enrolment provision for any of those students. If there's a particular program or initiative that you're referring to—all the students who were enrolled in that Southern Cross distance ed are continuing. But if there's a particular program, you might want to just tell us the particular program.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I might take that offline with you. Sure. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Just a quick one from me. The recent announcement in relation to the requirement for teachers—previously they had to complete the 50 hours of education in disability, mental health and Aboriginal education. I know that you've not had time to consider our full report coming out of our recent inquiry, but one of the recommendations was around how we, I guess, incentivise teachers to continue to learn, particularly in areas to do with disability. Appreciating the need for teacher autonomy and respecting that, when you made that decision to remove that requirement, were there thoughts given to what else we can do?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There's no doubt that we need to support the professional development of teachers to continue to upskill when it comes to servicing an increasing student population with disability. The changes that were announced recently about professional development were about trusting the profession to be able to choose which professional development is relevant to them in their professional setting, as is pretty much afforded any other profession that has similar accreditation requirements. We trust teachers to be able to do that. It significantly cuts down workload. Every single sector was calling on this. I'm very proud of the work that the NESA board did on this with all three sectors—not just public schools but Catholic and independent school teachers as well. We have made it very clear that the professional development needs to be of the highest standard and relevant to their setting. I would absolutely bet my bottom dollar that there will be lots of teachers that will be using the opportunity to upskill using PD on disability. We'll be doing everything we can. I'm sure that we're intimately involved in that.

**The CHAIR:** And we can track that data—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** —so I'll no doubt be asking you again in a year's time.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There'll be regular audits is my understanding. Mr Martin might have more information on that.

**The CHAIR:** I might come back to you in the afternoon. Do you want to ask a final question in this time?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Just back on that lobbying issue, I also remind you that you're Minister for Western Sydney. You have got the airport there. I have no doubt that there will be lobbyists coming to your door as well.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have taken that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I would like you to take that seriously, and the fact that you, as Deputy Premier, should be asking the Premier and your Cabinet to respond to the ICAC commissioner at the very least.

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**The CHAIR:** That brings us to Government question time. Are there any questions at this point? No. That means we get an early tea break. We will break and be back at 11.15.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back. I'm going to begin again with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Welcome back, everybody. Deputy Premier, if I could pick up on the issue of the department's code of conduct or the teachers' code of conduct, do you recall that in February this year, at an earlier estimates hearing, I raised with you the teachers' code of conduct? I reported breaches of the code. I tabled photographic evidence of teachers displaying Teachers for Palestine propaganda in schools. We saw evidence of the propaganda—the signs and banners on whiteboards in the school classrooms—clearly visible in the school environment. I also spoke about the instruction that Teachers for Palestine was issuing teachers in terms of a national day of action. It said, "Get involved. Wear your keffiyeh and your Palestine badges into the school. Let's be seen." Parents are continuing to ask about what the value is of the code of conduct. Does it stand for anything apart from a piece of paper that we might discuss on these occasions? What has changed? We are continuing to hear more today. The Chair mentioned some of that stuff. What is the value of the code of conduct today?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** In relation to the first question—you asked about if I recall you asking about that. I do. You may recall my answer was that we expect teachers to be neutral and that my expectation is that they be neutral in the classroom. It's related to the previous discussion we had about public schools being neutral places. I know that they are and that teachers, as part of their expertise and training, are trained and deal with navigating this difficult terrain on this issue and others each and every day. I have to say that when you're talking about a particular group of teachers that call themselves Teachers for Palestine, I don't know if this is news to the Committee but I can't, nor can the department, stop groups of people forming together under a group that is not endorsed by the department.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I referenced that earlier. We have agreed—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Teachers for Palestine is not a department group.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** —that the right to protest outside of the classroom, outside of school hours, is a liberty available to everybody. The issue was what the code details and the conduct we're seeing in the classroom and by teachers during school hours. That was the issue. Parents are continuing to question the value of the code. Is it enforced? Is it recognised? Does it mean anything?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It is enforced, it is recognised and it is probably used each and every day. I'm happy to ask Mr Dizdar to go into how that's used in schools, but it is absolutely used.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** We're happy to go to that this afternoon, Mr Dizdar. You may remember—

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order: I have refrained from taking this point of order, but it is long-established custom and convention that a Minister can refer to an official to elucidate an answer that has been given.

**The CHAIR:** That is true, but it is also within the rights of the member to redirect the question should they choose to, given the time available with the Minister.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, in terms of the level of community concern on this, what parents are seeing and what students are reporting to them, we continue to be presented with examples of this. If I could direct you to Davidson High School, there was concern across the community on that.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, I saw that in the media.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Concerned parents have met with me. I entered the discussion by questioning again what does the code of conduct mean. You may recall with Davidson High School there were reports of the geography teacher screening YouTube videos from a self-described socialist YouTube account relating to the Middle East conflict in terms of Israel and Palestine. Students and families of that school of the Jewish faith—and I recognise that Madam Chair has spoken about Palestine, as well as your comments relating to this. We have a situation where the family reported the breach to the school. Contact was made with the family up to two weeks following the report of that breach. There are questions around the duty of care to the student. What is the employment status of that current teacher? Is it fair that the student affected by this is continuing to be educated independently, isolated from the classroom, and the teacher continues to teach? What more do we

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know about this? Has there been any discipline? Are there warnings? How does it work? Do we just sit back and hear from concerned parents and students?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No. I remember at the time, Ms Merton, when this was raised in the media I think by Sky News, who might be in the audience here. That was a concerning use of resources by that teacher at Davidson High School. I am going to take advice, but I am going to answer this question. This was dealt with immediately. I do believe that the student in question is actually back in school. I don't know if she is learning independently.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** That was my question, Deputy Premier. Correct. She is learning independently and isolated in the library. There is no classroom teaching relevant.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Can I just ask for advice on what is happening with that teacher, please, so that the Committee gets the right information? Mr Dizdar?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We were made aware of that matter. Ms Summerhayes might give a bit more detail. We did work through that matter. We take the code of conduct—all our staff do—very seriously. In my 27 years in the organisation, I don't know a teacher or school leader who hasn't taken the matter seriously. I think we've always got to take context when you investigate and look into a matter. You've got a teacher before you who hasn't got it wrong in the past but in this case clearly the resource selection was not in line with our syllabus requirements of giving a balanced, two-sided view on this. I think it would be remiss if you think we didn't take action. My understanding when I was briefed—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** We've established possibly that the material was not balanced, as you just said.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me finish. You were interested in what action we took.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, is the concerned teacher still employed by the department today and still teaching in that environment?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That's what I've asked Mr Dizdar.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It's a yes or a no.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That teacher was fully counselled around the requirements for their professional delivery under the code of conduct. They continue to teach and we'll continue to support that teacher.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Meanwhile, students are continuing to learn outside the classroom. They are isolated. They are in the library.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** My understanding is that the teacher got it wrong on this occasion. It's not something that we've had to talk to this teacher about in the past. I think that context is really important. I was a former geography teacher myself. I would make it my mission to try and get resource selection syllabus requirement right. If I said to you that on each occasion I got that picture perfect—it's a professional endeavour. We respect that professional endeavour. The teacher got it wrong and we followed up at a system level to remind the teacher of their professional obligations, and that teacher took that on board, as we would expect.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The teacher continues to be employed and is still teaching today.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** And I support that teacher's continued employment.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the material that was shown to the students, is there some directive or clearance that those materials are endorsed and are cleared? Is it that at the teacher's discretion to show what they think forms part of the curriculum? In this instance, I think the material screened here to the students appeared on YouTube two days prior to the screening in the classroom relating to the Middle East conflict.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think I said, Ms Merton, that that material that was selected—I don't know that it was the wisest selection of material. It wasn't balanced in its representation for the students. NESA does a fine job with the syllabus and there is a new curriculum rollout, as you know—over 100 syllabuses. For forever and a day as a former teacher in the system it's the teacher and their colleagues who make professional choices about bringing that syllabus to life.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Mr Dizdar, that's why the teachers code of conduct—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** At times I use textbooks and at times I use videos. Teachers know that they are allowed to have professional discretion.

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** About the discretion of teachers I appreciate and recognise your experience here. But I think parents and the community are asking what is the value of the teachers code of conduct when students are coming home with trauma and stress and then, when they are returning to the classroom environment, they are isolated. The code of conduct seems to just—it's in a departmental folder in the back room. The application of it in the classroom, in terms of independent learning and safe learning spaces, we are not seeing it.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I hear your question. I hear your line of questioning. I've got to say that I don't concur with it at all around the importance of the code of conduct. My experience with 95,000 teachers is that they take the code of conduct very seriously. There is annual training around that. The professional obligations that come with that are taken seriously. Merely, I'm indicating to the Committee that—and as a parent in the system myself, I applaud parents who might bring their concern forward. There was a concern brought forward here and we dealt with it appropriately in line with the code of conduct. There has got to be a material difference for the teacher who gets it wrong on one occasion and a repeated occurrence of that kind.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** But as a teacher we can appreciate, Mr Dizdar—if I could just redirect in terms of what is presented here in the Davidson High School. You have articulated yourself in terms of that the choice of the material was not good and the balance was not good. We appreciate the sensitivity of the Middle East and Israel and Palestine and how this needs to be managed in the school environment. But the only thing that we can point at is the code, and it doesn't seem to stand for much. This is continuing to happen.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm indicating to you and the Committee that the code was applied and that we went and provided appropriate counselling in line with that code to this teacher, who acknowledges that we didn't get it right in this particular lesson. I want to tell teachers out there in New South Wales that they are doing a sterling job under very difficult circumstances on a global event. You and I don't hear about the instances in classrooms where they get it right and they are giving balanced consideration in discussion with young people.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** But it's a duty of care, Mr Dizdar, that's all that we have here.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** From time to time, our people might get it wrong and it's raised with us and we act on it decisively. We did that in this case. This is a teacher who could have applied better professional judgement in this instance, acknowledged it and has been counselled in line with the code. I don't agree with the representation you might be making that the code is not important.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, are you concerned that antisemitism is a systemic issue in our schools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm concerned about antisemitism, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you think it's a systemic issue in schools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm concerned about any antisemitism, any racism and any intolerance. We've actually set up the Premier's panel on the prevention of extremism and hate and we are a part of that—a crucial part. The deputy secretary of public schools is working on that. Yes, I'm concerned about antisemitism. I think everyone can put their hand on their heart and say that they are concerned about antisemitism.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have a few examples that have been raised with me by parents. One is a year 7 student at St Ives High School who has experienced ongoing antisemitic comments and cyberbullying and has also had students draw swastikas in a notebook with the intent to intimidate her. This has been raised with the school. What will you do to address an issue like that?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I can't begin to imagine how traumatic that would be for a young person in school to have to deal with that. That is extremely concerning. That is why we are engaged constantly with faith leaders. That is why we are looking at religious intolerance. That is why we are setting up a hotline about bullying, particularly when it relates to religious intolerance. I will need to take that away. I'm appalled at that. I don't think anyone can actually say that their response to that would be anything than "That is disgusting."

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You are happy to take that one away and look at what you can do?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Of course.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have one other one that I've been asked to raise with you at Lindfield Learning Village. There are allegations that someone also drew a swastika and a sentence saying "Kill the Jews" in the school bathrooms and that students have been told that all Jews deserve to die. Again, that has been reported to the school. Could you take that one on notice as well and report back?



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**Ms PRUE CAR:** I will definitely take that on notice because there is a responsibility that I have personally and that all the people around the table have and that every teacher has and every principal has to make sure that our duty of care means that every student feels like they can belong in our public schools. That is unacceptable. I will take that away.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** As we've seen from questions from us and also from the Chair, there are some pretty serious things happening. If you can report back to the Committee on specifically what actions you will take as well—I appreciate you said that you are going to take them away but if on notice you could provide information about what you will do in those particular schools.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm happy to.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to move now to a new issue. The numeracy check, you've made some comments publicly that it's a policy area that you're looking at. Have you done any costings as to how much it will cost to implement a statewide numeracy check?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You're right, Ms Mitchell. We are actively looking at this. It is also tied up in the negotiations with the Commonwealth Government because it is something that the better and fairer schools review has pointed to. I would very much like to have a situation where it's part of the agreement with the Commonwealth Government that part of the increased funding we receive from them goes towards a numeracy check. I think we can both agree that the phonics check I think that you introduced is really helpful.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It is. That's a great point.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I would like to do the same for numeracy.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But my point is, Minister, we didn't need a Federal funding agreement to implement a statewide phonics check.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, and I've said—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If I could just finish my question. I put to you that you don't need a Federal funding agreement to put in place a statewide numeracy check. Why won't you just do it like we did with the phonics check?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I've said publicly that if the Commonwealth Government doesn't do it, we will do it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Have you costed it? Have you done any policy work on it?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There is work being done right now.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have an indication as to how much it might cost to roll out?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So just confirming that even if the Federal deal doesn't land, you will look to implement—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, we want to do it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have a time frame of when you would like that to be in place?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I can guarantee you this would be something that we will be proud of. This will be something that I will be shouting from the rooftops when we do it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine. So this year, next year, this term of government?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, what I'm saying is, Ms Mitchell, this is not going to be a secret. I'm going to be out there saying, "This is the numeracy check. I'm proud to be advocating for this."

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine. But you've made public comments about how you think it's a good idea, probably after comments were made in the media by other organisations about it. Have you done any actual policy work to implement it? Have you got a time frame of when you'd like to see it in place? Has any of that happened?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, and we are doing policy work on it now, and I hope to say something very shortly.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Had that happened before it was talked about by people like Glenn Fahey?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So your work on an independent numeracy check happened prior to Glenn Fahey?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We have been looking at this for some time.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you provide on notice when that work began, under your Government?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm actually telling you now that we have been looking at it quite—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, but "for some time", to be fair, Minister, is not an answer. When did you start working on a policy platform to do a statewide numeracy check?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not sure why we're arguing about something that we both agree with.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, we agree, but you've said, "We've been thinking about it for a long time." I'm just asking when did you start doing the work? It's not a hard question.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I mean, it would have been nice if it happened under the previous 12 years.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We did the phonics, so you can do numeracy. When did you start that policy work?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** After a significant time. There was no phonics.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When did you start the policy work on the numeracy check?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I will take that away.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great. Thank you.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But we've been looking at it for some time, and I agree with Mr Fahey.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Then I expect that that work would have started months ago then, but I look forward to your answer.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It's pretty rich coming from someone who was a Minister in a 12-year-old government.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you've just said that you've been looking at it for some time. You should be able to tell me when you started the work. Was it one of the first things you did?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I will take it on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. I want to ask about how you are going to measure outcomes in schools. Are you going to have any outcomes that are measured by NAPLAN?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When will they be in place?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We need one more year of NAPLAN results. As you well know—and I think you were probably part of EMM when this decision was made to change the way that NAPLAN was reported.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, I actually pushed it. It was my idea.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That was a Commonwealth requirement. All the parents that read the NAPLAN report and think, "What does this mean?"—that's the Commonwealth Government.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They're not that hard to understand, Minister.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That requirement has changed. We need a further year of that data so we can compare apples with apples so we can have actually meaningful targets for NAPLAN, not just on a school-by-school basis but also at a system level.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will every school have to use NAPLAN as a measurement for an outcome and improvement?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Every school does.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you said you're bringing in new ones next year, and media reports indicate that that will be optional. Schools might look at using reports or other methods to determine growth. Are you confirming that every school will have to have outcomes using NAPLAN as a measurement?

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** You well know that every school is different. The targets for a school for specific purposes is going to be very different to a selective high school.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will they all use NAPLAN, Minister? It's pretty simple.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The truth is that we will be working with schools on their school-by-school targets, and one more year of NAPLAN results will result in NAPLAN targets for schools and NAPLAN targets for the system.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So every school will have to use NAPLAN? That's a yes?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Schools use NAPLAN, and they'll be using NAPLAN in their targets.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But in your new targets, will every school have to use NAPLAN?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Every school will have targets.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With NAPLAN as one of the measurable outcomes?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** They're all using NAPLAN.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Deputy Premier, obviously the Government has made it clear that there are some very significant housing targets. You've got, I think, 37 transport orientated development locations—which were 31 and now 37—including metro and suburban stations, and something in the order of somewhere between 170,000 to 200,000 new dwellings. Have you or your department started to look at what this will mean for additional families and children? We know the census says one child minimum per household. When you look at these sorts of housing figures—for example, Castle Hill will have over 9,000 new dwellings. What sort of work has the department done in relation to anticipating new schools? I mean, some of these suburbs, like Lakemba and Punchbowl, I can't even imagine—you don't have the greenfield sites for schools. What are the plans of how you're going to accommodate the thousands of children?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You're right to call that out, Ms Mihailuk, because some of these infill areas do come with significant challenges because they are already quite built up, and there's a lack of greenfield sites for the Government to purchase to build new schools. Are we working on the impact of the housing targets and the Government's priorities of housing on the need for future school infrastructure? The answer to that is yes. School Infrastructure is hard at work on that. I can guarantee you I make it a personal priority of mine as Minister for us to do the work that is required to build schools where they are needed. I represent a community that was at the actual coalface of what happens when you don't do that. Under my watch, there is absolutely no way this would not be a priority for the Government.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What guarantees are you going to give, then, for these communities? I'm just thinking of Castle Hill—already, that high school there has 51 demountables. Chester Hill has over 50 demountables. Have you got a specific plan? Will you be coming out with a plan on how you're going to accommodate these students? New schools? I'm just thinking if we're struggling at the moment with finalising this Federal deal, I think our priority—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The Federal deal is not to do with infrastructure, Ms Mihailuk.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No, of course it's not.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It's recurrent funding.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** That's right; it has to do with resourcing. Nevertheless, infrastructure is such a huge issue.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It's huge.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** My concern here is that it's one thing announcing housing, but the two areas that we would like to hear more from is, one, where are the new hospitals going to be and, two, where are the new schools? You've already got such a surplus number of demountables, which is why I've given you those figures. We already know that.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, that came from the former Government, no doubt about that, but I don't know what work is being done to remove these demountables now. I think you're actually purchasing more demountables at the moment rather than building new schools.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I think we're in agreement that more housing means we need to have more schools. While that seems like an obvious thing to say, governments of the past didn't actually understand that equation.

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More houses means more people who are going to have babies who actually, by law, have to go to school. It would seem self-explanatory, but not so much for previous governments.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So what are you thinking? How many schools do you envisage every year that you can get built?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I've tasked School Infrastructure. We're doing this important work. Ms Harrington is leading School Infrastructure expertly, very competently, looking into this work for where we need to build schools and upgrade schools. You're right to call out some of those areas in the inner south-west of Sydney. Those areas may need to be upgrades, whereas there are no greenfield sites for us to even purchase to build new schools. We will do the work.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you're envisaging more higher density type of schooling going up, right? Is that what you are suggesting?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That's not what I said. What I said is we will do the work to ensure that we build schools and upgrade schools where they are needed. Make no mistake about this: Some of the biggest challenges we are facing to do with declining enrolments are a direct result of the previous Government not building schools where they are needed and the fact that we've had to turn around vacancies, which are 24 per cent down today.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, the migration levels are sky high right now over the last 18 months or two years, actually, and the Coalition weren't even in government when that happened. You've got the issue of migration numbers, and you've got the issue of the Premier making a decision that housing is a priority, both social housing but indeed, in this case, private housing. We all agree on that.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm agreeing with you.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But the problem here is that you now have a real issue with finding appropriate land. I know the Premier asked every department to find vacant land for the purposes of housing. I don't know what was finalised. Is there an update that Mr Dizdar might be able to provide in the afternoon? Did you hand over any Department of Education land for the purposes of housing?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mihailuk, that is most definitely a question for Minister Kamper. But I will tell you this: If there is land that belonged to the department—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No, it's a question for you because they asked every department to work out if they had any vacant land for the purposes of housing.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am aware. I have indicated that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You would know whether you did or not. In fact, Mr Dizdar and I had a conversation about this at the last budget estimates, so you would know whether you had any land allocated for that.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Hang on, we were just talking about what an absolute disaster it is when Education gets rid of land that should have been for public schools.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes. You should have said, "No, Premier. I don't have any land for housing. I desperately need it for schools." Did that conversation happen?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** If you let me answer the question, I would say that if we had land, we would use it to build schools.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you say that no land was proposed for housing when the question was put by the Premier?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not sure what we're arguing about here.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Because there was a directive from the Premier to every department to work out and allocate what land was not being used or utilised by the department for the purposes of housing. I don't know what was finalised by the department.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Mihailuk, so much of School Infrastructure's work is about finding land on which to build a school. We are not in the business of giving away land.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you are essentially saying that your answer was, "No, we don't have any excess land to be provided for housing."

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, my answer is clearly to your previous line of questioning, on which we passionately agree with each other—there is a first time for everything—about how we need to build schools where there are new houses being built. Yes, that's a personal priority of mine, I can guarantee the people.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So what you're saying then is that when you were given a directive by the Premier to find land specifically for housing, your department chose not to do that and instead said, "No, we have to allocate land for schools instead."

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This is a whole-of-government effort. But our priority, as the Department of Education—upon my instruction and that of School Infrastructure as the arm of the department that does this—is finding land on which to build schools.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'll ask Mr Dizdar in the afternoon about which priority took place because there are two different priorities of the Government there. There is one from the Premier to find vacant land specifically for housing and you're saying that you gave the directive to your department and School Infrastructure to specifically find land for school sites.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** In news just in, the Department of Education needs land to build schools. I think the Premier would agree with that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Perhaps we could take that on notice, or would you like me to ask Mr Dizdar later? Mr Dizdar, do you have answers to that?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** He usually does, if I can say.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** He has some answers. I don't know if it's the answer that I'll be after, but I'll put it to Mr Dizdar later. I want to ask you a couple of other quick questions. Minister, back to the code of conduct and the issue of parents being distressed about some of the actions that have taken place at schools in relation to the politics that has played out both internationally and domestically. We have had the Voice and we have had other issues. It could be the department or one of the staff or managers there that might answer this instead, but are parents now taking their children out for homeschooling, for example? I know homeschooling started to rise a couple of years ago as a result of COVID and post-COVID. Do we have any numbers, like the 2022 or 2023 numbers, on the amount of parents who are exiting their children out of departmental schools and into homeschooling?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, we do. I'll ask Mr Dizdar to give some information on that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, I think Mr Martin at NESA holds the oversight over homeschooling, which cuts across all the sectors, but when I was a NESA board member—and we were recently briefed—the numbers seem to have stabilised after some years of growth, Ms Mihailuk. But Mr Martin might have the exact figures for you.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Mr Martin, did it stabilise from 2022 onwards? Is that what we are seeing, or was it after the post-COVID era?

**PAUL MARTIN:** Yes, it has. It increased over the period of COVID and the one year following, and it is now stabilising. But it is an increase from its pre-dating numbers.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, does the department still undertake exit interviews for the parents? They are required to do that, right? If they are choosing to take their children out of the system, they are required, under the policy, as I understand it, to actually interview those parents.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I note that your question is specifically about parents who might be taking their children out of department schools.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** For the purposes of homeschooling, yes.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But, just remember—as evidenced by the question answered by Mr Martin—there are obviously kids coming from the three sectors who might be moving into homeschooling, not just the public school system. I'll ask Mr Dizdar to make sure the Committee has the up-to-date information on what we do when a child wants to leave to be homeschooled.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Our schools do a great job of wrapping around every enrolment. If there is going to be a change—and it can be for a variety of reasons, Ms Mihailuk. It could be as simple as a student and family moving from one suburb to another suburb.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But you do exit interviews, right? Are they required or not? Is it optional?

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. In that case we will be working with that family on the exit from one public school to another public school, or it might be across the sectors.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Or homeschool.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** If they are asking to pursue homeschooling, we often sit them down, interview them and work through and give any system support that's needed because they may—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** The principal does that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, as well as system support that's available, because they may or may not be aware of what the homeschooling provision looks like and what their responsibilities are. We always make it clear to them that the option of coming back into the public system is available for them as well because it is a big step for families. It is almost like a step where you go from primary to high school. That's a massive step. We want to make sure that we support them really well. I find that, in the vast majority of instances, we do that. If the principal and school needs any support, we have a system expert in Mr Graham's area in the department that can go and help as well.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Good morning, Minister. As you know, I have serious concerns about the installation of synthetic turf in schools, particularly with the risk they pose to kids in terms of pollution and burns. The Department of Planning and Environment has now released its draft guidelines entitled *Synthetic Turf in Public Open Space*. I note that they specifically don't consider synthetic turf surfaces in schools, even though in those draft guidelines there are several examples given of schools in joint-venture schemes where synthetic turf gets to be shared between the school and the community. I have a few questions about how the advice of those draft guidelines will impact schools or if it is being taken into account. Firstly, the draft guidelines say:

Synthetic turf, especially those consisting of crumb rubber in-fill, should be reconsidered in bushfire prone areas.

There are several schools in the Blue Mountains that have synthetic turf playgrounds. What's being done in response to that recommendation?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm happy to take this on notice because I know it is of particular interest to you and I want to make sure that you get the right information about what we are doing in response to the report. But I believe we are investigating the impact of synthetic turf, including in schools. I believe that's happening. Let me get the latest information to you on notice.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** I have a very related follow-up question, but it's not about bushfire-prone areas. The draft guidelines also recommend developing procedures to limit the risks of ingestion, lodgement and inhalation of, or skin contact with, loose infill material. I'm pleased to hear that there might be some work going on in terms of new synthetic turf installations, but for schools that have existing synthetic turf installations, what work is being done to bring the Education Facility Standards and Guidelines to incorporate that recommendation?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I will have to take that on notice or pass to Ms Harrington if she knows. But just hearing what you're saying, obviously safety is the number one priority of ours when it comes to the wellbeing of kids in our care. That would be of concern if it is a safety issue, but I'm not sure if Ms Harrington knows anything more.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I might kick off and then Ms Harrington can add to it. Our preference, and the advice that our asset management units give—our asset management units are on the ground and support 10 schools each through an office structure, so there is quite a strong army on the ground out there. We always give the preference of natural turf. If the school is working with us and looking to install synthetic material, we will be steering them on to natural turf if they are working with us. At the moment, we only consider it in high-use zones or shared areas, and we limit it to that. We will obviously adhere to any guidelines that impact on us, too. Ms Harrington might want to add more, but my operational experience is that, whenever a school comes to us, we go natural first. We push down that avenue and hear their case or why they may want it. In the vast majority of cases, it ends up with natural turf.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I'd just add that, in terms of the draft guidelines, we will be looking at those and we will amend our Education Facility Standards and Guidelines, or EFSG, if we need to. To add to the secretary's point, if any schools are concerned, we have asset management teams that work really closely with the schools. If there needs to be any rectification of synthetic turf within schools, we will take that action at the local level.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** And that potential upgrade or update to the facilities standards and guidelines— is there an expected time frame for that one?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** No. We're having a look at the draft guidelines now, so we'll do that after we've considered the draft guidelines.

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** Can I give you a real practical example. I was at a fantastic school the other day, Mosman High School—great leadership, phenomenal school, wonderful new build, alongside buildings that are 140 years old, which are being refurbished. And, in one section of the school, there was no other viable option, which was made clear to me by AMU, as well as the principal. It's in those scenarios that we only look at the non-natural substance.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** I'm pleased to hear that it's your preference or your recommendation for natural turf, and I look forward to the answers on notice. I'm particularly concerned, given these new draft guidelines that have now come out. There are, obviously, existing synthetic turf installations across the State and, at a minimum, procedures and protocols that need to be updated, but I'd be really interested to hear if there is going to be any work to actually look at removing those and putting natural turf back in. I'll move on to a completely different topic if that's all right. This winter there's been an extraordinary rate of infection transmission in schools—particularly influenza, RSV, whooping cough, COVID.

I appreciate you're very busy, Minister, and you might not have read it yet, but the National Science and Technology Council published a report earlier this month about the impact of indoor air quality on the transmission of airborne viral diseases, and that report clearly advised governments that, in education settings, proper ventilation and air cleaning strategies enhance safety for students, for staff, reduce absenteeism and improve the learning conditions. What's the progress to date on rolling out permanent improvements to air quality in schools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Obviously, we need to ensure that our schools are as safe as possible; that goes without saying. Diseases definitely take root within school environments. That's for sure. Sometimes it just takes over, when there's an RSV. Almost everyone had RSV this season. But I'm not aware of the publication you speak of, Dr Cohn, but I'll take that away on notice and come back to the Committee.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Thank you. I know that, during the height of the pandemic, there was some work done that, I acknowledge, had to be very rushed, where a number of schools were deemed to have adequate ventilation that was natural ventilation. Do you know how many schools in New South Wales still have natural ventilation as their ventilation method?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'd just ask Mr Dizdar if he knows the detail on that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I remember the work that you're referring to. It was very timely, particularly at the height of the COVID pandemic. We can get you the exact number, but we've had a strong program of rollout of air cooling and heating in schools as well. We've got some schools that are sealed—for example, under flight paths. So we take a nuanced approach. When you've got a footprint of 9,900 hectares, 2,200 schools, you have got to make sure you can meet that nuance. But I know that that program's been very successful in the rollout of air cooling and heating. But, in terms of how many still rely on natural ventilation, let us go back to that and get you that data. As a former classroom teacher, it's always—teachers do a great job of getting in there before the kids and making sure the room's aired et cetera and then getting them to a comfort point when they arrive, but let's get you the specific number that are just using natural ventilation.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** I'm really interested in that number. And what I'm hearing anecdotally from teachers and from parents is working in classrooms that are naturally ventilated in winter—that, obviously, doesn't happen. Windows are closed, and those rooms are often filled over the recommended capacity. Now that people aren't paying as much attention as they were in the height of the pandemic, it's obviously a huge transmission risk.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Every new build and every upgrade also gets the air cooling and heating systems. And, like I said, there is an extensive rollout of air cooling and heating in our schools. But we'll go back for you to how many still rely on natural ventilation.

**The CHAIR:** In the New South Wales Government's response to the disability royal commission recommendations, there was reference made to an inclusive education unit, which performs education support functions, including advising educational authorities, educational institutions and principals on inclusive education issues. This was news to a lot of people that I've spoken with. What is this unit? Who manages it right now? Where does it sit?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It most definitely sits with Mr Graham, and I'm going to ask him to answer that question.

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Certainly. It's a unit that sits within Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing and advises schools on inclusive education practices and advises the department on our policies. It oversees advice to the Minister around these policies and around commissions and inquiries such as the royal commission.

**The CHAIR:** When was it established?

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**MARTIN GRAHAM:** The department has, certainly in my memories, always had something like this. It would've been called different things over different periods of time, but there's always been an area that provided that kind of advice. Certainly to my knowledge, since 2005—Disability Discrimination Act—would've been increased emphasis and focus on that.

**The CHAIR:** Is it called a unit? Does it have an official name?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Yes. All kind of areas of the department are often a directorate or a unit.

**The CHAIR:** How long's it been called a unit?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** I'd have to go back and check to see how long it's been called a unit.

**The CHAIR:** Does it get any specific funding?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Certainly. It's funded. It's not an independent body. It doesn't have an independent board. It's part of the department, so it's funded mainly through its staffing.

**The CHAIR:** How many people work in it?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** I can take that on notice and come back to you with that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. If you could let me know how many people and what their qualifications are, that would be useful. It's not mentioned on the website or anywhere, which is interesting.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you, Chair. Deputy Premier, do you know the current rate of inflation?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do I know the current rate of inflation?

**The CHAIR:** Google it.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes. I'm not going to be quizzed on what the current rate of inflation is, at the Committee.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you know it?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not going to be quizzed on the current—I'm just not going to do that. I'm doing my job as the Minister for Education.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** She's the Deputy Premier. We're in a cost-of-living crisis, and you don't know the—

**The CHAIR:** Order! I'm going to hear the point of order.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I know. Trust me. I know because I represent a lot of people who are really, extremely struggling, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you don't know the rate of inflation.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You know what? I'm not going to use them to make a political point.

**The CHAIR:** Order! I've had a point of order. And, when that happens, everyone else has to stop talking so we can hear the point of order. Go ahead.

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Chair, it goes to paragraph 9 of the procedural fairness resolution to do with relevance and—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What's not fair?

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** The terms of reference of this inquiry are the estimates of expenditure from the Consolidated Fund and related budget papers. So—

**The CHAIR:** One would think that inflation was relevant to expenditure, but—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That's true. Inflation is relevant. Inflation is 3.8 per cent. Okay?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm pleased you got the note. You're right. It is 3.8 per cent, and I would've hoped you'd know that. I want to take you to, just to go to my fair colleague's point here, *Budget Paper No. 02*, page 6-1, and you'll see there, Deputy Premier, the increase in recurrent expenses for the department is 3 per cent in this financial year. Can you see that?



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**Ms PRUE CAR:** I take it as read that you're reading from the budget papers, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. So you accept that the current rate of inflation is 3.8 per cent, but the increased funding in your department is only 3 per cent?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I don't accept the premise of your question.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But they're the numbers.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I would take that on notice because the lion's share of the funding under—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I think Mr Dizdar's got it there.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Really, being that nasty doesn't really suit you, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm asking about your own budget papers. Who turns up without their budget papers?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But I will say that the lion's share of the funding that we spend in Education is actually on the wages of teachers that teach in our classroom, and I know for a fact that that has increased, and I will say it has resulted in a 24 per cent decrease in teacher vacancies.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm asking you, Deputy Premier. You have been given advice that the current rate of inflation is 3.8 per cent. Your only percentage increase in your overall agency expenses is 3 per cent. So do you accept that that is a 0.8 per cent cut in recurrent spending after inflation?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, because I put it on record that I'm advised that the department budget allocation is actually up 6 per cent on recurrent from 2023-24.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But why does it say 3 per cent in the papers, then?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** And then the Education portfolio allocation is up 7 per cent on recurrent. We can have a debate over this number and that number, but I'm not going to be part of this comparing apples with oranges to suit someone's political purpose.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But your own budget papers say 3 per cent, with respect. I'm literally reading from your own budget papers.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** With respects, Ms Mitchell, you can cut it whatever way you like.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's the numbers from Treasury.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are spending more on public education than you ever had. We're spending more on public schools than you ever did.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So we can't trust the figures in the budget papers.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are spending more on teachers' wages than you ever did. You can cut it whatever way you like and use whatever figure you want from the budget and not use other figures, but I'm not falling into this.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're telling me that that figure's not correct.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is not what I am saying. What I am saying is that you can use whatever figures you want to use to suit your purpose.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will use the figures from the budget paper. That's what they have been printed for.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But if we flip it on its head, when we talk about inflation and the cost of living, where was the previous Government for 10 years when teachers' wages were capped when inflation was rising?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They were well above inflation for a long time. Can I just say, I am referring to—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do you think teachers were paid enough before the pay rise?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That is not what I have said. You are here to answer questions, not ask them. I refer to figures within your own budget paper.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You wonder why we get that response when we go into schools.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am going to let that one go. I want to take you to other figures in your budget paper—just over the page at paragraph 6.5—for the New South Wales Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund. The figures show that the budget allocation for the last financial year was close to \$90 million. I believe \$100 million was the legislated amount. But the revised expenditure was only \$31 million. That is quite a gap. Why did you not spend the full allocation last year?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are spending record amounts in early childhood education and care. We are committed. Unlike the previous Government, since day one of this Government we have been committed to early childhood education and care, including the biggest ever investment in public preschools. I realise that, Ms Mitchell—you talk about it a lot. But it came at the end of a 12-year Government. It is almost like at the end everyone sat around the Cabinet table and said, "Turns out, people need child care."

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, can I just redirect you. I have asked a very specific question related to the budget papers.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Right at the end of 12 years.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There was a \$90 million allocation in your budget papers that was then revised to \$31 million. There are a lot of families who can't access child care. This fund was set up by the previous Government and legislated, which we all agreed to at the time.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But what did you deliver on, Ms Mitchell?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Why did you not spend the full amount?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You didn't deliver anything.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Why did you only spend \$30 million? Where is that \$60 million?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This is very rich. You had 12 years. You were going to do this and you were going to do that. You were going to do that and you were going to do this. You actually never delivered. At the end of 12 years you said, "Oh God, what about child care?"

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is this your answer?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** My answer is to say that we are providing record amounts in early childhood education and care. I will ask Mr Barraket to go into the details.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am asking you.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I want to give the Committee the latest information.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will ask Mr Barraket this afternoon. I am asking you if you are so committed to early childhood and you are delivering all of this, can you explain to me why you didn't spend the full \$90 million allocation and you only spent \$30 million? Why?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I am delivering more than the previous Government ever did. Ms Mitchell, we are delivering more than the previous Government ever did on early childhood education.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You delivered a third of what you said you were going to spend. Why?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** But you delivered nothing.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You are the Government, Minister. Why did you spend a third of what was allocated? It is not a trick question.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are the Government and we are delivering.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But you're not.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are delivering the Flexible Initiatives Trial. We are delivering scholarships. We are delivering public preschools.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You are short-changing families to the cost of \$60 million. Scholarships don't cover this—

**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Point of order—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Why did you not spend what was allocated?

**The CHAIR:** Order! We talked about this. There is a point of order. When there is a point of order, we have to shoosh. I can hear it and then we can get on with things. Go ahead.

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**The Hon. BOB NANVA:** Paragraph 19 of the procedural fairness resolution says that courtesy needs to be extended to the witness. I just ask that this happens on this occasion. It would assist with Hansard, no doubt.

**The CHAIR:** I think the more relevant point of order is the talking over each other. Could you just allow each other to speak full sentences?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I will come back to this in the afternoon because I am not getting an answer. I want to go to the 50 non-government preschools. Where is that commitment up to?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Our commitment, as you referenced, is 50 new and upgraded preschools in non-government schools. We are delivering that, as well as 100 public preschools.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sorry, you are delivering that? Where are the locations of those 50 non-government preschools?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We'll have more to say about that shortly.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So you haven't announced anything yet that has been decided?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are working on that with the non-government sector.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Right, so you haven't actually delivered anything on that commitment yet even though you are almost halfway through your term?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are 18 months in, Ms Mitchell, and we are working with the non-government sector.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's pretty close to halfway.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are working with the non-government sector. We will deliver on our commitments.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Right, but you don't have a list of where those 50 preschools will be at this point?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That is our Government's election commitment. We will deliver it. We will be announcing the list shortly.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You're running out of time. I would suggest you get onto it. I will hand over to my colleague.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do you really want to ask about running out of time when it comes to early childhood education and care after 12 years of doing nothing? It's like I'm getting Dixers here.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I am very proud of what we did. That is not much of an answer, Minister.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, I will just take you to the rapid growth in the Southern Highlands as a consequence of housing growth and development, and the increase in student enrolments. Deputy Premier, what plans does the Government have to address the outgrowing capacity of the current school hall at Moss Vale High School?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You are right to call out, Ms Merton, the explosion in population in the Southern Highlands. All throughout the area south of Macarthur, through Wollondilly and through to Picton, there has been enormous growth. A lot of the communities have grown without any infrastructure over the past 10 years. I am happy to take on notice what is happening at Moss Vale. I meet with people regularly about school requirements in areas like the Southern Highlands, like Wilton and like Picton, where, can I say, the previous Government built a school where the classrooms had no walls. We are trying to retrofit that right now. We are committed to building schools in growing areas. I don't know how many ways I can say this in different syntax: We will build schools in growing areas.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, if I could just redirect you, the issue was specific to the school hall at Moss Vale High School.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Which I will take on notice.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Have you visited Moss Vale High School as part of your south-western visits?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have not been to Moss Vale. I don't know if Moss Vale is in the south-west. It is in the Southern Highlands. But no, I have not been to Moss Vale. Do you know there are 2,209 schools?

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Deputy Premier, what impact are these challenges and limitations having in terms of school halls and the educational experience of students?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I can give you a long list of schools where we are addressing historic issues of a lack of investment in halls. It is like any school infrastructure. Communities deserve public schools that are fit for purpose in their communities. We are hard at work delivering that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Deputy Premier, you will recall, obviously, that at the last estimates we spoke in some detail about the issues with asbestos on school sites. That was during a period of time when there were those alarming issues underway.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Indeed.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you confirm now exactly how much material was removed from the Liverpool West site?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Look, I am going to take that on notice or I am going to ask Ms Harrington. I do not want to give the wrong information.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That is alright. If Ms Harrington has it, I am happy for her to provide it.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Ms Harrington, I am just wondering if you have got that information?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes, I do. So 2,500 tonnes of mulch were removed.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Do you have the date as to when the final amount of mulch was removed?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I can get that for you.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So it was 2,500 tonnes. Minister, just to confirm, are you confident that all the asbestos that was removed as part of construction works at that site was done in line with the relevant legal requirements?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That was the instruction and I would expect nothing less.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. You have made about three or four announcements over the course of the past year about having deputies, senior teachers and assistant principals back in the classroom. The first announcement was, I think, in December last year. Then there was another announcement in April and then one a couple of weeks ago as well. Have you actually implemented that policy?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We undertook the Review into Executive Teaching Time. I am going to answer this because it is very important, actually. We had a situation where we inherited a chronic teacher shortage. The number of extra deputy principals, assistant principals and head teachers had exploded while we were struggling to fill classroom teacher positions. We had 10,000 merged or cancelled classes that were brought to us by yourself. What we decided to do was to consult with school communities about how we can encourage executive teachers—APs, DPs and head teachers—to spend more time in the classroom. Can I say, most teachers I have met absolutely love being in the classroom. In fact, their biggest thing to me is "Take my admin away so I can spend more time in the classroom." We have consulted with a range of stakeholders, primary principals, secondary principals and the Teachers Federation, and we will be rolling that out.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I wanted to confirm though, Minister, that you first announced this in December last year. There was an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that said the review took place in September last year and that from term one this year State school executive or senior teachers would be expected to teach certain numbers of days per week. But an article earlier this month said that actually wouldn't happen until day one, term one, next year. Have you not implemented the policy you announced back in December last year at all this year, or are you doing it in a staged approach? It is just very unclear.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We make no apologies for doing everything possible to deal with the chronic teacher shortage that you left us.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With respect, that's not what I've asked. Deputy Premier, I respect that you come to government with your own agenda. You announced this late last year—that it was going to happen from day one, term 1 this year. Recent media reports are now saying that, no, it's day one, term 1 next year. So which is it?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We consulted with schools on how this would work.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is it happening from next year?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I will ask Mr Dizdar to report on the implementation—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I'm asking you. This is one of your signature policies. You've done—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —of this key government priority.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —three media announcements about it.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes, and I will keep talking about it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, but I'm asking you.

**The CHAIR:** Order! No-one can follow this.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy to speak to Mr Dizdar about this this afternoon. This is one of your signature policies.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It is and I'm proud of it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You've done at least three media announcements over a course of almost 12 months. I'm asking is it in place in schools now? Did it start on day one, term 1 this year as media last year reported was going to happen? Or is it starting next year?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You're conflating two things. Under the award, it actually is a requirement for executive teachers—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, I'm actually answering it now, Ms Mitchell, seriously. Under the award it's a requirement for teachers who are executive teachers that might be in positions of leadership to teach in the classroom. We encourage that to happen. To be honest, it wasn't happening that much. So we encouraged that to happen in accordance with the industrial arrangement. The executive teaching time review will occur from term 1. That has been a massive piece of work that we worked with schools across the State and all the stakeholders to make sure that we get more of sometimes our very best teachers in the classroom while also ensuring that we can support our schools.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When that starts on—I think you're saying—day one, term 1 next year, how many days a week in the classroom for deputies and how many for assistant principals?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It's going to be different based on their setting.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So it's not a set amount or set number?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I know you will argue with this, but I'm in the interests of giving the latest information to the Committee. This is where I will ask Mr Dizdar to give the—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'll come back. I've got more questions for Mr Dizdar on this this afternoon.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Because it is different based on the different setting because, in a disadvantaged setting, there is a different requirement of need, and there is a different complexity, a different concentration of disadvantage. That's important to me as Minister.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will the assistant principal, curriculum and instruction roles continue?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will they be back on class as well?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, the APC&I roles have a crucial role, especially when it comes to the rollout of the curriculum.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to ask you about Public Education Week. I know that there's a campaign—I think the hashtag was "proud to belong"—talking about previous alumni. I think there have been various iterations of that over the years. I think there was "proudly public" when I was Minister. I agree with the concept of raising the awareness for public school students of former alumni. Were you involved in the decision as to who would be promoted through that program?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There was an operational decision.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you see beforehand who would be used as examples?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not sure where this is getting to, but I'm proud of our alumni in public schools. I refute any suggestion that we shouldn't be proud. Who are you—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just wanted to ask. I know there were some comments.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Are you saying that Michael Kirby doesn't deserve to be recognised?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I'm not. I thought it was interesting. I saw on the website there were comments about former Prime Ministers; the former Governor, Dame Marie Bashir; the current governor of the Reserve Bank. And on the social media post, there are some really great examples of particular alumni. You've got astrophysicists, you've got the current DPP, Sally Dowling. But I have to say one that did catch my eye was—the former head of the Teachers Federation was chosen. As the former president of the Teachers Federation, Mr Gavrielatos was amongst the alumni to celebrate up there with people like an astrophysicist, like the DPP. Do you think that's a partisan or a political statement to make when celebrating education week?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I actually am proud of our relationship with the union that represents teachers. And I am proud to say that Angelo Gavrielatos came from a public school. He's a public school teacher. He led the teachers union that negotiated the biggest pay rise for teachers in a generation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When you say to young children in public schools about what you should be aspiring to be and you put the former Governor and the head of the Reserve Bank—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There's a range of things.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You would put the head of the teachers union up there on that level?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do you know what I'd say to young people? Yes—that pursuing a career in advocating for workers' rights is a noble cause. That's what I would say.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's up there with the Reserve Bank governor and that's up there with the Prime Minister?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I mean, you're using very selective examples.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They're the examples that you gave and I just was a bit surprised to see Mr Gavrielatos on your social media.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Do you know how much he's going to love being mentioned?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm sure he will love it. I'm surprised my phone is not going off right now. But I just found it a curious choice and I'm wondering did you approve it, Minister? Did you see it beforehand?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I didn't approve it. It's a personal project of the secretary because we are proud of our alumni, including Mr Gavrielatos.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's an interesting decision to make.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm happy to talk to it if you like, because it was a post that I put out.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I've seen your accolades and your education on there as well. I wanted to come back to the issue around professional development. Can you guarantee that every teacher will be taking professional development to better support students with disability?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What we will be doing is ensuring that, under the new regime of professional development, that will be applying not just to the public school system, teachers working in the public school system, but also the non-government sectors—that that professional development will be of the highest quality.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'll just redirect you—we've got eight seconds. Can you guarantee that every teacher will take professional development to better support students with disability?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What we are saying is that we trust teachers to actually choose the professional development that's relevant to their setting.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So you can't guarantee it?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Of course we'll be encouraging teachers to take professional development in disability.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But they used to have mandatory professional development training in disability and that's no longer the case. That's correct, isn't it?

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** Every sector called on the mandatory to be taken away. It added to workload. It meant that we weren't trusting teachers to make their own professional decisions as expert practitioners. I would guarantee you that teachers will be choosing professional development on disability.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Righto.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I trust teachers, Ms Mitchell, unlike yourself.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that there is a restructure occurring of the teaching, learning and wellbeing division. When did it begin and when is it going to end?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This is most definitely an operational decision, but I will say that central to this decision is the fact that, particularly under the last term of the previous Government, the bureaucracy in the corporate side of the Department of Education exploded. We are in the business of making sure that we run as tight a ship as possible because we're redirecting absolutely everything we are doing to teaching and learning in schools. But Mr Graham, as deputy secretary of that area, can fill you in on the details.

**The CHAIR:** When did consultation begin for that restructure?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** We first started speaking to staff—I think it was about in February about the need to be able to align what we're doing with the plan for public education and supporting schools. So we've worked with staff, let them know that the consultation will be happening in term 3. At the moment, staff in the area have been going through trying to see how we best align with that plan and we'll be going to formal consultation with our staff shortly.

**The CHAIR:** Will there be roles removed as part of that restructure?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** We're currently going through that and will be consulting with our staff shortly about that and we'd like to be able to speak to them.

**The CHAIR:** So staff were told in February that there was a restructure occurring, which many of them would have assumed would involve some people losing their jobs. We're now in August. Why is it taking so long?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** That's right. We're really aware that the longer these things take, the more stressful they can be, but we're absolutely balancing the need to get it right with the need to be really fast. That's why we've been very open with them about the time frames. I have been very clear that this is the time frame which we would be consulting and we're sticking to that.

**The CHAIR:** Why does it take so long though?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** It's a large and complex area. We really don't want to have to do this more times, because it is stressful for staff, it does cause a certain amount of dislocation. We're certainly keen to ensure that schools are also not deeply impacted. We serve schools directly. We want to make sure that they also feel that continuity of service. We're aware of the time frames and we really need to balance those two things.

**The CHAIR:** Who is the current Executive Director, Teaching Quality and Impact?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** There's not currently an Executive Director, Teaching Quality and Impact. There is an executive director who is currently managing the staff in that area.

**The CHAIR:** What happened to the previous executive director who was managing?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** The executive director has left the department.

**The CHAIR:** Were they let go or did they voluntarily resign?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** The Executive Director, Teaching Quality and Impact, has had a proud history in public education. As we all—when we become PSSE, our conditions are such that we can exit the department if there's a discussion about whether there's an appropriate way forward.

**The CHAIR:** So she was fired. Is what you're saying?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** I wouldn't use that term about what occurred.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That officer has had an outstanding career in public education. Mr Graham was up-front about what that structure may look like and there was a mutual agreement around her exit. We've met all of our requirements under the GSE Act. I just put on record their exemplary service to public education.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I understand that that particular executive director had a demonstrable impact on student learning outcomes and had done some really good work. Is recruitment underway to fill that new role?

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** Once we do the consultation—we want to respect the consultation period with our staff that Mr Graham was referring to, because often they may pick up things that will make further changes on what our intended structure is—we'll finalise the structure. If there are vacant roles within that structure, we'll go through necessary recruitment procedures.

**The CHAIR:** So not "made redundant" because that position is going to be filled again, or we don't know?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think we're looking at a different configuration.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Going in a different direction, perhaps?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Certainly the area of teacher quality is core for what we do. But we are looking—Mr Graham has been briefing me extensively. The challenge for this system is how do you get scale and reach? Teacher quality initiatives under the former leadership have been phenomenal. The impact's been significant. But I've got the challenge of trying to get to 2,200 sites, 800,000 students, so the reach and scale of that is where we want to take it next to.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that the public schools division is also going through some sort of restructure?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** They've already been through a structure.

**The CHAIR:** So that one's done?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That's already been done. When I came in as secretary there were two deputy secretaries, school performance—the State was split into two. I amalgamated the role. It was a role that I formerly undertook in my career, where I had responsibility for the whole State. I was delighted with the merit selection process. Ms Summerhayes commenced in that role. She is a phenomenal educator with extensive experience who's got huge respect on the ground. She's been undertaking that role since this year.

**The CHAIR:** How many roles were lost in that restructure?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** In the public schools division? There was very little movement. I mean, obviously there was one dep sec that was no longer required because I went from two to one senior officers. There were some of those office roles that were amalgamated. The way we always manage structure—and I'm proud of the structure and the work they're doing—is, one, we look at vacant roles. There are no humans in there, so how do you remove vacant roles? We've been assiduous in removing contractors and bringing down the contractor number.

**The CHAIR:** We'll talk more about that. In the interests of time—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, I've got good data to share with you.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Mr Dizdar, I will come back to you this afternoon. I do want to give my colleague Dr Cohn the last few minutes of my time.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Minister, regarding the proposed Bungendore High School, the department's figures that were included in the State significant DA showed that there are far more children in the catchment area than what the department's estimating the capacity of the new school is going to be.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** You're sticking to this commitment by the previous Government despite community opposition regarding the site, but also despite your own figures now showing that it can't possibly meet the needs of its catchment area. Why?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** This Bungendore project is much needed by the community. It is something that my colleague Minister Whan would speak to me about on probably a daily basis; he's a very good local member. We are going to have something to say on that shortly. I will ask Ms Harrington to give an update to the Committee.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We are really monitoring enrolment demand in that region. We have seen, through some of the recent schools that we've opened in that region, a higher government share than perhaps the State average, so we are really looking at the need and our enrolment projections to make sure that that school will be able to service the community.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** I'll come back to the Minister. I appreciate it, but I'm asking questions that should be answered by her, not the department. Given those figures, will you be looking at a possible alternative site that can provide a much bigger school for this community? Nobody's disagreeing that you do need a new school in Bungendore.



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**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes. We need a school that's fit for purpose as well. We'll be having something to say on that shortly.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Okay, thank you. I understand that enrolment application forms for all government schools provide gender options only for male and female. Why does the department not follow the Australian Bureau of Statistics standard classification for gender?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not across the detail of the enrolment forms, to be honest. I will ask Mr Dizdar to answer that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've been moving those online. We've got a proud track record of embracing all. I might get Mr Graham to talk to where we're at. It's been representation that's been made to us in the past as well. I'm not sure if he's got any info on that?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** I don't have information on that. But, generally, our enrolment forms have to conform to a national statistical standard so all the information in that conforms to the national collection. All the information about parent SES and previous level of education—all that kind of stuff is all in the national standard—

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Yes, but if I can redirect you for a second, the Australian Bureau of Statistics standard for gender includes—there are actually five different statistical options there.

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** It's different to the educational collection, which is the same collection that's used by non-government schools as well. It's a standard that is applied. But we can come back to you with more information about that.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Thank you. I've got some more questions, but I'll probably need more than 36 seconds. I might come back to them this afternoon.

**The CHAIR:** You've got to just jump in! I will ask a real quick one. I understand that the out-of-school-hours care tender process has had a policy change—that parent-managed services are now having to enter a competitive tender process. The feedback I'm getting is it now favours the kind of corporate and the larger players. Do you have concerns about that?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I met with the representatives of those out-of-school-hours parent-run services recently and heard their concerns. I'll take that on notice because I did ask the department to come back to me on what could be done in relation to the concerns raised by those parent-run services.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, I wanted to ask a couple of general questions on behalf of people that have contacted me. One is about work experience. I've actually had a number of people raise with me why there isn't a very specific year 10, year 11 program that used to exist for work experience. I'm wondering whether the department is looking at reinstating work experience in a formal capacity, where schools will be required to, at least either in year 10 or 11, ensure that students are taking up a minimum five days of work experience in a formal capacity.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Work experience is obviously a crucial part of careers advice work that we do with students in that upper, senior part of secondary schooling. In terms of the detail of what we do on work experience in the secondary school system, I'll ask Mr Dizdar to give some detail about that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Like the Deputy Premier said, it's a very important fabric of schools. What I've seen is really a proliferation of focus since what was called the new school leaving age. It's no longer new; it's well over a decade. What you and I remember was the set two-week period in the particular year.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Correct, in years 10 and 11.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There are a number of schools that still maintain that traditional method—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But this is the issue. Back to you, Minister. It's all over the place. There are some schools that do continue these processes and others that don't. There are children that are going to schools where this is never being offered, this opportunity of work experience, and I'm just wondering why. Is the Labor Government in general going to look at the value of that? You've got trades, you've got opportunities—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** It's got great value.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** There is so much value—but actually having consistent policy that every school has to adhere to.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I would agree with you, of course, that it has enormous value. It's important to remember that schools are servicing different communities, and different needs in different communities. Every setting is

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different. The school leadership would respond to the needs of that student population, I would imagine. I'll ask Mr Dizdar.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Running work experience is very critical. Where we've freed the rein is where you might run that, so that it can meet that school community's needs. I now know schools—and I wish I had this in my time, if I had my time again as principal in the system—that allow work experience to start in year 9. The child might do a week in year 9 and a week in year 10.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, you know that right now the bulk of children and high-schoolers leave high school not having an opportunity for work experience. That's what currently happens now. It's not the other way around, where the bulk of kids are actually having work experience.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, I'm not sure if it is the bulk that don't.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No, I would say it is. I think Mr Dizdar knows this. It's not a criticism of you or a former government. I don't know what has happened over time. The bulk of kids, unless they personally go and take on a job, will not have had the opportunity to have had work experience as they're leaving year 12.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm not sure we've nailed it. We've also got a program called the Educational Pathways Program that has been expanded. This is working—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Again, that's voluntary. It's not everybody.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What does that mean for a student in year 10, year 11 or year 12?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're getting tremendous feedback from secondary schools involved in this project, because the careers adviser, the transition adviser, the year advisers and the students are being opened up to a whole range of opportunities in those communities.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** They're like exhibitions.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Is that where they go on site? What does that involve?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** This is where the system helps unearth work experience opportunities or school-based apprenticeships and traineeship opportunities in those local areas. It takes the burden away from just the careers adviser. We're getting great results on that front. I concur wholeheartedly with you that work experience is pivotal. Ms Summerhayes and I drive it hard in the system. It's not my experience that schools are not conducting it. In fact, my experience is that they're just using the flexibility of how that occurs.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** They're using the flexibility of whatever you've offered there with these pathways to perhaps give them another opportunity. I know they're meeting with their careers advisers. They often go to exhibitions. People come to them and talk to them about work opportunities. But they're not actually going out to a business and working for five days, for example. I think this is a lost opportunity for kids in New South Wales. I think businesses would welcome it. I think other local communities would. All sorts of government departments, and your own department, should be taking on work experience opportunities, as you could yourself, Minister. I'll put it to you on notice.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I think that happens.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I think I'll probably move something formally in the Parliament. I'd like to see the Government actually consider this formally—what they're doing in this space. I think it has been lost in this other world of career pathways and this and that. They're not actually formally doing work experience, which I think is a real lost opportunity for young people to trial what they might want to do in the future post-HSC. I'll leave that there. I need to ask this as well: When we're thinking about new schools, where are we up to with K-2 infant schools? They were once very popular. Is the Government building any new K-2 infant schools specifically in the next 12 months?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are building public preschools and K-6 schools.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What has happened to K-2?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** In fact, every new school that we build—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It's not a criticism. I just want to ask—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** —is preschool to year 6.

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** —is this something where people are moving away from K-2? Is this what has happened?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've still got some fantastic infant schools in the system that are K-2. The Deputy Premier is right: You want to get those P-2. There is some research around transition and the additional transition point where from year 2 you go into year 3 at a different context. The research says that you don't want a multiplicity of transition points because it can lead to negative outcomes for a student.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Is it something that we're moving away from? I'm just asking because I don't hear of K-2 infant schools being built anymore.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The ones that we have converted under different persuasions of government in my time have been as a result of demand pressures. The most recent one of those was Russell Lea infants school. It's a fantastic school in the inner west. It was K-2 and it's now—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** That's K-2?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It's now a phenomenal K-6 school. It went to that because of the demand in the area.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Mr Dizdar, that's not quite—I'll leave that. That's not what I'm asking.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The community was asking for that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'm asking are you going to build any K-2 infant schools in the next 12 months? You can take that on notice if you don't have the answer. It's specifically K-2.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** On all the growth corridors, our advice to government is for K-6 or P-6, as well as 7-12.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It looks to me that K-2 infant schools are being wound back for whatever reason. Minister, on your staffing, you're obviously the Deputy Premier, you're the education Minister and you're the Minister for Western Sydney. What is your staff make-up, specifically in your ministerial office? How many staff do you have that are allocated for Western Sydney, for Education and Deputy Premier? Are they allocated in the different portfolio areas or is everybody working on all—

**Ms PRUE CAR:** The allocation of staff in my ministerial office is a matter that I deputise to my chief of staff. Every Minister has an allocation. Obviously, I have the responsibilities of being Deputy Premier, as well as being Minister for one of the largest portfolios in the Government, as well as Minister for Western Sydney. There are a variety of advisers that take care of a variety of areas, and then there are DLOs.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** How many do you have in total in your staff in your office?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'd have to take advice on what that number is right now.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** And you don't have them allocated specifically for Western Sydney or Education? You don't know that? Could you take that on notice as well?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Advisers advise on particular areas.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** How many advise specifically on Western Sydney, for example, in your office?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There's a range of advice that might come from advisers that are in charge of infrastructure or advisers that are in charge of policy. This is a matter that is handled by my chief of staff.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** How many of your staff are specifically focused on policy as opposed to media? Is that divvied up as well?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Of course. I think everyone is aware that there are some people with skill sets that are policy advisers and there are some that are media advisers.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You can take that on notice if you don't know that. I'd like to know how many are specifically media advisers and how many are policy. Also, how many do you have seconded from the department?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'd have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You don't know?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I have department liaison officers, like the previous Minister had.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Have you got anyone seconded from the union?

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**Ms PRUE CAR:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Any ex-union staff in your office?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What union, Ms Mihailuk? You well know it's a requirement—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Any union. It could be TWU. It's a general question. I'd like to know how many of them are coming from a union.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I myself am a member of a union. Does that count?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'm just asking. I'd like to know where people are coming from into your office and whether they're coming from the department or whether they're being allocated from your unions.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** If your question is if there's a secret Teachers Federation spy in my office, the answer is no, because the Minister—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I think the Minister gives them all the information over drinks anyway.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** No, because the Minister engages with them because they represent the teachers that work in the system.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I don't think you need to have any secrets. I think you're publicly having drinks. We've explored that at the last budget estimates. There are lots of social gatherings together between your union.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not ashamed of working with stakeholders.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Everyone knows this. No-one is asking any further questions on that. You travelled together to go up to Canberra, protest against Clare up there and yell at Parliament House.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You'll take that on notice. Thank you, Minister.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** All of that, that's not a secret.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Minister, will you rule out turning any part of the former Marsden High School site into a housing development?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'll have to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you remain committed to delivering the indoor courts and the 29 outdoor netball courts as part of the West Ryde Multi-Sports Facility?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not sure whether Ms Harrington has some information on West Ryde that we can give to the Committee.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes, we are committed to that project. We recently issued the tender in relation to that project.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you, Ms Harrington, have an anticipated project completion date for that at this stage?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Deputy Premier, I know you're doing consultation at the moment in the northern beaches in terms of co-educational school options. One of the options talks about considering letting in a local stream at the selective high school. Is that something that you'll look to do at other selective schools across the State?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What we've committed to doing in single-sex locations is consulting on any changes that may occur in communities to ensure that every single person in New South Wales has access to a co-educational high school. That was the Government's commitment.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But one of the options up there is to look at a local stream in the selective school.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** And that's discrete to that location.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You won't be looking at that anywhere else across the State?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'll take that on notice, but that's part of the consultation about the northern beaches.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If that one does go ahead—and I appreciate that it's in the consultation phase—will you increase the number of selective school places elsewhere to make up for that difference?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm not going to answer in hypotheticals. We are consulting with that community. As shown by the other changes we've made to single-sex offerings around New South Wales, we're not going to do anything without consultation with the community.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you guarantee, overall, no net loss of selective places in New South Wales?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are not in the business of taking things away. We are going to provide more. I think you're drawing a conclusion from a consultation about co-educational offerings about selective schools. That just happens to be that there is a selective offering in that location where we are consulting on a co-educational offering.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just want to go to Bungendore High School quickly. I realise there is one minute left. Can you advise why you are looking at alternative locations to the current site?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We are going to say something about this shortly. This has been an ongoing saga. I'm sure that you are well aware of the dramas with this promise that never eventuated and that was drawn out. That was one of the legacies of the former Deputy Premier, John Barilaro. But we will say something about that shortly.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you confirm that alternative sites which had previously been deemed unsuitable are being considered again and, if so, why?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We will be saying something on Bungendore very shortly. But this will come to a resolution because finally this community has a local member that is actually constructively working to bring something to a conclusion.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I ask again for clarity, Deputy Premier, are you looking at other sites because the current site is not suitable or is it because of local activist groups? What's your motivation?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** You are not going to get an announcement about Bungendore out of me today. We will be saying something about that shortly.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So there is something to announce. You're going to move from where it is, are you?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I just said that previously to Dr Cohn as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That you're going to move from the existing site?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** We're going to deliver the school, which might be something that you should have done.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** On the existing site?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There is going to be a school. I wasn't left a school when we had the handover.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's very interesting. We will be looking at the ethical and transparent behaviour around that very closely, I can assure you, Deputy Premier.

**The CHAIR:** Deputy Premier, the respectful relationships education at the moment, as you know, is a bit ad hoc as to who it's being provided by. Is there a plan for there to be a consistent, coordinated respectful relationships program across the State?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** I'm really proud of what we are doing in this space, and not just in who is providing respectful relationships but actually the rollout of the curriculum is going to be world leading in this space. Consent education is now going to be part of the curriculum from the beginning of kindergarten in an age appropriate way, from K to 6, and then a crucial part of the PDHPE curriculum. The question of how we are treating the issue of respectful relationships is now it will be mandated in the curriculum for every school sector. That is probably one of the things I am most proud of with the curriculum rollout. The response to that was that everyone said, "It's about time." I know that Mr Martin has worked on this literally day and night. I'm really proud of what NESA has done on this. I might give him an opportunity to say something about this.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, I've got limited time. I will come back. What is being done to actively increase the capacity of schools and teachers then to teach that bit of the curriculum?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** What happens now that the curriculum has been released to teachers is that we go through the process of familiarisation so that teachers can get used to a new curriculum which has got new content and also is now designed in a different way to support explicit teaching, which we know the evidence shows is

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the way that our young people learn. It's the "I do, we do, you do" that teachers do in classrooms. The teachers will have a period of time to get used to that, supported by roles like the APC&I and supported by professional development and supported by the system and by the systems in other sectors as well.

**The CHAIR:** Will that curriculum completely do away with the need for externally sourced respectful relationships education providers or is that going to be part of it as we go?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** Schools can definitely opt to do that, but it's important for us as a government that we put it in the curriculum so that we know that, when our children go to school, it is a mandatory part of the curriculum that they are taught—and can I say explicitly taught—about consent and respecting each other in an age appropriate way. Not only are we preparing their brains for future work but we are preparing them to be good citizens for the future.

**The CHAIR:** I think we can agree that that is a good thing. We were lobbying for it for a very long time, so it's very good. In terms of ensuring that it's now done properly, from what you are saying there is a period of time before we—but are there going to be particular resources put into that aspect of curriculum expertise and making sure that people are up to speed?

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There will be the curriculum, which is clearer than ever before, that will lead to explicit teaching of knowledge and content. There will be requirements that then provide resources in line with that syllabus. And then, of course, every teacher does their programming and scope and sequencing and all the stuff in line with the curriculum. But there will be specific resources.

**The CHAIR:** I didn't realise that that was not split already. Did you have anything else, Ms Mihailuk?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No, I'm okay. I just want the Minister to head off and catch up with Minister Clare and finalise the agreement. She's got work to do.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** That's certainly true.

**The CHAIR:** I will check with Government members if they have any questions. No? Given that Government members have no questions, that gives us another early mark for lunch, which is fantastic. I thank the Deputy Premier for her time today. Her time with us is over, but we will be back after lunch at two o'clock with the rest of the witnesses and some additional witnesses, I understand. Thank you very much.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

**Ms SARAH HARGANS**, General Counsel, Legal Services, NSW Department of Education, sworn and examined

**Mr DAVID WITHERS**, Officer for Problematic and/or Harmful Sexualised Behaviour, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back. We have two additional new witnesses here this afternoon. We will commence again with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Secretary, I'm going to start with you, and I want to go back to the issues around Lurnea High School. Parents are saying that the department dismisses their complaints. Former staff say that when they raise complaints, they're bullied and silenced. Has the department been covering up the issues at this school?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, not at all.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Has the school been put in the too-hard basket?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Not at all.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What will you be doing after some of the allegations that have been raised, particularly in the last few days by 7NEWS and others, to look at what's happening at Lurnea?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me just first put on record that this is a school I've visited six times in my career since I was a director and a regional director, the executive director and a deputy secretary. I know it to be a school that does its darnedest to provide a growth education for students in its care. It is a very complex community that suffers from significant socio-economic disadvantage. It's game-changing work that they lead. They also lead an intensive English centre that has got new arrivals who are experiencing education for the first time in our system. It's a very, very important provision.

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We take the allegations that have come before us very seriously. The Deputy Premier asked me, as secretary, to assess those allegations. We're in the process of doing that. I would put on record that what was covered in Parliament by the local member, we're following through on those matters that were raised. I look forward to giving a full briefing for the Deputy Premier. These are historical matters that have been raised over time as well, and I urge any parent who has concern at that school—indeed, any public school in the system—to approach the school to work with the school leadership to resolve it. Normally things get resolved to good effect. As you would know, if that's not a sound outcome for a parent or a family or a child, there are mechanisms to escalate that within the department.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Does it concern you, Mr Dizdar, that parents are saying that the department has dismissed their complaints?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't believe that to have been the case. We're working through both the representations of the local member, and we are working through the assessment of parents and their issues that have been raised. I mean, you may or may not be aware—or the Committee may or may not be aware—that there was a community engagement mechanism conducted in November last year at that school to attain community input into how the school was faring, and there is quite favourable commentary that comes from parents. In fact, I'm a little bit concerned with the portrayal and labelling of a school in my career when I've seen a public school come under maybe unbalanced scrutiny like this and get labelled as I saw it last night in the press. It can be very damaging for a school community.

In fact, in my career, some of the Committee members will remember the very unfortunate portrayal of Mount Druitt and the class action that stemmed from that and the changes that came. I'm not saying there are not issues that have been raised by parents. It's not my experience that they have been swept under the carpet. I urge every parent at Lurnea to come forward if they've got any concern. I've asked Ms Summerhayes and the Director, Educational Leadership to provide ongoing strong support. If parents are concerned around raising it with the school leadership, then I ask them to raise that through appropriate channels with the Director, Educational Leadership.

I would just like to get on record that this school is doing some very, very strong things. They've got unprecedented year 7 enrolments for next year. They're growing in their enrolment base. In my experience, you don't grow in enrolments unless there's a sense of community confidence in the school. They've been working very hard on welfare and wellbeing programs. Having spoken to the school leadership for our people, they don't stand for any acts of violence that were portrayed in the media. There's a zero tolerance around that; there's a zero tolerance around that in every public school, and they take appropriate action. I do look forward, as secretary, to giving the Deputy Premier a full briefing on the assessment of the matters that were raised in Parliament.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Does it concern you that former staff are saying that they've been bullied and silenced?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't accept that premise. If there are former staff that have got claims, they can raise that. It does concern me that there may be some aggrieved former staff who are providing material evidence on their view of the school, and they may be inadvertently damaging the school. I would ask them to raise that through the appropriate channels. The department stands by ready to receive their concerns and act on their concerns. I don't know that it's in the interests of 700 young students there and their families today to have their matters played out in the press.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you, Mr Dizdar. I want to move to some questions now for Ms Hargans and Mr Withers, because I appreciate you are only with us for a short period of time. We'll let you go once I've asked the questions that I've got. I want to start, firstly, with you, please, if I can, Ms Hargans. It's nice to see you again. In relation to a recent Standing Order 52 that was passed through the Legislative Council that was moved by myself but actually agreed to by all members, can you explain the process in terms of returning those documents, from the department's side of things?

**SARAH HARGANS:** Generally with standing orders?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, and that particular one as well.

**SARAH HARGANS:** Which particular standing order was that?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The one in relation to school budget allocations.

**SARAH HARGANS:** When we do receive a Standing Order 52, it's allocated to the departments and relevant Ministers by the Cabinet Office. Once it's received in the department, we do go out to all deputy secretaries and divisions to question whether there might be documents relevant to the return. As you would be aware, they're very short time frames for returning those documents, so the department moves pretty swiftly to

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identify relevant documents and check that they are relevant to the return. We then need to consider privilege over those documents and whether a privilege claim could be made, cataloguing the documents and printing the documents, and then having them returned by the due date as best we can.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. You appreciate, of course, that the motion that's passed by the House is binding, and there is a requirement that the department provides any and all relevant information as captured by the motion that's moved?

**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to ask in relation to that one—and some of this goes to you as well, Secretary. There were a number of documents that were received in the first tranche. I'll note that multiple tranches of documents were provided, but there was a letter that came back to the Cabinet Office, signed by yourself. It indicated that the files were too large, that they couldn't be printed and that you encouraged the member—presumably me—to make a GIPAA request to access that information. Did you receive any advice about asking a member to put in a GIPAA when an SO 52 had already been passed?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We take those responsibilities really seriously, Ms Mitchell. Let me apologise for what took place, because I asked to be briefed. That was the material advice I had when I signed, that the files were too large. I was subsequently advised that, inadvertently, human error—I own it as secretary—on our part. Why the file was so large? There were a number of empty columns, and that impacted on this particular attachment and its flow of pages. When I was made aware of that, it was indicated to me that we were in a position to provide that. I repeat, and I apologise, Ms Mitchell, it was a human error on our part that led to that initial advice and signature.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who gave you the advice to say, "Put in a GIPAA"?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sorry, who gave—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who gave you the advice to encourage me, the member, to put in a GIPAA request?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The briefing document came forward to me to sign off on the letter, and it was in a written form that I took that advice. Subsequently, I asked for a meeting, and in that meeting I was advised that inadvertent human error. I asked how that had occurred. I was briefed, like I indicated to you, that there were a number of rows or columns that were empty, and that led to this file going on for an inordinate length of pages, and that it was in our capacity to be able to cut and remove those empty columns and then provide yourself with the requisite 52 request.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you seek advice from Ms Hargans? Did you discuss the process? It's a little unusual, with respect, for a secretary to ask a member to put in a GIPAA request when a Standing Order 52 call for papers has passed, as you would appreciate, by the entire House. I may have been the member who moved it, but other members were interested in the information as well.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That's why I wanted to put on record my apology. I stand by what I signed at the time. It was the advice I was given.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But who gave you that advice? That's what I'm trying to understand.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Like I said, it was in a written brief. I would have to go back to the written brief.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you can take that on notice, that would be great.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** But then Ms Hargans subsequently advised me in a meeting around what I just indicated to you, that there were a number of empty columns that lead to an inordinate length of documentation. We were in a position to be able to remove that and provide you with what you had requested. Again, my apologies for the human error on our part.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you now confident that all of the documents that should have been captured under that return have been provided?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That was a question I asked as well, and I am.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Hargans, I want to go now to the issue of GIPAA requests in general. There have been quite a few requested that have been put forward by journalists but also by my parliamentary colleagues that were either rejected or sought a re-scope. Can you advise what the process is within the department when a GIPAA request comes in?



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**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes, of course. When a GIPAA application is received, it will be received by one of the teams in my directorate who have those specialist skills to deal with GIPAA applications. We look at the scope, we identify relevant areas in the department, and we talk to those areas about whether they hold documents, the scale of the documents they hold, and the amount of time it will take to search and review those documents. Where it is considered that the search and review will take more than 40 hours, we do initially consider that to potentially be an unreasonable diversion of resources and we will speak to the applicant about whether we can re-scope the application to be within a manageable level. At times, if the request doesn't quite meet the documents we have but kind of meets the documents, we will potentially have discussions around what documents we would likely have and can provide.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Discussions with the applicant or within your team?

**SARAH HARGANS:** Discussions with the applicant. Sometimes we will provide documents informally and outside the GIPAA process, if that's what's allowed under the legislation, because there are a range of different ways under the legislation that we can deal with an application. There is, at times, a little bit of backwards and forwards between my team and the applicant, just to make sure that we have the scope of the application correct, that we do have meaningful documents that we can provide, but also so that we can do that in a scale that is manageable.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Mitchell, can I also add that, having been an executive member of the organisation for some time, there has been no change to how we handle GIPAA requests as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Hargans, just keeping with you while I have you, in terms of determining a fee, what's the process for that? When do you waive processing fees due to public interest? What's the threshold you put on that?

**SARAH HARGANS:** I will have to take that on notice. There are some calculations that are taken into account. I wouldn't want to mislead the Committee by taking a guess at that, so I will take that on notice. We do consider waiving or reducing fees on public interest grounds. Again, to the scope around what would be considered to be in the public interest, I would need to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have an example, but I won't go into specifics. A member of the media has asked all State departments for some data, which every other State has provided and waived the processing fees for. In New South Wales it was \$660 and now it has been brought down to \$330. There are some questions about why New South Wales is not also following the public interest process when other States appear to be with this particular information.

**SARAH HARGANS:** I can't speak for other States and Territories, but the department does work within the guidance from the Information Commissioner, particularly around how we process GIPAA applications and when and how we charge for that. But I can't explain why the other States and Territories decided to waive that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you could provide on notice the threshold—for lack of a better term—that you put around the fees, that would be very useful.

**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes, we can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have a final question in relation to GIPAs. What engagement do you have with the Deputy Premier or her office about that process and the information that's going out?

**SARAH HARGANS:** We provide a regular weekly GIPAA report, which is de-identified. That has been the process for a number of years—I would say more than a decade—across different governments. We identify when decisions have been made and the documents to be released.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to turn now to the issues around sexualised behaviour in schools. Obviously you would be well aware that some work was done by UNSW that started when I was Minister and has continued on. An updated legal issues bulletin to schools with updated advice—is there a time frame on when that will be rolled out?

**SARAH HARGANS:** We did release the legal issues bulletin in week two of this term. That has been released to schools.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there further information that is due to come out to schools at some point in relation to these issues as well?

**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes. The department is undertaking a review of our problematic and harmful sexualised behaviour guidelines. These guidelines have been in place since 2020 and provide quite significant and focused guidance to schools on how to deal with events or situations of problematic and harmful sexualised

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behaviour. Those guidelines are currently under review. But, yes, I was very pleased that we could issue the legal issues bulletin this term. Alongside and connected to that bulletin, we were able to also provide schools with a one-pager of the critical actions they should take when they have an instance of problematic and harmful sexualised behaviour, but also some fact sheets for parents, carers and guardians when they are faced with either a child who has experienced the behaviours or a child who has exhibited the behaviours.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just to confirm, that's available now for all schools to be able to access?

**SARAH HARGANS:** It is. The legal issues bulletin is publicly available on our website as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sadly, a few parents have reached out to me whose children have unfortunately been victims, and they had some concerns about the information that was available. It is good to know that that has been updated. It has been some time since the UNSW work was commissioned, and some documents that came through another call for papers in relation to these issues from back in April last year talked about time frames for rolling out some of this information. Is this advice going out to schools coming later than it was perhaps intended to be?

**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes, it is later than we had originally planned. As you can understand, it's a really complex, difficult area where schools have to grapple with a range of ethical, policy and legal obligations. We wanted to get it right and we wanted to do a really comprehensive consultation piece on this. We have had multiple consultations in writing, verbally or through in-person meetings within the department. We also went out to almost 20 external agencies and bodies to get their feedback on the legal issues bulletin as well. That was quite a long process. Following that feedback, we virtually did a complete rewrite of the legal issues bulletin. Legal issues bulletins are really important tools for our school leaders. They give that short snapshot of what the law is and what those legal expectations are of school staff.

This particular legal issues bulletin was getting a bit long, dense and weighty. It was close to 20 pages, whereas they are meant to be a five-minute read. The rewrite got it down to around a 10-page limit, which really hits on, quite clearly and quite quickly, what the key issues are that schools need to consider. But I just want to be clear that there's a range of supports within the department. The legal issues bulletin itself is just meant to be that short snapshot. But, as I said, these are incredibly complex situations. When it does occur in a particular school, there are a range of different support areas in the department that will come together and wrap around that school to give advice and to assist with the management of that issue.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And then, obviously, there's work with other agencies, like police and DCJ, if applicable, and others. That is my understanding, as well.

**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes. That's correct.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Just following on from that, can I ask you, Mr Withers, what your role is. It's quite unusual from my perspective. I've not seen this before. When did your role start? What does it entail?

**DAVID WITHERS:** My role started towards the end of January. Term 1 this year is when it started. My role is, essentially, to support the capacity-building of our staff across the department; to ensure best practice; and to understand, respond and manage incidents of PHSB within their school setting. A big part of that is building relationships across those existing stakeholders that exist and in support of schools and then, where needed, in quite complex cases, ensure that those supports are coordinated appropriately and the advice being provided to schools is done so within reference to each kind of advice and supporting point.

**The CHAIR:** When we're talking about problematic behaviour that's not sexualised behaviour, are we talking about criminal or near-criminal acts? What are we talking about?

**DAVID WITHERS:** The definition of PHSB is that it's a spectrum—problematic and/or harmful sexualised behaviours. I guess it acknowledges that behaviours of a sexual nature do happen on that spectrum, and some are normal, typical behaviours that a child or young person may display. When we're talking about problematic sexualised behaviours, we're referencing behaviours that may not have an overt intent of harm, but they happen outside of the scope of what may be considered age- or developmentally appropriate.

**The CHAIR:** So I think we've got your title slightly wrong, then. It's "problematic and harmful sexualised behaviour". So it's sexualised behaviour of—

**DAVID WITHERS:** "And/or harmful". Yes, correct. There are two. The categories—there's generally normal, typical behaviours or sexual behaviours. Then we've got problematic sexualised behaviours, and then we have harmful sexualised behaviours.

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**The CHAIR:** I understand. Thank you for clearing that up. If I could come back to you, Mr Graham, in relation to the restructure of the teaching, learning and wellbeing division. I understand that there's a program called Writing in Secondary. Is that going to remain after the restructure?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** We are very proud of the work that Writing in Secondary have done. I think, with NESAs now including writing in every syllabus as a really strong thing, we're certainly not looking to reduce the amount of support we provide to schools, in secondary schools in particular, regards to writing.

**The CHAIR:** That's been a successful program?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Certainly. Mark Howie heads up that program, is very well respected across sectors and has a deep level of knowledge, which the department greatly values as an institution, and we're looking to strengthen the amount of support we provide in writing, to secondary schools.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Given, particularly the HSC requirements, every subject has a strong writing component. Some have even more than others. Given it's been an area of performance at a system level that we could lift—we got some green shoots in this year's NAPLAN results around writing. The reading results are a bit more concerning. We need to lift our efforts there. But we're seeing the benefits of such support in schools, around writing. So we intend to continue our efforts in that area.

**The CHAIR:** The HSC Strategy program as well—has that been a successful program?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'll get Mr Graham to talk to that, as a former HSC teacher, as well, in the system. We wanted to make sure we could get good HSC support. The program's been building across the years and has done very, very good work. It goes back to my earlier commentary around how we can make sure we go to scale across a larger number of HSC subjects, how we can support teachers who teach HSC for the very first time, and how we can teach teachers who are teaching out of subject area and the HSC. That can be quite complex and confronting when you're a secondary teacher. So our initiatives here are to look at how we can embed that across our entire division that Mr Graham's going to lead. He might want to unpack a little bit further. I've heard a bit of a fallacy around the building that we're getting rid of the HSC Strategy or we're getting rid of Writing in Secondary. It's not the case. The case is we want to make sure we can mobilise our resources across a wider spectrum of staff and schools.

**The CHAIR:** Did the executive director of teaching quality impact use to head up the HSC Strategy or the Writing in Secondary programs?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** They did, and I think I made commentary in the morning around her work and her efforts in the department.

**The CHAIR:** I understand she was very well respected.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** She was a very respected educator. I applaud Mr Graham. At senior levels, you've got to be up-front with senior staff around changes you're considering and making. And, like I indicated, there was agreement that she would move on, and we met all of our requirements that are necessary under the GSE Act with that. I want to reinforce what I said in the morning. I know the individual to be an exceptional educator, and I thank her for her work in public schools here in New South Wales.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Graham, is that your experience, too?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Yes, certainly.

**The CHAIR:** It's confusing, from the answers that you gave before. But, if these were the programs that she was heading up and they were successful and they're staying, then what was the—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're looking at our structure there, of senior personnel and where things will fit and how they'll sit and what the responsibilities will look like. So there are changes afoot there, and we want to consult with our staff, get their feedback on that draft structure that's imminent, then go out with a final structure and start to place our people in that structure.

**The CHAIR:** I might leave that there, then. Mr Dizdar, we talked before about the use of consultants and contractors and the sheer number of contractors that were being appointed. I also understand that there were some questions raised in relation to the way that some of those contractors were appointed. Has there been any broader review or looking into staff within the department and their role with that contractor appointment?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm pleased with the work that we've been undertaking in this area. It's not work that's fully finished, but I can tell the Committee that we've gone from an average spend of \$35 million a month on contractors to an average of \$15 million a month in 12 months. We continue to go, month on month, with a downward expenditure trend. We have, as I speak to you, Chair, 50 per cent fewer contractors than the same time

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last year, in physical count. The Deputy Premier has been clear with me in the Education portfolio, and the Government has been clear around the contractor spend and requirements, and I share the same commitment, that we should be looking for roles within the organisation where we can have repeatable expertise, and some of those contractor roles have gone on for too long. I know it's been an area of interest and concern for you. I've been in the role 18 months, and, from day one, it's something that I targeted. We've also done an embedded-services review, and we're just finishing the second leg of that.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate the work that's being done to reduce the spend. But, in terms of the issues that we identified during our inquiry and that have been raised in a number of places around conflicts of interest and the appointment of contractors in particular, has there been any broader review in the department to ensure that everybody is aware of their obligations and that anybody who was perhaps not doing the right thing has been taken to task for that or there's been sort of action?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I took immediate action. I actually put in new approval processes, and that happened within a matter of weeks of starting in the role. My deputy secretary colleagues are the only ones that can approve a recommendation for a new contractor. And, in fact, I'm the final approval.

**The CHAIR:** That's great going forward, but in terms of the past?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I can only speak for what I have instituted in the 18 months that we have undertaken. The other part of this is that I undertook an embedded services review. I brought in a former colleague with vast experience in the department—you will be pleased to know, not as a consultant and not as a contractor—for a term role in the organisation. They have done enormous work around embedded services. We had, for lack of a better phrase, shadow functions across such a large organisation. We have been working on that as part of our functional realignments here. There are savings to be had there as well. I was of the view that there was duplication across the organisation and that was what this review has shown.

**The CHAIR:** One of the things we found in our consulting review was that there seemed to be a complete lack of consequence for wrongdoing. Where we found self-attestation statements being signed off incorrectly, and where there were conflicts of interest that hadn't been managed appropriately, there were never any real consequences within the public sector for that. I appreciate not talking about things that occurred before you came on board, but to the extent that there are still people working in the department who were potentially involved in unethical behaviour, have you taken action to ensure that those people have been taken to task for that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Two things. Number one is that the entire executive team—and I am proud of the executive team who are here with me—have made it our own business to make sure we know our divisions. We know who these people are and how long they've been there. We have gone back on the ones who are in play to address the things that you're alluding to. As well as that, having the approval level at this table, at this level, to be able to put someone on. That is new. I don't think it is in the best interests of the contractor or the organisation if we are not assiduous around that.

I also just want to put it on record that we have got many fantastic contractors who are making an enormous contribution to the organisation. I have learnt, as secretary, particularly in the IT area and the School Infrastructure area, what competitiveness looks like in salaries across sectors. It is naive to think you will have zero contractors. But I am also proud that we have led a reduction of 50 per cent in contractors. Some of that has been converted into ongoing permanent roles, which has been wonderful. For others, like the term says, it should be for a time period that comes to an end. That is what we have done. We are reaping the benefit of that with over \$20 million in savings per month.

**The CHAIR:** I will just turn to something different, then. Back on the respectful relationships issues and the domestic and family violence prevention initiatives, how will the Department of Education implement the domestic and family violence common risk and safety framework to ensure that all school staff have the capability to identify domestic and family violence and assess or manage risk?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'll bring Mr Graham in on this, but I have to concur with the Deputy Premier's comments this morning and thank Paul Martin and his team. They have led the comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum. Consent and respectful relationships feature a lot more predominantly in K-10 PDHPE syllabuses and in Life Ready courses in years 11 and 12. Mr Graham and his team have quite a task because what they are hard at work at is that while Mr Martin breathes a sigh of relief when the syllabus document goes out, we hit the accelerator button at our end to produce scope and sequences for individual lessons that are evidence based and that teachers can access. It is our intention to unpack these syllabuses with quality-assured lessons. It is not just a scope and sequence for a term, but actual lessons that will be pure gold for teachers, who can grab and use them, which are developed by teachers.

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Of course, teachers will need to use their professional judgement and make nuances and differences for the students who they are serving. But Mr Graham and his team are really hard at work on that. I have got to say, study after study—global studies as well as domestic studies—say that if you really want to tackle teacher workload, one of the greatest things you can give teachers is the resource material, so they can bring the syllabus to life. As a former teacher, I spent weeks on end preparing lessons. I wish back then the department was producing lessons that I could grab, rather than start.

**The CHAIR:** All of that is great, and I think that building that into the curriculum is great. But this particular question is around what we are doing to upskill teachers, not as teachers but as people who are in direct contact with children who may be experiencing domestic and family violence, to be able to identify and step in to help in those situations, so they know what to do. They see it, and then know what to do. The common risk assessment and management framework is what this question is about.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me see if Mr Graham has any detail around that, in particular. But if we don't we will take it on notice and make sure we come back with it.

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** I might take some of it on notice. But I will say that our child wellbeing area has exposure to the reports from schools and it is also where we start our professional learning around identification. We have talked about how the mandatory training that takes place each year around child protection has a different focus. Certainly, family and domestic violence has been a focus previously. It is that kind of work. In respectful relationships, we have the work around the syllabus, but we also have a significant investment around additional resources for respectful relationships. We are working closely with the Commonwealth, because all States are doing it. We are also working with the DCJ, Our Watch, Commissioner Hannah Tonkin, and so on. We definitely want to make sure that it is all aligned and that we are supporting our schools strongly with a consistent, single message. Things like the framework can be supported because we are not all talking about different things.

**The CHAIR:** Are you able to put a quantum on how much is being invested in this work?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Certainly. So \$8 million of State funding is going into that. I think there is about \$17 million of Commonwealth funding. It is a really substantial piece of work. We are doing that in house. We will have our own expertise. Our job is to support teachers. There are a lot of teachers out there, so we really want to make sure there is a strong, consistent understanding. We build off the same teams that are working on the consent material. It is all very consistent and consistent with the DCJ and the work of our partners.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Boyd, I also believe it starts from the top, and I am really proud that recently as an executive we did a full day of training on domestic, family, physical and sexual violence. Given the size and extent of our workforce, I must say that I found the day quite confronting around the stats and scenarios. I feel better placed as an executive around how we could support our workforce. It is our intention—the training had a massive impact on all of us—to then bring it down to the ELG layer, our executive leadership group, which includes below the deputy secretary level. I think it is an area we can do better in and we want to make sure we invest in, given the size and scale of the workforce.

**The CHAIR:** And the size of the problem. I will ask about something different. How many people are employed under School Infrastructure NSW?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'll get Ms Harrington to answer if she has the exact figure. We have been reducing our contractor contingent labour in that area quite significantly. I was going to say close to 1,000 employees make up that area. Ms Harrington might have the exact number.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I don't have an exact number. I will come back to you on that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Can I ask how many infrastructure upgrade requests are yet to be completed?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Are you talking about the school-funded works?

**The CHAIR:** I am talking about basic maintenance upgrades—bubblers and things like that. Where would that normally come from?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** For maintenance, if something is broken and needs to be fixed, that comes under maintenance. That is done as quickly as possible. Obviously you have got critical, urgent maintenance if you have got pipes leaking or a broken window that needs to be dealt with really quickly. We also have a planned maintenance program that is for things like painting and roof replacements when they come to the end of their lives. That is more of a program that is planned for. We have projections for when that needs to come up. Then we do a validation with schools for when it needs to be sequenced.

**The CHAIR:** Does the school make a request and say, "Look, we've got these really old bubblers. We need new ones"?

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**LISA HARRINGTON:** We have asset services officers. We have one asset services officer that deals with 10 schools. That's a smaller ratio than we have had in the past. We've got more support for schools. We've also changed the way that schools make those requests. We amended our FM web system last July, so it is very simple now. You either log a request for a call out—that is for that reactive maintenance work—or you put a request in for a nominated project, so an upgrade or an addition.

**The CHAIR:** My understanding is that some schools are waiting for years for what they would think of as quite basic upgrades. Do you have any data on how many of those would be outstanding?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** For maintenance, we have really improved our response rate for maintenance. We have changed how we respond to schools. Basically we do it through facilities maintenance contractors, rather than through a whole-of-government contract. We are seeing an improved response rate for those call-outs. On average last financial year it was 16 days in terms of those requests, those call-outs, and now we're down to about seven days. In terms of upgrades and additions, there is a long list. A lot of schools throughout the State have requested works be done and that's a matter of sequencing those works according to need. We've done quite a bit with schools in the last few months of really looking at it from an equity point of view—what schools haven't had works done in some time, what's the level of disadvantage in that area.

**The CHAIR:** Is there a number that you can give me of those that are outstanding?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I can take that on notice. But, yes, the upgrades and additions are the requests that schools have and there is quite a long list of those that have developed over many years. We need to keep engaging with schools and to see the need to be able to address the greatest need. Maintenance is very different. Maintenance—the reactive we have to deal with straightaway. The planned maintenance—we have a program that is more directed by the condition of the asset. We have modelling that's done and then it's validated with the schools.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Hargans, I'll just come back to you. I wanted to go to one of the documents that I got back in the SO 52 on the issue around that legal issues bulletin. There's an email that talks about holding off on external consultation pending the all-staff meeting between the secretary and the Deputy Premier, and it says that, based on that meeting, expectations are clear that any changes shouldn't add to administrative burden. Would you be able to provide any comment—or perhaps, Secretary, you? Was there a delay in rolling that out because you didn't want to add to teacher admin burden?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No. What that email might be referring to—something that we've been very cognisant of is the run rate of change for schools. When we release things, we want to make sure they're in spaces where schools can deeply engage with them. We want to respect the operating rhythm of schools. Schools have told us that part of the problem is that it feels like to them it's this funnel that just goes "bang" at them, so "Can you make sure you look at appropriate avenues of when you release material?" Even under the former executive structure here and the former Government, we respected, for example, the first five weeks of term 1 to say—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I wanted to specifically get to the issue of this legal issues bulletin, though. Because it was originally—launch date was mid-June last year. We now know it's out this term and that's great, but that's sort of a full 12 months behind where the original plan was. And I appreciate Ms Hargans' point about going and making it more streamlined and I understand that it's important to get it right. I'm just concerned that an issue that's as important as helping schools manage these very, very serious allegations and incidents when you do have that sexualised behaviour occurring might have been delayed unnecessarily because of concern about an admin burden.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'd just reinforce what Ms Hargans said. The major reason for the delay was the extent and size and scale of the consultation that we wanted to undertake to make sure we got this right. We weren't operating in a vacuum; we did have guidelines there. But we did need to go revisit that in line with the research piece, in line with what schools were reporting. But it's not easy to navigate 20 other stakeholders out there, the range on the ground to make sure you capture that fully. That email that you're probably referring to would've been, "We're almost right to go here. When is the best time to then go out to schools to give them space so it's not lost in the paraphernalia of things?"

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It was from April last year and I've been told that they've only come out within the last few weeks, so it's quite a delay.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It came out early in the term. I would have been deeply concerned as secretary if we had nothing in play. We did have guidelines in play that schools could rely on. If they had zero in play—apart from guidelines and legal issues bulletins, you've got to nail those things. You've got to get those things right. I just reinforce the support mechanisms that are there in the organisation if a school is in a particular pointy end

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of a case with this that might be involving the police or JIRT et cetera. There is system support that can be distributed from Mr Graham's area out to the ground to help.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Hargans, in terms of further information or advice that will come out to schools, is there more to come later this year? I just wanted to clarify that.

**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes, as I said, the problematic and harmful sexualised behaviour guidelines are being reviewed and the plan at this stage is that they will be released in term 4.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will they be publicly available as well?

**SARAH HARGANS:** I can't say at this point in time.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you take that on notice perhaps?

**SARAH HARGANS:** Yes, we can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Withers, I have a few questions for you as well. My colleague kind of stole my thunder a little bit. Thank you for coming and I know that you're relatively new to the role and I promise we won't drag you to budget estimates every time, because I know the joy that comes with preparing for it. But I'm very interested in the role. I think it's a good thing that it has been set up within the department. Can you explain where you fit structurally, what team you work in and if you have other staff supporting you in your role?

**DAVID WITHERS:** Yes, I sit between our Child Wellbeing Unit and our mental health service. That's the team I sit in. I work really closely with the supports that are currently in place for schools. When an incident of PHSB might be being managed at the school, I work with the network specialist facilitators, I work with Child Wellbeing Unit field assessment officers, and I also work with our health, safety and staff wellbeing teams to ensure that those wraparound supports are being coordinated appropriately.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Who is your direct line of report? Which dep sec or which area are you under?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Graham.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, I don't want to put you on the spot. But your personal professional background in this role—is your expertise teaching or legal?

**DAVID WITHERS:** I'm a teacher and my role in schools was predominantly in learning and support coordination. From there, I moved into a learning wellbeing officer role, so supporting schools across a number of networks in there, support of students with additional needs. And then I also have filled roles in attendance and child protection and behaviour policy.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You said before, in response to one of Ms Boyd's questions about supporting best practice—where do you look to for best practice guidance and how does that play out in the day-to-day in your role?

**DAVID WITHERS:** I look to the range of experts and supports already in place. I work really closely, as I said, with those members within the department. For example, our Child Wellbeing Unit has really close ties to the Department of Communities and Justice in responding to child protection concerns. With the health and safety colleagues, they have access and a clear understanding of police processes and supports in place as well as their risk-management planning to ensure the safety and welfare of all our students. I work really closely with NSW Health clinicians out in the field, so Safe Wayz and New Street, when they're managing issues of complex PHSB within our schools and I also seek advice and support from legal services colleagues and mental health services when they're relevant to the case as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If there is a specific issue within a school where there has been a student presenting with this behaviour, does the principal, through those different areas of the department—and I appreciate the context, but I'm trying to get to the creation of your role as a new one. Does that end up being something that you would look at as a case in providing support as requested, or is that a proactive role that you take?

**DAVID WITHERS:** In terms of the case management, it's as requested in some cases but I also monitor the reports that come in. Essentially, my involvement is when there are additional complexities that may warrant additional support to coordinate the vast amount of advice and stakeholders that are already in play.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you ever do any work with the Chief Behaviour Advisor?

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**DAVID WITHERS:** Not directly with the Chief Behaviour Advisor, but there are incidents and cases that I will be in support of that would rely on behaviour specialist support.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, that just depends on the nature of the issue?

**DAVID WITHERS:** It depends on what is needed, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is it limited to issues that happen sort of within school grounds on school days or do you have a role to play if there are issues outside of the classroom, outside of the school, online? Where is the line in terms of your area? I know it can be a grey area.

**DAVID WITHERS:** Essentially any incident that has an impact on the school setting. They can be incidents that occur outside of the school setting and depend, again, on the severity of the case, where it might be reliant on what police are doing, what DCJ are doing. But if it is coming into our school gates and impacting student safety and welfare within the school setting, then it still warrants a school-based response.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Chair, I don't have any more questions for either Ms Hargans or Mr Withers. I think they're only meant to be here for 10 more minutes, but if they'd like 10 minutes back they're welcome to head off—unless you've got any questions?

**The CHAIR:** No, I don't have any questions either.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Chair, I thank both Mr Withers and Ms Hargans. They were really excited to be here today. I want to thank them—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I know that's misleading the Committee, Mr Dizdar!

**MURAT DIZDAR:** —for being fantastic employees of ours.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Good luck in the role. I think it's an important one.

**DAVID WITHERS:** Thank you so much.

**(Sarah Hargans and David Withers withdrew.)**

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Dizdar, I'm going to come back to you. I know there have been a few questions about the restructure of the department over the course of the last 18 months. Are you able to provide—and I'm happy if you do it on notice—how many senior executives have either left, their position has been no longer required or their role has been terminated? How many senior exec have left? How many were eligible for a payout under the appropriate section of the GSE Act, and how much has been received in those payouts?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Like every agency, I'm bound by the Government's target of a reduction of 15 per cent in PSSE and I'm working to deliver on that. I'm about halfway through delivering that requirement.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But can you provide on notice the specifics that I've asked for? How many senior executives have left, how many were eligible for a payout and how much did they receive?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, I'm happy to do that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Ms Harrington, in relation to some of the projects that schools have effectively paid for themselves—in terms of accumulated funds or budget allocations that then go to School Infrastructure for the capital projects that need to go through the appropriate processes within School Infrastructure—I've had some concerns raised with me that, even for those projects that have been fully funded by accumulated funds or budget allocations, they have been transferred to School Infrastructure but they've been told that they're on hold indefinitely, with no indication of when those projects are going ahead.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Can I help there, Ms Mitchell, and Ms Harrington can give some guidance? This is something I've directly spoken to all principals about.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've made it clear that any commitment that we gave—and you gave a great example, where the funds were transferred—we'd deliver on that commitment. We've been very clear. I've just done 11 rural and regional roadshows where we spoke to close to 1,400 principals; I've said that in the live stream. There have been cases we've come across where there has been misunderstanding at the school level. We have said you need to be patient with us, that we'll definitely deliver those projects but we need to prioritise our run



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rate of delivery on those projects. Ms Harrington might give you some more detail, but I want to reinforce to schools that the money they shipped across to Infrastructure for projects will be honoured.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** That's right. Just to add to what the secretary said, our commitment to schools was that any projects where funds had been transferred by the end of last year will be honoured. Asset management teams have been working with schools over the last couple of months to basically try and prioritise those works, as I mentioned earlier, with trying to do it with a real equity lens—as transparent as possible. We're very conscious that those schools and those principals need to communicate with their school communities about the works and when they're happening.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, I think that's the concern. School communities are seeing nothing happening for things that they assume they've had the money paid for.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Some of those projects have been in the system for several years. It is a matter of checking with the schools again, understanding whether that's still a live need and understanding the scope. We expect over the next few weeks to be able to come back to those schools and confirm what is happening for this financial year. It's just taken a bit of time to engage with each school and make sure that we're prioritising the greatest need.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have a list or a number of how many projects there are that are on hold as you work through that process?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** The school-funded works—as the secretary said, we committed to honour all the ones that had been transferred by the end of last year.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How many is that? Is it 10, 50, 100?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** A bit over 2,000 were in the system, and that's over—some are as old as five years. It's a matter of working out which are the greatest priority there. The community-funded, the P&C-funded are progressing. That is a case of making sure that we can have the resources. We've got a certain amount that we can deal with in each asset management regional office, so that's a matter of sequencing, but all those projects proceed. Obviously, those funds have been fundraised by the community and they proceed.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Mr Dizdar, can you remind me of the process if a student or a child is on a temporary visa and wants to be enrolled in a public school? I'm happy for someone else to answer this. What's the process of that, in terms of the school enrolment for those on temporary visas?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me also test my understanding, and then Mr Graham will correct me if I get any of this wrong. I get mixed up a little with the visa classes. We have the international students unit. They'll make an application through the international students unit and then we'll help facilitate their enrolment into the closest local public school.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So there's not an option for schools, for instance, to not accept students on temporary visas?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, I don't believe so. We have to accept all comers, including temporary visas. We'll work with the family around their geography setting, also around whether there's a need for intensive English provision because that's a very important provision. But let me just test my understanding with Mr Graham. Have I got that right, Mr Graham?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** He's not looking like you've said anything wrong, so that's a good start.

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** No, that's right. There are differences, depending on the visa class, around school entitlement to enrolment, which we're looking at now in terms of which schools you're entitled to enrol in.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If, for instance, a school has a concern—you mentioned the intensive English—that the student perhaps doesn't have the English capabilities, would a school be able to say, "Look, we don't think that we're a good fit for that particular student because of those concerns"? Where can a school say, "Actually, that's not going to work"?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No public schools can say, "We don't think it's a good fit." They can say, "Can we get help, Mr Graham and Mr Dizdar? Can we get you guys in? Can we assess this case together? We're concerned we may not be able to meet all their needs. We're of the view they may need intensive English provision. Can we get your help?" They can't turn the child or family away, though.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. Thank you for clarifying that. Obviously there have been changes in recent times to make sure that people are attending the school within their local area, in terms of the enrolment policy.

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have any figures or issues where it's been raised with you that parents might have fraudulently applied for a school when they don't live in the catchment? Again, I've heard scenarios of people pretending to rent houses or having fake electricity bills set up and the like to be able to go to a school in a particular catchment. Do you have any way of monitoring that? Do you investigate that in any way? What's the process there?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It concerns me. It's been raised with me, particularly with high-demand schools. But we don't have any centralised data capture on that, Ms Mitchell. We only have what may be available at a local school level. We don't require schools to keep that data. Schools may have how many out-of-area applications they have. But this can be an issue that I know Ms Summerhayes and Mr Barraket have come across in their careers, when they've been DELs on the ground in high-demand schools. It's lovely to have a high-demand school, but you want to make sure you're servicing in area. We don't capture that centrally.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Selective schools—sorry, I'm jumping around a little bit here. I'm trying to get through a few different issues. I know in the past there's been public commentary about the prevalence of tutoring, the use of coaching colleges et cetera for students for the selective school test. Have you done any surveys of those families or students that take up a selective school place to get an indication as to whether any of them have used tuition or coaching services for the test?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Graham might have info there. But another welcome development that commenced in your time was to make sure we had the test that was, in my words, less coachable.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That's what every parent and child wants. We have been able to make those changes. Another really positive fillip has been to have an equity cut across this to make sure we've got the diversity and we can capture those who might be doing it tough but have got enormous potential. I want to put to bed any claims that they are of less academic merit.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I know it sounds like we've got lots of time but I have a lot of questions.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It's just a passionate subject.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of surveying any selective school students and parents about using external—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm not sure that we do. Mr Graham?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** No, we don't collect data on whether they use informal or formal, paid or unpaid tutoring. But, as the secretary said, we've tried to make it—we provide samples of the assessments on our website so you don't have to pay someone to familiarise yourself with the assessments.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** This is probably for you again, Mr Graham. Have you got any data in terms of appeal applications that you have received, say, in the last 12 months? I know that the selective school placement tests are only out recently—some a little earlier than anticipated, but I'm not going to go there. Have you had any data in terms of appeal applications from last year relating to the selective school placement outcomes?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** I'll have to come back to you with that data.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can I go to you, Mr Ruming, in relation to some numbers. Obviously, I've seen the Deputy Premier's media release today about teacher vacancies. When was that data captured? I think it's 1,690-something. When is that figure from?

**SHAUN RUMING:** From 5 August.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There was also a mention today that retirements and resignations are trending downwards. I think we talked last time about what data was available for the previous year, but you indicated that you'd have some more. Do you have any updated figures in terms of the actual numbers?

**SHAUN RUMING:** We typically measure that and report that annually, but after the last estimates we decided that we should definitely look at that monthly. Although it's an initial trend, when we got to July, the resignation rate was down to 3.21 per cent and the retirement rate was down around 1.6 per cent, down from 2 per cent. We've been looking at it monthly. The challenge with that is some people may retire in term 3 or term 4. We're not doing a victory lap as such, but the indication is that the retirement rate and resignation rates are slowing.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Percentages are great, but last year you gave us actual numbers. You said that retirement was 1,078 and resignation was 2,050. Do you have the raw numbers?

**SHAUN RUMING:** I'd have to come back to you on notice on raw numbers.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You don't have them with you?

**SHAUN RUMING:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Percentages can be misleading. It's good to know the actual figures.

**The CHAIR:** Coming back to the number of not the maintenance requests but the upgrade requests, you said that there was a seven-day average for responding to maintenance requests. What is the average for responding to an upgrade request?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** It is quite different. When they put the nomination in, there is no set time frame because there is a large demand in terms of schools asking for upgrades and additions. It really does vary depending on the particular upgrade and addition in terms of how quickly those are dealt with. Across all of our 2,200 schools, there are quite a few requests in the system.

**The CHAIR:** Could you perhaps come back on notice with exactly how many requests there are?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes, we can.

**The CHAIR:** Is there any difference in the process for disability accessibility upgrades?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes. It is quite different. As the Deputy Premier said this morning, we have a requirement to make sure that schools are able to be accessible for our students. Through the integration program, we need to make sure that we make the necessary changes in the school to cater to the students and staff who might have accessibility requirements. That is a requirement. We have a budget, but we need to deal with whatever requests come in to make sure that a student can go to their local school even if they have got accessibility requirements.

**The CHAIR:** That's all very responsive. What is the proactive upgrading to make all of our schools accessible? Is there a plan for that or is there still so much of a backlog in the system that we haven't got to that point?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** The asset management teams do a really good job working with the schools. It's hard to know exactly what each child is going to need from an accessibility point of view. Even if we had all the money in the world, we would want to make sure that we are dealing with it case by case to make sure that we are dealing with the particular requirements of each student. I would say that in many of the schools over the years, lifts have been installed and ramps have been installed to cater for kids over time. It's not a case of there being a backlog that is stopping children from being able to access education. Case by case, in some ways, does suit the fact that we need to make sure that each student and their particular needs are catered for.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that there's a range of different needs for people with disability, particularly people with invisible disability as opposed to physical disability. I understand that there are a lot of needs, but you would think that we would be getting to the point where, from a mobility perspective, we can at least access all of the rooms. How far away are we from—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think you're spot-on. If any child is going to come in with an adjustment need, we've got to meet that need. Where you go to is can you make sure your entire footprint can meet a point of need? It is a large footprint. It's close to 10,000 hectares across 2,200 sites. Whenever we're going to do an upgrade, we make sure that, while we're at it, we can look at what the accessibility features of a school look like. I gave an earlier reference of Mosman High. It has got buildings that are 140 years old against a brand-new wing that is one year old. It's a credit to Lisa Harrington and the School Infrastructure crew because they have made sure that the accessibility needs can cut across building to building. We do look at taking advantage of natural things that we've got in play so that we can get value for money, but we do have a long way to go because it's a very large footprint. It requires strong investment over time.

**The CHAIR:** And times have changed. I'm not expecting that back in 1960 all of the new buildings were fully accessible.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No.

**The CHAIR:** In terms of the new builds, are they 100 per cent accessible now?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** They have got that requirement. All of the design and the build has to make sure they meet that requirement. You can't get sign-off for build unless that's the case.

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**The CHAIR:** So it's about going back and trying to—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm not trying to avoid it, but it is difficult.

**The CHAIR:** And I'm not saying it's not a big task. I'm just wondering if there's a plan.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It's 9,900 hectares. I know how many football fields that is, given my love of football. It's across 2,200 sites. Anytime we're doing an upgrade, anytime we're doing maintenance work—whether that's reactive or planned—I have got to give real credit to the asset services officers on the ground who are looking to then take advantage of those builds or work to improve the accessibility of a school. The other part that I'm a little bit proud of that I'm seeing come through in my career is meeting that child's needs years before they get there. We're becoming a little bit stronger in transition. If we know from preschool to kindergarten that we're going to get a child with X, Y and Z adjustment needs, making sure we can factor that in before they get there is really important. That goes to the value and sense of belonging and embracing. Sometimes, given the mobility and nature of our schools, we don't know until they arrive, and then we've got to put our skates on through infrastructure and make sure we can meet that requirement.

**The CHAIR:** That's right. We want this level of accessibility to become the norm and not just saying, "There's a person coming. We have to suddenly change the school around."

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The other part where I concur with you wholeheartedly that you mentioned earlier is around our staff. It's not just our students; it's around our staff and their accessibility.

**The CHAIR:** And carers and grandparents.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Exactly.

**The CHAIR:** A similar process began in the area of transport back in the early 2000s, when we had all of the States and Territories sign up to make transport across the board fully accessible within 20 years. They have missed that deadline, but there has been some progress towards it.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There has been lots of good work there.

**The CHAIR:** One of the frustrations I had with the previous Government was that, as far back as 2019, they still couldn't tell me what was left to be done in terms of knowing what was accessible and what wasn't. Does the Department of Education have an idea as to what is already fully accessible and where that work needs to be done in the future?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Harrington might want to make comment, but I think we're improving in this area too. Why I know that to be the case is that when Ms Summerhayes and I were principals, we had an asset service officer for 40 schools. We were lucky to see them once a year. Our asset service officers do a huge job, and we've given them a ratio of one to 10 schools. They are in and out of those schools on a regular basis. They're the ones that are keeping us updated on what that school need is, where the facilities lie and what condition they're in. That goes to things like accessibility. Ms Harrington might want to add to that.

**The CHAIR:** Is there a central repository?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We can come back on notice. But I do know that the majority of our buildings were constructed prior to the disability Act, so it is a big task to go and rectify all.

**The CHAIR:** I do appreciate it's a big task. I just would like to think that we've begun an audit to go, "This is what it would take", rather than just letting things flow until we do get, hopefully, one day, that requirement that everything be made accessible. That's incredibly helpful. Can we do some basic questions around numbers of children with disability in mainstream schools? Are you able to tell me how many have separate support units or come back with the data on that in terms of how many of our schools have separate support units and how many there are?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Graham might have the figure about how many support units we've got in the system. One in four of our children in our care in public education have an adjustment or adjustments or require adjustment or adjustments for disability. As to the number of support classes, I'm not sure if Mr Graham has that.

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** We have just over 4,500 support classes. That includes in our SSPs and in mainstream schools. We can come back to you with how many schools those 4,500 are across.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have any visibility over how many students with disability are being homeschooled?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Mr Martin?

**PAUL MARTIN:** No, I don't have those figures.

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**The CHAIR:** It's something that we just don't capture. That's right, isn't it?

**PAUL MARTIN:** The application form for homeschooling doesn't require parents or carers to indicate their reasons for. It's a voluntary section of the application form. We have a proportion of people who fill out that that indicated that the reason they are moving their child or choosing homeschooling is because of disability. But in terms of the actual numbers of students with disability who are homeschooled, no, I don't have that data.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, let me get this straight. That's because we have a voluntary field rather than it being a mandatory thing, which is fair enough.

**PAUL MARTIN:** Since it has been a voluntary field, I think about 80 per cent of parents or carers are filling something out. I can get the proportion of those that indicate that it's because of special needs.

**The CHAIR:** That would be really useful. Maybe one question for you, Mr Dizdar. I understand—well, I know, because I get a lot of constituents coming to my office and asking me to try and help them. For people whose children have been excluded or expelled from schools or there has been an incident of restrictive practices or something along those lines where they have basically come to the department and tried to get some sort of rectification for that situation, how many of those result in legal action?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I wouldn't have the data to my fingertips. I'm happy to see what we've got available and make that available to you. But I was looking at expulsion rates in the system recently because I wanted to look at the time when some of us around the table were principals. There has been a significant decline in expulsion rates in the system. That goes to what I believe to be the great work that our schools do in making sure they can meet the needs of students. Sometimes there is system support around what the best wraparound support looks like.

But I'm ashamed to say that, when we were principals, expulsions were more common. It's a pleasing trend to see those decline. Even if we enact an expulsion, we have to work with that family and that student at system level to look for ongoing education provision. It may be that we determine that it's no longer fit at that setting but we certainly don't cut them adrift and say, "Find your own way here." We have to work with that family to look for an alternative provision. That may be a neighbouring school, or it may be a specialist setting that may be required, or it might be a support class setting that is required.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that some work has been done establishing an independent complaints system. Is that correct?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** An independent complaints system?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I know it was a recommendation of the disability royal commission. I believe in the New South Wales Government's response there was an indication that an independent complaints system had already been established of some kind. Is that correct?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It's not ringing a bell for me. I'll see if Mr Graham has any information. But it might be getting confused with our recent updating of our complaints handling guidelines for parents and for staff. We made that distinction clearer. I'm taking you back a couple of years only. It was the one and the same for the complaints policy. We did make it clearer around the procedures for staff as opposed to parents and community. I'm wondering if it's getting confused in that. We don't have any other independent set-up, unless I'm missing something. Mr Graham?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** No, there are the revised procedures and there is also a section of PES which has the feedback and complaints section in it, which does do some of that work.

**The CHAIR:** In the last budget estimates we talked about the out-of-pocket expenses, and we were looking at that time at the 2023 interim report. Obviously, we don't have the audited full report at the moment, but the financial year has ended. What is the trend looking like in terms of parents' out-of-pocket costs?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me come back to what figures we do have. I don't have them at my fingertips. Since 2020 we have provided the same consistent advice four years running that voluntary contributions—schools must stress that it's voluntary. We cannot use the words "fees" or "mandated". We've got to respect the capacity of our communities to pay. We've also capped the rates. We haven't allowed for increases because we are being cognisant of the cost of living in New South Wales as well as the pandemic and then unfortunate natural disasters, starting with drought but bushfires and floods. It's a message that we have been reinforcing. Ms Summerhayes has been doing the same since she became deputy secretary. But we have kept those fees at their notional caps and have not allowed for increases.

**The CHAIR:** So we'll have to wait for those figures.

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** That's on voluntary contributions. I want to thank parents across the State and the P&C federation. They do a range of activities that can go to support schools on excursions and on camps. I was at a wonderful public school on Sunday for their biannual fete, all volunteer done. They put that money into helping those that can't meet activity costs like excursions et cetera.

**The CHAIR:** If you are at a school where you have this voluntary excursion or sports activity and you can't pay for it and there is no fundraising or other means of paying for it, do you just not go?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Our position has always been clear in public education that no student can be excluded from the curriculum on learning activities, and I consider excursions to be the same—a learning activity—because it will be tied to the curriculum. They cannot be excluded on the grounds of whether they can afford to pay or not. We ask schools to use their operational budget and their equity loadings to make sure that those who may be in financial difficulty or can't meet the costs—they meet the costs so that those activities can occur. In fact, Ms Summerhayes can probably point to a range of schools that never even ask for those costs and just run those activities free of charge in recognition of the community that they serve.

**The CHAIR:** There are a lot of third-party providers. I know with my own kids that we will get a form come back that's like, "Do you want to do Flip Out or climbing or tenpin bowling?" They all have quite a cost attached, and parents feel that they have to look and go, "Can we budget for that to actually pay for it?" It's not necessarily voluntary—the money is flowing through to a third party. In those circumstances, what is the ability for a parent to say, "No, my child can't go with their friends to that thing"?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I want parents to feel comfortable to say to the school, "I don't have the capacity to meet this. I would like my child to participate." And I expect my principal and school to say, "We'll meet that need."

**The CHAIR:** But I guess not every family can do it. If you're in—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm very respectful and appreciative that parents may find that difficult to do or may have cultural sensitivity around that or might not want to reveal what their circumstance looks like. I think we can do a better job as a system at reinforcing to families that they need not feel discomfort in being able to ask the school for help around an activity. The result here is that we could have a child miss out on an experience, and I wouldn't want that to be the case. I know no principal in the State who would want that to be the case with a family who was before them and said, "I need a bit of help."

**The CHAIR:** It's very hard for families when—there's one thing of being at the point where you literally can't afford anything to then go and ask for something, but there are a lot of families that are just so under strain and maybe a family or parents decide, "We're just going to eat beans on toast for a week so that we can allow our child to go to Flip Out." They're not going to go and ask the school in that circumstance.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, and I really respect and appreciate that. That's where I feel we can get a bit stronger to give stronger guidance to schools to reinforce that. But my operational experience here is that principals are very respectful and very understanding of the school community that they serve. If you're talking about a principal leading a school in a disadvantaged context, then they are likely to waive that across the board to make it happen and absorb those costs internally. I know many schools in south-western Sydney that I've had the opportunity to visit in my career—and I can name many—who don't ask for a single dollar of voluntary contribution or don't ask for any costs around activities and just make it happen. We still have to seek parental permission around those activities but don't ask for the financial contribution because of the points that you raise.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to come back to you, if I can, Mr Ruming. In terms of overall teaching numbers—and I'm happy if you need to take this on notice—do you have figures, in terms of within the department, for how many permanent full-time equivalent teachers there are at the moment?

**SHAUN RUMING:** Yes, just give me a second. Actually, I've got the vacancy numbers in FTE. I'll come back to you on the workforce numbers.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If you could take on notice for me the number of permanent FTEs and the number of temporary FTEs—teachers, for both—and also the number of SLSOs and the number of school admin and support staff.

**SHAUN RUMING:** Sure.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The most recent data, if you've got it—from the start of term 3 this year is fine—but whatever you can provide. Could you also provide on notice the same datasets for 12 months ago as well.

**SHAUN RUMING:** Sure.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you. Mr Martin, just a quick one for you. In terms of new teachers entering the system, what are the numbers like so far this year in terms of new approvals to teach? I appreciate that's across all school sectors. Do you have any data in relation to that?

**PAUL MARTIN:** I do. Just give me a second; I'll have a look. I might take that on notice. I'll try to find it and add it into a later answer, if that's okay.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, that's fine, thank you. I want to ask now about Rankin Springs, a school that I've asked about a couple of times before. I'm happy to direct it to you, Mr Dizdar, but Ms Summerhayes might also want to answer, depending on the nature of the question. I've had some more community concerns about the student enrolments going down. I think they're now down to 19 pupils, whereas about a year ago they were at 32. Is there any feedback in terms of the declining enrolments? Also, could you provide any information in terms of the principal's position and having someone permanently in that role and where that's up to?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure. I'll just see if Ms Summerhayes has got any info on that.

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** I'd have to take on notice the enrolment numbers precisely, Ms Mitchell. What I can tell you about Rankin Springs is you would be aware that we have been going through a recruitment process for a new principal in a community that has been very active and very involved in this school but also a little bit split in community about how we do that. I know that you're aware of that. We're working very closely. The DEL has a really good relationship with the community. They are speaking with her regularly about how the progress is going on the recruitment for a new principal. I'm happy to come back to you with all the numbers on enrolment.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there a financial incentive with that principal position that has been added? I've been told that there is. I just wondered if you—

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Yes, I believe there is.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy for you to provide on notice how much—

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** What that incentive is? Certainly.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And if you can also—again, on notice is fine. My understanding is that the position has been advertised possibly a number of times, but it still hasn't been filled. If you could—

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Unfortunately, that's not uncommon for many of our country areas, as you would know, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes. But if you can provide any further information on notice, that would be great.

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Of course.

**PAUL MARTIN:** Ms Mitchell, if I can answer that—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, please, Mr Martin. Go for it.

**PAUL MARTIN:** It's 4,425 teachers as at 30 June—so for six months of the year 4,425 granted either conditional or provisional accreditation.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** The other thing that we talked a lot about last time was the canteen sales and the increasing prices that were being faced by parents when it came to school canteens. From speaking to other parents, I know a lot of this has to do with, as we've got cost-of-living pressures, people are also getting busier and busier. Parents are commonly now two-income-earning households, and they don't have time to be packing full lunches, so the school canteen has become particularly important, just at the same time as a bunch of them have become privatised. Whether it's making profit for a private enterprise or profit for the school that's going to school funds, it's still an increase in out-of-pocket expenses for parents. Has anything changed since we last spoke about this? Has there been any focus?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm happy to get what data we've got, but we've still got lease canteens, and we've also got parent/P&C-run—canteens. Unfortunately, sometimes I come across the school wanting to have a canteen but can't get a canteen up and running. They've got no interest from a lease or parents are busy and can't volunteer their services. That's where our—we've got some folk in Infrastructure that try to help out there. We've also been trying to take the pressure off schools around some of this work when the lease does come up—so how can we help them to streamline those processes? Maybe lead some of those processes for them to make it easier for them.

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But I must say, as a father in the system, I'd be in a lot of trouble without the canteen in the two schools my kids are at. I look at the menu with envy sometimes, thinking if only I could order from it as well.

**The CHAIR:** My daughter works in the canteen at her school. She gets free mac and cheese for it.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I go and help. Do you go to canteen duty? It's great.

**The CHAIR:** No, I don't have time to do the canteen duty.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I do now.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I would encourage all the Committee. Ms Mitchell has been a leader in that front, so I would encourage all of you to volunteer in the canteen.

**The CHAIR:** I would love the opportunity, but I do not have the time. Anyway, this is not about me. In terms of the department actually looking at whether there are certain canteens that are charging too much or if there's anything that the department can do to rein in the expenses of those canteens, is there anything—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I know when we're running a lease process, all applicants have got to comply with a healthy canteens policy that we make available. I'm sure pricing becomes part of that as well. I'm just looking at Ms Harrington, whose area helps schools on that front. She might have more info.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** The work that we're doing at the moment is trying to support P&Cs with an easier-to-understand, more plain English licence—so to support them. Obviously we recognise P&Cs have a vested interest in a successful operation of a canteen in a school, so we're doing what we can to support those who are interested in participating. That work is underway right now.

**The CHAIR:** I guess I'm looking to see if there are any guidelines or regulation. For instance, you could put something out saying, "If you're running a notionally not-for-profit canteen, rather than taking money and using it to fundraise for the school, maybe you could make the products cheaper for those children who are least able to afford it"—that sort of thing.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The struggle here is that, for those leased canteens, the provider is looking at trying to make money from the canteen operation.

**The CHAIR:** Therein lies the problem.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The ideal would be to have P&C-run canteens right across the State, but I also respect and appreciate that parents across the board don't have the time or capacity in their busy working lives. If we had our way, it would all be not-for-profit out there and driven to meet the needs of the kids.

**The CHAIR:** There is a happy in-between. There are people being paid a fair wage to work there but then there are profits being skimmed off the top by private operators.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I have done canteen duty at Canley Vale High School with 1,500 hungry young adolescents at lunchtime with a yellow vest on. Let me tell you, it is some task. It was like a military operation, and that's a leased operation. Given the size and scale, we would need almost 100 parents volunteering there on any given week.

**The CHAIR:** Well-paid workers.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** True.

**The CHAIR:** That brings us to afternoon tea. We will be back in 15 minutes.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Welcome back. Mr Martin, I will start with the issue of civics. In terms of the curriculum of civics and the teaching of civics, what do we know about it? Where does it sit within the curriculum? How is it taught in the classrooms?

**PAUL MARTIN:** We haven't dealt particularly well with civics and citizenship in previous syllabuses. I think we received some criticism from various stakeholder organisations. In fact, we were probably not as up to date on civics and citizenship in our syllabuses as the Australian curriculum. We had them as a guide. We have spoken to a range of people and included it now as mandatory or essential learnings in K-6 and 7-10. In K-6, it goes to issues of the origins of parliamentary democracy, I think the Magna Carta is there, things like referenda, understanding the upper and lower Houses and how the States and Territories work in terms of government.



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By the time you get to 7-10, it occupies both mandatory and elective parts of syllabuses. It is there as an elective in commerce; it certainly sits in history, depending on which parts of history you focus on; and it is in mandatory history as well. We have much more coverage. I think we have been getting a reasonably positive response for including it. There are sometimes arguments that it's dry or that it's a bit prosaic as an area of study. I don't think it is; I think students will enjoy it. There is an enormous amount of work that teacher support can provide for teachers, through various professional developments, to make this enlivened in the classroom. It has been a great move forward, I would argue.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Mr Martin, I think you might have touched on this, but in terms of the subject or civics education, is it currently integrated with other subjects or is it standalone?

**PAUL MARTIN:** It's integrated in HSIE in K-6 and in standalone history in 7-10.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Does the department play a role in ensuring that civics education is consistently taught across all schools?

**PAUL MARTIN:** I will refer the department's processes to the department, but the syllabuses are mandatory in the sense that the knowledge in them is essential: Teachers must cover it. The content is less in terms of the amount so that there are more opportunities for teachers to complete the work that is there. It was quite cluttered and overcrowded, and there were many options for teachers to pursue, plus there was not enough actual content. My view is that all students in New South Wales will cover the content in the classrooms, without it necessarily being a standalone subject. My personal view is that it sits best within history or HSIE in primary school.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** This might be to the department, but are there measures or are we monitoring this? Is there any enforcement of this? As you can imagine, parents are reporting to me that different students are having different experiences and exposure to civics. When I go into schools and they want to hear more about the Parliament, for some kids there is absolutely no knowledge or awareness. They say, "Hang on a moment, where does civics actually sit in the curriculum?" Mr Dizdar, just in terms of monitoring or enforcing, how do we do that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think Mr Martin was covering it really well. I think, from here, you'll find a real improvement because the syllabus documents have given much greater clarity to teachers across this State around what's required to be taught for civics and citizenship. I think, as parents, we will have much better line of sight through the K-6 syllabus documents as well as the history K-10 documents around the requirements for civics and citizenship. I'm looking forward to improved—not as a result of the capabilities and capacities of teachers, but syllabus clarity—uptake and understanding of parliamentary practices and democracy, the cornerstones of civics and citizenship. Of course, I wouldn't rule out the commerce syllabus, which has always been strong on this front. But that is an elective subject in years 9 and 10. I know there is reinforcement in senior syllabuses by way of legal studies, business studies and economics, which touch on these areas, but not all students undertake those.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Is there any consideration within the department—or whatever the process or arrangement is that you guys have relating to the curriculum—for establishing civics as a standalone subject, to ensure uniformity and its importance across New South Wales schools?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We respect and adhere to the NESA syllabuses and subject offerings. We will work on delivering the curriculum requirements that are across the board through the K-10 syllabus, and Mr Graham's area will work on making evidenced-based lessons available to teachers in this area.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Mr Graham, is there specific training for teachers on the subject of civics?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** That's right. With clear syllabus outcomes, we will be providing materials and lessons around them. That will provide a level of consistency. It won't be compulsory for schools to use, but they can calibrate against the department's materials to see that there is consistent teaching. We can provide assessment advice as well.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Would there be any data available that might show how many schools in New South Wales are actively engaging in teaching civics as part of the curriculum?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Certainly, 100 per cent. Ms Summerhayes might be able to talk to curriculum monitoring because one of the absolute bedrocks for us is that we teach all the syllabus outcomes.

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Indeed. Ms Merton, I was just mentioning that it's a bit of a rite of passage that every year 5 or 6 student in a New South Wales school would usually attend the Canberra excursion.

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I certainly did when I was in primary school—100 years ago!—and our children across the State continue to do so in most cases. I know that civics is part of the instruction that leads to those extracurricular experiences.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Would any data be available in terms of monitoring the teaching of civics in the curriculum?

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** When we do curriculum policy monitoring, our schools run through a rotational monitoring process. We look at what is taught in all of our schools from K-12. Certainly, we are looking at all parts of the syllabus requirements.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Would that data be available?

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** We can give you information on curriculum policy monitoring. I would need to take on notice—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Just in terms of results, that's all. Parents are saying, "It's not being taught," or "Why does school A know but school B doesn't?" So just in terms of data and what we might be looking at.

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** I can certainly take on notice how much specific civics data we have. But, Ms Merton, I would also say to you that when kids talk about what they are learning in a classroom, they may not identify it as civics, but they may have been learning about Parliament, getting ready to go on the Canberra excursion, doing work around the role of the Prime Minister and the history of the Australian Parliament. When kids talk about learning, it's sometimes hard for parents to understand which part of the syllabus is being taught in the classroom.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Merton, a lot of schools actually run a student parliament. I was just talking to a clerk here today whose daughter is at one of our fantastic public schools. Her daughter is the environment Minister at that school. A lot of schools actually run an entire parliamentary process, and it's a very powerful way of reinforcing civics and citizenship, but what I'd underscore here is the syllabuses that Mr Martin and the team have developed are now a lot clearer for teachers across this State, around what they are to teach in this area, K-10. So I think you'll see much improved practice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Ruming, I think this one's also probably for you. Just in terms of department staff, not those who are working in schools but those working in the different corporate offices, both in the Sydney area and across the State, do you have any data on how many full-time staff are working three days a week or more in the office currently?

**SHAUN RUMING:** We'd have to come back to you on notice with those exact figures, but we do have flexible work options, part-time, job share, flexible start and finish. But, with those exact numbers, we'd have to come back to you on those. We can provide those figures.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. I'm just after full-time staff, how many are working three days a week or more.

**SHAUN RUMING:** I'll have to come back to you on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you also, if you provide those figures, give me, if possible, what percentage of staff that is?

**SHAUN RUMING:** Sure.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm assuming it's not 100 per cent at this point. When would you expect to hit 100 per cent of those staff back full-time, three days a week, as the Premier has outlined is his expectation for the public service?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Can I just make comment on this because I've got oversight and responsibility for the entire workforce? We're looking forward to delivering on the Premier's circular, as every agency will need to. I think there is a rebalance to be had here, off the back of the COVID years. Eighty-five per cent of the workforce that I'm responsible for have no option of working from home. They're inside the school gates.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand. That's why I asked specifically about those in corporate offices. When would you expect to hit the 100 per cent of staff back three days a week or more?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're working on our draft policy in line with the Premier's circular, and then we'll need to go out with our draft policy. I intend to consult with Mr Ruming and our workforce, and then we'll make decisions around what that best—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** What's the timeline for that consultation, Mr Dizdar?

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think we should be able to achieve that work this year. We're in term 3. We're midway through term 3. We should have definite clarity, heading into the new school year, if not earlier, but we look forward to consulting with our workforce and making sure that we can meet the operational needs of schools, because we're the support arm, how we can best deliver and achieve that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that. I just wanted figures. But, if Mr Ruming can provide some on notice, that would be great. A couple of quick school infrastructure questions to you, Ms Harrington. Is there an update on the process of the new public school at Thurgoona and where that's up to, in terms of delivery? Sorry if I stole your thunder there, Ms Cohn, as someone who lives in Albury. "Dr Cohn", I should say. Apologies.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes. We are really monitoring that region, in terms of the commitment there, in terms of the project. The development hasn't been coming on as quickly as we expected. We are committed to that project, but we are just monitoring in terms of the development that that school will service.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** It's one of the schools that's been slated for one of the public preschools that, we've been told, will be open by 2027. Will that school be open by 2027?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We're doing a lot of work with council at the moment is the advice on that particular project. Obviously, we are committed to the 100 preschools, and that is one of them. So we're conscious of that time frame and the need to deliver on that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The new high school at Medowie—I've had some community members raise concerns in relation to, I guess, student access once that school opens. Medowie Road is quite a busy road. I'm told that there's not a safe access across that road for students, and a lot of them will be living on the other side of that road, as opposed to the school. Has there been any costings or budgeting for some sort of safe passage for students to cross that quite busy Medowie Road, in that project?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I'll have to take the specifics of that on notice. Obviously, we work really closely with stakeholders across council and Transport to make sure that, when we build a school, there's safe access. But I'll have to come back to you on notice on those details.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine. If you could take that on notice, that would be great. Thank you. Mr Barraket, I have a couple of early childhood ones here. Not letting you get off today.

**MARK BARRAKET:** I've been waiting.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With bated breath, I'm sure. Could you give me an update in terms of, outside of the 100 preschools, just general capital works fund opportunities for existing services. How much has gone out, in terms of those grants? Is it still a process where those existing preschools can provide on an as-needs basis? It's not open for rounds anymore, I think, is my understanding. How much is going out the door, in terms of capital works?

**MARK BARRAKET:** Thank you for your question. There have been a number of capital works projects over a number of years. We will be going out with a future round shortly, and that is going to be \$20 million, and that is from the Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But that's going to be for existing preschools.

**MARK BARRAKET:** That's for preschools. In 2023-24 financial year, there was \$11.8 million distributed in payments for open projects.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I've got an example, and I might even share this one with you after. Dungog Community Preschool—they've got an existing service. They've just purchased some land, next to the public school, which has an old church and hall on it, but they need some capital to assist them with some sort of minor upgrades to make it serviceable. They've got a long waiting list. Would that be the sort of project that they would be able to apply for some of that \$20 million that, you just indicated, is coming online soon?

**MARK BARRAKET:** We're still finalising the round of capital works and the guidelines for that, but I'm happy for that service to reach out to us, and we can have a conversation with them about whether it might be appropriate for them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Excellent. I may well just give you this letter that I've got here, as well, if you'd be able to reach out, because I know they've got quite a significant waiting list, as well.

**MARK BARRAKET:** Happy to take that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They've got the land and they've got the buildings. They just need a little bit of help. But I think that would be great, if you could have a look at that one. Thank you. I wanted to also

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just go to, probably—I'm not sure whether this is Ms Scott or Mr Dizdar. I've had some concerns raised with me just in relation to—some schools use external providers to help them with some of their business management. They use some of their budget to do that. I believe there's a number of people who, around the State, provide that external support, in terms of schools and their sort of budget allocations and working through their finances. But one thing that's been raised with me by several of these schools is that those who provide those budget support services used to be able to remotely access some of the data in relation to the school budgets. They're now not able to do that. There's been a change. Can anyone provide information as to why that has occurred and if it's something that's been done intentionally or if it's just an accidental overlook of a situation.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** If Ms Scott's got some detail, I'm happy for her to go to it. I'd just encourage all our principals to reach out to us. I know we've got a strong finance directorate, and I know they're well placed to provide the expertise to schools, whether in person—we've had a series around, in past years, in person—or online. I'd encourage them to work with us, because you're referring to external providers. Schools may make that decision, but that internal expertise does exist. As to the specifics of they were able to access data and now they don't, I don't have anything to hand. I'm not sure if Ms Scott's across it.

**KAZ SCOTT:** No. I'm also not aware of that matter but very pleased, happy to look into it, if you can provide us with those details.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. The advice that I've got is these people who—as I said, my understanding is there's a number of them who work across the State, often former principals and DOE officials who go and provide that expert support, particularly to small rural schools. They can still go and do that, but they can't access the data remotely before they come is the issue that's been raised with me.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Do you want us to take it offline and look into it?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** You might tell us who they are and what that looks like, and we're happy to because it sounds like they have access to something that's not there.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** They used to have access, but now they don't, as of earlier this year, and they're just curious as to why.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let's have a look, but I would encourage all principals to work with us, through our finance directorate, as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be good. Thank you.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Mr Dizdar, last budget estimates, I asked about the department's role and involvement in the Mardi Gras and the costings, and you didn't have an answer. You told me at the estimates it was a very small investment. Further questions on notice were undertaken, and the cost of the department's involvement in the Mardi Gras was \$30,000. Mr Dizdar, given the current budget environment, I'm just wondering what the department's plans might be, going forward, in terms of such expenses.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I look forward to applying for the next round of the Mardi Gras, and I hope the committee sees fit to merit-award our application. I'm deeply proud, as secretary, to have marched alongside our LGBTIQ+ staff, staff who are deeply committed to public education. As secretary, while ever I'm at the helm, I look forward to marching with our staff and embracing them like we have. I have done that parade and have seen the faces on the sidelines—people I have recognised in my career who are just beaming with pride and saying, "You recognise with us; you see us."

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could just redirect you, Mr Dizdar—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, let me finish, because it is really important.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you for saying it was a positive experience for yourself. But it is a budget estimates hearing.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I was going to our people.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the current budget environment, what would the plans be for such expenditure going forward?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me finish, because I was going to our people. Our people, including our LGBTIQ+ staff network, have commented and written to me about the profound impact that has had on them. We will be applying again for next year's Mardi Gras. I look forward to a successful application. I look forward to marching with our people.

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You will be looking at similar expenditure going forward?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'll be looking to a similar investment.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The answer wasn't given to me at the last estimates in terms of the \$30,000 expenditure. In the current budget environment—I ask you again—will this continue? Will there be another commitment of \$30,000?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I will be putting in an application with our people. If the committee sees fit to accept our application, we'll march. As to the budget for that, I am yet to determine that with our people. But I will be putting some financial commitment aside for what I consider to be a very important endeavour and what my people tell me is a very important endeavour. For one of the largest workforces to be embracing diversity—I consider that a worthwhile investment. I will be committing funds to it.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. You have led me nicely into my questions about how LGBTQI+ students and staff can be better supported. I wanted to follow up with Mr Graham, who took the question this morning about the forms. I wanted to confirm what the national standard was that he was referring to.

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** I might clarify some of those comments. We've now had another look into it. ACARA control the statistical standard and it currently only reports two categories against gender. But it does now allow the collection of additional categories. We are looking at our collections across the department. It is a bit complex because we have to look at students, staff and all the different student collections so it is all consistent. Obviously, there are a lot of IT systems that underpin that. I am also advised that we are considering the Australian Government Guidelines on the Recognition of Sex and Gender. That is directly based on the ABS work. We are undertaking that work at the moment.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Fantastic. I am really glad to hear that. Not having had that data up until this point, how does the department understand the prevalence and needs of, particularly, trans and gender-diverse students?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** We're very much focused on supporting every individual child. Every child at school is supported and the department and system support every school to manage the needs of each child.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Yes, but if I can redirect you to the question specifically: If you are not actually asking at enrolment, how do you actually know how many trans or gender-diverse kids there might be in a particular school or what those needs are?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** The school knows, and we support them in that way. That is the most important thing. It is true that we don't have a centralised system that says this many kids are trans and this many kids report against the categories that we will be having in the future. I am conscious that it would still be a fairly discrete set of categories, so it would tell you something about a slice, but it wouldn't tell you about every individual particular child and, particularly with gender diversity, where that might be. We are still focused on supporting every child, even without us knowing in head office how many would report X and Y.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** There was a project from the Advocate for Children and Young People, *The Voices of LGBTQIA+ Young People in NSW*. It made a recommendation that the department fund inclusion training for teachers and school leaders. Has there been any progress in implementing that recommendation?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Graham might add to this, but inclusion is a major feature of all our training. You have heard lines of questioning around that. Stakeholders are pushing me to say there is more work that we can do on this front. We did partner with—Mr Graham will get the title right for me—an external authority that has just opened the LGBTQIA+ museum in Sydney. They are not going to forgive me, because I work closely with them. Mr Graham?

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** You are talking about Qtopia.

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Qtopia—it is on the tip of your tongue, Secretary.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, Qtopia. We partnered closely with them. We supported them around curriculum development for excursions for children and our staff. We are working to provide better guidance and more guidance to schools by way of our staff. Mr Graham, did you want to add to that?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** We know how important it is for schools to be supported by the department, particularly with these issues. There is work that we are doing. Our work with Qtopia is one of the things we are doing. We are also working to support teachers and schools. We are doing more work around that.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Thank you. I am delighted to hear that it is possible to do an excursion to Qtopia. That would have meant the world to me as a high school student. More specifically, I am interested less in the

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staff who might be interested in this and are promoting inclusion really well—I am coming back to that report from the advocate. There were certainly some pretty distressing anecdotes of a lack of acceptance from some teachers and staff, but also just a lack of awareness and understanding. That recommendation was specifically around training for staff who might have no knowledge or interest in inclusion. Is there any training being rolled out or prepared? What is happening in that space?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That is the area that I was referring to that stakeholders are pushing us on, saying, "You can give better support to your workforce. You're certainly doing it through the LGBTQIA+ staff network. But how can you then grow that understanding across the board?" I think we have work to do there. I think it is a fair line of questioning that you indicate to us. Let's come back to you with what we intend to do in that space. We could provide better support for our workforce.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Sorry, I am moving to a completely different topic. I want to ask about early childhood education and care. The Federal Government announced that it is going to fund a 15 per cent pay rise for early childhood education workers. It is my understanding that educators who work in local government in council-run early childhood education centres would be eligible for that. Is that correct?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Barraket is our resident expert on this. He can talk to this.

**MARK BARRAKET:** The announcement by the Commonwealth Government to fund a 15 per cent wage increase is for CCS-subsidised services only. I think it would depend on the nature of the council-run service to determine whether they would receive that payment or not. We are conscious that there are some awards across New South Wales that are not captured as part of that. We are working to understand the implications for those at the moment.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Have you had meetings with relevant stakeholders in the local government sector here in New South Wales?

**MARK BARRAKET:** What we have been doing since the Commonwealth made their announcement about that pay increase is working with the Australian Government to understand the nature of that program and what the guidelines are going to be. Until we have full visibility of those guidelines and the approach that the Australian Government is taking, we can't fully understand the implications for our services in New South Wales. That is our first step. We do expect that the Australian Government will publish those guidelines sometime in October.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** There was also a recent announcement by the New South Wales Government for 1,300 apprentice and trainee positions in local government, which was a really excellent initiative. Do you know how many of those roles will be allocated to early childhood education and care?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Read might talk about the apprentices and trainees. We've got a government commitment to deliver for Mr Whan, but this one goes specifically to local government. Ms Read might have details on that.

**CHLOE READ:** I would have to take that on notice. I am not sure whether they will be allocating specific numbers of places to particular occupations or whether it will be for councils to decide the workforce that they need and can support and using that to access the scheme. I can get more information on notice.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Thank you. I would be really interested to understand. I was reading the report that the department did on early childhood services, which was a really informative report—particularly the comments that council-run services were particularly strong in looking after marginalised or vulnerable communities in a way that the private sector hasn't. I am really keen to understand the investment from the Government in council-run early childhood education.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let's come back to you with specific info on that.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** There was also a recent announcement for \$10 million in early childhood education and care as part of the Western NSW Workforce Activation Program. I understand from the announcement that was for establishment, expansion or upgrade of early childhood education and care facilities in local government in Broken Hill and Cobar. Is there any more detail about how that is being allocated?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Barraket, do you have more detail?

**MARK BARRAKET:** Yes, I'm happy to take on notice how that's being allocated because, while we have worked with the appropriate government agency on that, we're actually not the lead agency—so happy to take on notice what we're doing to support that.

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**Dr AMANDA COHN:** I suppose my follow-up question with both of those schemes—your report on local government particularly noted the staffing challenges because of the poor pay conditions for educators who work in local government. I'd be keen to understand if there is any work being done from the department to address that.

**MARK BARRAKET:** As I indicated, we are working with the Australian Government to understand the implications of their recent announcement. There is also a supported bargaining piece for community preschools in New South Wales, which is being lodged with the Fair Work Commission. That was lodged just recently. We are going to be looking at the outcomes of that application to make sure that we can respond appropriately to that.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** There was quite a prolonged exchange this morning about schools being needed in areas that have been earmarked for housing and development. What work is being done for targeted establishment or expansion of early childhood education?

**MARK BARRAKET:** All new public schools that are being built will have a preschool built as part of that process. Members of my team also recently met with Housing to understand the plans there and how we might collaborate on supporting infrastructure around early childhood in those areas.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** It's a fantastic initiative to have a preschool in all of those new schools. Has there been any work to understand the need for long day care as well?

**MARK BARRAKET:** We are conscious that long day care is something that is one of the types of services that early childhood education and care can provide for communities and there is a lot of interest in that. The Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund, which is a significant investment across 10 years, does look at how we can support children from zero through to five in different types of care models. We are exploring that at the moment.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** I appreciate it might need to be taken on notice but I'm particularly interested in that work in the context of the growth areas or the areas that are targeted for housing.

**MARK BARRAKET:** I can take on notice that detail for you.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** I had a couple of questions which I imagine you're going to take on notice, but I'm happy to put them on record for you. I'm interested to know, for the funding that has been allocated for fee relief for preschool—is that for yourself as well?

**MARK BARRAKET:** Yes.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** Is it possible to understand that funding broken down between department operated, council operated, privately operated et cetera?

**MARK BARRAKET:** When you're talking about funding, is this the amount of money that we provide for fee relief or is it the amount of money that goes to the service?

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** The question was about fee relief, but I think both would be helpful.

**MARK BARRAKET:** There is a range of different types of fee relief that we provide and we've committed over \$430 million in fee relief this financial year. I can provide on notice the breakdown of the amounts that we provide to four-year-olds and three-year-olds through that.

**Dr AMANDA COHN:** That would be helpful—and by the type of service.

**MARK BARRAKET:** And by the service type, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can I ask—it might be Ms Summerhayes. I've just had some questions put to me in relation to Rye Park Public School down near Boorowa, which I understand is in recess at the moment. There is some community support there to have it reclassified as operational and to get some students back. Are you able to provide any information in relation to that particular school?

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** No, I'd need to take it on notice, Ms Mitchell.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is there anything general you can say in terms of what would be the minimum number required to get it back to an operational status?

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Each school community is consulted, as you know, when we put a school into recess or are discussing whether we should close a school or not. It's very much contextualised by the communities that we are serving. So I wouldn't like to give you a number out of a ballpark.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But can you provide on notice some information about that specific one?

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**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Yes, I'll certainly provide on notice about that specific site.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have a few quick infrastructure questions that I might ask. There is Lismore South Public School. Ms Harrington, do you have an update—obviously that's a flood-impacted school, as you would know—in terms of any kind of time frames of construction to begin on that rebuild?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes, we had an information session with the community earlier this month and some concept designs were shared. In terms of the time frame, I'll have to come back to you on notice. But we're obviously moving forward with being able to share with the community the designs of what the school will look like, but I'll come back to you on notice on the time frame.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you also provide on notice hopeful or planned construction commencement but also estimated completion date as best as you can?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Also, just in relation to Richmond River high school—again, I know that there have been some recent plans made available. Are you able to provide any information or updates in terms of construction time frames up there?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes, I'll take that on notice. So similar sort of story there—where we've recently met with the community and shared some designs. I can come back to you on notice on the construction time frame.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Googong high school, again, was also another commitment—to build a new one there. Are there any updates in relation to that particular project?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I can come back to you on notice on—so stage two for Googong?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The high school.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We have the site for the high school for Googong, and we're at that design and planning stage. But I can come back to you with more on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And, again, as best you can—time frames for construction and completion.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I appreciate that there is a process that goes with this, so this might cross over into Ms Summerhayes' purview, but the catchment area for that particular school—and I've had some community members raise questions about the impact that there might be then on Karabar High School when Googong does open. How will you manage that with the local community in terms of information around catchment boundaries? And the time frames for that as well—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There is an intricate balancing act with the existing schools and what their boundaries look like. We look at demographic projections for the area. We look at as sensible as possible boundary cut-off points because they can be contentious. We've had historical cases where you cut off a street, where one side of the street can go and one side can't, so we look at all of those things. But the key factors are the demographic projections of the entire area, the drawing area, as well as the existing schools. Having visited Karabar High School recently, I understand their concerns. We'd want to balance their viability alongside a new high school there as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of the time frame of that, obviously that is dependent on the actual build and construction of Googong high school. So there is no kind of clarity that we can give to the community about those boundaries at this point?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No. Once we know when we're opening—as you will recall, we like to try to recruit the principal a year in advance of opening because there is a lot of work to be done and, through the principal, we like to get other key staff on board, we like to start working with parents. You want at least six months out, if not earlier, to have the drawing area because you want to start taking prospective enrolments. But we've got a long way to go here. We've got to determine when we'll be opening that school, what year groups we'll be opening with. We've had high schools where we open only with year 7 and we've had others where we open with a stage year 7-8. We've had others where we open with years 7 to 11. All of these things come into play, but at least six months out, if not earlier, we want to make sure we bed down the drawing area and start taking enrolments.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** With Googong high school, is that being funded through DOE School Infrastructure or is it coming from the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund?



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**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't want to get this wrong. I'm not sure. Ms Harrington?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We might take that on notice.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let's take it on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine. Bungendore High School—I know we asked about this a little earlier, but I just wanted some figures. Again, I'm happy for you to take this on notice if you need to, Ms Harrington. Do you have any figures in terms of the total amount that has been spent so far on the temporary school?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** And are you able, if you can, to on notice provide anticipated costs to maintain that temporary site both for this financial year and the next one, if you've got that available?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** Yes, we can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I don't expect you to have that at your fingertips in here. That's okay. Willyama High School, out in Broken Hill: Obviously there's issues out there with the mould and there's been the commitment to rebuild. Is there any update on the timeline for that particular project?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We are working really closely at the moment on that. Asset management is involved, as well as infrastructure delivery, in terms of the demolition of the existing school and also the plans for the new school. I can come back to you on notice in terms of the time frames, but we are hoping to come out to the community soon on the designs in terms of the new build.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Has there been any consultation? It's been raised with me—again, this might stray into other areas—that Allison House, which operated for a long time out in Broken Hill to have remote students come and attend local public schools, and operated independently from government, has had to close this year. Some of the community have been speaking to me about if, while there's a new rebuild happening at Willyama, there is scope or possibility to look at some form of boarding facility for those more remote students who want to attend a public high school, who used to be the residents at Allison House. Has that been looked at by the department at all?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It's not my understanding that we've had such representation come our way. I'm happy to stand corrected if any of our people—but they're nodding to say they haven't either. It didn't come up in the community consultation we ran at the two schools, either. I'm happy for you to provide that detail to us, if you like?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure. I'll take you up on that. You might be aware that the local council has put together an education working group that is made up of local community representatives, Teachers Federation, the mayor, and invited members of Parliament and their staff. The request was made for a Department of Education person to also be a part of that, but they were told that they were not able to attend. That is the forum where, on multiple occasions, local community have said they would like to look at that. The ICPA has raised it as an issue as well. It would be really useful, I think, if someone from the department—whether it's your DEL or whomever—was part of that working group. I think the community, to be frank, feels that the consultation maybe hasn't been what they would have anticipated. That's why the mayor and others have formed this group. If someone was given permission to be on that working group, it might help in terms of some of the community sentiment. Is that something you can have a look at?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're definitely happy to facilitate that. The consultation we ran was for the two existing school communities. People broader could have a say, but it was around what the provision should be. That was loud and clear to us, that they wanted two standalone schools. The Deputy Premier announced that. That's what we'll deliver. On this working group, I'd be happy to nominate someone local.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Peter Macbeth has been mentioned. He's a very good local DEL.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** He is.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** If he's able to attend, I think that would be very well received by the members of that group. I'll leave that with you.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** He is, and it will mean a lot to him to have that on record. He's one of our hardest working DELs out there.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** He is. He's very good.

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**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm happy if you want to pass on, because I don't know the group—if they want to write to me directly, I'll make sure we get Peter there.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Okay, that would be wonderful. Thank you.

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Ms Mitchell, I just add that the stakeholders that you mentioned on that group were invited to participate in the consultation that we ran in Broken Hill. A lot of community members did and a lot of organisations did.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I understand that these things have their local context—

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Yes, of course.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —but the feedback that I have had was that people felt that they were told about what would be built and it was very much about, "This is what we're presenting to you," as opposed to, "What do you want, beyond the two separate schools?" As I said, it's a very unique environment out there. A lot of families, particularly when it comes to high school provision, do tend to go into non-government schools because of the boarding access, even though I know there are three government boarding schools. But to me, it perhaps seems like an opportunity to look at—if there is a chance to add to that provision in the Far West, I think it's probably worth looking at.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We put on record that we're not saying yes or no that we could pull it off.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** No, I understand. I'm not holding you to it today. But I think it's worth exploring if you're rebuilding anyway.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Definitely, given the context, it'd be good for us to be at the table.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Fantastic, thank you. The social media forum that the Premier has announced recently—I think it's in conjunction with the South Australian Government—is the Department of Education going to be involved in that forum at all?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, we will be.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you know which education stakeholders have been invited to take part?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, we're undertaking that work to support the Premier's summit there. If I've got it right, there's a day in New South Wales and there's a day in South Australia. We'll definitely be at the table because we're a key entity here, but there's work underway on that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm happy if it's on notice, but are you able to provide any further information in terms of education stakeholders, student voice—who might be invited to take part in that forum?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, I know that I've already been asked around the student voice, and I know you've got a very strong understanding of the DOVES network out there and how we might capture it. What I do know sitting here is that there's work at play. I'm happy to come back on notice with whatever we've got at that time. I imagine, given the importance, there'll be a whole cross-section of stakeholders here. Definitely, Education will be at the table.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you, Secretary. I'm going to turn now to some questions to Mr Martin about the changes to professional development requirements. Again, we canvassed this a little bit this morning in terms of the change to the requirement to do the 50 hours in those four priority areas. Could you provide some more information in terms of the changes to the accreditation process for those courses? My understanding through media reports is that those who've got the current accreditation will have it until time lapses, but what happens after that? How are you going to ensure that what's being offered or what schools are doing is actually of a high quality, given concerns about potential—I'm trying to find a polite way to say it—maybe not the highest evidence-based providers coming in and doing professional development?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure. I'll give you a bit of context. We've been changing and developing policy in this space right since the very beginning of the NSW Institute of Teachers in 2004. We had a policy initially that because there were only two or three thousand teachers who were accredited, the capacity of NESA to approve courses and have a very high standard, for the time, of approval process was okay—we could do it then. We ended up, of course, by 2018 having 140,000, 150,000 and now 170,000 teachers. Each of those have had to do 50 hours of endorsed professional learning; and then, more recently, the policy that you're aware of in priority areas.

In order for that to occur, we can't set up a system that allows or requires teachers to do professional learning in endorsed areas and not have enough professional learning for them to do. We endorsed the key

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stakeholders—i.e. the three sectors—as providers. Up until very recently, 80 per cent of the professional learning that teachers were doing came from their employer and they were able to identify—the employer at the school level, the system level or the diocese level—what priorities that each individual school needed to do within those five areas. We, at NESAs, continued to approve for people or private providers or not-for-profits who applied to us to get that endorsed status and ended up with enough providers there in a variety of ways. The teachers had additional choice if they needed it. Those providers will continue to be recognised providers because they've applied for and gone through a process. We'll leave those on our website. They won't be mandated—teachers won't have to do it—but if they want a guide or an example of what NESAs considers to be quality provision, they'll be able to see that on the website.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But sorry, they'll be classed as "recognised providers" but not accredited anymore?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, that's right. We have four, I think, committees—one on special ed; one on wellbeing and mental health; one on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture; and one on leadership—where if providers wish to have that recognition, they can apply to us. We'll have those committees able to look at that work. The Aboriginal community in New South Wales is very keen that teachers doing professional learning in that space are doing so with the full confidence that the work is approved and provided with support by Elders, land councils and whatever. We will maintain the capacity to recognise PD and we'll add to that list of recognised providers as a guide for teachers. I think most of the PD, or a significant proportion, will come through and via employers, as is currently the case and has always been the case. That's both an entitlement for teachers and also a, I suppose, responsibility. But they'll also be able to have a look on our website and see recognised providers and be able to do other PD.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But the guide will be there, so a school can say, "I'm going to go on the NESAs website and this is who I'm going to get to come in to provide Aboriginal education or PD", or whatever, but my understanding is that there is no requirement to use necessarily providers from NESAs. I'll pick up on civics. I could decide post-politics that I want to educate people about Parliament, and I could go and do that and offer PD to schools. I'm not a recognised provider by NESAs, but a school could still engage me to do that. Is that correct?

**PAUL MARTIN:** It is correct. But it's also the case that that's correct now under the elective PD, which it was called until previously.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The 50 hours that you could choose from whatever you wanted to do.

**PAUL MARTIN:** Yes. They could already do that. We had anomalies in the system where a diocese or an independent school might have used a particular provider—a literacy provider or a phonics provider—under their own endorsement, and that provider hadn't been endorsed by, for example, the Department of Education. So we would have two teachers at two different schools doing exactly the same professional learning, but one was getting the hours under the priority policy and the other was not.

What we've attempted to do is move away from a one-size-fits-all policy regulated from Clarence Street and recognise the people best placed to make those decisions about not only what they do but the quality of what they do. There is, as you say, the capacity for teachers to choose provision of PD, external providers or whatever that we don't think are necessarily of the highest quality, but that has always been the case. Our view is that good regulatory practice for us is to guide teachers into what is a quality decision and rely on their judgements about what they do, their schools, their systems and their sectors. When we do audits, which we will be doing, we'll get a much better sense of the areas teachers are going into and be able to provide advice back to the schools in the system.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How often are you going to do those audits?

**PAUL MARTIN:** We'll have rolling audits. We haven't started, obviously, because the system has only been in place for a couple of weeks. We'll have rolling audits that will begin in 2025. I think that gives us enough time to start. I can't tell you the number of audits. We have got staff that will do it. We'll use those audits to provide information back to the systems and the sectors.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The audits will be on what PD the teachers are actually doing?

**PAUL MARTIN:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Will it be on the quality or the provision of the courses provided as well?

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**PAUL MARTIN:** We'll get a sense from what they're doing to be able to have a look at those providers. As I said, a significant proportion is from the sectors anyway. We will be able to have a look at what they're doing and interrogate those providers. If we get information back from a teacher that says, "I went along to this course and it was terrible," we will go straight in and have a look, and we'll talk to and provide information back to the teachers, the schools and the systems about that course.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But that auditing process will start in 2025?

**PAUL MARTIN:** Some of it will start in term 4, but most of it in 2025 for the transition period.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I want to go back to some of the recruitment process, so it's probably back to Mr Ruming. Have you got any data on how many teachers have been hired since the last estimates through the Priority Recruitment Support scheme?

**SHAUN RUMING:** We've expanded that scheme. I think we're at around 110 schools right now, up from 79. That has been a good improvement. I'll have to come back to you on the number of people who have been hired through that program.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you also provide on notice how many of those staff received the full targeted recruitment bonuses that were available?

**SHAUN RUMING:** Yes, we can do that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** On the Beyond the Line Program, can you tell me when the most recent iteration of that took place and where they went on that trip?

**SHAUN RUMING:** That was re-established, I think we said at the last estimates, in 2023. We'll be continuing that in 2024—we've got an intake in September—and also in 2025. We do two trips per year. The March 2024 tour had 49 participants. As I said, the next one is due in September.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So I'm a month early asking about those numbers.

**SHAUN RUMING:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you know roughly how many are slated to go in September?

**SHAUN RUMING:** I'll have to come back to you on notice. Out of the cohorts that we've done, 19 students are engaged in rural placements or rural scholarships.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you able to tell me where they're going on the September trip?

**SHAUN RUMING:** I cannot. I think last time at budget estimates I said they were going to Mudgee and then they were going west from there, and we all wanted to join them in Mudgee. I'll come back to you on the locations for the next one.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, I'm happy for you to take this on notice, but do you have any data in terms of the Rural Experience Program and how many teachers have taken part in that so far in 2024?

**SHAUN RUMING:** We've got 28 teachers that'll complete that program in 2024.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** On the Grow Your Own teacher pipeline—and I know that there are a couple of iterations of that—do you have any updated data in terms of the numbers under that program at the moment?

**SHAUN RUMING:** For 2024 the planned intake was 211 for Grow Your Own. I note that the Chair earlier had an interest in SLSOs, so this program is right up their alley. It's probably our most popular program. We have currently got 382 participants in that program. We're looking to do more in 2025. We're just doing the modelling on that. We ran about 520 scholarships this year across 13 or 14 different scholarship programs. We're looking to do over 600 in 2025. Grow Your Own will be a big part of that, but I can come back to you with exact numbers for the next cohort.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Do you have any data available in terms of how many people applied versus how many positions there were?

**SHAUN RUMING:** Not in front of me, but I know we're way oversubscribed—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm not surprised.

**SHAUN RUMING:** —so I'll come back to you on the exact number.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The Grow Your Own - Local Teacher Pipeline, I know that's Western Sydney, Dubbo, Queanbeyan and I think the Murray area as well. Are there any plans to add additional regions or areas to that program?

**SHAUN RUMING:** That's the modelling that we're doing right now. We think there's an opportunity in rural and remote. Chloe Read and I have been having those ongoing conversations.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Would you like to say something, Chloe? I know you haven't had a chance today.

**CHLOE READ:** I've answered one.

**SHAUN RUMING:** In terms of those regions, we think they'll benefit significantly from Grow Your Own. Those four areas that you talked about were specific to high schools. That was the difference in the first program.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Again, I'm happy for you to take it on notice if you've got a breakdown of the allocation of those positions and how many are going to each of those priority areas as best as you can provide.

**SHAUN RUMING:** We'll come back to you on those.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could ask a question about the Memorandum of Understanding to Strengthen Accountability for Non-Government Schools and the agreement between the New South Wales Government and Catholic Schools NSW, does the Government have a timeline to revisit the document and renew the memorandum of understanding?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'll get Ms Read to see what information she has got. It sits in our Education and Skills Reform area. I'm not sure if she has got it to hand. Or is it Mr Martin?

**PAUL MARTIN:** Sorry for my ignorance, but I might have to take this on notice. Can you explain the MOU in relation to—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It's the Memorandum of Understanding to Strengthen Accountability for Non-Government Schools. It's an agreement between the State of New South Wales and Catholic Schools NSW.

**PAUL MARTIN:** In relation to replacing the diocese and our responsibilities for the Catholic system?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The question is just in terms of what the status of the agreement is and the time frame for the renewal of that.

**PAUL MARTIN:** Can I take that on notice?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes.

**CHLOE READ:** I think that might actually be ours to take on notice. I think that was under the current school funding agreement. If that's the case, it would go with that timeline. When we had a new funding agreement, we might refresh that documentation. I'll take extra detail on notice.

**PAUL MARTIN:** One of us will answer it.

**CHLOE READ:** One of us will answer.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Harrington, I think this might be to you. Earlier in the day, we spoke with the Minister about Milperra in response to community feedback that I'm receiving about a shortage of schools and efforts being made as to a new high school in Milperra. I'm wondering what we might know in terms of student numbers or demand for schools. Is a new high school in the Milperra area in the pipeline?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** We have been looking a lot at that region. Obviously, there has been a bit of interest in that site and that region. We have been monitoring it, but the advice continues to be that the existing schools can meet the demand in that region. We obviously do have some upgrades of nearby schools that are also assisting, but we are monitoring that closely. At this point, there is no need for an additional school at that site.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Harrington, if I could revisit the issue of school infrastructure—and we spoke about this earlier today—in terms of the new housing zones and precincts and plans and the expected influx of new dwellings and residents and bigger communities. If I could, I go back to the Hills shire and the Castle Hill area. I am aware that Landcom announced in terms of the Castle Hill Showground precinct being one of the housing areas there that School Infrastructure NSW has confirmed a new primary school is required to meet

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future demand generated with the wider Hills showground areas. Ms Harrington, I'm wondering whether we have a time frame or we know anything further about that.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I can come back to you on notice with some more detail there. Obviously, we are working closely with Planning. That area is of interest in terms of the transport oriented developments. Following our enrolment growth audit, it's one of those regions that we are looking at really closely to make sure that we are aware of the housing in that region and we are able to make sure that schools are there for those communities. I can come back to you on notice in relation to that particular project and time frames. But it's an area that we are talking to Planning about a lot at the moment in terms of making sure that we, with the Bella Vista and Kellyville precincts, are able to meet the demands in those regions.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Harrington, in terms of current budget commitments to meet the increased schooling needs in areas such as this, is there current budget provision for such schools?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** As I said, there are quite a few projects that we've got in that region currently that we are delivering. The activity as a result of the transport oriented developments is being captured as part of our standard processes as we look at enrolment across the region. It's another driver that's changing the dynamics there. We'll continue to monitor that through the normal processes of then putting to government what particular projects we think are required to meet the demand. But at this stage there are quite a few projects in that region in the north-west that will deal with the forecast demand at this stage.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Harrington, am I correct in understanding that, in terms of the identified TODs, or the transport oriented developments, there is no further budget provision to meet increased schooling needs and it's being treated in the current budget environment?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** It's a bit too early to say. We are talking to Planning at the moment. One of the things we have found from the enrolment growth audit is that it's not just the number of houses that are really relevant for us to monitor; it's also the number of individuals or families within those houses. We don't yet have that detail from Planning. We are working closely with them. It's monitoring the number of dwellings but also the number of families within those dwellings that will impact the amount of schools we need or the upgrades to existing schools.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the eight accelerated TOD precincts here with the Hills and Castle Hill, as you identified being one of those, both primary and secondary schools within the existing schools within those precincts are over their enrolment caps. That's what we are being told by the community. Do we have knowledge of that?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** I can run through some of the projects we've got happening in that region. There are a lot of them.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the existing schools, it's saying that they are over their enrolment caps. I can cite that the Caddies Creek Public School is 400 students over and Kellyville Ridge Public School is several hundred students over.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** That's right. The enrolment growth audit really showed that, in a lot of regions, particularly in the north-west, the predictions in 2016 were far outshot in 2023 in terms of that development coming on faster. There are a lot of projects. We've got three school upgrades and one new school in addition to two more upgrades in that region. There is a lot of activity and investment happening. As I said, we are working really closely with Planning just to make sure that, with the additional activity that's coming on through the TODs, we're aware of not only where the houses will be and when they will come on but we have a good sense of the composition of those households so that we are able to meet the demand.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the eight priority areas of the TOD housing precincts, are we able to get a greater understanding about budget capacity or where work might be at in terms of meeting increased student demand? The communities are concerned about this. The schools are full and more are coming. They are wanting to embrace larger communities, but they are concerned.

**LISA HARRINGTON:** That's right. As I said, with the enrolment growth audit, we did a lot of work in looking at how do we make sure that we can meet the needs of communities, particularly in those growing areas. There are various mechanisms at the moment by which we are working with Planning. Through the Urban Development Program we are able to have input into the detail of where that development is coming and, as I said, the composition of those dwellings. A combination of the housing targets, where the TODs are and the Urban Development Program is allowing us to be really close to what is happening in those areas. That is in addition to the actions we are taking as a result of the enrolment growth audit, things like having our own custom population projections. We take the common planning assumptions but then we layer in more data—Medicare data and

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talking with local councils—so that we are able to try and really understand what is happening in those regions and meet that demand.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Is there community information available or are we just hoping we are going to wing this and the schools are going to meet it?

**LISA HARRINGTON:** No, definitely not hoping we are going to wing it. As I said, there is a lot of work going on at the moment. It is probably a bit too early to say exactly what we need in terms of additional schools or upgraded schools because it is really about not just the number of dwellings but the composition of those households, and we are not yet at that stage.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The FASTstream program, I understand, has been concluded?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're not taking any further cohorts.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But there are those who are currently part of that who have been told that those positions at those schools don't exist anymore. That is my understanding. What is happening to those who are in that cohort?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, there are two cohorts. We are working with each individual. We conducted a webinar with them through the School Leadership Institute and we have reached out and made phone contact with each. We are working with each individual. They've got permanent employment in our system but we are working on what's best for them once the program finishes for them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But that one-on-one contact happened after they were told that the program was winding up, is my understanding. Is that correct?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The sequence of events is that we sent an email to them so they could be aware of the webinar, we spoke to them at the webinar and then we followed up with a series of individual phone calls.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Those who were part of it—and you would be aware that some literally uprooted their lives to go out to regional areas or to different schools—what happens to those who might be in another area away from where they were before? Can they stay in that town or how are you going to manage that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We are individually case-managing and taking a humanistic approach. In our staffing procedures, we normally only look at two surrounding staffing areas, but we have thrown that entirely open.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** How many all up are in those two cohorts at the moment?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me give you an example. I know of one case where an individual wants to be 200 kilometres from where they are at the moment because they've got family connections there, so we are working on their placement to the location they want to be at.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You said you are taking that one-on-one approach. How many people in those two cohorts need to be looked after, for lack of a better term? What's the number?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't have that in front of me, but there are all up about 70 staff we are working with.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I wanted to also ask about funding for a teaching position working out of BackTrack in Armidale. That's something that has been available for a period of time. Do you know, Mr Dizdar, whether that will continue to be funded by the department?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I am happy to take it on notice and come back to you.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Does Ms Summerhayes know or are you going to take it on notice?

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** No.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The issues around consent education and the new curriculum—and I know that the Chair raised this earlier so I don't know if it's back to you, Mr Graham. In terms of support for teachers and resources, what will be available and what will be the process for the most evidence-based, up-to-date curriculum resources for teachers in consent education?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** There is certainly the large range of materials that have already been published after the work that was done with the Catholic and independent sector, off the back of previous work. That consent information is already available. We also have the online approved set of providers that schools can use and we have recently expanded the topics that are covered by the providers to consent education to maintain and give that probity over those providers.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Can you remind me—if new providers wanted to be considered to be on that online-approved providers list, what's the process for them?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** The process is you apply to the department, and there's a panel with a range of expertise that considers those providers, and then you come onto the panel. These schools know what the price is and what kinds of services they offer.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I have an individual who I met with recently, who is doing some work in this space, and they're a survivor themselves. They were keen to share some of their resources if it was going to be useful to schools. Are you able to provide—I'm happy if it's on notice—some advice that I could pass onto that individual about the process?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Yes, we can provide some contact details of people who would be happy to talk to them, whether they wanted to be a provider or whether they're just keen on passing on materials or other people they might like to work with. There are a lot of not-for-profits working in this area that certainly we're aware of as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great. Thank you. I want to turn now to the curriculum rollout, so this is probably to Mr Martin. There has been the recent announcements of the remainder, I think, of the K-6 syllabuses. What's next, what's the timeline, and are you on track?

**PAUL MARTIN:** We are on track.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Are you on budget? I haven't got to ask you that anymore.

**PAUL MARTIN:** We're on budget, and we're on track. There were originally 111 syllabuses. As you're aware, there was a four-year time frame which was almost impossible to complete. Even had we been able to, the load on schools would have been significant. The mandatory syllabuses are completed, in terms of primary. The PDHPE has already come out for 7 to 10. History and geography—I think history is coming next and imminently, and then we will be completing and going through senior secondary, which won't be released until 2027. The final date of all of the syllabuses is 2027.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So 2027 is senior secondary being released?

**PAUL MARTIN:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** When will they begin implementation, and when will they be examinable for HSC and the like?

**PAUL MARTIN:** Year 11 in 2027, year 12 in 2028. I'll confirm the new timeline with you on notice so that that's all very clear.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great. The changes that were made—and I'm just trying to refresh my memory; I think they came in this year—in terms of the ATAR requirements for vocational education and that change to allow more. Ms Read might want to comment on this as well. Have you seen an uptick in the number of students wanting to take vocational courses after that came into place? If it wasn't this year—and I can't remember, so correct me.

**PAUL MARTIN:** The change to category A and category B—so there were two categories of courses. For ATAR calculation, UAC had determined, historically, that students could only do one of the category B courses if they wished to have an ATAR. After conversation with the NESAB board and Professor Shergold, UAC got rid of the categories, so students can do more than one category B course. They still are required, if they do more than—any category B course, any VET course, still has to have an exam at the end of it for it to be counted for ATAR. There are 12 industry frameworks where that is covered at the moment. The implementation—I think this is the first year of year 11.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, that was my understanding.

**PAUL MARTIN:** So we won't have data until—I mean, we'll have data that's from our HSC returns. I can provide whatever we've got on notice.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Did you want to add anything to that, Ms Read?

**CHLOE READ:** I was only going to say at schools that I've visited recently it's really well known and well received. Even one that I was at in Griffith two weeks ago was saying, "It has been so great because this student here was going to have to drop one of them, blah, blah, blah." It's definitely out there, but obviously Mr Martin will have the data next year.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So anecdotally positive but data coming soon?



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**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**PAUL MARTIN:** I think very positive and also, status-wise, allowing students that VET is not a second-class option.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, absolutely. I look forward to seeing that data because I think it's going to, hopefully, be good. We'll see. In *Budget Paper No. 1* in the Measures Statement and some of the new measures, there's a dot point around "Human Capital Management Program—Release 3" but not a lot of detail. Can someone provide me an update as to what that next iteration is and what the budget allocation is, if possible?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've released human capital management, the first section of the rollout. So we're at work for rollouts two and three. We're happy to take the figure on notice so we can give you the accurate figure.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Thank you very much. Vaping in schools obviously is an issue that, again, is not new. Are there any updates in terms of the work with Health around how you're managing this in schools? Again, Ms Summerhayes, you might want to add some context from your position as well. Is there any more updated guidance advice going out to school communities in terms of vaping since we last met?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We held a very successful round table with Health earlier this year around vaping, and we had stakeholders, including students and academics, health experts, educators and partners in education at the table. We did capture a series of actions, and we're delivering on those actions. Mr Graham may have what those actions were. If not, we'll come back with what they were and where we're at.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That was earlier this year?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Could you, on notice, maybe provide the timing of that round table as well? I think there was media interest in it at the time.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, there was media coverage, but there was a series of actions captured. I don't have it in front of me, but we'll give you those on notice and where we're up to with them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great. If there's any information, and not just what the actions were but if any have actually been delivered or acted upon, that would also be good to have that information as well.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, we won't just list the actions—what we're doing with them, yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That would be great.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could touch on Life Education. I recently had the opportunity to meet them and to learn more about the important role they're doing in the schools. My question would be what is the current funding arrangement between the department and Life Education to allow this service to operate and support students?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It's one of the approved providers. They do great work. Mr Graham was covering the list of approved providers earlier. Schools have always done so and can still do so: make decisions to engage Life Education.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Has there been any change to their funding arrangements?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** They did have historical funding, 2019-20, and then there was 2022-23 funding that was provided by government. There's no further funding, but the program is supported by us. It's an approved provider. Schools still engage what they—up to them as an approved provider. In fact, I can tell you last week at Drummoyne Public School, Healthy Harold and Life Education were onsite, and I could hear the buzz from years 3 and 4 students when I visited the school.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of parent concern that Life Education won't be able to continue at the level it was, what is the current funding commitment to Life Education?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There are 2,200 schools in the system that I'm responsible for, who've still got the capacity to engage them.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But just confirming that there's no longer a central funding from—you mentioned before previously there was.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, there was historical funding provided. That was—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** But that's not available through the department?

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Which you said ended—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The first lot was 2019-20, and then there was another lot in 2022-23.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Yes, which I think was \$2 million over that four-year period of time.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It was \$2 million over those four-year periods.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So that's finished and it hasn't been extended. That's my understanding.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No. It was department funding. We haven't extended that. We still support the provider, and we still support the provision. It's still one of our approved providers.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the absence of funding, you make reference to support. What does that look like?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've got a list of approved providers.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** But just in terms of the support, if you could just detail what—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We encourage our schools to engage with them. They're a good service, and they fit well into the curriculum. Healthy Harold has been with us a long time, and we support schools to take part in that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I think he's 70 or close to. He looks very good for his age.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The recent intergenerational report says that he could go upwards of 92, so long live Healthy Harold.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just to follow on, while you say "support", what happens in practice is that schools determine whether or not they can engage those services based on their budgets—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** —and whether they pay in entirety or whether parents have to pay a proportion as well.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. But, Ms Mitchell, I think it just goes to that earlier line of questioning around voluntary contributions, fees, excursions et cetera. Even when we were providing that departmental funding, there were still schools that may have asked for a contribution for that, and there would have been plenty of schools that didn't.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** We'll be watching that closely. Earlier I asked the Minister about the potential rollout of a numeracy check. She seemed to indicate that policy work has been happening in that space for some time. Can anyone provide me with an update on where that's up to within the department?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. Mr Graham might give some detail here, but we've had a numeracy check-in that has been available to schools for a while. We are looking at that because—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Is it the check-in assessment model that you're talking about?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** The media commentary tends to indicate that it's a new thing. That's what the Deputy Premier was saying publicly.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The move on phonics has been really strong and really welcome. You will recall that it had a bit of debate and discussion.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I remember. Yes, I certainly do.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, it was good to back in the evidence. So 2020 was a trial year. We're now well down the track. We're getting good results and we're making good improvement. We want to do that in numeracy.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So a similar numeracy check. Has any work been done on what year, for instance, you might look to target?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What we've been looking at is the existing check-in assessment and how we might leverage off that. It is a topic of discussion at the Education Ministers Meeting and it was part of the better school funding report that came out. If needed, we think we could lead the way with this work for the country. I might get Mr Graham to say where that work is up to.

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**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Yes. Since January, when I started with the Secretary, that's one of the first conversations we had. It was about, "You've done all this work on reading; what are we doing on numeracy?" We do have products: we have the check-in assessment and we have the Interview for Student Reasoning, which is for K-10. We have been looking at that and working with our colleagues between our division and CESE around what something that parallels the phonics check might look like. That's the kind of thing you've seen out in the national domain. We're looking to see how we can integrate it into our own infrastructure so it's a lot more efficient.

Teachers already use the same thing that they would use for the phonics check, so could we do it for a numeracy screening? We're looking to provide the Minister with advice about what year that might be in, what time of year you might do it and, probably importantly, what we would do with the results to be able to say, "These students are struggling here. This is what we would provide." We're getting ready to provide that advice up through the Secretary—we haven't yet briefed the Secretary on our wonderful plans and the options we might be able to do—and then through to the Deputy Premier.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I appreciate that it's still under consideration, but I'm assuming you're looking at some point in the early years of schooling?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** Yes, very much so. In year 1.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So it's similar to the phonics check?

**MARTIN GRAHAM:** It's very similar to the phonics check, yes, to be able to intervene early.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Mitchell, can I correct something that I placed incorrectly on record?

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Sure.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I can only think in school terms, but the vaping roundtable was 16 November last year. I said it was this year.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine. I won't hold it against you. I want to come back to the issues around student outcomes and how that's going to be measured in schools. Obviously there's the plan for public education that you spoke about, Mr Dizdar, at the last hearing. I asked the Deputy Premier this morning about outcomes and how these things are going to be measured. There have certainly been media reports about using check-in assessments and report cards. But for schools that are effectively setting their own targets, which might not necessarily be able to be compared across the system, can you provide some more information in terms of how that will look and how you will measure those benchmarks against the plan for public education? With respect, the plan has a lot of lovely sentiments, but I'm curious about how the data will be measured in terms of what success looks like. Can you provide information about that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, I'd be delighted to. It's a really fair question. First of all, can I say I'm very proud of the plan for public education. It's the first time in my career that we have had 7,000 teachers provide input into a draft plan. It has been really well received. We also recently put out a six-month report card on the plan for public education. I have committed to the ground that every six months we'll be transparent about what we have been able to achieve to date and what we're looking working on. Alongside that, we've put what our system measures will look like. People have been at us around that for the numbers. There's a good reason for that, and we're going to come out with those numbers. I know you have a stronghold on this, but there has been some misconception out there.

We have had a new NAPLAN; it's the second year of it. All the psychometricians and data experts—that's not my area of expertise—have been advising me that you need a baseline to come off. Schools already have a reading target, a numeracy target, an attendance target, and a pathways target for secondary schools. We have a very strong OECD report that said formally, "The department, with the Government at the time, did good work on targets, but if you really want them to resonate, you can't be top down; you have to go bottom up and you have to respect context and trajectory." That's what we're doing. But we are at work on NAPLAN reading and numeracy targets that are growth related.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** For every school or for the system?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're looking at it for every school. We'll have a system measure but, rather than go top down and say, "Here's a system measure", and then say, "The dissection for every school is like this", we're going to go reverse; we're going to go bottom up. We are going work school by school and then have the system measure as well.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** You said that you'll come out with some numbers—I don't want to paraphrase—but as a parent in the public system, there were previous targets that were very easy to understand,

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and there were system-wide targets. I will be the first to admit that during our Government we didn't always meet them, but it was quite clear in the annual report, "This is the benchmark we're trying to hit across the system." When will we see a return to that transparency? At the moment, it is a little hard to track where this is going, where the measurements will be and how you can have that transparency.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Read might add to this, but the OECD health check on our reforms and targets said, "Having targets and aspirations as a system at a school level and a commonality is a good thing, but you've gone about it the wrong way. You've gone top-down, and you haven't had great buy-in."

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I get that, but when will you, me, as a parent—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've just received those NAPLAN results. We've now got two years of results. So we're hard at work around what a baseline can look like and what a growth measure can look like for—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So you would anticipate to have targets by next year?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're hoping to—the annual school plan, the school plan, which is a four-year plan, is always updated at the end of term 1. So we're at work to see what we can achieve in that time period.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'll be frank. I'm a politician. We work in four-year terms. It's very difficult for the public to judge or to make views on accountability of the government of the day if, throughout most of that term of government, there isn't actually a tangible measure set, there's not an outcome. I appreciate your point in terms of the dataset change for NAPLAN, but it does feel that we're 18 months into a new government, and it's still not particularly clear, particularly for parents, around how to judge success or failure.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** First of all, what I want to assure every parent out there and the Committee is that it's a fallacy if we think there are not targets already in play—there are. Every school's got a reading target. Every school's got a numeracy target. Every school's got an attendance target. Secondary schools have got a pathways target. Every jurisdiction has confronted what we've had to confront: a new NAPLAN, new reporting bands. All the experts say you need two years of data. That's just now happened. So we're hard at work to achieve consistency across the system, and we're looking at a growth measure because the OECD report and principals and teachers said, if you only look at the top two bands, which were the previous measures, you don't capture every single child. You need to capture every single child. So we're at work—

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** So that's what the new measures will do—they'll capture every child?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're at work to try and capture every single child by way of a growth measure, so there's quite a bit of work to do here. The other complexity here has not just been the NAPLAN complexity, the new NAPLAN. You've heard from the Deputy Premier that we're in deep discussion with the Commonwealth around a funding agreement. As secretary for public education in New South Wales, I hope we've got a strong funding agreement that comes, and then what the measures are off that will be important so we don't go back out to schools and overburden them again with what measures may come from that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** In terms of the pathways target, can you provide some more information in terms of what schools are collecting?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. I'll get Ms Read to talk to that, and then Ms Summerhayes has got great operational experience on this as well.

**CHLOE READ:** In terms of the pathways target, we wanted to make sure that we captured a range of different pathways. So I, from memory—and Ms Summerhayes might help me out. The target can be things like number of school-based apprenticeships, HSC completion and finishing year 12.

**DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES:** Yes—SBATs et cetera.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes. And then, at the system level, we'd be tracking the thing we've been tracking for a long time, which is the number of students in further education, training or work in the year post-school.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Just one year post-school?

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** There was some talk previously about looking at a five-year period, but I don't know whether that's eventuated.

**CHLOE READ:** I might come back to you on that.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** That's fine.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We're also deeply still pushing the Commonwealth for the unique student identifier.

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**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Good. I'll be very happy if that happens in my lifetime, because it's been a long time coming.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We've been very patient in our career, and we're hoping to see that to fruition, too, because that'll allow all jurisdictions to make sure they can track exit outcomes.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I won't hold my breath, but I wish you the best of luck in getting that across the line.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I remain optimistic. I hope to see the day.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I'm just going to make it even more complex. Is there any talk about doing it from the early childhood stage as well or is it just from school-beginning age?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Now you've thrown a spanner in the works! Let's see.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** Mr Barraket had a physical reaction to me just asking that.

**MARK BARRAKET:** I have not had any conversations around that at this point.

**The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:** I just think maybe it would be worth if you want to look at pre-K as well. But I'll let you do the school-based one first.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. That does end our time here today. We've had a lovely time with you all. Thanks very much. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in the near future, regarding questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**