

Budget Estimates 2025-26 – Initial hearings – 27 August 2025

Transcript Questions

Minister for Education and Early Learning and
Minister for Western Sydney

QUESTION 1 PAGE 2

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Absolutely. Can you tell me how much was spent from the Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund in the last financial year?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I can, and I would like to thank you for the question. This is obviously in relation to early childhood and early learning. There is a lot of scrutiny in this particular part of the portfolio at the moment. If you'll just bear with me while I bring that up, I can give you some details. At the moment, we are in the process of rolling out the Flexible Initiatives Trial.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I've asked a pretty specific question: How much was spent?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, sure. I'm happy to come back to you on the specifics of that.

ANSWER

The 2025-26 Budget – Budget Paper No. 4 provides the NSW Childcare and Economic Opportunity (CEO) Fund revised expenditure of \$74.7 million.

CEO Fund expenditure is reported at the end of each financial year in the CEO Fund Board Annual Reports which are made publicly available on the Department of Education's website at: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/nsw-childcare-and-economic-opportunity-fund/fund-governance#NSW2>.

QUESTION 2 PAGE 7

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to take you to the issue of funding for community preschools, and particularly capital funding. Obviously, community preschools are not-for-profit, very important, very high quality operators. We've had a number of services reach out that are just completely dismayed that they cannot access any funding to support growth and additional rooms, particularly in the Upper Hunter. I want to call out Cassilis community child care, Gloucester preschool, Dungog preschool, Scone preschool and Muswellbrook community preschool. They all would like to be able to access some capital funding to help grow their service numbers, but there is none available to them. Why is there nothing for community preschools under your Government?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That's the first time that you've raised these specific concerns with me, Mrs Mitchell, and I'm happy to take those specific services' concerns on board.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Why is there not a stream of capital funds for community preschool in this State?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I have to say, I'm not sure if that's accurate. I might just pass to the secretary in relation to that. I know we provide ongoing funding for community preschools—a lot of ongoing funding for community preschools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but I'm talking about—there used to be Start Strong capital grants that preschools could apply for. There were different rounds. There was urgency funding if they had a natural disaster, for instance. For a long time the sector knew that there were rounds of funding. For a period of time there was open funding that they could access to add an additional room and create more places, for instance. That was available across the board. It no longer is, and these services have wanted me to ask you today why they are not a priority when it comes to capital investment.

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The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I make this point to community preschools, because I recently had the opportunity when I was on the North Coast to meet with a number of fantastic local community-based preschools. They do really important work each and every day, and the Government does provide funding for programs. These are long-running, community-based organisations that have often serviced their communities for generations. The Government does fund community preschools, predominantly through program funding. But in relation to the question about capital, perhaps I'll just pass to the secretary, because I think there might be something he can add.

MURAT DIZDAR: I just want to acknowledge, Mrs Mitchell, the great work community preschools do. They're a very important part of the sector and have a good track record of service delivery. We did distribute \$8 million in payments in 2024-25 under the Start Strong Capital Works Program that you're talking about, and we do have a \$20 million provision for not-for-profit providers to be able to access.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that available to all preschools everywhere? Can they apply for that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Mr Barraket to give you the detail, but they're the high-level figures that I've got.

MARK BARRAKET: The recent round of Building Early Learning Places was a test and trial initiative from the Childcare and Economic Opportunity Fund and, as such, the board took the decision to look at areas of undersupply to use those funds to increase supply in areas of most need. It didn't cover all community preschools, but it was targeted to a number of geographical locations, with the aim of increasing supply in particular areas to respond to the independent market monitoring report.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that didn't include the Upper Hunter, because those services are fairly unhappy.

MARK BARRAKET: I would have to take on notice the locations that it included.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide on notice where the areas were, that would be great.

ANSWER

The Start Strong Capital Works Grants Program improves access for children to attend preschool by creating additional enrolment places in areas of need and demand across the state. In 2024, \$17 million in capital works was approved for 8 projects across NSW.

In recent years, 3 early childhood services in the Upper Hunter have received Start Strong Capital Works Grants:

- Singleton Heights Preschool and Stroud Preschool completed their projects resulting in an increase of 25 places.
- Denman Children's Centre project is currently underway to deliver an increase of 25 places.

The Building Early Learning Places Program aims to help not-for-profit providers create more early childhood education and care spaces in communities with the greatest immediate need. The Building Early Learning Places Program has 2 eligible priority groups – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and undersupplied areas.

Further information about the Building Early Learning Places Program and the list of undersupplied areas are available on the department's website at:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/building-early-learning-places-program>.

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QUESTION 3 PAGE 8 & 9

The CHAIR: Can we just get back to—we have the Wheeler report saying the regulator's doing a stand-up job. But, as you know, I've looked through over about 130,000 pages of documents now that show very clearly the regulator is not doing a stand-up job. I'll give you some examples, because I think that always speaks a bit louder than statistics. For example, we have a service, Busy Bees in New Lambton. They were "working towards" NQS. They were rated as "working towards" back in August 2021. In October 2022 they had their rating upgraded to "meeting" NQS. But in that period there were so many breaches of the rules, to the extent that when, in July, a show cause notice was issued to that service asking them why they shouldn't be cancelled, the regulator noted that, between 2020 and 2024, 13 compliance actions had been issued, compared to the sector average of two; 52 confirmed breaches were substantiated with 23 serious incidents and 14 complaints, compared to an average sector of 12 breaches and six serious incidents and three complaints.

This was a very poorly performing centre from the perspective of the people going out and—they're really quite horrific issues at that centre. Even just some very basic things: not having Working with Children Checks, insufficient teachers, no waivers, just having no ECTs on site, inadequate risk procedures, hygiene issues, really dirty premises. This went on and on, and yet we have then the ratings part of the regulator going in and upgrading them for their rating during that period. How on earth does that happen, and we still have a report saying, "Yes, the regulator in New South Wales is fine"?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Boyd, I might pass over to the regulator to provide you—because those cases and that series of events is really concerning. I accept that. I'm not across the detail of each specific action that the regulator takes in each specific service. What I would say is some of those issues that you've raised are some of the issues that we were discussing at the education Ministers' meeting on Friday.

The CHAIR: But this isn't new. A lot of the frustration is that—we now have some responses from the Federal Government; that's great—none of this is new. We've known about this for years and years. But then New South Wales has commissioned a report that's come back and said that the New South Wales regulatory authority has been effective in the performance of its role—as though that's some big tick—but, hey let's do these little minor things like talk about CCTVs and the rest of it. Just on that particular—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, with the greatest of respect, Ms Boyd, I would just not accept your characterisation of it giving us a big tick. I would take the opportunity to commend you for the work that you've done in producing the documents but then also matching them up. I just think it's really important to say—and I'm not alone when I say this; the Federal Minister said this on Friday—this reform is too late. It hasn't happened fast enough. The thing I would say is that this is work that the Deputy Premier has been on for years. It's true: We need reforms. We need reforms to the national law. We need reforms to the way that we enforce the regulation at State level. We're getting that process under way, and we're happy to take on board—

The CHAIR: And I appreciate this wasn't your portfolio until quite recently. I appreciate that and I hesitate to interrupt, but I do have limited time. What I'm asking is for you to now, I guess, listen to the information I'm giving you. We have this situation. This is a really good example. I could pull out hundreds of them, as you know. This is just one that I found this morning. With this particular service—let's just walk this through—even though it's got all of these compliance issues, the New South Wales regulator has upgraded it so that everybody who looks on the site can go, "They're great. They're meeting the standards. Everything's fine."

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Fast-forward and we get July 2024, which then leads the regulator to finally do something. On 20 February an enrolled child sustained a fracture to the back of their skull after slipping in the bathroom at the centre. No concussion monitoring occurred. Parents were not notified until 13 March—almost a month later—when the child admitted to hospital with a large fluid lump and skull fracture. Long-term effects of the injury are unknown. It's at that point that the regulator says, "Maybe we shouldn't have. Maybe we should actually close down this centre." I would love to know what's happened, because that was July 2024, and they still have "meeting quality standards" on ACECQA.

What's so frustrating in this area is how obvious it is. When you look at the compliance record of a centre like that, when it's constantly underperforming, they're constantly not having enough educators, they're constantly not having Working with Children Checks or anything. The amount of times it's noted they didn't do their child protection training, they haven't got their safe sleeping practice in place and all of those things. Then you get an incident like that, where a child is seriously injured, and people are saying, "It's so obvious." Then you get the Wheeler report come out and say, "Oh, yes, but they're doing an effective job." Do you understand just how frustrating it is for there not to be a greater acknowledgement that actually the regulator in New South Wales has failed, and there needs to be a bit more of a serious response?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just say at the outset, Ms Boyd, they are horrific allegations, and they're not isolated. It's pretty hard as a person, as a parent, not to be deeply moved by the idea of a child having that level of injury and parents not being notified and then only finding out about it months later. That's just completely unacceptable. I appreciate you have limited time today. I'm not across the specific details of that specific centre, and I'd be happy to take that on notice. We can come back to you at the appropriate time. I'll certainly be making inquiries about it.

ANSWER

Busy Bees New Lambton was rated 'Working Towards' in August 2021. In 2022, it engaged with the regulatory authority's continuous improvement team to support improved quality and compliance. This program required the service to work intensively with the authority to address any concerns.

The Regulatory Authority completed an assessment and rating in October 2022 following participation in the program, resulting in a 'Meeting' rating. A further assessment and rating took place in July 2025, with the outcome pending.

Following the February 2024 incident, 2 compliance actions were issued, including a show cause to cancel the service approval. Since then, the Regulatory Authority has undertaken regular compliance monitoring, with 7 visits to the service, most recently on 19 August 2025.

QUESTION 4 PAGE 10 & 11

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you. Tom Alegounarias. As a wannabe Greek, I should know how to say that. I apologise. I would say he has done some really important work. We're in the process of implementing that. It's also being done, I can assure you, in consultation with the sector. Some of the reforms may have slowed down a bit, but there's certainly work that's underway.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I understand. I put to you, Minister, that he was asked to do the review, and he has subsequently, as I understand it, also been asked to do the implementation. Are you aware of that— both? As I understand it, he was asked to undertake

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the review, but separately also to play a role in the implementation. Is that correct? Perhaps Mr Dizdar can respond, Minister, if you don't know.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, Mr Martin has ultimate carriage as the CEO of NESA, but it is a fact that Mr Alegounarias has been employed by Mr Martin to see the implementation come to fruition.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Interesting. Minister, what was he paid for completing the review? If you don't know that, you can take it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'd have to take that one on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's fine. I would like to know how long he was contracted for to undertake the review, and at what point he became an employee of NESA, if that's what you just said to me, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I make a comment that might also help? I do want to commend Mr Alegounarias for his work, because he worked with all three sectors.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's fine, Mr Dizdar. That's not what I'm asking. I'm not criticising anything. I just want to know what he was paid to do the review, because it's interesting that he was asked to do both the review and—I do find it a little bit odd that he has also been asked to do the implementation. I know that normally you go to academics and people with experience in a sector to undertake reviews, but you've also sought his assistance in implementing this, so that's why I'd like—

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I make a comment on that that might be helpful in a broader sense? There have been occasions where I have done the same in my roles in the organisation because it can be beneficial, while ultimately—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's fine. I just want to know what the contractual arrangement was. I want to know what he was paid to do the review, and I want to know—

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's take it on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can take that on notice. And at what point he became an employee of NESA, if that's the case—unless he's a contractor? I imagine he might be on a contract.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think we'll have to come back to you with the specifics, Ms Mihailuk. I make the point that I am certainly aware of other times across government where people who have been commissioned to do reviews have then been asked to implement them. I'm thinking of some within the Transport portfolio. I think we all agree—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When he was asked to do the review, was there an expectation at that time that he would then be implementing his own recommendations? I put that to you, if you could take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'd have to take that on notice. That's prior to me—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I appreciate you weren't the Minister at the time. That's fine.

ANSWER

In October 2023, the NSW Government appointed Professor Thomas Alegounarias to conduct a review of section 83C and its associated sections. The department engaged Professor Alegounarias to conduct the review at a cost of \$335,000.

On 16 August 2024, the Deputy Premier publicly released the Review of Section 83C and Related Provisions of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW) Report (Review Report) and announced that Professor Alegounarias would oversee implementation of the Review Report recommendations. NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) subsequently engaged Professor Alegounarias under contract to implement the recommendations of the Review Report. Professor Alegounarias was engaged with an indicative total contract value of \$118,800.

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QUESTION 5 PAGE 12

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, I noticed in the submissions that there were no submissions made by any representatives of the Islamic schools in New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, submissions to 83C—the review?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes. There were submissions done from Catholic schools. There were submissions done from other independent schools. Do you know why—or did anyone seek a submission from any of the representatives of the Islamic schools in New South Wales?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's a good point. It obviously predated my brief period in the portfolio. I could probably pass to the—

PAUL MARTIN: The submissions were a public process. I'm not sure that there was any formal solicitation of submissions from groups.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: No-one was asked—nobody was written to?

PAUL MARTIN: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can take that on notice. I'd like to know if anyone was invited or if it was just up to you whether you wanted to make a submission or not. Happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Because you want to seek broad views.

PAUL MARTIN: Absolutely.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: They're a very growing sector. A lot of students are going into Islamic schools in New South Wales.

PAUL MARTIN: The Association of Independent Schools covers a range of schools, including Islamic schools. Quite often we ask—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I appreciate they did a submission, but I don't know how much—

PAUL MARTIN: Quite often they are presenting also on behalf of Christian schools, Adventist schools, Islamic schools and others, because they are channelled through the process.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But their obligations to who they seek advice from is different from what the Department of Education is doing. If you're making a review of this section—

PAUL MARTIN: Sure, but my point is that the association—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —and making significant changes, then you'd probably want to make sure that you've canvassed as many different views across non-government schools—

PAUL MARTIN: I'm happy to take on notice the submissions that were put there. But, as I said, the variety of schools that are channelled through the Association of Independent Schools often includes particular sectoral groups.

ANSWER

The review of Section 83C and related provisions of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW) was conducted publicly, with details and submission information available on the NESA website. No groups were solicited for submissions. The Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW), representing independent schools, including Islamic independent schools, made submissions to the review.

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QUESTION 6 PAGE 13

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have a couple more questions on early childhood. In relation to the number of services not meeting the National Quality Standard, I think the Wheeler review said it was about 400-odd. And then there was a report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* a couple of weeks ago that said that had risen to 424. Are you able to tell me how many of those services have a waiver in place?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sure. I could pass to the regulator to see if we can give you those details today.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you've got it, yes, that would be great.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Otherwise, I just might have to—I'd have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

As at 30 June 2025, 60 services with a quality rating below meeting the National Quality Standard have a waiver in force.

QUESTION 7 PAGE 14 & 15

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There were 476 students suspended last year for using a weapon. Does that concern you?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am concerned by the use of any weapons in our public schools. That's all I'd say.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you able to tell me how many students have been suspended for weapon-related incidents in 2025?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I don't have that figure. I would be happy to see if we've got any details that we can provide to you today.

MURAT DIZDAR: We keep data. We release that as a system every single year. I'm never going to apologise for wanting overreporting. As a former principal on the ground, I want all of our people to make sure they report every single incident. We're proud of our track record in supporting how we work through at the local level. We have New South Wales seconded police. I want to thank them. They're part of our incident report and support hotline. To your earlier question around the stats, we're driven to get every student engaged and connected in their school environment. At the same time, you've got to have the right authority and disciplinary procedures in place.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. I appreciate the sentiment, Mr Dizdar. I was just after the figures. I have pretty limited time.

MURAT DIZDAR: One incident of a weapon would be one too many, so we work really hard to try to improve that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I agree. But you had 470-odd incidents last year. Do you have any data on how many there have been so far in 2025? Can you provide that to the Committee?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have that at my fingertips, but we provide it on an annual basis.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide—and I'm happy for it to be on notice—a breakdown of what those 476 incidents last year were, what kinds of weapons were involved and at which schools they occurred?

MURAT DIZDAR: What I can commit to do is go back to the data that we proactively release and give you the categories and what we've got centrally. I can commit to do that.

ANSWER

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The department has a zero tolerance approach to prohibited weapons and matters are referred to the NSW Police Force. Schools follow strict policies prohibiting weapons on schools' premises.

The department proactively releases data relating to incident reports. 2023 data is available at: <https://data.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/nsw-education-incident-reports-nsw-government-schools>.

The department also collects suspension and expulsion data, with published factsheets made available online at: <https://data.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/nsw-education-suspensions-and-expulsions-in-nsw-government-schools>.

QUESTION 8 PAGE 16 & 17

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might come back this afternoon to Mr Martin about the specifics. I agree: I think Professor Cross does great work. I just think it's curious that you didn't continue her on in the same role, but we can get to that later. I want to ask you about bullying and pick up on behaviour and wellbeing. The most recent data available on the incidence of bullying of students is work the Mental Health Commission has on its website. It's from the department's Tell Them From Me survey, but that's from 2023. Do you have more current data in terms of the number of students who say they have been bullied at school in 2024, or so far in 2025?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would either have to take that on notice, or pass that to the secretary.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, do you have that data?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But before I do, I'd make the point that, as I said earlier, bullying

is not something that just occurs in public schools. It's also not something that just occurs in schools. As you would know, Ms Mitchell, that's one of the challenges we face. The nature of technology has changed since we were at school, which means that it follows kids home.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I understand that. I literally just want the figures. If Mr Dizdar has them, that would be great.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Again, this is something that the Deputy Premier has really led the way with a cross-sectoral approach to bullying.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to know the figures. I'll get to any specifics you might have in place that are different or new. At this point I'm not aware of any. The 2023 data showed 29 per cent of primary students and 28.4 per cent of secondary students in government schools reported experiencing bullying. I want to know if there are updated figures. Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: We're running a new student survey that replaced Tell Them From Me. It's been really well received. We've had high uptakes. We're just waiting for all those results to come in.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's the public school survey that you're running this year. Data for 2024 should be available. Tell Them From Me ran in 2024. That's correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go back, Ms Mitchell, and see what we've got.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. You've used data from the Tell Them From Me survey in the update of what works best.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's accurate.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But you didn't include any bullying data and that's what I'd like. Do you have access to that? I'm assuming you do.

MURAT DIZDAR: You referenced 2023 data. You're right that we did Tell Them From Me in 2024. We've replaced it with our own student survey. That has been developed by CESE and has been well received by schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, but where's the 2024 data from Tell Them From Me? Has that been publicly released?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me go back and see what we've got. I don't have it in front of me. I've got the 2023 data that you referenced.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The 2024 data, will it be publicly released, Minister?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm happy to take that on notice. I don't know.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Why wouldn't you release it when it's always been released before?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would say that I'm aware that we used to have Tell Them From Me. We don't need to re-canvass all of the issues that we canvassed when we were on opposite sides of the table with that survey. I'd say that certainly the need for information is one that has prompted the change. I'm really encouraged that it's been informed by CESE. I think it's really important that our new public school survey will be—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want the data. We used to be able to know how many kids are being bullied at school. I just would like to know from 2024 what that data is. It's been conducted. It's now mid-2025.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But I think—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's not a big ask.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Point of order: The question has been asked and taken on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: I said I'm happy to go back and see. I don't have the specifics in front of me. What I do know—and that's why I don't want to get it wrong, and go back and get the specifics—is that 2024 data was quite stable compared to the 2023 data. But let me go back and get that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I just—

The CHAIR: Order! Ordinarily I would take the point of order and rule on it, but the conversation we've had is fine. I just want to note that in future, I will rule.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Just to be clear, Mr Dizdar, that's all of the Tell Them From Me data you can provide?

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct. You asked about the bullying.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I did ask about the bullying, but if you've got the rest of the data—some of it, as I said, has been referenced in a recent report from CESE—it would be good to have all of that on the public record.

MURAT DIZDAR: I put on record how Ms Cross, in her work, in her report also, referenced the fact that a system having that data and acting on that data is something that's been good and has been driving the system. I think she makes reference to that possibly being stronger across the nation in her report. I noted that when I read it. What's really important here is that at every individual school level, every incident is acted upon. But you're right: We look at the global level, so let me go back and have a look at the global level.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. I think it would be good if parents could see it as well. I think it's important to be transparent.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think the data is important, Ms Mitchell, but I also make the point that it's then what we are doing in schools to address that. Certainly, the cross-sectoral working group is developing a framework. It's going to be both preventative and responsive. I think that's really important to make sure we're taking action. We're not just getting the data and passively reading it and saying that we've got a problem.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm not arguing that, Minister, but at this point a parent can't even see what the data is from last year, so that's what I'd like to have provided to the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm not sure that's the case, but we'll take that on notice.

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 141.

QUESTION 9 PAGE 18 & 19

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, I asked you in February a very similar question. I wanted to know the staffing allocation of numbers per school when we were here in budget estimates. You took it on notice. You told me that the census date for that was 17 March and you would have it to the end of term 1. Therefore, I figured when I asked a question in May that that data would be provided to me. Why wasn't it provided to me?

MURAT DIZDAR: We provide advice on questions on notice and provide our best advice. At the end of the day, as you would appreciate and respect, having been the Minister also, it's the Minister's answer, not my answer, and not the department's answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you provide the Minister's office with the breakdown of how many teaching positions there are at each school?

MURAT DIZDAR: We try to answer every question on notice we get with the required due diligence.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. But when I asked you about that in February, you also said that you had the data for last year or the most recent data for staffing entitlements, and you took that on notice and said, "Yes, we would have that. We can definitely give you that." Then, on notice, what I got back was, "Entitlement data has not yet been finalised." So you didn't give it to me for 2024. I haven't got it for 2025. Minister, what I would like—and this is not a trick question—is the staffing allocation for each public school in New South Wales; how many teachers there are allocated to each school. I'm asking now, for a third time, can you please provide that to me?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It's the first time you've asked me that question in budget estimates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I did it on notice, but can you provide it, please?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would make the point that staffing figures are available in annual reports. I'd probably direct you to those in the first instance.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm asking you to provide that to me. It's been provided in the past. I provided it, I think, to you when I was the Minister—a list of every school.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I might go back and check that because I'm not sure that you answered all the questions on notice I used to lodge to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I provided a list of every school and what their staffing allocation was. I know Mr Ruming would have it. I'm asking can you provide that to me and the Committee, and not hold us in some sort of contempt by not answering questions we ask? Could I please get a list of every school and the staffing allocation?

ANSWER

As the former Education Minister may be aware, each school's annual report, which includes staffing information, is published on their website as listed below:

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The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Thank you. Can I just also put to you that, in his 20 August speech, Mr Butler also discussed the Mental Health in Primary Schools program, which has been rolled out in Victorian schools and is currently being piloted in Queensland and South Australia. Is this going to be rolled out in New South Wales as well, Minister?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm not familiar with that part of his speech, so I'll be happy to come back to you on notice. I'm not familiar with that particular program.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Are you aware, Mr Dizdar, that that was part of his speech?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm aware we're doing a lot around student mental health. I'm not sure if Mr Graham has got the specific detail.

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The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Essentially Mr Butler implied that all States should take on this program. He acknowledged Victoria. He then acknowledged Queensland and South Australia. Has the department had any thought about this program being ruled out here in New South Wales?

MARTIN GRAHAM: The program was referenced in the speech. The department has met with Professor Oberklaid and the team who run the Mental Health in Primary Schools program in Victoria. We talked to the team about the type of mental health supports we provide to our schools, particularly through the staff that we already employ.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When did you meet with them? How long ago was that?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I can come back to you on that.

ANSWER

The department met with Professor Frank Oberklaid in May 2025, with a follow up meeting in June 2025.

QUESTION 11 PAGE 26

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Do you have an update for me on a new primary school at the Hills showground. Similar circumstances that you've just outlined—a new primary school at the Hills showground?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What I can tell you is that we are building more than 600 new permanent classrooms across the Hills and across north-west Sydney. If there's a specific project that you have in mind, we're happy to look into that. But I would say there is a record classroom-building program, led by the Deputy Premier, who is from not too far from there and understands the challenges that we have inherited, when the previous Government approved housing but did not build the local schools and the local infrastructure that was required.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, are you building a new primary school at the Hills showground?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm not aware of that, but I'm happy to take advice.

MURAT DIZDAR: Like the Minister said, we monitor population movements in all localities. We are building new high schools that commence this term at Gledswood Hills, Googong, Jordan Springs, Leppington—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It was specific to the Hills showground, Mr Secretary.

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 244.

QUESTION 12 PAGE 27

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm the Deputy Chair. Minister, if I could draw another school to your attention, Castle Hill High School is operating at over 200 per cent capacity and has 50 demountables on the school grounds today. What plans are there to address capacity issues at the school?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would make the point again, Ms Merton, that of those 50 demountables, 42 of them were put there under your Government. When you want to ask questions that clearly reflect on your party's period in government, then you should maybe consider those a little bit more closely. What I will tell you is we are building a

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range of public schools across the north-west of Sydney. There are 600 new permanent classrooms. That includes six projects, including at Box Hill—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, it is an estimates session. You have covered that. We ask the questions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm providing you with a directly relevant answer, Ms Merton. You want to talk about Castle Hill High School. Castle Hill High School has 50 demountables, 42 of which were put there by your Government. Yes, we have a program, as I said, to build 600 new classrooms across the north-west.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are any of those new classrooms for Castle Hill High School, Minister?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm happy to take that one on notice. Let me just see.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, we have established there's no new primary school

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 248.

QUESTION 13 PAGE 27

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, you were critical of no land being purchased in that area. You've been in government now for over two years. Have you purchased any land in the Hills area to build a new school?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In the Hills electorate?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'd be happy to take that on notice and come back to you.

ANSWER

The department has acquired the George Street site in Box Hill, which currently houses the temporary Box Hill Public School. This site will be retained for a future public school.

This will be in addition to the new permanent Box Hill Public School and Box Hill High School being built on Terry Road and the new public school at Gables on Pennant Way, all of which are being delivered by the Minns Labor Government. Unfortunately, the former Liberal National Government did not build any schools in Box Hill or Gables for 12 years.

QUESTION 14 PAGE 30

The CHAIR: If I could just add to that—and I will hear from you, Mr Dizdar. But, for example, there was a recommendation in the 2019 report saying that there needed to be an increase in the number of principal investigation officers. I understand, despite the commensurate increase in number of investigations corresponding to the number of school staff that have increased, we actually don't have a proportionate increase in the number of principal inspectors in the unit, as an example. So how has that recommendation been complied with?

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy to speak to both recommendations and both reviews. The Tedeschi review happened under the leadership of a former secretary and not the current leadership of PES either, but that was fully implemented as well as the Wheeler review. If I can talk to some practical things that have changed—

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The CHAIR: Sorry, can you just focus on that staffing one, though?

MURAT DIZDAR: We've put extra staffing into PES. I am happy to get you the numbers this afternoon. We've put extra resources into PES because one of the rightful criticisms of both reviews was, while this was challenging and different work—both reviews called out, in a workforce of 150,000 people, one of the largest agencies in the Southern Hemisphere, less than 1 per cent of that workforce faces disciplinary action. Sometimes those proceedings, Chair, can be lengthy and we are at, sometimes, stop-the-clock work in relation to other agencies' involvement. Putting that aside, both reviews spoke about the fact that there could be better resourcing and more timeliness for all parties. We have actually invested more resources into PES. Let me get you the figures this afternoon.

The CHAIR: I can tell you. We've got, when I received—even in December last year, I was told there were 17 principal investigators which is only a five-person increase since the 2019 review. That report reviewed the 2017 to 2018 period, so that doesn't seem like a very significant increase in staffing.

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry, what dates were they, Chair?

The CHAIR: So 2017 to 2018 was the period criticised by Tedeschi in his report as being understaffed. There were 12 principal investigation officers at that time, 45 in total. As at December last year, on questions on notice, you told me 17 of 51 are principal investigators. Again, we've only got an increase there from 45 to 51 in seven years, or six-and-a-half years, and 12 principal investigators going to 17.

MURAT DIZDAR: Right now, that unit has 158 staff, and 66 of those staff are in investigator roles.

The CHAIR: So 66 investigators; that's a bit better. How many principal investigators?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me grab you that this afternoon.

ANSWER

There are 66 investigator positions in the Professional and Ethical Standards (PES) Directorate including:

- 42 investigators
- 12 senior investigators
- 12 principal investigators.

Since the Tedeschi Review in 2019, the department has increased the total number of investigator roles from 39 to 66, including the creation of new Senior Investigator roles as recommended in the review report.

Following the realignment in PES, the number of investigator roles has increased, and the department remains committed to resourcing PES to deliver on its functions.

QUESTION 15 PAGE 32 & 33

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do you know how many times the Department of Education has had random site inspections? I know there was one that was coordinated by Macarthur. Has the Department of Education actually been on site?

MURAT DIZDAR: There are monitoring mechanisms for the contractual compliance. Let me see if I can come back this afternoon with how many visits we've undertaken.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I would like to know how many times any official from the Department of Education has actually undertaken a random, onsite inspection of one of these Football in School sessions that Macarthur specifically run, and are receiving \$2 million a year to run. In the order for papers, I received information that only one

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inspection took place, and it was one that was coordinated by Macarthur. I understand that the member for Liverpool was in attendance at that. I don't know of any other inspections. You can take that on notice, that's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy to come back this afternoon with what we might have there, but we are executing the funding deed with the due rigour that is part of the delivery of those programs. That goes to a number of things around compliance with our policies and procedures: the contractual monitoring that I spoke to, the annual financial audits that we conduct, the clearly defined consequences that are in the funding deed for not meeting the KPIs that have been set.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, you can also direct this question. On how many occasions has the department verified the number of participants in sessions conducted by Macarthur Football Club under the grant with one of its own schools, whether by phone call or email? Please advise each verification compared to reports provided by Macarthur. Do you want to take that on notice, or Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I have global data on how many students—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you also take on notice how many Macarthur Football Club T-shirts have been handed out through the Football in Schools program, and to which schools specifically? And how many Macarthur Football Club home game tickets have been handed out through the Football in Schools program, and to which schools? Can that also be taken on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me take those on notice. Is this helpful for you, Ms Mihailuk, if I let you know, for the Western Sydney Wanderers—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: No, I'm asking about Macarthur. I know there is a separate arrangement there, but you actually have specific contractual arrangements, one with Macarthur—and a different amount, for some reason.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, we do. Do you want me to tell you—is this helpful—for Macarthur Bulls, that we are looking at 24,000—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I am interested in the independent audit. Who is conducting that?

Minister, do you know who is doing the independent audit? Were you aware there was an independent audit?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No. Like I said to you, I'm broadly aware that you've been raising these matters in the Parliament, but I haven't been formally briefed on them. I think the secretary is best placed to answer.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I put to you: Who is undertaking the independent audit?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I don't know. I'm happy to—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: It is external to the department. That is another layer of rigour we've—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Say that again?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's external to the department. It's in addition to the compliance actions we've put in the funding deed. I got to the third of those compliance actions. There are three others, if you want me to tell you what they are.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I am going to be here in the afternoon, so I am going to ask these questions again. That's fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's help you in the afternoon with that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm happy for you to answer it then. How much of the funding provided to Macarthur Football Club to date has been used to fund head office salaries, including to any of the shareholders of the club who draw a salary? Can you provide a breakdown for that, Minister, or Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let's see what we can give you in the afternoon.

ANSWER

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The department has conducted 6 site visits with the Macarthur Bulls since March 2025. Site visits are part of ongoing management and verification of participation numbers and staff to student ratios.

The large proportion of the Macarthur Bulls activities are conducted on school grounds with teaching staff present, supporting the sporting and physical activity sessions which occur during school time. The other component of Macarthur Bulls' activities includes 2 holiday programs, Girls Only and the Multicultural program.

The department receives fortnightly reports detailing participation numbers. These are cross-checked against amalgamated numbers provided at the Mid-Progress and Final Reports. As per grant requirements, a midway audit is underway.

Schools do not receive T-shirts under the Football in Schools program. T-shirts are provided to participants in the Girls Only and Multicultural holiday programs. T-shirts are provided for holiday programs so that all students participate on an equal basis given they are not in school uniform. T-shirts help to distinguish students from other participating students who are not part of the program.

The department is not aware of any game tickets provided to schools as part of this program.

Grant Thornton Australia is conducting the independent audit.

Football in Schools program funds are used by the Macarthur Bulls to administer the program.

QUESTION 16 PAGE 37 & 38

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have my answer, Chair. I will move on to Medowie High School, specifically in relation to the site that has been chosen. I have raised this in previous estimates, and I know Ms Harrington will remember. I am continually getting community concerns about the site that has been selected: Students have to cross a really busy road with an estimated 10,000 vehicles per day, and there are no traffic lights. What assessments have you made in terms of the risk and safety of students? Do you 100 per cent guarantee that students attending that new school when it opens will be safe on their journeys to and from school?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You've asked me a series of questions about Medowie High School. Can I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the incredible member for Port Stephens, Kate Washington, who has been advocating to the community and even to me personally for this project for the better part of 15 years. I am so excited that finally it will be open and ready for students on day one, term 1 of 2027. I think we released the designs of that particular project recently for the community. It is a fantastic local facility that the community has been crying out for—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I direct you to my question, Minister?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —and that your Government promised for years and didn't ever deliver.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I've allowed a little bit of latitude for a general response. I'm asking about parental concerns about the very busy road that students will have to cross and whether you are comfortable with the site that has been chosen. Can you give the

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guarantee that students will be safe when they are coming to and from school when that school opens?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am told that the Medowie Public School is located across the road from the proposed high school, which seems pretty logical to me. But I think probably Ms Harrington is more familiar with the site and can give you more details.

LISA HARRINGTON: Obviously, through the planning process, these sorts of concerns or issues are addressed as a matter of course—safety, transport, traffic, that sort of thing. We have received planning approval for Medowie, so that is something that has been assessed and appropriate mitigation measures are in place.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What additional measures will be put in place in terms of student access? As I said, there's no traffic lights. There are roads; there is commercial access. Are there any plans to improve student access for that site?

LISA HARRINGTON: That will all be detailed in our planning documentation. I can come back on notice with that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know when that will be available to the public and the community?

LISA HARRINGTON: When we get planning approval, it is published, so it should be. I can check on the timing for that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes.

ANSWER

It is noted, and unfortunate, that the Liberals and Nationals continue to oppose the new high school in Medowie.

Planning documentation is available online at www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/part-5/new-high-school-medowie.

QUESTION 17 PAGE 38

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many students will that school cater for from day one, if possible? Do you know now, Minister or Ms Harrington? I'm happy with either.

LISA HARRINGTON: I don't have that. I can come back on notice.

ANSWER

This question was answered in the hearing. Please see transcript pages 71 and 72.

QUESTION 18 PAGE 38

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, in the time I have left I want to quickly talk to you about the selective schools test debacle. Can you tell me how much Dr Bruniges was paid to conduct the review into the opportunity class and selective school tests?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I don't have that figure at hand, but I'm happy to come back to you on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does Mr Dizdar? Can you let us know?

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back, yes.

ANSWER

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Dr Bruniges undertook an Independent Review of Selective School Testing for the Deputy Premier, with a cost of \$54,450.

QUESTION 19 PAGE 38

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you advise why the decision was made to move them to mega-testing centres this year, given that, presumably, you've now spent money for Dr Bruniges to do the review, and why you are reverting to what was originally the case? Why did you move to a mega-testing centre in the first place?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will say a couple of things at the outset. The crowd control disruption that occurred on Friday 2 May was just not acceptable. It fell well short of our Government and the department's expectations. The Deputy Premier was really quick. She apologised at the time for the disruption that was caused to students. I have to take on notice why the decision was taken to move to large testing centres. What I am aware of is that this is something that's done in other States—for example, in Victoria. It's only natural that if something like this occurs, we would undertake a review as to what happened and how we can make sure that doesn't happen again.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Some of the documents we got back through the call for papers indicate that when they did the trial of the off-site exams, there were concerns raised about crowd management, students and how they were going to be able to manage those large cohorts, yet the exact same issues occurred on the testing day. You've just said that's not good enough, but why didn't you look at the results from the trial period of the test? As I said, why did you do this in the first place? Was it because the teachers or the principals wanted you to move off school sites? What was the genesis of that decision?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You've asked me a series of questions, including one that I've already taken on notice, which is why was the decision taken. You would be aware that that decision was taken prior to my period in the role.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I accept that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'll take that on notice. I'll get some advice.

ANSWER

A procurement approach to conduct computer-based testing in external venues was approved by the previous Education Minister, the Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC, in August 2022 and released to market on 28 February 2023. The original intention was to provide a consistent computer-based test experience.

QUESTION 20 PAGE 39 & 40

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, in relation to the Janison contract, can you confirm when that was signed?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: My understanding is that it was signed by you just at the end of—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Janison announced it on 6 February 2024. That was when it was listed, and they're a stock exchange listed company.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The advice that I have is that this was a contract that was signed by you.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Dizdar, do you know when the Janison contract was signed?

MURAT DIZDAR: The briefings, the approval processes to go down this approach stretch to a former secretary, former Minister. As to the exact contract execution, let me find out.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If they're announcing it on 6 February 2024 and they are an ASX company, I would anticipate that it was signed close to that time, you would expect.

MURAT DIZDAR: If this helps the Committee, what I found out and discovered when I came in as secretary is that these decisions stretch back to 2020, now operationally executed under our watch, and that's why we want to get it right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's what I'm curious about. Particularly that Janison contract, what happens to that now, Minister?

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just help the Committee there, Minister, if that's okay with you?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

MURAT DIZDAR: We will be undertaking some contractual discussions with them, and I've got to be very careful with what I say.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that. Just one more: During the time in August last year, the Hi-Intelli contract that was also awarded for selective education test provider and test centre management services, what was that for?

MURAT DIZDAR: The contract with Janison was to execute the online selective schools testing, both the production of those tests, which is through Cambridge University, as well as the administration of those tests. The Hire Intelligence contract goes to the hardware, the actual computers that were used.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also take on notice, then, what happens to that contract as well?

MURAT DIZDAR: Again that's a subject of discussions.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As much as you can provide on notice would be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

ANSWER

A procurement approach to conduct computer-based testing in external venues was approved in August 2022 and released to market in February 2023, under the former government.

Following a competitive tender, the department entered a contract with Janison Solutions Pty Ltd in February 2024, and a contract with Hire Intelligence International Limited in June 2024.

The department is in discussions regarding future placement test arrangements with Janison Solutions Pty Ltd and Hi Intelli Pty Ltd (novated name change from Hire Intelligence International Limited on 11 September 2024).

QUESTION 21 PAGE 40

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could take you to Western Sydney and to Blacktown Hospital, I think we've all seen the images of patients sleeping on the floor. I've seen it myself: patients undergoing examination, IV drips. I've got messages on my phone from nurses. It's a crisis. They're looking for immediate help from the Government. As the Minister for Western Sydney, what are you doing on this?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You're right: I am the Acting Minister for Western Sydney. I am broadly aware of those distressing images that you're referring to. But I

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think specifically the steps that the Government is taking in relation to Blacktown Hospital are probably best directed to Minister Park. I'd make this point: I saw a media release from him maybe earlier this week that said that the performance indicators had tripled in their improvement. Perhaps I can come back on notice in relation to that, but I would say this Government is doing a huge amount of work across Western Sydney to play catch-up on the lack of infrastructure and the lack of investment that occurred over the past 12 years.

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 225.

QUESTION 22 PAGE 40 & 41

Dr AMANDA COHN: I appreciate that you're acting in this role, but I wanted to ask you about something I know you were interested in as a member of the Opposition previously, which is air quality in classrooms. The National Science and Technology Council recently released yet another report confirming that proper ventilation in public buildings, including education settings, not only reduces infection transmission but actually improves learning conditions for kids. Last year when I asked for updates on the progress on the department's plans to enhance ventilation I was told that 29,000 of the 43,000 libraries and teaching spaces in New South Wales rely on natural ventilation, things like opening a window—and we know that in winter or if it's noisy or if there's outdoor air pollution, teachers don't open the window. Do you think it's acceptable that a majority of those learning spaces are still relying on natural ventilation?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, you're right, Dr Cohn. This was something that I asked a number of questions about in opposition, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. I haven't asked the department for updated information since acting in this role for a brief period, so perhaps it would be best to pass you to the secretary to provide you with updated advice on that.

MURAT DIZDAR: I might get Ms Harrington to unpack anything that we've got that we can add there.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm happy to come back in the afternoon in terms of dissecting the figures. To the Acting Minister, we are now past the peak of the COVID pandemic, but the evidence is mounting that this is important outside of pandemic conditions, and this is actually about best practice learning conditions for kids, not only relating to infection and transmission. Do you accept that it's important to have ventilation in classrooms?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, I'd accept that we want our schools to be safe, great quality learning environments. Our current capital budget is about \$9 billion over the next four years to provide a range of school upgrades. I would expect that some of those would include measures to address some of those concerns but, again, I'm not across the finer detail of what they are. I'd be happy to come back to you on notice, if that's appropriate.

ANSWER

The department, in partnership with the University of NSW, ran the Clean Air Schools program to monitor air quality in a selection of NSW public schools. The program aimed to better understand indoor and outdoor air pollution and support improved learning environments. Data was collected over a 2-year period and the department is now analysing the findings. The findings will help inform air quality protocols.

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QUESTION 23 PAGE 41

Dr AMANDA COHN: At the previous estimates hearing for this Committee, I asked Minister Car about synthetic turf installations at schools. I understand the education facilities guidelines recommend against it unless it's essentially required, and there are a number of reasons there. At that hearing, I was asked to follow up with a list of schools that I've got as examples, and I did write a letter to Minister Car that included 18 examples. That list wasn't exhaustive. Thank you very much for responding to that letter. In that letter, it noted that most of the play areas with synthetic turf are partially shaded by surrounding trees. The chief scientist recommended that synthetic turf be shaded. That's because it's a burns risk. It gets really hot in the sun. It can be hotter than adjacent concrete, notwithstanding the other health and environmental issues associated with synthetic turf. Are you satisfied with this answer that only most of the non-exhaustive examples that I provided are actually following the chief scientist's advice?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I would say that we have had some discussions in relation to this. I don't recall the 18 specifics. I do remember that I signed a letter to you in relation to your concerns around synthetic turf, and I think I was encouraged by the advice from the department that said the default position is that natural grass is what we want. But, as you would know, there are certain parts of schools that are shaded or that require synthetic turf, and it's a calculation of how we can make sure that kids still have access to outdoor play space, particularly with the weather that we've just had over recent weeks, but then, also, the default position is that natural grass is the best option. In relation to the 18, I might pass to the secretary about what the specifics are.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Again, I'm happy to come back this afternoon. I suppose what I'm trying to draw your attention to, Minister, is that I have asked about this a number of times now, and that response that natural grass is preferred is reiterated. I'm pleased that that is the policy position of the education department. People who are concerned about this issue and who watch these hearings subsequently contact me with the list of existing or new schools that have synthetic turf going in, and there are at least some examples that aren't following what is the stated policy position of the department. I suppose what I'm looking for is: Are you willing to actually make that examination school by school? The 18 that I provided on the list wasn't an exhaustive list; they're just the ones that I know of. Are you satisfied that every case of synthetic turf at a school in New South Wales is actually following your own policy, or will you make that examination?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm happy to take those specific examples on board, and we'll go away and do the work. That's completely fine. I would say that the department's been pretty definitive in their advice to me that that's the starting point—that we want natural grass wherever possible. But, like I say, if you've got specific concerns, we'll certainly follow up on them.

ANSWER

Information on where synthetic turf is installed across NSW public schools is currently being collected by the department's Asset Management Units. This will provide insights into any concerns relating to synthetic turf.

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QUESTION 24 PAGE 44

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, in the 2025-26 budget, has the Government allocated some money to support schools to install see-through lockers or lockable pouches in New South Wales public schools to help enforce the ban?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The secretary is nodding to me, so I might ask if he's got some—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: We know of one school that had them: Ashfield Boys High School.

Do you know if any others have installed them, Minister?

MURAT DIZDAR: When we operationalised the ban in term 4, 2023—we're now almost two years down the track. Everywhere I move as well, Minister, I get wonderful—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How many schools have the lockable pouches and see-through lockers?

MURAT DIZDAR: We made it very clear to our schools that they—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, how many? Can you direct Mr Dizdar to answer the question?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm happy to come back on notice. But I make this point: I've been out to more than 20 schools in my brief period in the role and different schools have different approaches.

ANSWER

Please see answer to transcript question 9 and 21 from the 2 December 2024 Budget Estimates hearing.

QUESTION 25 PAGE 45

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: There are 236. That's at 77 per cent capacity with 65—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Back to Macquarie Park, when was the decision to made to change that the commitment to just a 7-12 high school? When did that happen?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'd have to take that on notice. We are being very honest with the community about what that site is actually able and capable of producing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just on that—and I've got a copy for you—in January this year the Federal member there, Jerome Laxale, said that the Macquarie Park Education Campus will include a new primary school, as well as an integrated public preschool and a new high school. That was in January 2025. You'll get a copy of that. Was that information correct as of January 2025?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'd have to take that on notice. I wasn't in the role at the time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You announced, though, just this week in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that it would be a high school only. Did that happen during your time as acting Minister?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I just made the announcement. You said that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So was that decision made since you've been acting Minister, that it would just be a high school?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'd have to take on notice whether it was formally taken by me or at what point—

ANSWER

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The Minns Labor Government is proud to be delivering a new high school at Macquarie Park for 2,000 students, along with a new primary school at Midtown Macquarie Park and new public preschool, co-located at Ryde East Public School. This investment by the Minns Government will provide for the needs of students from preschool right through to Year 12.

This was announced in August 2025.

It should be noted the Liberal National Government broke its 2017 promise to build a new high in Macquarie Park. Furthermore, in 2022, it proposed a 3,000-student education campus on a 1.79 hectare site, which would have made it the densest school in NSW, if not Australia. The former Liberal National Government had also proposed it to be a mixed development with both residential and commercial development, which could have included fast food outlets and tobacconists. At the time, the former Minister for Education, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, said this was an opportunity to deliver infrastructure in an “innovative way”. As it turned out, the former Liberal National government delivered no school infrastructure at the site at all.

QUESTION 26 PAGE 46

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, one of the other things that keeps coming up in the regulatory documents through the SO 52 that seems to be a very routine compliance breach is in relation to staff understanding safe sleep policies and safe sleep practices. It's really, really common. I know it's also one of the things that the coroner in the Jack Loh inquest noted: that people just didn't seem to understand safe sleep practices. There's a current campaign being run to try to get this implemented where we have mandatory training across the board for people in these services to have that minimum amount of safe sleep training. Do you support that?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm certainly aware of the campaign, and I have asked questions about some of the consequences of that. I am reticent to mention individuals' names. I would just say, yes, I am very aware of the serious nature of that and I'm aware of that campaign.

The CHAIR: Will you advocate for it at the national level?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I'm certainly aware of the ask of the campaign. I'm just going to be careful about what I can say. Can I come back to you on notice on that one?

ANSWER

Recommendation 1 from the coronial inquest into the death of Jack Loh related to the implementation of compulsory safe sleep training for family day care educators. NSW is leading the implementation of that recommendation on behalf of all Australian jurisdictions.

Since the death of Jack Loh, the NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Regulatory Authority has:

- revised Safe Sleep and Rest guidelines to help services and educators understand their responsibilities and how they can effectively implement safe sleep and rest practices
- partnered with Red Nose to deliver free sleep and rest training to NSW ECEC services

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- undertaken a safe sleep and rest regulatory priority program in 2022-23 to provide extensive information, guidance and resources to the sector on safe sleep and rest.

The Regulatory Authority is supporting the sector with communications around new mandatory standards for infant sleep products that come into effect from 19 January 2026.

QUESTION 27 PAGE 46

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, very quickly on all the increased housing targets that the Government has, obviously your department, I assume, are working as to how these housing targets will potentially impact education, where you'll have additional schools and so forth. I wonder, where you're likely to now have high rises—and I think I've put to you the example of Wiley Park and Lakemba, which are going to have a significant rezoning right next to at least two or three schools in the area; they're going to have significant high-rise developments right on their boundary—has the department or your office had a look at what impact that will have on the school operations?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think you've heard me say several times this morning, Ms Mihailuk, that the department has a fundamentally different approach now. As I read out the figures in relation to some of those eastern suburbs schools that The Nationals party member to your right was asking in relation to, I would just give you—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I think the difference here though, Minister, is that, for example, Canterbury Bankstown are going well and above what the Government's expectations are for housing. There's going to be a significant rezoning that's probably going to exceed whatever else is being done by the Government across New South Wales. I wonder whether you've had a look at what happened to those couple of schools there— Wiley Park, Wiley Park Girls and Lakemba?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I personally haven't looked into that specific example. But what I can say is that the department has a much closer monitoring of existing school capacity and what the current enrolment utilisation rates are. When considering future upgrades, it is monitoring that far more closely. We're aware that a key focus of this Government is in relation to addressing the housing shortages that we see. As we do that, we're not operating in a silo; we're certainly looking at it across government. I think the secretary can provide you with more details now or perhaps this afternoon.

ANSWER

Please see answer to LC QWN 381.

QUESTION 28 PAGE 48

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm going to start with you, Mr Barraket. Just back to the early childhood area, has the Government put in any additional measures specifically for for-profit providers in the last two years?

MARK BARRAKET: I'll take that on notice, but my recollection is that the majority of measures have been directed at not-for-profit services. I think there might be some initiatives through the fund where for-profit providers have been eligible, but I'll take that on notice and come back to you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I mean more regulatory oversight, sorry. Are there any specific regulatory oversight changes that relate to for-profit providers only?

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MARK BARRAKET: I will ask Mr Backo to answer that because Mr Backo is the head of the regulatory authority, and that sits outside of Early Childhood Outcomes.

NICHOLAS BACKO: I'll have to take it on notice and come back to you with any details about specific programs in relation to for-profit services.

ANSWER

The NSW Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Regulatory Authority continues to be a risk-based regulator. Large providers that are considered higher-risk experience focussed compliance monitoring and elevated regulatory responses.

The NSW Government has introduced the Children (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Amendment Bill 2025 to place children's safety as a "paramount consideration" provision, ensuring child safety is at the heart of ECEC.

The NSW Government is also proposing to increase all maximum penalties in the National Law by 3 times. Large providers will face even higher penalties of 3 times the tripled maximum penalties.

QUESTION 29 PAGE 49

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL:... The non-government preschools—which was also an election commitment. I think I asked about that last time. Have there been any announcements in terms of where they will be located?

MARK BARRAKET: I will ask Mr Kurucz to answer this.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Thanks very much, Ms Mitchell, for the question. The Government has not made any announcements in relation to that at the moment. We're undergoing the assessment of the first round of applications and working with the non-government school sector in relation to future application rounds for that program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you anticipate that those services that are either going to be expanded or new will be open by day one, term 1 of 2027 as well? Is that your time frame for delivery?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'd have to take that on notice because it's a grant program, so it operates slightly differently and we will be engaging with the sectors around delivery time frames for particular projects in relation to when Catholic schools or New South Wales or independent schools can open those preschools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it the expectation from Government, though, that you deliver those in this term of government?

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes. Government has an expectation of us that we will disperse the grants and work with the sectors in this term of government, correct.

ANSWER

The NSW Government is investing \$60 million to build and upgrade preschools on 50 non-government school sites. The department is delivering this through a grant program, in partnership with Catholic Schools NSW and The Association of Independent Schools of NSW as grant authorities. The first tranche of successful applications will be announced shortly.

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Individual schools are responsible for managing delivery timelines. The department and the relevant grant authority will support schools to manage project risks and monitor the progress through regular updates.

QUESTION 30 PAGE 50 & 51

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The issue around flexible working arrangements for classroom teachers—maybe through you, Mr Dizdar. If you need to refer it to any of your colleagues, that's fine. That was obviously part of the award. There's some information, I know, in relation to flexible work arrangements, particularly for classroom teachers. Can you talk me through what that process looks like, who makes that decision and how many teachers have taken up that option so far this year?

MURAT DIZDAR: I certainly can. I'm proud of the consent award that we negotiated for three years with the NSW Teachers Federation. Part of that was to modernise the workforce conditions for those inside the school gates. We have always had the opportunity for part-time employment, but that was never systematically applied. What we did through this award is to make that clearer as an option for the workforce. We came out and communicated with our teachers in its entirety that—this goes to retention. When the whole nation is grappling with teacher workforce challenges, having a teacher not leave the profession but maybe, with life circumstances, work circumstances, make a decision that they want to remain for two or three days—we wanted to give primacy to that. We gave clear instructions to our principals to support those award conditions.

We also made another change, and that is that—when we go to recruit for a teacher vacancy, sometimes you can go a number of times and not be able to fill the position. We said that, once we go out for merit selection, if we're unsuccessful in the recruitment of that position, on the second occasion for that role, we will create the option of part-time employment. I know of schools where we've gone five, six times for a maths teacher in a high school. We felt that we could open up the opportunities if it went part-time. My view was that you're better off having a maths teacher that you recruit successfully for two days than not five days when you keep being unsuccessful at that. They were the two major—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How many though? Can you tell me how many you've recruited under that?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll have to come back on data for you because we're in the first year of the award implementation.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good. I understand what you're saying about the concept. I'm just curious as to how many have taken that up. I'm assuming it's open to existing teachers as well, not just new recruits.

MURAT DIZDAR: It was opened up to the entire workforce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then who makes the decision to approve that arrangement? If an existing teacher says, "I want to be flexible for caring reasons, family reasons", whatever it may be, does that decision rest with the principal? Does it go to the DEL? The department? Who decides?

MURAT DIZDAR: The principal makes that decision, but we gave clear guidance on what that looks like. We also respect the operational requirements of the school because, if you've got multiple applications in front of you, what would that look like? So, we've given guidance, but there are clear instructions on where our stance lies.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there any limitation as to how many teachers in a school can take up that option?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, there isn't.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the process, or the right of appeal or review, if a teacher puts forward that application and it's not approved by the principal? What can they do about that?

MURAT DIZDAR: In the first instance, we want the clear consideration at the local level, but just our normal processes. If one of our staff members, a teacher at a school, put that application in and spoke with the principal and the principal didn't support it, we've got our director, educational leadership and our executive director. We've got Ms Summerhayes who oversights the public schools as an escalation point, if necessary. I can tell you that none of that's come into play in the first year, which tends to indicate to me that it's being operationalised well with the intent that we had.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Any data, as I said, in terms of numbers on notice, would be fantastic, if you can provide that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me see what we've got.

ANSWER

Applications from teachers are provided to the principal for determination. The department does not hold information on local arrangements centrally.

QUESTION 31 PAGE 51

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to take this on notice, unless you've got it, but I don't expect you to. How many reportable conduct matters were referred to the OCG in the last 12 months?

DARYL CURRIE: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If possible, can you also, of those, advise how many were referred after 24 hours or 48 or—the average time period that it took?

DARYL CURRIE: Yes, I think we'd be able to get that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Should we come back to you on the reportable period that's given?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry?

MURAT DIZDAR: There's a reportable period that you've got to meet it within. I think you said within five days.

DARYL CURRIE: Yes, we can come back on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm sure some don't take five days. I would assume you would do them more quickly, but anything you've got around that would be fantastic. Do you keep a record of the exact date and time that you send them off to the OCD?

DARYL CURRIE: Yes, we do.

ANSWER

From 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 PES reported 344 reportable conduct matters to the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG).

QUESTION 32 PAGE 54

The CHAIR: Has the department ever raised concerns with Allianz or icare or SIRA in relation to surveillance and intrusive investigations of Department of Education employees who have made psychological claims through workers comp?

MARY NOY: Not to my knowledge. I've only been with the department since February. In my time, I haven't had those conversations with those departments.

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The CHAIR: Could you take on notice whether there has ever been any concerns raised by the department with SIRA about the way that icare or the claims service provider manages claims for Education staff?

MARY NOY: Yes.

ANSWER

The department is not aware of any concerns being raised with Allianz, iCare or SIRA in respect of surveillance or intrusive investigations of department staff who have reported psychological injury claims.

QUESTION 33 PAGE 55, 56 & 57

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The other one I asked, I think, on notice was about Professor Alegounarias and his contractual arrangement. You also took that on notice. I'm not sure if you're ready with that now.

MURAT DIZDAR: If it's okay with you, we might come back. We don't have it in front of us, so is it okay if we come back when we give the answers to supplementary questions?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's fine. I might put some more questions to you about that then. Mr Dizdar, I just wanted to ask a little bit more on that issue. We know he was the chief executive officer of NESA and the previous Board of Studies prior to his appointment to conduct the review of section 83C arrangements. Can you please advise what the selection process was to identify Professor Alegounarias as the person most suitable to conduct the review, or was there a process of inviting others to participate in this?

MURAT DIZDAR: I might get Mr Martin to speak to it. But can I just say, as a NESA board member, and all of my cross-sector colleagues are board members—the head of the Catholics, the head of the independents. All three of us, as heads of the sectors, were delighted with the appointment and with his vast expertise working across the sectors. I think it was a very good appointment. As to the process of the appointment—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm just interested to know, did you invite others to participate, or was it just a done deal that he would be the one?

MURAT DIZDAR: Normally we're looking for expertise, and it's quite specific expertise. Normally we'd make sure we fulfil all procurement—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Was this an open procurement process?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, I think you'll find that we went to direct negotiation on it because of the eminent expertise he brought to the role. I reiterate—and I think I would speak for my sector head colleagues—we were all delighted with the appointment and had full confidence in the work that he'd undertake.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Was it specifically yourself that contacted him to do the review, or was it Mr Martin?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Martin was the one that engaged him, yes.

PAUL MARTIN: Sorry. I think that Mr Alegounarias was appointed prior to his engagement with NESA, but I'll take that on notice to get the exact sequence of events and also, as I said this morning—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What do you mean by he was "appointed prior" to do this review?

PAUL MARTIN: He was, as far as I understand—and I'd have to get this on notice—appointed by the Government to conduct a review into section 83C.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Who was it from the Government? Was it the Deputy Premier herself or her office?

PAUL MARTIN: I'll take that on notice.

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The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You don't know if any other proponents were considered to undertake the review.

PAUL MARTIN: I think Mr Alegounarias's expertise in cross-sectoral matters meant that he was—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The most appropriate person.

PAUL MARTIN: —the most appropriate candidate, and he was welcomed by all three sectors.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm not questioning that, but I just wanted to understand the process of how he was chosen. Earlier in the day I think you said—because I played the tape back, and I'm pretty sure you said that he's been engaged on other occasions by NESA to conduct reviews.

PAUL MARTIN: I don't think I said that this morning. I said that he had previously been—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: He's been "engaged" was the term you used. I wasn't sure what that meant.

PAUL MARTIN: I think that he has—well, I'm absolutely sure he's previously been the CEO and/or the president of the Board of Studies.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, and since he's left those roles, was he ever engaged in any kind of contractual arrangement like this?

PAUL MARTIN: He is currently working with the centre for educational measurement at the University of Sydney.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I understand that. He does that, yes.

PAUL MARTIN: We have arrangements with that organisation, but that's not directly with Mr Alegounarias.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: This is a private arrangement. This was a private contractual arrangement, and you're going to take on notice what the value is, because I think I put that on notice this morning.

PAUL MARTIN: In relation to 83C, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Were any staff also provided to Professor Alegounarias in conducting his review—any departmental staff or NESA staff to support his work?

PAUL MARTIN: NESA provided some secretarial support for Mr Alegounarias.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: At what point did it become clear that he would then be implementing the recommendations? Did you say only once the review was complete?

PAUL MARTIN: There was a decision made post the review and the report coming down. The implementation process and the movement from the 83C secretariat to NESA that it was also decided that some—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When did he start, Mr Martin? When did he start here?

PAUL MARTIN: I'd have to take the exact dates on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can take it on notice.

.....

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And at what point he became an employee. Did you say he became an employee?

PAUL MARTIN: He's not an employee of NESA, but he is contracted to conclude the work that the review recommended—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So there's a separate contractual arrangement—

PAUL MARTIN: As far as I understand it, yes, but I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can I then get the value of this secondary implementation and whatever terms can be made public? I assume some can't be.

PAUL MARTIN: Yes, of course.

ANSWER

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NESA staff provided secretariat support to the review of Section 83C and related provisions of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW) (Review). On 16 August 2024, the Deputy Premier publicly released the Review of Section 83C and Related Provisions of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW) Report (Review Report) and announced that Professor Alegounarias would oversee implementation of the Review Report recommendations.

NESA subsequently engaged Professor Alegounarias under contract to implement the recommendations of the Review Report, with an indicative total contract value of \$118,800. Professor Alegounarias was engaged to oversee:

- the transfer of regulatory oversight of public funding for non-government schools from the NSW Department of Education to NESA
- development of regulations on not-for-profit requirements under Section 83C of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW)
- improvement of the Not-for-Profit Guidelines for Non-Government Schools to make the regulator's role clear and transparent in assuring that school expenditure arises from the operation of the school
- development of more timely and less costly remedies to address for-profit activity to avoid unnecessary litigation
- strengthening of the oversight role of the Non-Government Schools Not-for-Profit Advisory Committee.

QUESTION 34 PAGE 57

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The media release from the Deputy Premier at the time—back in August or whatever month it was in 2024—was that it was going to be implemented in 2025. Are they now all implemented—all these recommendations—or is it still on foot?

PAUL MARTIN: Some of the recommendations have been implemented. Some of them are still being progressed. There are changes—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you specify or take it on notice which ones?

PAUL MARTIN: I'll take it on notice, but there are changes for both the guidelines and potentially for regulations that result.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, I'd just like to know to date what's been done and what is yet still to be done.

PAUL MARTIN: Sure, I'm happy to provide it on notice.

ANSWER

Several key recommendations from the review of Section 83C and related provisions of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW) (Review) have been delivered including:

- adding a member of the Independent Education Union (IEU) to the Non-Government Schools Not-for-Profit Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee). This appointment was made effective from 1 January 2025
- transferring the regulatory function from the NSW Department of Education to the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). This transfer was effective from 14 February 2025.

NESA is currently working closely with Professor Tom Alegounarias to deliver the remaining implementation work, which includes:

- amending the *Education Regulation 2017* (NSW) to clarify services and functions that do not constitute 'for-profit' activity

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- revising the Not-for-Profit Guidelines for Non-Government Schools to make the regulator's role clear and transparent in assuring that school expenditure arises from the operation of the school
- developing more timely and less costly remedies to address for-profit activity, to avoid unnecessary litigation
- strengthening the oversight role of the Non-Government Schools Not-for-Profit Advisory Committee.

NESA and Professor Alegounarias are continuing to work closely with key stakeholders, including the Advisory Committee, the Association of Independent Schools of NSW and Catholic Schools NSW to consult on key areas of implementation and to ensure stakeholders are kept up to date on progress.

QUESTION 35 PAGE 58

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: How often do you meet? Could I have a record in terms of who's holding the meetings, when and where they're held and what's discussed?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm part of the secretary's board that has all of the secretaries across New South Wales. I'm in contact with the secretary for planning on a fortnightly basis. Ms Harrington and her team have great regularity of contact.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: When would the last meeting have been held, Ms Harrington?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll get Ms Harrington to add some more detail.

LISA HARRINGTON: There are a few different, more formal mechanisms that have been introduced recently that have strengthened that connection. First of all, the urban development program, we meet—there are various committees and working groups under that, which are sort of breaking up and looking at the growth areas for that formal connection. The other thing that has been introduced recently is the government property advisory committee that I'm a part of. Basically agencies get together and can get visibility if there is surplus land from any other government agencies to see whether it might be utilised by another government agency. That has assisted.

Also, with the TODs, it has enabled us to zero in on where housing will come. So it's a way that we're able to really start to improve our forecasting of where that housing is coming. In addition, we've got more granular with our projections. It used to be that we would have, from the common planning assumptions, the data at basically a local government area level. We're now at a suburb level, and then we added in extra data sources, whether it be from the Federal Government or councils or developers. That's helped us just be more clear about where the growth is coming, the type of dwellings and the pace of that development.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are you able to provide the Committee with any of those materials, or possibly the last meeting papers where these issues were discussed, relevant to the Hills?

MURAT DIZDAR: Is there something that you're particularly interested in?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It's just relevant to the Hills in terms of the projected housing. People are continuing to ask the questions: Are the Government departments talking? How are they going to meet this? They're seeking more information. We're told the meetings are held. Could we see records of how often you're meeting, what are you discussing, and what's the action plan?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back on notice around the meetings.

ANSWER

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Please see answer to supplementary question 236.

QUESTION 36 PAGE 59 & 60

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, on a similar topic, if I could now move to Chatswood, concerning why the Government terminated plans for a 1,000-place public school at 607 Pacific Highway, Chatswood. I think it's known as the Chatswood dive site, from memory. Why did the Government terminate plans for the 1,000-place public school, despite this being a longstanding commitment linked to the completion of the metro, and what would that mean in terms of the student cohort?

LISA HARRINGTON: We have recently completed the upgrade at Chatswood Public School, and we constantly need to look at our enrolment projections and see. When the Chatswood and also the St Leonards projects were proposed, it was prior to COVID and the enrolment projections were a bit different to what they then became after COVID, so we did reassess. We were able to confirm that we didn't need that dive site anymore, and we confirmed that to metro. We were able to deal with the existing demand with the existing Chatswood primary school, recognising that in that area—Willoughby and Chatswood—there have been significant upgrades in the last little while, so there was sufficient capacity with those existing schools. We're also undertaking upgrades at Cammeray and Northbridge to provide additional capacity there.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I will just acknowledge the strong representations by Tim James, the member for Willoughby there, who no doubt is well known to you in terms of discussions relating to school infrastructure. Tim and the community have put it to me that they feel it's a betrayal of local families and the future. It's a planning disaster. Housing density is proceeding, infrastructure is proceeding and the Government is terminating plans for schools that once had approval.

LISA HARRINGTON: We are still looking at it. Obviously we've got the Crows Nest metro there, so it isn't an area that we are dismissing. It's just that, at this stage, it doesn't make sense to put an additional school there because we can deal with the demand with the existing schools. But we are still monitoring it, recognising that it is a TOD. It is an area that is going to have additional growth, so we need to continue to monitor.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Harrington, in terms of the student enrolment modelling that you referred to there that was undertaken prior to the decision to cancel the school, can that be shared with the Committee?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice on what we can share there.

ANSWER

The project was promised in 2019 by the former Liberal National Government on the basis that there would be approximately 8,700 enrolments in the area in 2026. However, that growth has not eventuated with enrolments currently at approximately 6,900, which is significantly short of the original projections which underpinned the proposal.

In contrast, the community of Box Hill oversaw student enrolment growth of 1,114% between 2018 and 2023, yet the former Liberal National Government failed to plan for any new schools in the area. Fortunately, the Minns Labor Government is delivering 2 new primary schools in Box Hill and a new high school in Box Hill, the first high school built in The Hills since Labor was last in government.

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QUESTION 37 PAGE 62, 63 & 64

The CHAIR: I'll quickly go to Mr Backo, and then I'll come back to Ms Noy fairly shortly thereafter. Mr Backo, we were talking about Busy Bees in New Lambton earlier. In the interest of time, I wasn't able to give you more of a chance to say what has gone on. Looking at the show cause notice that was issued to them on 17 July 2024, what has happened since? I see that they're still there as a "meeting standards" service on ACECQA. How did they show cause that they should be allowed to continue to operate?

NICHOLAS BACKO: As you would be aware, the show cause process requires a provider—in this case, Busy Bees—to provide a range of information to the department about, essentially, in this case, why their approval to operate should not be cancelled. They responded to that show cause notice. I can advise you that, since that matter, the regulator has visited the service a further seven times—most recently this month, in August.

The CHAIR: That is even though they have this track record of that service for well over five years having some very significant problems. It's noted in this letter very clearly. It says that between 2020 and 2024, 13 compliance actions were issued to the service compared to a sector average of two, and a total of 52 confirmed breaches were substantiated, with 23 serious incidents and 14 complaints. That is compared to a sector average which is less than half of that. This is a very serious situation. They've got to the point of being issued a show cause notice, but when parents look at the ACECQA website, it just says that they're meeting standards. Were parents given any other notification around these issues? Do they know?

NICHOLAS BACKO: I absolutely agree; it is a very serious matter. I also agree with the Minister's comments from this morning: Transparency for families is incredibly important. I don't have in front of me the specific communication to families, if there was any, in relation to that matter, so I'm happy to take on notice and look into that specific example. But it's fair to say that transparency is incredibly important. We have increased the amount of enforcement actions that we publish on the department's website significantly. The legislation that the Minister mentioned will also consider additional ways that we can be more transparent. I think it is incredibly important that parents understand what is happening within early childhood education and care services that their children are attending.

The CHAIR: I think we can all agree on that, but what we've got here—I can't tell you how easy it is to find these examples. It's quite shocking. There are so, so many centres like this. This is yet another example of one that has had a five-year history—at least—of just incredibly concerning issues. Any one of them would be a concern. To culminate in a child being that badly injured, unsupervised, no-one got told about it—I don't understand what they could have provided to the regulator that then allowed them to just carry on. In this case, are you telling me you don't know why they were allowed to carry on?

NICHOLAS BACKO: What I'm saying is I agree it is incredibly serious. I'm happy to take on notice and provide you with further information about the specific response from the service to the concerns that the department outlined.

The CHAIR: Given that there have been numerous examples of services breaching the rules and having no fines, or if they do get a fine they might get—I think it's a \$200 fine if you don't tell the parents something, which is absurd. Are you able to tell us how much Busy Bees New Lambton has been fined?

NICHOLAS BACKO: I can certainly provide that to you on notice. I don't have that in front of me. I do agree. I think Mr Wheeler described the financial penalties as paltry under the national law. Again, the Minister mentioned this morning bringing forward legislation. Indeed, education Ministers last Friday agreed to triple the maximum penalty available under the national law—in relation to financial penalties, to clarify.

.....

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The CHAIR: That would be very useful to know. Mr Backo, are you able to find out over the tea break what the case is with Busy Bees at New Lambton and why they're allowed to continue?

NICHOLAS BACKO: I'll have to take it on notice. I'm happy to provide the information that we can.

The CHAIR: If you could just have a look, that would be very useful.

MURAT DIZDAR: If we can't achieve that in today's estimates, we're open to coming and sitting down with you, Chair, if you're open to it.

The CHAIR: I'm always open to it, but I also want public transparency. I feel like the public ought to know why, in this case.

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll see what we can get you today.

ANSWER

In response to the incident that occurred in February 2024, Busy Bees New Lambton were issued a show cause notice to cancel their service approval and were required to provide evidence to address non-compliance identified throughout the investigation.

The service took immediate steps to address breaches in relation to investigation of the matter. In addition to submitting evidence, authorised officers from the Regulatory Authority attended the service for the purposes of inspection and validating the evidence Busy Bees New Lambton provided.

The Regulatory Authority visited on 7 occasions including most recently on 19 August 2025. The Regulatory Authority will continue to closely monitor the service.

QUESTION 38 PAGE 63

The CHAIR: Do you still have that situation where there's a physical penalty infringement notice book that has to be filled out before a fine can be issued?

NICHOLAS BACKO: In terms of penalty infringement notices—you are correct. There is a physical penalty infringement notice book. We will look to address that in due course. The first thing that we're focused on is increasing opportunities for the regulator to issue penalty infringement notices.

The CHAIR: Just on that, though, how many of those books does the regulator have?

NICHOLAS BACKO: I would definitely have to take that on notice. I'm not sure.

The CHAIR: Is it two?

NICHOLAS BACKO: I don't know how many books we have.

The CHAIR: I'm told it's two. So if there are two physical books that have to be filled out before you can actually fine somebody, and you have over 6,000 services across the State—and, presumably, you have inspectors going out to all of those services at some point—is it true that they have to try and find whoever has the book in order to then issue the paltry \$200 fine to the service for not notifying a parent of something as serious as this?

NICHOLAS BACKO: I don't know the details of the specific books. I am happy to take that on notice.

ANSWER

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The NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Regulatory Authority has 9 penalty infringement notice books. Currently approximately 20 specialist investigators issue penalty infringement notices.

The Regulatory Authority is actively considering alternative options to using a physical penalty infringement notice book for issuing notices, in anticipation of current reforms.

QUESTION 39 PAGE 65

The CHAIR: I think previously you mentioned a 2024-27 document.

MARY NOY: The staff wellbeing strategy.

The CHAIR: Is that a public document?

MARY NOY: I'd have to check on notice. It's certainly well communicated and promoted within the organisation.

The CHAIR: Can you provide it on notice, if it's possible? Or if it's just public, then just the website is fine.

MURAT DIZDAR: It is publicly facing.

The CHAIR: Do you need a staff login for it?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, you don't. Let me get the plug in for our website; it's a fantastic website—education.nsw.gov.au. I've been hard at work improving the search engine.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You personally?

MURAT DIZDAR: I've had good people. If you type in "staff wellbeing strategy", it'll take you directly there. It is publicly facing.

The CHAIR: Okay, here I go. It says to download the strategy I need a login.

MURAT DIZDAR: No. I just went in through the public domain.

The CHAIR: It says "Staff Wellbeing Strategy 2024-27", and then when I click on "download the strategy" it says I need to log in.

MURAT DIZDAR: I seem to get in without—

The CHAIR: Maybe you've got a login, so maybe that's why—

MURAT DIZDAR: I didn't log in. But, anyway, let's get you a copy.

ANSWER

The Staff Wellbeing Strategy 2024-27 can be publicly accessed at the following link:
<https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/staff-wellbeing-strategy>.

QUESTION 40 PAGE 65

The CHAIR: That would be lovely if you could. Can I ask, Ms Noy, how many staff are currently off work on workers compensation? Do you know that?

MARY NOY: At any one time, our dedicated employee health recovery team is supporting about 2,700 employees with return to work. I can come back to you on notice with those exact figures, as they change regularly.

The CHAIR: That would be useful. If you could tell me how many of them are psychological claims and how many are physical claims, that would be useful.

MARY NOY: I can do that on notice.

ANSWER

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As at 30 June 2025, the department was supporting 2,672 staff (2.6% of the workforce) in their recovery and return to work following workplace injury.

The majority of staff being supported in their recovery at work are undertaking suitable work duties as part of a recovery at work program.

Approximately 60% of the cases being supported by the department are physical injury claims, the remainder psychological.

Data Source: The department's SHIELD system as at 30 June 2025.

QUESTION 41 PAGE 65 & 66

The CHAIR: Has the department been found noncompliant with workers compensation reporting obligations in the past three years at all? Do you know?

MARY NOY: As I said earlier, I only started in February, so I'm happy to come back on notice. As all TMF agencies are subject to the SIRA review that did look at and audit TMF agencies, I can go back and have a look. As I understand, there were no findings. But I can come back.

MURAT DIZDAR: Not that I'm aware of, but we will double-check.

The CHAIR: Has the department conducted an internal review to ensure it's meeting its statutory obligations under the workers comp Act and the workplace injury management and workers compensation Acts?

MARY NOY: We reviewed a return to work or recover at work program earlier in the year. SIRA had already audited it and found it was compliant. We are constantly reviewing our systems and processes to make sure they are in line with the regulatory framework we work within as well as best practice. We have implemented recently around reporting a digital online form to enable people to report injuries not only through our hotline but via a digital form as well.

The CHAIR: In terms of an internal review to ensure you're meeting statutory obligations under those Acts, has that been done?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll just check. Again, if we can come back this afternoon, we'll quickly check if we have done one or if it's part of our audit plan.

ANSWER

The department has not been found noncompliant with workers compensation injury reporting obligations.

The department's workers compensation legislative obligations, including the requirement to have a compliant return to work program, were audited by the State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA) as part of their compliance audit and performance review of the Treasury Managed Fund (TMF) government employer workers compensation claims in 2023. The department was not subject to any regulatory action arising from this audit.

The department is currently undertaking an internal audit of its Return to Work Program. This review will include assessment of compliance with SIRA Guidelines for Return to Work Programs.

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QUESTION 42 PAGE 66

The CHAIR: How often do PES findings get overturned or varied following appeal, external review or Ombudsman or guardian scrutiny?

DARYL CURRIE: In terms of findings, as in findings of misconduct—

The CHAIR: Yes, or the other way.

DARYL CURRIE: They're not the jurisdiction that can overturn those findings. It's the IRC that will actually overturn those findings.

The CHAIR: Okay.

DARYL CURRIE: In my experience, in five years of decision-making, twice, I think. I'd have to take it on notice, but I think it's twice in my experience of the findings—and not so much the findings: the decision. I think it's really important to point out they don't overturn the findings; it's a case de novo. They make findings of their own and not necessarily on the same evidence, because we—or I—make findings when it comes to dismissal based on the evidence in front of me. If the person goes to the IRC, it's a case de novo, whether it's a public sector appeal or it's an unfair dismissal. New evidence may be actually proffered that wasn't available to us through submissions et cetera, and they will make a determination themselves. So, yes, it may not be the decision that I made, but it's not an overturning; it's a different decision based on different evidence. Can I just point out something? Tedeschi, in his review, said—this is a paraphrase—that we should have more overturn because we should, in the interest of protecting kids, take more decisions that may actually be overturned. That's the sign of a healthy department that is looking at protecting students.

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 78.

QUESTION 43 PAGE 67

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you tell me what the latest data is that you have on the number of children being homeschooled in New South Wales?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, I can. I've got figures as at the end of last year. Is that okay?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I'll take those.

MURAT DIZDAR: It was 12,762 children in New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When would you expect to have 2025 data?

MURAT DIZDAR: I think we report on it annually, Ms Mitchell, so it'll be in our annual report. But if it's any different, let me come back to you.

ANSWER

Home schooling data is published annually by calendar year. The 2024 data has been released and is available on the NSW Government website at:

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2025-07/home-schooling-data-reports-relating-to-2024.PDF>.

All published data is subject to a thorough verification process to ensure accuracy.

Data for future years will be published in due course.

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QUESTION 44 PAGE 67 & 68

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. I then wanted to ask about distance education through the department. Obviously I'm aware some students will do it for certain subjects and the like. Do you have any data in terms of the number of students who are doing full-time distance education in 2025?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. This is data, my notes tell me, that was at the beginning of term 2 this year. We had 2,235 full-time students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you know how that compares to previous years' data? Is it an increase?

MURAT DIZDAR: I might have that. I might not, so let me come back on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you take that on notice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is it possible to provide also a breakdown of those students as best you can regional versus metro? I understand that some take distance because of where they live, but I have sort of heard anecdotally that there are more metro-based students taking that option as well. I would be curious for the best breakdown that you can provide. I'm not sure how you hold that data.

MURAT DIZDAR: Let me come back to you with what we have.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you also provide—and I'm happy for this to be on notice—if possible the breakdown of the year groups that are study by distance education?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sure. The numbers I gave you were K to 12.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, but, again, I'm just curious if it's more frequent in high school. That would be fantastic.

MURAT DIZDAR: Just to clarify, that was full time?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that's what I was asking.

MURAT DIZDAR: As you also know, we have some students that do a distance ed subject.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, for a certain subject. I want full time.

MURAT DIZDAR: Okay.

ANSWER

Distance Education enrolments change throughout the year. The breakdown of enrolments at the commencement of Term 2, 2025 is below. Of these, 1,227 students were from metropolitan areas of NSW according to the Australian Statistical Geographic Standard (ASGS).

At the same time in 2024, there were 2,422 students enrolled in full-time Distance Education.

Year Group	Number of enrolments 2025
Preschool	49
K-6	563
7-12	1,623
Total	2,235

QUESTION 45 PAGE 69

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of sexual assault cases or allegations reported to the department, how many would there be?

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MURAT DIZDAR: Are you asking, Ms Merton, around claim farming or just sexual assault claims in general?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sexual assault claims.

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't know that I have that data in front of me. Is it okay if I come back to you?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Take it on notice, sure. I'd be keen to get a breakdown maybe in terms of government schools or non-government schools or—I'm not sure how the process works.

MURAT DIZDAR: You'd have to ask the other sector heads for non-government schools. I've got carriage of the government schools so I'll see what I've got.

ANSWER

Between 1 January 2025 and 30 June 2025, PES received 75 reports relating to allegations against employees of sexual assault, this includes 11 allegations of sexual misconduct and 64 allegations of sexual offence. Under the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*, sexual offence is defined as conduct that would, if proven, amount to a sexual offence, regardless of whether charges have been laid or of there being a conviction.

QUESTION 46 PAGE 69 & 70

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Barraket, I'll direct this one to you. The Start Strong Pathways program—has there been a funding allocation for that in this year's budget?

MARK BARRAKET: Let me just check my notes. I'll have to come back on notice. I don't have anything specific from my notes on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding is the current program that was funded is due to expire on 31 December this year. Is there any funding to continue that program beyond 31 December 2025?

MARK BARRAKET: I'll have to take that on notice. If there is a decision to continue that, then there are different ways in which it can be funded.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just for providers, though, we're now in almost September and some are looking at contingency planning, particularly those who operate playgroups in rural and regional areas. Obviously, that's a very important part of communities. Just some clarity around the timing of a decision of Government to allay or answer that—

MARK BARRAKET: Certainly. We are anticipating an update to the Start Strong guidelines and all the components of that out soon, so that might clarify that for the providers. But I'll certainly take that on notice and provide you with the information.

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 157.

QUESTION 47 PAGE 70 & 71

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to go now to school maintenance. Ms Harrington, can you tell me what the actual spend was on school maintenance in the 2024-25 financial year?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you with the exact figure.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What about the total allocation for school maintenance in this financial year of 2025-26?

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LISA HARRINGTON: I believe, actually, there were some statements on the budget last year in terms of the breakdown. I think it was \$1.5 billion for maintenance and minor works. There was a breakdown, I believe, in a release, but I can dig that out. We've got a similar amount of funding going to maintenance this financial year as well. The difference in the last couple of years is more money for renewal through that HPGE high school uplift program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In the budget papers, obviously there's major works that are listed and then minor works.

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When you say "minor works" in the budget papers, that covers both minor works and school maintenance, is that correct?

LISA HARRINGTON: It does but, actually, planned maintenance is in capital funding and also in recurrent funding.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just on that, I'm curious as to why, in last year's budget, the total for minor works was just over \$1 billion, and then this year it's \$557 million. It's sort of half as much allocated to minor works in this year's budget papers than was there last year. Can you explain why?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice. One of the changes we have made is we have previously included money to acquire land in minor works, and we are now allocating that a little bit differently, attaching it to projects. It might be that it's related to that, but I'm happy to come back to you on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that change within the last financial year, that process?

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could just, for absolute clarity, come back with what the specific maintenance spend—not the total—was last year and what is allocated for maintenance this year.

LISA HARRINGTON: I can. I can also just say now that it is about the same for both years.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But it would just be good to have the actual figure, if I can have that.

LISA HARRINGTON: Sure.

ANSWER

The Minns Labor Government inherited a significant maintenance backlog from the Liberal National Government along with the biggest debt in NSW history.

As part of the 2025-26 NSW Budget, an investment of \$1.25 billion has been made in maintenance and local upgrades this financial year – this includes funds for school maintenance, disability access and safety, and to address the backlog of small upgrades and refurbishments.

2024/25 financial results will be released in the Annual Report.

QUESTION 48 PAGE 71

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I've got a few school infrastructure ones, so these will be all to you, Ms Harrington. Do you have any data around the number of asbestos inspections that were conducted in public schools in 2024?

LISA HARRINGTON: I do. I've got 629 schools in financial year 2025 for asbestos surveys, and we're planning to do a similar amount this financial year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data from 2023?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice with that.

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ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 167.

QUESTION 49 PAGE 71

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just with that nature playground at Minnamurra, when was the department asked to provide funding for that particular project?

LISA HARRINGTON: I believe that was an election commitment, so that would have been 2023.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you aware that that was previously listed as a commitment under the Local Small Commitments Allocation?

LISA HARRINGTON: No, I'm not aware of that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you be able to take on notice—because I appreciate you were not in the role at the time—when that became a Department of Education project? Pre-election it was local small commitments and post-election it seemed to have found its way into the Education budget, so I'm curious as to when that change occurred. If you've got any information on that, that would be useful.

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back on notice.

ANSWER

The new nature playground at Minnamurra Public School was delivered by the department in June 2024.

QUESTION 50 PAGE 71 & 72

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I asked some questions earlier about the Medowie high school. I just wondered whether there was any update in terms of any modelling that might have been done in relation to water run-off and flooding. There's been quite a bit of rainfall in that area recently, and I had some photos sent to me showing the site being impacted by quite a bit of water. What is the latest information in relation to that advice the department has?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice. Also, I can confirm that, actually, the planning documentation is published now. A lot of information—and it would likely be addressing any sort of flooding impacts as well—would be publicly available as part of that REF approval. I can confirm as well, in relation to your questions before, that there is some supporting documentation that relates to safety, transport, traffic—those sorts of issues. There has been a commitment. Obviously, we need to make sure that all the road safety measures and the mitigations that are listed as part of that planning documentation is in place before the school opens.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And just a couple more on Medowie because I've got some very interested parties in that part of the world. How many students will be the capacity for day one, term 1? And what is the expected capacity over time?

LISA HARRINGTON: Year 7 only. So it's about 110 students for when it opens. And the capacity is 640 students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And is there room to grow beyond that if need be?

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LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice, in terms of whether we're master-planning for future growth.

ANSWER

Flooding mitigation measures are included in the project's Review of Environmental Factors, which was submitted as part of the planning application and approved in June 2025. The planning application is available publicly at: <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/part-5/new-high-school-medowie>.

The masterplan includes provision for future expansion if required.

It should be noted, the former Liberal National Government opposed a new high school in Medowie and said it was not needed.

QUESTION 51 PAGE 73

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: When was the last time a metro school in Sydney was put into recess? Are you aware?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: I'd need to take that on notice. But I can tell you it's quite a rare occurrence.

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 187.

QUESTION 52 PAGE 73

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And then also just some of the issues around Killara High and Lindfield Learning Village local enrolment areas that were announced earlier this year—
how was that change communicated to local parents?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: I'll probably ask Ms Harrington to speak to you about the process, but local parents were communicated with to let them know about boundary changes. We actually had a lot of parents come back to us about that, and some decisions were made to address some of the concerns that were raised. But I might ask Ms Harrington just to explain the process to you. Then we can talk about what we got back through the communication.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want to know the date when parents were told that those changes were coming into effect. Do you have that, Ms Harrington?

LISA HARRINGTON: I don't. I can come back to you on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could you provide that on notice? Thank you. Was the original change of enrolment area due to start next year? Is that the case?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice. We did have conversations with the school community, and some changes were made following that consultation. I can come back to you on notice with those details.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And do you know whether the new boundaries will come into effect at the start of 2028? Is that correct?

LISA HARRINGTON: I'll have to come back to your notice. I'm sorry.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Okay. Do you know, Ms Summerhayes?

DEBORAH SUMMERHAYES: I should take it on notice, Ms Mitchell.

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ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 173.

QUESTION 53 PAGE 74

LISA HARRINGTON: With the new guidelines coming out, and obviously the chief scientist's report, we are conscious that we don't have good central data on where there is synthetic turf through schools. Through our asset management unit, we are now, as the secretary said, collecting data to make sure we understand exactly where synthetic turf is on all school sites. We're collecting that data now and, as part of that, just checking— obviously conscious, as you mentioned, around the heat impacts—to make sure that there are no concerns. As the secretary said, and following your questioning last time, we did go out and really check, particularly that list of schools that you provided. But we are going out to all schools now just to collect that data centrally to make sure we know where it is and that the right shading is in place, recognising those concerns.

Dr AMANDA COHN: I'm really pleased that it's being done in a systematic way. My one quick follow-up question is what's the time frame for the data collection? When will you have that information?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you. The survey is out now, so I can come back to you on notice with that.

ANSWER

Please see answer to transcript question 23.

QUESTION 54 PAGE 75

LISA HARRINGTON: Yes. Just in relation to that clean air study as well, we have very recently received the report. I haven't yet been briefed on the findings, but we're obviously going to be looking at that, because that was that methodical way of checking to make sure that where we do ask for the windows to be open for natural ventilation that there is the appropriate air quality inside. We'll have more information about that soon. I have confirmed that we've received it, but I just need to be briefed on what the findings are.

Dr AMANDA COHN: That answers my earlier question about the Clean Air Schools program, but the question outstanding is what is the current advice that's given to schools around natural ventilation?

MURAT DIZDAR: Natural airflow in those sites, where we ask for the windows to be open. But then we work with them on what air heating and cooling might be required, given the diversity of climatic zones that we've got across New South Wales. If I've got a site where I say, "Keep the windows open" and it's absolutely freezing cold out there, then that's a marker for me and Lisa to make sure we can support that school, because we do it on a case-by-case basis, making sure we can get air heating and cooling into those locations. If I've got that wrong, please add to it, Ms Harrington.

LISA HARRINGTON: Obviously, it was really looked into at COVID time. We do follow the health advice, and natural ventilation is recommended. We do recognise though, as the secretary said, there are some climates where teachers don't want the windows open on particular days. That was part of why we did that clean air study, to just check whether, if that is happening or is not happening, is the air quality inside at the right sort of level for learning. We'll be able to come back to you with more details on that. But yes, we do

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recommend natural ventilation. We do recommend that windows are opened, but we are conscious that that might not be practical in all environments. So that's an ongoing thing that we're looking at.

ANSWER

Please see answer to supplementary question 1.

QUESTION 55 PAGE 75 & 76

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, is the 2024 data for suspensions and expulsions available yet?

MURAT DIZDAR: I'll ask Mr Graham if we have that.

MARTIN GRAHAM: No. That data hasn't been published yet.

The CHAIR: Why has it not been published yet?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I understand that data is still undergoing cleaning and is in preparation for publishing.

The CHAIR: It's very slow. This is something I have been asking about for six years. Before that, Mr Shoebridge also was asking for this information, particularly the disaggregated figures so we can see the percentage of children with disability and the percentage of First Nations kids who are being suspended and expelled. It didn't used to take this long. It's eight months after the end of last year.

MARTIN GRAHAM: I'm advised that's not an unusual amount of time. It is a complex dataset. The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation undertakes that work, and it's published when the data is finalised.

The CHAIR: I've asked several times for the 2023 data to be disaggregated so I can see exactly how many children with disability were being excluded and I haven't been provided with that, either. Do we have that on a disaggregated basis?

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have that in front of me but it is published in a number of different disaggregations. We can have a look at what's available and check that out.

ANSWER

The latest published data regarding suspensions and expulsions data is available at: <https://data.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/nsw-education-suspensions-and-expulsions-in-nsw-government-schools>.

QUESTION 56 PAGE 78

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To you, Mr. Martin, just in relation to Willyama High School HSC students, are there any sort of group special considerations in place for those students, given the impact on their learning being on the Broken Hill High School site?

PAUL MARTIN: As the Committee may be aware, there are two ways in which students can get particular considerations for the HSC. One is disability provisions, the application process for students with a disability that may affect both their teaching and learning and the exam itself. Then there's illness/misadventure, which are things that happen quite close to the day of the HSC rather than things that occur over a long period of time. We've had issues of illness/misadventure where we've wrapped around services in the flood areas of New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I remember.

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PAUL MARTIN: It is the case that it is very difficult to apply a particular provision to a group of students because of issues that may be in relation to construction or a range of other matters in the school. We have a team of people looking at the issues at Willyama and, where we can, we will provide appropriate provision. We will also be talking to UAC around the effect of those sorts of issues on the school themselves. So we try and do as much as we can.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: For the last calendar year and the year before, were there any provisions applied for students at Willyama as a group collective, given that they had to deal with the mould, moving and all of that?

PAUL MARTIN: I'd have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

In 2024, Willyama High School submitted group illness and misadventure applications to NESA, outlining the impacts of power outages caused by severe thunderstorms in the area, coinciding with the 2024 Higher School Certificate (HSC) written exam period. NESA approved these requests.

NESA worked closely with the school to determine support for their Year 12 students and provided advice and support to the principal, including guidance on Year 12 assessment tasks and supplying online teacher support materials. In 2023, the school did not submit any group illness and misadventure application.

QUESTION 57 PAGE 78 & 79

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. Then I just want to take you to the issue that the secretary just raised before in relation to the ITE reforms and the time frame around that. Mr Dizdar, I think you just said 2026 is when the universities have to have their fully aligned programs.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How is that work tracking? Have any universities met that target already? What's the latest on that?

PAUL MARTIN: I'll take it on notice, but we have I think it's 114 initial teacher education programs in New South Wales. We have a team of people at the moment looking at each of the programs for the Teacher Education Expert Panel review recommendations, which go to core content and the neuromyths et cetera that Mr Dizdar was referring to. I think we're more than halfway through our examination of those programs, so we'll have sent back to those universities what they need to do to change and adapt. We're very confident that New South Wales will conclude the process in time with the universities. I might add that, because we already had subject content requirements and core knowledge in New South Wales prior to the TEEP requirements, our universities are well ahead in comparison to some of their State and Territory colleagues. So the short answer is we're looking very positive around the implementation.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Martin's really humble because, at secretary level across the country, it's been stated to me that we're leading the country in making sure that the alignment of the TEEP review with mandatory content is underway and will be adhered to for the start of 2026. Credit to him and his team, they've been hard at it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just so I'm super clear, have some of the providers already gone through that full approval process and they know that they're ready to go, or does that all get tied up at the end of this calendar year?

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PAUL MARTIN: I think it'll be tied up at the end of the calendar year. It's a kind of iterative process where we would send back and then they would send improvements et cetera. We've done more than half of them in that process; we'll have it all concluded. I think it's probably the case that some have already concluded, but I'd have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

NESA has received submissions from all NSW initial teacher education (ITE) providers with evidence of how the nationally mandated core content will be implemented in programs from 2026. NESA is on track to verify all programs by the end of 2025 in line with nationally agreed timelines.

QUESTION 58 PAGE 79

MARTIN GRAHAM: We're looking at a number of actions, one of which includes identification of Defence Force personnel so, for example, when they get posted somewhere, they don't have to go to the local school with 100 points of ID because they might not yet have all the standard paperwork someone might have if they took out a lease and so on. So we're making sure that they can enrol. We're looking at any other changes we might need to the form to be able to enable us to actually take actions like that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's for existing defence personnel, but will people also be able to identify if they're a veteran family as well? Is that something you're looking at?

MARTIN GRAHAM: We've been looking at a range of issues, but they're normally tied to—we need to have a purpose for collecting something. Under the Privacy Act and so on, we'd have to have a reason for collecting that information to actually do something with it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that you wouldn't have been watching Minister Harris's hearing. I'm just wondering whether that veteran family specifically will be identified on those forms or not. I'm happy for you to take it on notice if you don't know.

MARTIN GRAHAM: We can take it on notice. We've certainly taken action for current Defence Force personnel when that has been raised as an issue.

ANSWER

The department is looking into changes to the current enrolment procedures to enable greater flexibility for the enrolment of children from Defence families, particularly where housing has not yet been secured. The department is also reviewing the enrolment application forms to consider the required eligibility fields for enrolment in NSW public schools.

QUESTION 59 PAGE 80

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can allocate as you need to. This is not a new issue, but the challenge around particular subject specialist teachers for secondary school—maths and science. Again, that has been an issue for some time. Is there any data that you have in terms of those specialist teachers on certain subjects and how that's tracking?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Rumung might have data. We just released the day one, term 3 data, and we're 61 per cent below in teacher vacancies from 2023, which is fantastic.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want the specifics, though, for maths and science.

MURAT DIZDAR: High school maths and science?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, high school.

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MURAT DIZDAR: I'll see what Mr Ruming has.

SHAUN RUMING: We'll come back to you on notice in terms of the breakdown. As Mr Dizdar alluded to, the vacancy rate was 962 on day one of term 3. What we have worked out is that about 40 per cent of those vacancies are special ed or TAS. They are far higher than maths, but I'll come back to you with the exact details.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you can provide a breakdown—if they are special ed or TAS. But, as I said, I've had some feedback about maths and science as well. I'm wondering how many teachers are teaching out of area as well that aren't trained maths or science teachers but who are teaching those classes. Do you have any data in relation to that?

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll see what we have. We support teachers that teach out of subject area. As a former high school principal, I had teachers who wanted to because then you can get the qualification and the codes. There's a process; that's not new. But we'll see what data we have.

ANSWER

There has been a significant reduction in the number of vacancies for mathematics and science teachers under the Minns Government, with 8% of remaining vacancies being in these subject areas at the start of Term 3, 2025.

QUESTION 60 PAGE 80 & 81

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Harrington, I think this is for you. There was previously a Smart Energy Schools Pilot Project, which was looking at seeing what we could do to help schools in terms of solar power on roofs and battery storage. I appreciate it was an initiative of the former Government, but is there an update on that pilot and is there any more work being done in that space?

LISA HARRINGTON: We are continuing that pilot. That's still ongoing. We're still collecting data through the Smart Energy Schools Pilot Project. It is still progressing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are there any new schools being added to that?

LISA HARRINGTON: No, we're still collecting data from the existing schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How long will you continue the pilot project for?

LISA HARRINGTON: I can come back to you on notice, but that is still underway. We're still collecting the data to prove up that program.

ANSWER

The department is investigating the best methods to provide renewable energy solutions for NSW public schools through the Smart Energy Schools Pilot Program (SESPP). The program is trialling the application of solar and battery technology, including the optimal and maximum technology sizing for each school and a Virtual Power Plant (VPP).

Battery energy storage systems have been installed at 79 schools with new or upgraded solar systems also installed at most of the schools. Of these, 49 of the schools are participating in the VPP trial, which began in November 2024.

Further information on the Smart Energy Schools Pilot Project is available on the School Infrastructure website at <https://www.schoolinfrastructure.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/we-look-after-our-schools/-smart-energy-schools-pilot-project1.html>.

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QUESTION 61 PAGE 81

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Will those positions stay in the same schools and just continue on as they have been?

MURAT DIZDAR: We've got no intention of taking from the schools that they're in. We'd hope to be able to grow it in time.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are you able to provide a list of which schools those 106 nurses are working at? I'm happy for you to do it on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: We can do that.

ANSWER

The Wellbeing Health In-Reach Nurse Coordinator Program is a partnership between NSW Health and the NSW Department of Education. The program funds 106 wellbeing nurse positions who provide service across more than 400 public schools in NSW. Locations of schools where a wellbeing nurse is allocated is available on the NSW Health website at: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Pages/whin-map.aspx>.

QUESTION 62 PAGE 81 & 82

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have figures as to how many hearing support teachers there are in schools across the State?

MURAT DIZDAR: We would definitely know how many we've got and how many students they're supporting. I think Mr. Graham's got it.

MARTIN GRAHAM: I don't have that here but we can take that on notice. There certainly hasn't been any reduction in support.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you provide that on notice and, if possible, a breakdown of, if not potentially the specific school—if you can, that would be great—then even just the general area where they're working out of?

ANSWER

The department has over 270 itinerant support teacher hearing positions across NSW supporting over 1,900 students. Itinerant Hearing Support is available to all NSW public schools, based on student eligibility.

QUESTION 63 PAGE 82

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's probably a segue to you, Mr Martin, in terms of the new curriculum and the rollout around consent and respectful relationships. Obviously, to have that consistency from primary to secondary schools and across school sectors, when is the time frame of that being fully implemented in schools?

PAUL MARTIN: The K-6 PDHPE syllabus has already been released. The 7-10 PDHPE syllabus was released earlier this year, I believe. There will be 18 months of familiarisation. I'll take on notice the specifics, but I believe 7-10 is 2027. It does have that continuum of respectful relationships and consent all the way through.

ANSWER

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The new Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) K–6 Syllabus (2024) and PDHPE 7–10 Syllabus (2024) were both published in July 2024. These new syllabuses are to be implemented from 2027 and will replace the PDHPE K–10 Syllabus (2018). School sectors are responsible for implementing syllabuses and provide schools with specific guidance and information on implementation. Schools may choose to implement the new syllabuses during the planning and preparation phase for the PDHPE syllabuses in 2025 and 2026.

QUESTION 64 PAGE 82

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Going back to the professional learning that's available and what's on offer for teachers and school staff, is there an evaluation process to measure the impact of that training and whether it's giving teachers specifically the adequate supports that they need? How do you assess that it's effective?

MURAT DIZDAR: We run a general—across all the PL that we offer across the department—an evaluation of it. We want to get feedback continuously. Is it helpful? Is it hitting the mark? The most recent one I can talk to is the high potential and gifted education training that we rolled out across the State. It was on a school development day, with 42 modules that were provided. In fact, at this week's executive meeting on Tuesday, we were looking at the data, and 80 per cent of teachers across the State had said that it was very helpful and hit the mark. I'm part of that workforce. We are not shy in saying if it doesn't hit the mark, so we were quite pleased that 80 per cent had reported that it was very useful and helpful. There were further questions about what other training and support are you looking for. It was a series of about 10 questions. We do surveys and get feedback on every single PL we run.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have any data specifically on the family and domestic violence PL and what the teacher feedback has been?

MURAT DIZDAR: We would.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would you be able to provide that on notice? That's great for the high potential and gifted—

MURAT DIZDAR: I was just giving an example.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that, but I'm more specifically interested—

MURAT DIZDAR: We would. Let's go back and have a look.

ANSWER

An evaluation of the Respectful Relationships Education program, including the family and domestic violence professional learning, is being undertaken by the department.

In Terms 3 and 4, 2025, professional learning and resources are being trialled in 10 Case Study Schools ahead of release to all schools in 2026.

QUESTION 65 PAGE 84

The CHAIR: When it comes to licensing for uniform shops and canteens in public schools, where does that sit?

LISA HARRINGTON: Operations.

The CHAIR: That's all with operations now. It is quite a different-looking Asset Activations team there.

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MURAT DIZDAR: I made those moves because I think it's a much better fit helping schools on the operations arm, and infrastructure focusing on the infrastructure arm.

The CHAIR: In terms of the licensing, then, for the OOSHs—that's sitting in operations—is there a special team, or are there contract managers sitting there? And if so, how many?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms McCabe can talk to that.

MELINDA McCABE: Yes, there's a team that looks after that. It sits in the procurement function.

The CHAIR: How many contract managers are there in that—or staff?

MELINDA McCABE: I might take that on notice, about how many contract managers. Are you just talking for just the OOSH, because it's a joint team?

The CHAIR: They're doing OOSH, uniform and canteens.

MELINDA McCABE: I'll get you the number on notice, yes.

ANSWER

The Shared Use of Schools team manage the licences for Out of School Hours Care (OOSH), Canteens and Uniforms. They have a total of 10 Contract Managers and 8 Project Officers.

QUESTION 66 PAGE 85

The CHAIR: In answers to questions on notice that I got back in May of this year, the department said:

If a provider has been prosecuted for safety, child protection or compliance breaches, this is taken into account during the tender process for OSHC licences.

The question is how do you know? Is there a check made with the regulator before you then approve a new licence?

MELINDA McCABE: That's right. If you're talking about new licences through the tender process as new—

The CHAIR: New licences but not necessarily new licensees.

MELINDA McCABE: Yes, they're required to submit an application to the early childhood and care regulator. As part of the licence agreement with the department, they must provide a service approval within three months from the regulator.

The CHAIR: But, for example, Camp Australia has had multiple prosecutions in New South Wales and in other jurisdictions, like WA, but they keep winning OOSH tenders here in New South Wales over non-profit parent-managed services. Another corporate provider, Extend, has been prosecuted multiple times in New South Wales for child safety matters and they keep winning tenders. How exactly is it then taken into consideration?

MELINDA McCABE: I might need to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I'd like to know how that gets—it seems like, again, it's another one of those situations where the information held by the regulator is not necessarily getting through to something as important as winning a new tender on a school site. If you're taking that on notice, could you also look at whether consideration is given only if there's an actual prosecution on record? Or do you speak with the regulator about whether, for instance, there's a plea deal and we may not know who the provider was, but the regulator knows that they're a risky provider, for instance?

MELINDA McCABE: I'll take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Also, while you're at it, if the prosecutions in other jurisdictions are taken into account as well. A lot of these providers are now nationwide, or sitting in a lot of different States and Territories.

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ANSWER

As part of any OOSH tender, the department requires prospective tenderers to provide information regarding their provider approval, service approval and compliance history. The department may also review the tenderer's compliance history using other methods including sharing information with the Regulatory Authority in accordance with approved internal information sharing policies.

The Regulatory Authority may also confirm that the compliance history declared in tender applications submitted by providers is accurate or highlight inconsistencies or concerns.

The Regulatory Authority may also facilitate sharing confirmation of a pending and/or current prosecution of a particular service and/or provider to inform eligibility for tendering or any ongoing monitoring of licencing compliance.

QUESTION 67 PAGE 85

DANIEL FRENCH: In the scheme of the overall funding that we have for schools, it's a very small amount. For each school, we know that principals make decisions, knowing their community, on the amount that's asked for. That particular amount can be found in annual school reports, which are published on websites. But we're looking at around \$30 million a year that's taken in at the system level for voluntary contributions, which, as I said, over the whole budget envelope is a very small amount.

The CHAIR: But parents are spending \$30 million?

DANIEL FRENCH: That's voluntary contributions that are provided.

The CHAIR: From parents?

DANIEL FRENCH: Yes.

The CHAIR: So parents are spending \$30 million.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's the amalgam across the 2,219 sites, yes.

The CHAIR: What was it the year before?

DANIEL FRENCH: I'd have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: I think we've got it somewhere. I'm sure someone is busy looking it up for me.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's been stable for a number of years. My notes would say it's been pretty stable since 2017.

The CHAIR: In 2023 it was \$29 million.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The CHAIR: In 2024, you've just said, was \$30 million?

DANIEL FRENCH: Approximately. I can take on notice the exact amount.

The CHAIR: That indicates to me it's not getting better, though.

MURAT DIZDAR: I'm one of those parents, and I'm in a position where I do want to contribute. I understand what voluntary means. I want to make sure every one of our sites are really clear that there's no compulsion, there's no fees. This is a public education provision. We allocate the school-based allocation resource to fund that. But voluntary contributions are not new. What I want to make sure that we get right everywhere is that we make it clear around the communication—no compulsion. If you cannot afford it, you don't need to be contributing. But in plenty of school contexts—like myself, I can do it, I want to do it, I want to support the school. The school puts that to other programs and initiatives.

The CHAIR: Can we make a distinction, though, and perhaps this is caught in a different—I know we've talked about the difference between voluntary contributions and the amounts paid toward subjects, excursions and things. I understand that there are situations where parents may want to just donate money to the school. I don't think that anyone sees any

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particular problem with that. The problem seems to be, and the information that comes to my office that causes concern, is when a parent is faced with a situation where if they don't pay a certain amount of money, their child doesn't get to participate in the thing that all of their friends get to participate in. When you couple that with what parents are saying is an increased outsourcing, particularly with things like sport, it puts them in a really unfortunate position where they're having to decide between how much they can spend on the groceries that week and whether their child can attend the trampolining event on a Monday afternoon with the rest of their sports class. So how are we capturing that information and making sure that's not out of control?

MURAT DIZDAR: That's a really good question, because in my system, the system I preside over, you cannot exclude a child or a family's child from the compulsory curriculum delivery on contribution. You cannot do that, whether that's voluntary or whether that's subject fee. That's quite different to an overseas excursion. My child's high school went to America on a dance tour for 14 days, which was fantastic and an amazing experience. That had a cost component to it. The expectation in the system is if there's a family that cannot meet even that cost component, that we would do what we could at a school level around student assistance. But I know you're not saying that should be free. That obviously would have a cost and the family would contribute. But if it was the dance curriculum at the school, you couldn't exclude that child from that.

The CHAIR: No. For example, my kids get to choose their particular sport. They might get to go tenpin bowling or they can go walk around the school track, which is free, or they can go and do a Clip 'n Climb or something. But those external ones have costs.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct.

The CHAIR: What happens if they don't want to do the free one and instead they would like to go with their friends to something else? What are we doing in those circumstances?

MURAT DIZDAR: If that family is financially challenged, then we ask them to approach the school for support. We know—and Ms Summerhayes can also talk to this—many schools that don't ask for any voluntary contributions, do not collect any excursion fees/incursion fees are really high-equity schools. They recognise and respect the school context they're serving. They use our equity loading to make sure they don't put any family in a situation where they are facing financial complexity. And then you might have a school that has families from a lot of advantaged backgrounds and there can still be some students and families that are facing considerable complexity and financial hardship. We ask them to approach the school because schools know that they can give student support assistance. What I want to get right and continue to improve is the clarity around this—that every school communicates in this way.

The CHAIR: I think there is a very big difference between saying to people—I know a lot of parents that just don't have as much food for themselves that week because they want to make sure that they are paying for their children. They might be too proud or might not think that they are in a position to be asking the school for help. How are we tracking that and making sure that's not blowing out and getting out of control? Is that within the subject contributions line? I think it was \$41 million in 2023 that parents were paying.

MURAT DIZDAR: Subject contributions largely apply in our high school context, and they largely come into play in year 11 and 12. If you're going to do things like metalwork, woodwork and hospitality, there is often a subject contribution for materials. If I go to hospitality, there is the—I won't get the technical words right, so Ms Summerhayes might help me—knife set that might be required and the apron and uniform that might be required, so there is a subject contribution. If a family can't make that subject contribution, Ms Summerhayes and I make it clear to the ground that you can't preclude that child from doing hospitality.

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The CHAIR: But then where is the amount for the tenpin bowling? How do we capture that amount when parents have optionally decided to send their children to the more expensive sports thing?

MURAT DIZDAR: That is often captured—and Mr French will correct me if I get it wrong—in the extracurricular bucket. Is that right, Mr French?

The CHAIR: What is that figure?

DANIEL FRENCH: We can take that figure on notice, but I think what is important to note—that Mr Dizdar or the secretary has already covered off on—is that we know that there are a number of schools across the State that seek to contribute using their low SES RAM funding to support those sorts of activities. For instance, earlier in term 1, I was at Villawood East Public School where the principal made it well known that they use their RAM funding to support those extracurricular activities of students that are from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is a really important provision that is provided. The category that you are talking about would fall under extracurricular and excursion; however, the same thing applies that Mr Dizdar talked about before with the subject contributions—that families can also ask for financial assistance from schools in relation to some of those.

The CHAIR: They can ask, but that doesn't mean that they are going to get.

MURAT DIZDAR: This is quite a sensitive topic. I was one of those households you are referring to. My family went without and were too proud and paid for those things and would not have known of those mechanisms. It is a personal topic for me as well. In my experience, if a family approaches the school and says, "I need help on this front", I do not hear that that help is not forthcoming. I hear instances where the school might not be able to, and that is where we ask them to reach out to Ms Summerhayes and her team so that we can assist.

The CHAIR: That is promising. I guess what I'm trying to get to is that I don't want us to get to a world where every class on a Monday afternoon is going off instead of being supervised at school and we are, as parents, paying for our kids to go everywhere else. I just want to make sure that we are tracking to make sure that doesn't get out of control. If there is \$41 million for 2023 subject contributions, what is that in 2024?

DANIEL FRENCH: I might be able to help on the last point that you made there. I don't have the exact figures at hand to be able to tell you, but what we did see was a reduction over the pandemic in the amount taken in through excursions and extracurricular.

The CHAIR: You would expect.

DANIEL FRENCH: Coming out the other side of that pandemic, what we haven't seen is the dramatic increase from pre-pandemic. There is not a great deal of difference between what was taken in before the pandemic compared to what we have seen in 2024.

MURAT DIZDAR: Subject contributions have dropped, as a global amount, since 2022, which is a promising sign.

The CHAIR: What was it in 2024?

MURAT DIZDAR: In 2022 it was close to \$44 million. If I've got it right, it's close to \$41 million.

The CHAIR: In 2023 it was 41—

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct, it's very close to that figure.

The CHAIR: But we don't have 2024 figures?

MURAT DIZDAR: I don't have the exact figure. My notes say it's similar to '23.

ANSWER

Voluntary contributions in 2024 totalled \$30,771,404. Subject contributions in 2024 totalled \$40,801,483. School sport contributions in 2024 totalled \$43,495,404.

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QUESTION 68 PAGE 86

The CHAIR: Can I invite Mr Backo back. Were you able to find out any more information for me in relation to the Busy Bees at New Lambton?

NICHOLAS BACKO: Yes, I can provide some further information for you, Ms Boyd, and then obviously if there are additional questions or information, I'd have to take the question on notice and I'm happy to provide that in due course. Firstly, I acknowledge, as I did earlier, how serious the incident is. That is why we made the decision to issue the show cause notice. That's one of the more significant compliance actions that we take, with the end result of that having the possibility of a cancellation of a service approval.

What we received back from the provider was extensive evidence. We reviewed their response, and in reviewing that response, we considered the information provided, but we also did further visits to the service to confirm what they provided to us was indeed accurate. As I said earlier, we've done seven visits to the service since that incident, with the most recent visit being on 19 August, and continued to monitor the service really closely. In terms of the response that we received back, it included extensive details about a number of improvements related to things like induction of staff, and additional training and support to the existing staff. So they detailed additional training that was provided across their workforce, information about risk assessments and then additional staffing.

The CHAIR: Given that they had, I believe, ratio breaches and all sorts of things, that doesn't sound like a particularly—it's my opinion—compelling reason to stay open. You say there were seven visits since then.

NICHOLAS BACKO: Yes.

The CHAIR: But not one of them was a ratings visit, and they still have a rating that they are meeting standards. Why has there been no rating of that service since October 2022, given these serious incidents?

NICHOLAS BACKO: My understanding is—of course, we'll correct the record on notice if my understanding is incorrect—that one of the additional visits that has occurred since that incident was an assessment and rating visit, and that process is underway. There is not a final outcome from the further assessment and rating visit, but, again, I'm happy to provide further details on notice. That's my understanding.

The CHAIR: If you could come back telling us what the timeline for getting that new rating would be as well—

NICHOLAS BACKO: Sure.

ANSWER

An assessment and rating visit was conducted in July 2025, with the final report and quality rating to be issued shortly. The rating will then be published on Starting Blocks and displayed at the service.