

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Tuesday, 5 September 2017

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

EDUCATION

CORRECTED PROOF

The Committee met at 2.00 p.m.

MEMBERS

The Hon. Lou Amato (Chair)

Mr Justin Field

The Hon. John Graham

The Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones (Deputy Chair)

Mr Taylor Martin

Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile

The Hon. Lynda Voltz

PRESENT

Mr Rob Stokes, *Minister for Education*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the Portfolio Committee No. 3 inquiry into the budget estimates 2017-18. I acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are the traditional custodians of this land. I also pay respect to elders, past and present, of the Eora nation, and extend our respects to other Aborigines present. I welcome Minister Stokes and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Education.

Today's hearing is open to the public and is being broadcast live by the Parliament's website. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, while members of the media may film or record Committee members and witnesses, people in the public gallery should not be the primary focus of any filming or photography. I also remind media representatives that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. The guidelines for the broadcast of proceedings are available from the secretariat.

There may be some questions that a witness could answer if only they had more time, or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances witnesses are advised that they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 21 days. Any messages from advisers or members of staff seated in the public gallery should be delivered through the Committee secretariat. Minister, I remind you and the officers accompanying you that you are free to pass notes and to refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you.

Transcripts of this hearing will be available on the web from tomorrow morning. Finally, would everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing. All witnesses from departments, statutory bodies or corporations will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to office as a member of Parliament. I remind Ms Georgina Harrison and Ms Leslie Loble from the Department of Education that they do not need to be sworn because they were sworn at an earlier budget estimates hearing.

MARK SCOTT, Secretary, Department of Education, sworn and examined

GEORGINA HARRISSON, Deputy Secretary, Educational Services, Department of Education, on former oath

PETER RIORDAN, Deputy Secretary, Corporate Services, Department of Education, sworn and examined

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

JANET DAVY, Strategy and Evaluation, Department of Education, affirmed and examined

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

DAVID de CARVALHO, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, sworn and examined

DAVID MURPHY, Executive Director, Corporate Governance and School Standards, NSW Education Standards Authority, sworn and examined

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: According to the "Property Asset Sales Report", in the 2011-12 financial year you sold 33 assets, in 2012-13 you sold 26 assets, and in 2013-14 you sold 22 assets. Is it correct that from that time until now you have sold 687 assets?

Mr ROB STOKES: I would need to see the document to which you are referring. That does not accord with my understanding of the facts.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It is a document from Property NSW, and it states that in this financial year, which has not concluded, there have been 384 asset sales.

Mr ROB STOKES: That is not correct.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am sorry, that figure should be 162.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to go through this, but the figures you are quoting do not reconcile with my understanding.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What were the asset sales for the 2015-16 financial year?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to provide the details on notice because I do not have them off the top of my head. You said there were 384 asset sales during that period. There may be some confusion about assets that belong to bodies like universities or Aboriginal land councils. My understanding is that 42 Department of Education properties were sold over that period.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Is that the figure for 2015-16?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take the question on notice. The figure you referred to was 384.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but I think that is the total figure for that period.

Mr ROB STOKES: It was not 384 properties; it was 42 properties. We need to examine those properties. Some sales related to road alignments; for example, there was a 3.3 square metre boundary adjustment at the Rowland Hassell School at Parramatta. The council was encroaching on the school and an agreement was reached to transfer the land concerned. We sold 10 square metres of land in Moruya to allow the council to build a footpath. We are working on a \$100 million expansion of the Pacific Highway at Lisarow and some road alignment boundary adjustments had to be made. A range of different issues arise. Mulwaree High School was probably the biggest issue during the 2016 calendar year. The Department of Education agreed to sell a reasonably large site of some 6,000 square metres to the Challenge Foundation, which is a charity providing disability support services.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Will you provide a full list of all the land and buildings you have sold this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to do so. However, we must examine these things in context. I have provided a few examples. Obviously the Department of Education is focused on learning and teaching, which you would expect it to be. Where there are land assets that do not have any current or potential future educational purpose, we want to ensure that those resources are expended where they should be in providing quality education services to our young people.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: In the last financial year what land has specifically been purchased or earmarked for purchase for the purpose of building public schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again I will provide full details on notice. But off the top of my head, I think we have purchased land for a school at Bardia, for example. At Merrylands East we have purchased land. Another example would be Homebush West—actually, that is a really interesting example because that involved some negotiations with the local council at Strathfield. We purchased a former Anglican church and rectory which has some heritage elements at which we are looking. A portion of the roadway there—I think it is Exeter Road from memory—obviously not a vehicular part, will be used for the school. That is a school we are expanding; it has an expanding population. We are focused on trying to ensure that there is appropriate land for our growing school communities. I am not sure whether the secretary has anything further to add.

Mr SCOTT: I simply add that it is the biggest building program we have ever had in New South Wales schools so of course a significant acquisition program is underway in anticipation of the \$4.5 billion school building program that is underway for coming years. We will be able to provide a detailed list for you of the sites we have acquired.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, in February this year you were quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying that the department would need to build 12 to 15 new schools a year to meet the gap in school places.

Mr ROB STOKES: I recall my words quite distinctly. I was speaking about the entire sector not just about government schools. It is to meet the increase in enrolments we are anticipating over the next 15 years in government schools—about a 21 per cent increase—and an increase of about 164,000 students. We are projecting an increase of about 100,000 students in the non-government sector—they have different figures, but that is what we believe. It is a statement of fact that there will be the equivalent of 12 new schools each and every year.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, what new schools have been opened this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will happily provide some details. We are providing assistance in relation to a large number of schools. I am pleased to confirm those that have been completed since February. When I assumed this ministry there have been the Fernhill School and Point Clare Public School upgrade. I was there with Scott Campbell, the principal. At Fernhill School Julia Raciborska is doing an excellent job. At Harbord Public School a significant upgrade was completed. At Bourke Street Public School there was another upgrade. Rowland Hassall school was one I mentioned where we had also sold 3.3 square metres of land. That is an important education facility in Parramatta. Those are the schools thus far. I will refer to capital works that have commenced construction during the period I have been Minister. I refer to a very big one—Arthur Phillip High School. There is also Parramatta Public School and the new primary school at Bella Vista. Stage one construction has commenced and stage two has been announced. Recently I was at Cherrybrook Technology High School with the Premier looking at the upgrade that has commenced. Cleveland Street Intensive English High School—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, which ones of these are new schools? I know that a lot of upgrades are going on—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Which ones are new schools that have opened?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Which new schools have you opened since you became Minister?

Mr ROB STOKES: I think you need to be very clear here. My responsibility, which is clear in the Education Act, is to ensure there is a place available for every student who seeks a place in a New South Wales public school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but my question is: What new schools have you opened this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will continue my list. The networked specialist school is a new school that is currently being constructed in Dubbo. I have already referred to the Homebush West Public School upgrade.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Has that been opened this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, that is currently under construction.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: My question is: What new schools have you opened this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will continue my list. I appreciate you get to ask whatever questions you want—I do not influence your choice there—but I answer them in the way that I see best. I refer to the Hunter Sports High School upgrade—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is nice, Minister, but your answer has to be relevant to the question.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes, and I am being entirely relevant. You are asking me about augmentation to new schools and existing schools—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, the question is about new schools being opened, not about school upgrades.

Mr ROB STOKES: Narellan school is a new school that is currently under construction. I think you are suggesting that a certain number of schools should have been specifically opened within a six-month period. It takes longer than six months to build a school. But we certainly have more than half a billion dollars worth of capital works in schools currently underway. We are entirely—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, surely you have been in government for six years so there would have been new schools in the planning. In this 12-month period what new schools have you opened?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have already referred to a number of schools where works have been completed in the past six months.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Let us go to some of the works that you are completing. Let us go to the new high school in Parramatta. What is the new capacity of the high school over the existing capacity?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to take specific details on notice but I think it is an increase of about 29 classrooms. The best way to think of this—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Sorry, Minister, what is the number of students?

Mr ROB STOKES: When you are looking at new schools one area on which you might be getting confused is that not every school is the same size. Perhaps it is better to describe them not as new schools specifically because, as I said, every school is a different size. We are talking about additional classrooms. We have a very clear policy in relation to class sizes. The capacity of classrooms is a very clear measure to use. For example, we have announced—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It is 29 classrooms of the 7,200 additional classrooms needed.

Mr ROB STOKES: Let me finish my answer. As the secretary has mentioned, in the last budget we announced, for example, \$4.2 billion worth of works over the next four years, \$2.2 billion of which will start over the next two years. In relation to those works, we are talking about 123 projects that will increase capacity by about 1,500 classrooms. That will provide for about 32,000 extra students.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The original budget for Arthur Phillip High School and Parramatta Public School is projected to cost \$100 million. Is that still the budget?

Mr ROB STOKES: I can confirm that the budget for both those schools, which will provide a capacity for 3,000 students, is \$225 million.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If it is \$225 million why is the school website still saying that the cost of the project is \$100 million?

Mr ROB STOKES: I can confirm that the total projected cost is \$225 million.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You say that the new project will provide capacity for 3,000 students. What is the current capacity?

Mr ROB STOKES: I would have to get you the figures relating to Parramatta Public School. In Arthur Phillip High School I think again it is 29 additional classrooms.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You just mentioned student numbers. I am not asking for student numbers.

Mr ROB STOKES: Again I am happy to find those figures on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I return to the general point. You said that the property asset sales report includes 42 education properties being sold.

Mr ROB STOKES: Over that period. Over this year—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Over the five years, is that correct?

Mr ROB STOKES: No. I think there was an issue—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Over a number of years.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: For 2015-16.

Mr ROB STOKES: This year, for example—I am happy to take it on notice—I think it is 26. It might be 23.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In 2016-17, 26 schools were sold?

Mr ROB STOKES: No schools were sold. There were a few, for example—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Department of Education properties were sold.

Mr ROB STOKES: There were some road reserves, there was some disused housing—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: In 2016-17 there were 26.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, as I said, I think it was 23. Again, I am happy to take it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you could, that would be good.

Mr ROB STOKES: I might refer it to the secretary. You have to look at this in context. For example—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have any schools or any properties been sold since 30 June this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: You can ask another question, but I will answer the previous question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you sold any since 30 June? You have answered my previous question, Minister.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, I have not, with respect. I think there were 23 properties but I will confirm that on notice. As you have indicated, I have already answered your question relating to the specific purposes for which those properties were previously used. The answer is: not terribly much. That is the point of the disposal.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you sold any since 30 June?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am just going to keep answering the question. If you ask me another question on top of it—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This could take some time.

Mr ROB STOKES: That is fine. You have to recognise that in any given year the department will buy and/or sell property to meet the educational needs of the community. That is what you would expect the department to do. For example, if I look at the last year in which—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: These sales are increasing. The assets register reveals 33, then 26, then 22, then 141, then 162. This is speeding up. You have made the observation they are not all Department of Education school properties; I accept that. You have given us some other numbers. Have you sold any since 30 June? Is this increase in sales continuing?

Mr ROB STOKES: Can I just take you back?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, I am asking you has this increase continued since 30 June? Have you sold any this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: I do not accept the premise of your questioning, the reason being that you are saying—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you concede that the sales are speeding up?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, actually.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, you do not?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to give you some details, if you would let me finish. For example, I just pull one figure out: In 2009-2010, which was the last year that your party was represented in government in this place, again from the top of my head, I think it was 36 properties were sold, this year it is 23. I will give you an example—in my community that I am proud to represent in Pittwater, the Narrabeen Lakes Public School, where the enrolment has increased from 289 to 409 in the period since the 2009-2010 year. The then government sold off part of the playground of that site, which is now proudly hosting a unit block.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you for the history lesson.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, because the important thing here was you made an assertion in your question that the sales were accelerating.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have given us some details, I appreciate you are taking some on notice. Have you opened a single school?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have just mentioned an example of a year, which was in the past, which—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you opened a single school?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Point of order: Are we having questions or entering into a debate?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We are not having answers.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask this simple question: Minister, have you opened a single new school since you became Minister for Education?

Mr ROB STOKES: Can I just—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: A single new school, not an upgrade, not starting construction, a single new school?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have already pointed you to a list of new schools. Fernhill that I have mentioned—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is that a new school you have opened; is that what you are telling us?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have gone through a series of—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Have you opened a single new school?

Mr ROB STOKES: Excuse me, Mr Chair, I cannot honestly continue. I am here because I believe in this process—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It is a simple question.

Mr ROB STOKES: —and I think it is important that I be given the opportunity to answer the questions.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Point of order: The Minister's answers to a question must be relevant. I ask you to bring the Minister back to being relevant to the questions that are being asked of him.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: To the point of order: There were multiple questions being fired at the Minister and the Minister was attempting to answer at least one of those questions.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Further to the point of order: The one question we are asking is has the Minister opened any new school this year. It is a very specific question. We would like a very specific answer. That is the question, we would like a relevant answer. Has the Minister opened a new school this year?

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Maybe let the Minister answer it.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to go through my answer once again, but I have provided a huge amount of examples of the work that is currently underway.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Upgrades, starting construction.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The answer would be no.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The answer is no.

Mr ROB STOKES: Upgrades that have been completed.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The answer is no.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The answer is no.

The CHAIR: The Minister is generally relevant.

Mr ROB STOKES: Upgrades that are completed, as well as works that are currently underway, as well as a whole series of projected works.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are you telling me you have sold off more schools than you have opened this year?

Mr ROB STOKES: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Is that what you are telling me, you have sold off more schools than you have opened?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, that is not what I am telling you.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you give me a guarantee that it is not correct that you have sold off more schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have already answered your question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: On the figures you have provided already, that is certainly the record of this Government.

Mr ROB STOKES: No, I do not agree.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have opened two schools a year and you have been selling multiple properties.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Is the land at Macquarie boys high school being retained by the Department of Education?

Mr ROB STOKES: From my recollection, this was a school that was closed down by the Labor Government.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: To hand over to TAFE for education purposes, yes.

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, my understanding was that it was a school that the Labor Party closed down, but I am happy to refer to the secretary for details.

Mr SCOTT: The site was closed under the previous government and was deemed no longer needed for education purposes and was declared surplus to educational requirements in 2012.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: In 2012 it was deemed surplus?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, that is right.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But when it was closed as a high school under the Labor Government, it was for it to be used as a TAFE educational facility; is that correct?

Mr SCOTT: I do not have that detail. What I can tell you is that a review was made several years ago, in 2012, as to the uses of that site. It was declared that it was no longer needed for educational purpose and so was declared surplus to educational requirements, five years ago now.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are selling the school site?

Mr SCOTT: Yes, a disposal process is underway.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are selling a school site?

Mr SCOTT: A school that was closed, now the best part of a decade ago. Can I add to this, I think as the Minister has said, there is a very long established pattern across the department for decades now that land will be acquired and land will be disposed of. Land will only be disposed of when it is deemed not needed for current or future educational uses. As the Minister pointed out, some of the land that is being sold—you have spoken in terms of schools—is not schools at all, it is patches or tracts of land. It is some transaction and I think

some of the aggregated numbers that you were referring to do not refer to land that is owned by the Department of Education.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Except for Macquarie boys high school.

Mr SCOTT: But we are, of course, continuing to be a significant acquirer of land now to underpin the biggest building program the department has ever undertaken—\$4.5 billion worth of new capital works, significant renovation and, of course, the biggest maintenance program we have seen.

From time to time, as any owner of assets, we will divest when it makes no sense to hold onto that asset, but what we will do with the revenue from that, the income from that, we will invest that in new acquisitions or capital developments that are meeting the needs of students in this State. That is the strategy and I would say that that strategy has been the strategy employed by the department for decades now.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: The Department of Education owned land that is part of the Mambo Wetlands and in the middle of last year it was described as having been accidentally sold at auction to a property developer. This was despite significant concerns over the sale of this land and calls from the general manager to your predecessor to halt the sale until discussions could be held around a wetland reserve. The Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter, Scott MacDonald, has confirmed it was a mistake that this land was sold—that is certainly what he said in the media—for only \$250,000, when adjacent housing blocks were regularly selling for over a million dollars; although granted, this was E2 land. Given the admission by the parliamentary secretary that the sale was a mistake, is the department taking any action to correct this mistake, to purchase back the land or other corrective measures?

Mr ROB STOKES: I recall this matter because I received representations on it while planning Minister. While obviously recognising the significant conservation value of the land, I remember at the time making inquiries in relation to the appropriate zoning of the land and the uses to which the land could be put. That is why in fact it has got the highest environmental zoning outside a national park, an environmental conservation zone, which is appropriate given the sensitivity of the Mambo Wetlands and recognising how important wetlands communities are for water filtration and to the broader Port Stephens waterway. In any event, that is not land that I have received advice about, not having any continuing interest in it from an educational perspective, but I do recall it from a conservation perspective. I am happy if the secretary has further details.

Mr RIORDAN: It was sold by competitive tender, an online auction, back in July 2016. That sale was managed by Property NSW. The land remains zoned E2 Environmental Conservation and any change to that would be a matter for the Port Stephens Council to take into consideration.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Mr MacDonald said in the media last year, "The Government shouldn't have sold it. If surplus land like this is being sold, we need to jump on it for habitat." I appreciate this is Education budget estimates, but he said that "The department just put it in a bucket with Finance and their sole remit is how much money can we get. There should have been more communication between departments." You hold a lot of land, some of which is deemed surplus at times. Can you give us any assurance that where there are opportunities for land to be used in other ways for public purposes, whether it be environmental or other, that communications have improved between you and other departments so we do not have these sorts of mistakes happening again?

Mr ROB STOKES: I accept the premise of your question. School Infrastructure NSW has been charged with looking at the way in which our land holdings are used. Quite appropriately, we will always seek to acquire land where it is required for educational purposes, but if land is not currently required, or likely to be required for educational purposes, it is appropriate that we no longer seek to hold that land when its value could be better used by the community in another way. While I have asked School Infrastructure NSW to be more strategic in its approach to these sorts of matters I am happy to take representations in relation to individual parcels. If people are able to identify land for which they can see a particular purpose—where land clearly is of no educational benefit; it is still public land—we will obviously look at an appropriate use for that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Are you aware of any efforts within government—I appreciate it may not be within your department—to purchase that land back from the developer?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am not aware. As an aside, something that I would always seek to do in this portfolio is to recognise the importance of managing land appropriately, regardless of whether it is held in public or private hands. I recognise that, while we have almost 10 per cent of the land in the State in national parks, it is important that we use land appropriately wherever it is.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I move on to the anti-racism programs within schools. You put out advice to schools early this year that all schools are required to have a trained anti-racism contact officer [ARCO] and that principals are responsible for including anti-racism education strategies in their school plans and report on the implementation through their annual reports. Can you advise how many public schools in New South Wales currently have a designated anti-racism contact officer?

Mr ROB STOKES: As it is a specific operational matter I will refer you to the secretary, but obviously we need schools to be safe and inclusive communities for everyone. So unlawful discrimination of any kind in schools obviously needs to be addressed. Also within broader school communities we need to educate young people about their responsibilities outside of schools.

Mr DIZDAR: Anti-racism contact officer positions have been long established within all our public schools. I indicate to Committee members if they are not across this matter that it is not a new role within our public school system. In responding to the question about numbers, I would have to take that on notice and come back to you. The system has, for a long time, provided systematic support to upskill our staff in our schools to take a lead in that anti-racism officer role. The Committee should recognise that these people are classroom practitioners or in executive roles and they take on this broader role in the school context.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Given this is a long-standing program—I appreciate that—what was the reason for putting out the advice in May? Would you not have some confidence that all schools already have this program or an officer in place?

Mr DIZDAR: From time to time, across a number of programs, across a number of initiatives, across a number of roles in our schools we provide reminders for our school communities around the importance of things such as those to which the Minister referred. In this role the reminder is about anti-racism. In my career in public education in New South Wales I can point to at least three or four occasions where those reminders would have occurred in this program. So it would not be unusual for us to put out a reminder.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How many ARCOs have undergone ARCO training in the past 12 months?

Mr DIZDAR: I am happy to take that on notice and provide that to the Committee.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Do you know how many have undertaken the anti-racism contact officer blended online training course that has been coordinated by the schools services team? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr DIZDAR: Maybe I will take that on notice as well.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How does the department guarantee that 100 per cent of public schools have a trained officer in place? You mentioned in your advice that they are to report back in their annual reports. What steps does the department take to check those reports and guarantee that schools that are not meeting the requirement or the expectation are informed of that at the time and assisted to do so?

Mr DIZDAR: Just as you have indicated we do that in the public reporting domain. Our annual school reports are done on an annual basis by the end of term one of the following school year. So the 2017 annual reports will go up by the end of term one—2018. We have important system roles called directors—public schools and directors—who oversight principal networks. They play an important role in supporting principals. As you would appreciate, from time to time—because of the mobility of the workforce and often through promotion into other settings—schools may lose their ARCOs. The director would then tap into what training provision exists to upskill our next person in that school setting. So the director plays a role in overseeing and supporting our school principals and communities, not only in this area but in a multiplicity of areas—in particular, with respect to anti-racism contact officers.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, I would like to talk briefly about preschools. I know you are not the Minister responsible for early childhood education. I have looked into this issue quite a bit. The statistics coming out of Western Australia, which is much more heavily reliant on government-run preschools, seem to show that they have much better attendance rates. They come much closer to the expectations of the national partnership agreement between the States and the Commonwealth about attendance, and they have the most affordable—mostly fee—preschools. Has any consideration been given within the New South Wales Government—and your department—to increasing the number of government-run preschools across New South Wales? As my time for questions is up I am happy to come back to this matter afterwards.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I have some general questions about the Special Religious Education [SRE] and chaplaincy programs. What more can be done by churches and other religious organisations to assist in the SRE programs in State schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: There is a lot of opportunity, in the longstanding religious freedom, for parents to choose for their children to receive special religious education in our schools. That is clearly set out in the Education Act. As well, if parents prefer it their children have the option of receiving special education in ethics. There are a wide variety of providers accredited to provide special religious education and primary ethics education in the area of secular ethics. There are all sorts of opportunities and I would certainly encourage churches and faith groups to take advantage of those opportunities.

I want to put on record my gratitude to the many thousands of volunteers who provide instruction in religion during the time allocated within our public school system. We are always looking for ways in which we can meet our obligations to help young people with their intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional development. One of the great opportunities we see in the future is to partner with churches, other faith groups or other community groups which want to provide, for example, trained youth workers to work within the school communities to assist with some of the less tangible but no less important areas of children's development alongside their intellectual training in academic subjects.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Can the Minister provide an update on the progress of the chaplaincy program in New South Wales State schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: As it is an operational matter I will pass that to the department secretary.

Ms HARRISSON: The chaplains program is funded by the Commonwealth Government—\$43.16 million is available to all New South Wales schools that access that program. So far a total annual amount of \$6.47 million has been allocated to New South Wales public schools.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Good. Thank you. As the Minister would be aware, there has been some controversy about statues, monuments and other things. Can the Minister guarantee that the teaching of history in New South Wales schools will continue to respect the legacy and contribution of our founding fathers, such as Captain Cook, Governor Philip and the settlers who built this nation on the Aboriginal foundation?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am very happy to provide that guarantee. Obviously, history, by its very nature, is a contested area. As one noted historian said, the past is a foreign country so of course the way in which we look at the past will change. The important thing in relation to our history curriculum is equipping young people with the skills over time. Content knowledge also is very important and as learning progresses it becomes also important to be able to have the critical thinking skills that we are really trying to develop in our young people to be able to make sense of different source materials, whether that is primary sources or secondary sources. Certainly in relation to the new curriculum in history in stage six, there has been a real focus on an overarching narrative in relation to the development of modern liberal society and democracy. Those important parts of our history that you speak of will continue to be important elements of the history curriculum.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you. I am just following up an inquiry by the select committee of the New South Wales Legislative Council into homeschooling in New South Wales that was held in December 2014. There were some discussions during that inquiry and one related to the provision of a centre of excellence for homeschooling. Has there been any progress in that particular proposal?

Mr ROB STOKES: I had the opportunity to meet representatives of homeschooling and recognise the important role that they provide as an alternative offering for education in New South Wales. I put on record that I recognise in our education system, and obviously the Education Act makes provision for homeschooling, that education is a primary responsibility of parents. Obviously, the Government is here to assist in that. The method of delivery obviously is a matter of choice for parents. As to the specific issue, I was able to address a number of issues that the homeschooling representatives raised with me. That particular matter I will take on notice but before I do so I ask whether David de Carvalho, as the head of the New South Wales Education Standards Authority [NESA], the registration authority, has any further information that we can provide at this stage.

Mr de CARVALHO: Reverend Nile, if you would not mind, would you repeat the particular or specific question that you are asking?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: My question relates to the recommendation that there be a centre of excellence for homeschooling. Has there been any progress in developing that?

Mr de CARVALHO: The establishment of a centre of excellence would not fall directly under our responsibilities, but I might ask Mr Murphy, who is responsible for homeschooling registration, if he has further information.

Mr MURPHY: In relation to that particular recommendation, the Government's response at the time did not support it, but I am happy to take that on notice just to confirm it.

Mr SCOTT: Mr Nile, I can add that we are currently reviewing the report of the inquiry. We expect that we would be able to finalise our advice on the issue during the final school term of the year, term four, and would be able to provide a response to you then.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you. There are a number of recommendations of that inquiry that discussed whether some of these things be done within three years from the inquiry. Three years is now up in 2017. For example, what strategies have been executed to promote membership of homeschooling organisations and give support to those homeschooling parents? That was recommendation No. 16.

Mr SCOTT: We will provide advice shortly on that matter for you.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: In relation to recommendations Nos 21 and 22, can the Minister advise what steps have been taken to assist homeschooling students to take advantage of student concessions and financial assistance?

Mr ROB STOKES: That is one of the issues that was raised with me by the homeschooling representatives. I undertook to provide them information. We only met reasonably recently and I would be happy to provide that by way of an answer on notice.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What is the department doing to encourage homeschooling parents to deliver more effective teaching to their children?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will defer to anyone who will answer.

Mr MURPHY: We are in the process of, and indeed have concluded, our consultation process with the homeschooling community around the guidelines for homeschooling. One of the key recommendations of the homeschooling inquiry was that more work needed to be done to consult with homeschoolers around the requirements in order to be registered. We have nearly completed that consultation process and will be soon in a position to publish some revised guidelines, which provide more assistance to homeschooling families on how they can meet the requirements under the Act.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Has the department progressed plans for homeschooling students to participate in and be awarded the Higher School Certificate [HSC]? Apparently there are some obstacles.

Mr MURPHY: Again, that particular recommendation was not supported by the Government. The difficulty associated with it is that the Higher School Certificate has both school-based assessment and an examination component. There is no capacity within the arrangement for homeschooling registration for there to be an authenticated school-based assessment component for the Higher School Certificate. There are opportunities for homeschooled students to present as self-tuition candidates for HSC exams. That in turn enables them to have the results of the exams considered by the Universities Admissions Centre for the purposes of calculating an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, thank you for your information about the Fernhill School for special purposes, which I understand you opened in May.

Mr ROB STOKES: I would have to take that on notice in terms of precise dates.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sure. I am happy to concede that you opened one school. Have you opened any other new school since becoming Minister?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I will have to take it on notice. I certainly am aware of a large number of upgrades that I have referred to.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand that.

Mr ROB STOKES: In relation to a new public school, I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We have to build 15 schools a year. You have opened one. I want to come to the 23 properties you have confirmed were sold last financial year. I want to deal with some of the

specifics. I was going to refer to a Department of Education document. I am not sure if you have made it public or not, so I might table that, if that is helpful.

Mr ROB STOKES: We provide regular updates on the website.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sure, but it is the sale and acquisition of land from the School Infrastructure NSW part of the Department of Education.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Can a copy be given to the Minister?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes. Could we give a copy to the Minister now?

The CHAIR: Yes.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It confirms that in 2016-17 the land was sold. For example, those 23 properties were in places like Ballina West, Bargo, Bowral, Maitland, Moss Vale, Port Macquarie, Reids Flat, Salamander Bay, Stockton, Suffolk Park, The Oaks, Tura Beach—in other words, all over the State. Minister, if there is a school accommodation crisis, why are we selling this land?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am sorry, I am just going through the list. I can provide a general answer and then go to any specifics you might like to but, as I opened with, obviously we are an agency that is responsible for the education of young people. We will obviously hold spatially located assets—land—where it is educationally relevant to do so. We will also acquire land where it is educationally relevant to do so.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you have said that there is an accommodation crisis—to your credit, I think you have been upfront about that. Why are we still selling this land? Is it not insane to be selling this much land all through the State?

Mr ROB STOKES: No—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Speeding up sales?

Mr ROB STOKES: This rapid fire will work better if you ask a question and let me answer it.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The floor is yours.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Point of order: I think the word "insane" is not suitable.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy to withdraw.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to go through in an itemised way and provide what information I can now and take whatever I cannot answer off the top of my head on notice. We will acquire land where it is required for an educational purpose. I have already given two examples of where we have done so in the past few months. We will also dispose of land where it is not required for an educational purpose—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: On that point, Minister—

Mr ROB STOKES: —now or in the foreseeable future.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yesterday in estimates, the chief executive of Property NSW said, "I cannot sit here and give you a guarantee that the Department of Education may not need to buy back any asset that the Government has previously sold in the past." Can you give us that guarantee?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am not aware of a situation where that might emerge. Certainly—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you give us a guarantee that we are not going to sell this land and then buy it back to deal with the school accommodation crisis?

Mr ROB STOKES: Let me answer that question in context. First, the only reason why land is disposed of is if it is not required for an educational purpose currently and that we foresee there is no educational purpose for it in the future.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you give us a guarantee?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have answered your question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: So no guarantee?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, that is not what I said at all. I will use Beacon Hill High School as an example. It was sold off by the Labor Government in 2002-03, I think. Can I give a guarantee that we will never need to acquire any of that land back for educational purposes? Of course I cannot. Redfern Public School—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am answering your question. Redfern Public School that the Labor Government sold off—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No, you have been up-front that there is no guarantee.

Mr ROB STOKES: I wish that had not occurred, because that is one of the areas where we have some capacity constraints that we need to address now.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, why did the department underspend its capital program by \$71 million last year?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will defer to the secretary, but I will say there is a whole series of reasons that may relate to when different contracts fall due. It may be due to procurement processes—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a pretty big underspend, though.

Mr ROB STOKES: We are spending a vast amount of money, an unprecedented spend in relation to providing for the increased enrolments in future years. We are talking in a context of a \$4.2 billion spend.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you confirm you could have spent 15 per cent more on new schools last year if it were not for this mismanagement?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am still answering your question.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROB STOKES: You asked a specific question in relation to an underspend. I am happy to refer to the secretary.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: They are related questions, so I am happy for the secretary to answer.

Mr SCOTT: There were delays in a few major projects, so it is simply a timing question. All money will be spent, and I can tell you now, as of today—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But we could have spent 15 per cent more last year, could we not?

Mr SCOTT: No, it is simply a timing matter.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: It is a big underspend—15 per cent.

Mr SCOTT: No, I am afraid that is not correct. It is a timing matter around the end of the financial year. Those projects were committed, those projects are being built, those schools will be built. It was simply a timing matter about whether key expenditure landmarks fall before or after the end of the financial year. I can tell you, because I can tell that you are concerned about assets and the assets we build—as we are because we have an unprecedented increasing population—that as at the end of August 41 new and relocated schools are under construction. We could go and visit dozens of sites now where new schools are being built or schools are being relocated.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I appreciate the information.

Mr SCOTT: In addition to that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to come back to—

Mr SCOTT: This is important information.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to come back to the timing question, as that is important. It is a part of a pattern of behaviour, and that is my issue. I want to take one example, which is one of the new schools in the budget papers. It is the Wentworth Point Public School and there is an issue about the timing of the underspend. Wentworth Point appears as a new school in the 2016-17 budget, but it appears also in the 2015-16 budget when \$1 million was spent on it. It is also in the 2014-15 budget papers as a new school. It was also announced in the 2013-14 budget papers as a new school, and it was in the 2012-13 budget papers as a new school. The timing is part of the issue and the underspend is part of a pattern. Minister, what can you tell us about Wentworth Point Public School?

Mr ROB STOKES: Wentworth Point Public School is a school for which there has been an historical delay. Indeed, as the Minister, I am directly responsible for schools, but I am really not in a position to provide specifics on the period before I became Minister. What I can say is that I am well aware of Wentworth Point and right now, under its revised timetable, it is on schedule for opening in 2018, as advertised.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you give a guarantee that it will open as scheduled, given the delays in building the school? It is just one example.

Mr ROB STOKES: Can I finish my answer? You asked about this particular project, and I can say that there were delays associated with some issues. For example, a contamination issue was identified that the department took extremely seriously. In fact, it obtained advice on the contamination to ensure that all issues were dealt with. You would appreciate that this area was a site for industrial uses for many decades. As I understand, there were also some issues in relation to planning delays—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Given what you have said, I have one question on Wentworth Point.

Mr ROB STOKES: Please let me finish.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Will it open at the start of the year? Can you guarantee that?

Mr ROB STOKES: There were planning delays with Auburn council. This process will be quicker if you let me finish. I was just about to finish answering your question. One of the issues was contamination, which has been comprehensively dealt with—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I was about to finish too. I want to hand over to my colleague.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am losing my thread of thought because you keep talking over the top of me. I have dealt with the contamination issue. The other issue was planning delays with Auburn council. I understand all of those are resolved and that it remains entirely on track for its scheduled completion and opening date. However, just to be entirely sure on that matter, I will refer the question to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: Yes, we are anticipating it to be completed and open in 2018. We believe that the important remediation issues of the site have been addressed through the construction process. There were delays due to extended negotiations around the acquisition of the site and delays in obtaining development application [DA] clearance from the council. They have been met, so it will open in 2018.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, thank you for being up-front about the school accommodation crisis. Really what you have told us today is that you have sold 23 school properties, you have opened one new school and you have underspent last year's budget by \$71 million. Is your Government not making this crisis worse?

Mr ROB STOKES: Absolutely not. We have already been through, in quite specific detail, the fact that—and I just picked the one year of 2009-10—there were considerably more properties sold by the Labor Government. There goes that argument. In relation to the underspend, that is all money that is in the process of being acquitted on developing new schools. In relation to the increasing enrolment at New South Wales public schools, this is something that we should celebrate as a community. Obviously, it is a key challenge and that is why, in this year's budget, we have an unprecedented commitment of \$4.2 billion over the forward estimates to provide for the growing needs of our community. To put that in context, that is a 61 per cent increase over the \$2.6 billion in capital allocated in the previous year's budget.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, let us go to the increases in public school enrolment, which I would suspect reflect the population increases in the cities, and around Sydney in particular.

Mr ROB STOKES: There are a number of factors, and population increase is one of them. We are also getting strong results and strong outcomes in New South Wales public schools, and parents are choosing them over alternatives, which is also a pretty exciting development.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The Auditor points out that we will need another 7,200 classrooms over the next 15 years.

Mr ROB STOKES: A number of reports have indicated the challenges ahead of us given the growth in the population.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So it is about growth in population—

Mr ROB STOKES: Among other things, as I mentioned.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The Macquarie boys high school site is projected to have 6,200 additional people near its site. The Cumberland Hospital site is being developed. There is also development around the Parramatta heritage precinct. Arthur Phillip High School is projected to have an additional capacity of only 500. Where are all these new students going to go?

Mr ROB STOKES: I point you to the School Infrastructure NSW website that identifies the 123 projects that are being funded to commence over the next two years. You will see that there is a wide spread of sites based on where the population is growing, so—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Given it has grown there, can you point to a school there?

Mr ROB STOKES: Sorry, where?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Where Macquarie boys high school currently sits.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am having a technology issue in opening this; it is frustrating that I cannot open it because there is a very good story to tell. There is a large number and a wide range of schools across the inner west right through to Parramatta that are in the process of being upgraded with significant increases in capacity.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The Minister for Sport had Parramatta High School's oval down as a site for the new Parramatta pool. Did he meet with you about that?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will have to take that on notice, I am sorry.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Will you guarantee that Parramatta High School will stay open and that the school will retain use of its oval?

Mr ROB STOKES: Hang on—sorry, I am trying to open this to see where the actual spend is going.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Will you guarantee that Parramatta High School will stay open and retain use of its oval?

Mr ROB STOKES: Of course it will remain open. That is a very important school for the growing community, and of course we will ensure that there is access to a whole range of sporting opportunities associated with the school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But will it retain the use of its oval?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am very happy to take the specifics on notice but we will ensure that we will provide a high-quality education and a range of high-quality sporting opportunities. Obviously as the population around Parramatta continues to grow, access to sporting facilities and active play areas is very important.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: That is good, but you will not guarantee that?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have said I would take it on notice in relation to specifics.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Let us go to the redevelopment of the Bankstown line and the Sydenham-Bankstown corridor. As you know, the Greater Sydney Commission is well advanced in its planning for this corridor, with public consultation underway and lots of glossy plans. Many of the documents acknowledged the need for new and expanded schools yet to be announced by your department. In particular, the Sydenham to Bankstown Urban Renewal Strategy notes that there would need to be 35 new primary schools and 11 new secondary schools to meet the need for the expanded population. The 2017 version of that same report states that there will be an additional 1,828 primary school enrolments by 2036 and 1,061 additional secondary enrolments. How many schools have you been advised will be required for the Sydenham-Bankstown corridor?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, I will take the details on notice but I am prepared to speak to it in general terms right now. I will also ask the secretary whether he has any further reflections after I have provided some preliminary comments. Certainly we are already engaged in a number of school upgrades within that corridor—for example, Ashbury Public School, Canterbury South Public School and Yagoona Public School are three examples—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yagoona is not in that corridor.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am aware of the Arup report, which is what I think you are referring to, in terms of the social infrastructure requirements. That refers to there being a need for, as you say, roughly 1,900 primary school places and around 1,100 high school places over the next 20 years. I should note that I am advised that in schools within the corridor there are currently around 2,400 primary school places available and 5300 secondary

places available. There is detailed planning underway in relation to upgrades to support the growth in population anticipated in that corridor. Does the secretary have—

Mr SCOTT: I think that has covered the ground, Minister.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yagoona is not in that corridor.

Mr ROB STOKES: As I said, that was just an example.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but it is not an example that is relevant.

Mr ROB STOKES: It is pretty relevant. It is in the general vicinity of that area—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It is somewhere between Sydenham and Bankstown, is it?

Mr ROB STOKES: I was giving some examples of upgrades in that area. Canterbury South, I would anticipate, is in Canterbury—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How many new primary schools and secondary schools are you projecting to build?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am sorry: I could not hear you.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Given that the Government has already released its strategy, how many new primary schools and secondary schools are you projecting to build?

Mr ROB STOKES: We have a clear commitment to ensure that we meet demand. As I have mentioned, we are currently in detailed planning on a number of sites. Off the top of my head I think there are four schools that we have specifically identified that are highly advanced in planning. A further three are not—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Are these new schools?

Mr ROB STOKES: It goes back to this point: If we did a 1960s-style school everywhere, we would not have the luxury of necessarily doing that right across urban Sydney. As parts of Sydney move from a suburban character to a more urban character, land is obviously a key constraint. We need to be wise about the way in which we use land and we need to build schools in such a way and in such a configuration as to maximise play area, as well as great learning outcomes, through the environmental determinism of getting the design right. This gives great opportunities to look at some of our existing stock and redevelop it to provide an even better educational setting and context for kids. In many places that will involve purchasing new greenfield sites but in some areas we do not have a surfeit of greenfield sites to choose from, so we need to be innovative in these areas.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So at the moment, you are not planning to build any new schools in the Sydenham-Bankstown corridor.

Mr ROB STOKES: That is not what I said. What I said and what I will say again is that we will meet the future increases in capacity. I have already outlined with a fair degree of specificity the planning that has been done and the projected enrolment increase in those areas, and I think I have comprehensively answered your question in relation to the planning underway and the upgrades that are currently underway.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I think we have a different understanding of "comprehensively". [*Time expired.*]

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, if I contrast the preschool situation in Western Australia with the experience we have in New South Wales where attendance is much lower and cost is much greater, it seems that Western Australia has found a model that might be appropriate. Have you contemplated increasing the number of Government-run preschools in New South Wales?

Mr ROB STOKES: You are absolutely right to be focused on this area. As the secretary is fond of reminding me, the level of educational attainment on the first day of school is the greatest indicator of the level of educational attainment on the last day of school. He will be proud of me for remembering that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: We hear that from the Minister for Early Childhood Education in the Legislative Council nearly every day.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: At length.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: At length.

Mr ROB STOKES: We are well advised. I will be careful not to traverse the area of my colleague, but obviously I will work in lockstep with her. I recognise that obviously the better prepared kids are when they start in kindergarten, the better educational journey they will have and the easier it is for teachers to manage to appropriately teach across the various skill levels of five-year-olds and six-year-olds. I am not sure whether the secretary has more to add.

Mr SCOTT: The only thing I would add to that is—and I think this was traversed in Minister Mitchell's estimates hearing the other day—yes, we do have a policy designed to increase the participation rates of three-year-olds and four-year-olds in early childhood education. As the Minister indicates, you reap the benefits of that investment all the way through schooling and then, arguably, all the way through life. The Government has outlined a number of policy steps that have increased the opportunities for three-year-olds and four-year-olds in community preschool centres and also in long day care centres, and we operate as a regulator of those in New South Wales. The department operates 100 preschools. That has been a long-held convention, that number of 100.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: When you say it is convention, is there a specified cap on it?

Mr SCOTT: I think overwhelmingly the centres provided in New South Wales are community preschool centres or commercial long day care centres, some operated by local government as well. There is a sense that the market is meeting this need, that there are places that are available and with the right incentives additional places will become available. We have 100 preschool centres that are integrated into our primary schools and so places are available. We are looking to increase the incentives that are available for families to take advantage of that. I am informed there are 700 community early childhood centres and 3,000 or more long day care centres. The ones that are run by the department as part of the preschools are a small fraction of the provision. We are looking to increase the number of hours, increase the number of children who are taking advantage of early childhood education as three-year-olds and four-year-olds. I think the prospect that the Government itself needs to run is that rather than providing incentives for families to take up that opportunity it is focusing on the priority work that is being done.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That is the line that I am drawing here. We are ranked lowest in attendance or participation. We are talking about the targets set under the national partnership agreement and we have the most privately run preschool services running out of long day care centres. When we look at the statistics we find that Western Australia's model of government run services seems to increase accessibility of participation and certainly reduce costs to parents. This afternoon we have been having a discussion about new schools. Would it not make sense to incorporate a preschool into all those new schools that will be built as a way of improving accessibility, participation, cost, et cetera? Is that being considered?

Mr SCOTT: I might ask Ms Loble to answer that because she focuses on early childhood education for us. Before I do that I will add that there has been a significant increase. You are talking about benchmarks around the country. New South Wales had a significant increase in participation rates for three-year-olds and four-year-olds on the back of policy interventions that we have made. I do not think it has been a case of us sitting on our hands on that. There has certainly been a desire to increase those rates. A number of policy levers have been pulled and they have been beneficial and seen good benefit without the Government intervening and opening a whole set of additional preschools in an extensive very mixed market that has different kinds of provisions to meet different family needs. Ms Loble may want to add to that.

Ms LOBLE: Mr Scott is correct. There are a variety of arrangements across the States and Territories. Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales all have what typically is described as a mixed model to maximise choice for families. Preschools tend to have shorter hours, so a lot of families prefer long day care as their setting. It has been—certainly well before my time here—a longstanding approach to offer those mixed models and maximise the choice for families. As you would be aware from Minister Mitchell, the Government has invested an additional \$217 million over four years to increase participation for 600 hours. This year we are up to 85 per cent, up from about 77 per cent last year. It would appear that those policies are starting to work with community-based preschools.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I will come back to you, Minister. I am getting the sense that there might be not necessarily hostility but the department is not considering increasing the degree or the percentage of services delivered by the Government in this regard. I would have thought with 15 new schools planned to be built across the State every year there would be value for money in incorporating a small preschool into each of those and providing that additional option for parents in those growth centres in particular.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am being cautious. Part of that question traverses into the area of my colleague. In relation to the new school builds I can say that we are looking at ways in which we can accommodate preschools within new schools as well as in existing schools. Where we are retrofitting builds there are all sorts of innovative things that can be done. That is certainly one of the things that we are looking at. As you say, it does make sense. In fact, shared use more broadly is something that we need to—

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I will quote you on that; it does make sense. I am glad. I will move to the equity funding support package within the schools at the moment. How is the data on students and schools receiving resources under the English as an additional language or dialect [EAL/D] equity funding package gathered and verified?

Mr ROB STOKES: It goes to an operational question but obviously we have a robust methodology for allocating money on the basis of need, which is working effectively in New South Wales. I know that it is rigorously analysed and I imagine it would come within the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation [CESE]. I will refer to Mr Dizdar.

Mr DIZDAR: Since 2014 for our resource allocation model we pick up a loading for our schools called English language proficiency which targets those students most in need around their English as an additional language dialect—the dollar increment per student. In addition we pick up our new arrivals, our refugee students. As you would be aware, we have had a significant increase in the number of refugee students into our schools. Outside this loading they pick up additional dollars as well. That English language proficiency loading this year provided to our schools \$115.4 million. That is targeted to schools to best utilise the loading to meet the needs of students who require strong support with their English language proficiency.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: How do you determine the loading for each school? Obviously, new kids are coming in all the time and there are changes to enrolments. How is that reported and determined?

Mr DIZDAR: There is an annual survey that our schools complete and provide that data to the system. Then based upon the phase of learning for that student is the incremental dollar amount that is attached through that loading. It is through an annual survey process.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I may come back to some more questions on this.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What programs are held at lunchtime in State public schools that require permission notes from parents or guardians for the children to attend and for them to function?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer that question to the secretary. I imagine that an example would be Inter-School Christian Fellowship [ISCF] groups, for example.

Mr SCOTT: We will not be able to provide a comprehensive list today but Mr Dizdar will give a sense of how this works.

Mr DIZDAR: Can you repeat that for me so I get it correct for you?

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: What programs are held at lunchtime in State public schools that require permission notes from parents or guardians for the children to attend and for them to function?

Mr DIZDAR: A whole variety of programs require parental knowledge and permission. If I take you to a school that I recently visited, Drummoyne Public School, which not too far from here. I understand that at lunchtime a coding club is available for both the boys and girls to take part in. There are some physical activity clubs that the school runs. There is a chess club that runs, and a fourth activity will come to me while I am answering this question. Four activities are available Monday through to Friday.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: I am aware there are a lot of activities. Do they all require permission notes from parents for the children to attend, or can the children make up their own minds to attend the activity?

Mr DIZDAR: What they require is parental knowledge, parental permission to take part in those activities. That often happens through a variety of mechanisms, whether that be the school newsletter or, given the nature of the activity—because some of those activities happen both at school and outside the school—it may require a permission slip to go home and be brought back as well.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: A directive has been issued requiring permission notes. I understand that they were not always required.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take that question on notice. However, there would be procedures ensuring that relevant permissions are received for particular activities. The education system is a partnership and parents have primary responsibility for their children. We obviously work in lockstep with them to ensure that they have the opportunity to provide consent for what is delivered in certain areas.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: There have been situations where a child has attended and then wanted to take their friend with them, and that friend was stopped from attending because they did not have a permission note.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to look at more flexible arrangements wherever that is appropriate. Obviously we are not interested in creating administrative tasks for the sake of it. However, we must ensure that parents have the opportunity to be involved in making decisions about their children's education.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Are you aware of the background to this new policy? I understand the situation arose from concerns about Muslim prayer groups and the danger of radicalisation. There was some concern that children should not attend them without a permission note.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to defer to the secretary to address any operational matters. Again, the way in which departmental policies are implemented is obviously consistent across all schools and all groups, and that is appropriate.

Mr SCOTT: As the Minister said, there are religious implementation procedures that cover prayer groups at schools, and they include a number of requirements for students. One is that parental permission is obtained for each student. Any volunteers involved in a school must also be subject to the appropriate checks and safeguards that apply to anyone coming onto school premises. There must also be appropriate supervision by a member of the teaching staff. There are some other policies that apply, and they apply to a prayer group of any faith operating in our schools. They are applied appropriately and fairly across all schools in this State, and I think that is appropriate.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You would be aware of the controversy in other States about the singing of Christmas carols in State schools. Is there any proposal to ban the singing of Christmas carols in public schools in this State?

Mr SCOTT: I do not want to speak for the Minister, but I would be very surprised if that were the case.

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, our Education Act is specific in stating that general religious education is a feature of our public education system. That reflects our wider society and the traditions that have enriched this country. The celebration of Christmas is one of those traditions, so there is certainly no move on foot to ban the singing of Christmas carols.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Good. Can you update the Committee about the future of Ultimo Public School?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to refer that question to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: I have information on the Ultimo Public School.

Mr ROB STOKES: The temporary school at Wentworth Park is under construction.

Mr SCOTT: That is correct. As you are aware, there were some concerns about the site and the cost of remediation of other sites. We are committed to increasing the capacity of schools in that area. We decided to redevelop the Ultimo Public School on its existing site. We have commenced consultations and we have a concept design that was developed through an international design competition. Students will be temporarily relocated to a school at Wentworth Park, which will have good facilities. To ensure that the new school is completed as quickly as possible and with minimum disruption to school operations, we are working closely with the school community to investigate all options to expedite the project.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Has the Government reduced funding to the Smart and Skilled apprenticeship training program?

Mr ROB STOKES: That question relates to my colleague the Minister for Skills' portfolio, so I will refer it to him. If anything has a direct impact on our budget, I will take the question on notice.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: It relates to TAFE.

Mr SCOTT: That is under Minister Barilaro's portfolio.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: As you are aware, there has been some controversy about the Safe Schools program and an official announcement has been made that it is being replaced with a new anti-bullying program. What are the estimated costs associated with the dumped Safe Schools program?

Mr ROB STOKES: At no stage was the Safe Schools program a New South Wales Government program. I understand that it was developed in Victoria and that it was subject to Commonwealth funding. I also understand that the Commonwealth funding has expired. It was never part of the curriculum here in New South Wales. As you have correctly identified, we have provided a comprehensive anti-bullying suite of resources supported by a \$6.1 million allocation over three years. That funding will support the development of the resources and the rolling out of associated seminars and courses to deliver them. We are also working with the Youth Aware Mental Health Program in this area. That suite of resources has been peer reviewed by experts, and it recognises that students can face bullying for a range of reasons.

We need to make it clear that bullying in all its manifestations is unwelcome in New South Wales public schools. However, we must work with the bullied as well as the bullies to identify where bullying is occurring and to ensure that young people develop the skills they need to be resilient in dealing with it. We must identify children engaged in bullying because often they have problems in their background that also make them vulnerable. It is a big issue and it is something that your colleague the Hon. Taylor Martin takes very seriously, and I thank him for his input.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The Higher School Certificate year is already stressful for parents and students. Why is your Government making changes to NAPLAN that effectively make the Higher School Certificate a four-year test?

Mr ROB STOKES: We are not making changes to NAPLAN. It is a Federal Government program involving a national standardised test. It is a diagnostic tool used in every jurisdiction in Australia.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: The changes link NAPLAN to the awarding of the Higher School Certificate. The Higher School Certificate was a single stressful year for students. Why have you extended that stress from year 9 until year 12?

Mr ROB STOKES: I thank you for the question because it gives me the opportunity to say that as part of the suite of stronger Higher School Certificate reforms announced by the former Minister last year we have identified a number of ways in which to strengthen—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I note the credit.

Mr ROB STOKES: We have identified a number of ways in which to strengthen the HSC. In particular we have recognised—frankly I do not think anyone in the Committee would disagree but I would be interested to know if that is the case—it is appropriate that after 13 years of education young people seeking the Higher School Certificate should be able to demonstrate a functional level of reading, writing and maths. Having a minimum standard is consistent with approaches in, for example, the South Australian or Western Australian certificates of education. I think the very concept—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, this change which you have credited to the former Minister is opposed by parents and citizens associations, by the NSW Parents' Council, by Catholic educators and parents of students with disabilities. Concerns have been raised by the Association of Heads of Independent Schools and the Teachers Federation. Other than you and the people sitting with you at the table, who is in favour of this four-year HSC?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to get a list of endorsements relating to the policy. But the point is we believe that the HSC is a significant certificate that should celebrate students' achievement. One of the things I think we owe young people after 13 years of education is the opportunity to demonstrate that they have a functional level of literacy and numeracy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What research has been done and what evidence was put in front of the Cabinet when this was approved to show that this four-year HSC had a demonstrated educational benefit?

Mr ROB STOKES: First, I do not accept the premise of your question because it is not a four-year HSC as you term it. You have labelled the HSC as a single stressful year. In fact, the HSC goes over two years and, in any event, we see education as a continuum. Frankly, it is not about not doing terribly much at school and then getting to years 11 and 12 and working hard.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: What research has been done and what evidence was put in front of the Government for this change?

Mr ROB STOKES: In fact, education is a continuum. We want to make sure that each and every year is an opportunity for young people as well as teachers to demonstrate growth. That is entirely consistent with ensuring that over time children are ready for the next year and the challenges that will throw up.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is not my question, Minister. My question is very specific.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROB STOKES: I come back to my fundamental point—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might just repeat it for you so that you are clear. What research has been done and what evidence of educational benefit—

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROB STOKES: I am certainly not going to comment on Cabinet matters, as you would appreciate.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is hardly a State secret though. What research has been done and what evidence was in front of the Government?

Mr ROB STOKES: You asked me what evidence was put before the Cabinet. I am saying I am not going to comment. I am not going to comment on Cabinet matters.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am happy to rephrase. What research was done and what evidence of educational benefit was in front of the Government when this change was made?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to take on notice those specific matters. I can refer to the secretary. He might have something at this stage but otherwise I am happy to—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would be interested in that. I ask the secretary whether the department commissioned any research on the educational benefit before this policy was changed?

Mr SCOTT: I am afraid I was not secretary at the time the research went forward so I am not in a position to help you on that. I am happy to talk broadly about the policy and the reform.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking a very specific question. I am not interested in a broad discussion.

Mr SCOTT: I can tell you the thinking that went in behind the policy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am asking about research or evidence about educational benefit.

Mr SCOTT: There was certainly significant engagement and drawing from the lessons in Western Australia. That was an early State to go in this direction. The challenge they faced in Western Australia and in South Australia, and that we have looked at here, is that school retention rates have increased significantly.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Was there research from Western Australia to show that?

Mr SCOTT: There was a review of the impact of the policy change in Western Australia. I think it needs to be put into context. You raised the question of the HSC. The HSC turns 50 this year. When the Wyndham scheme was completed in the 1960s and year 12 was created and the HSC was first started in 1967, the percentage of students that went through to complete the HSC was 20 per cent. This year—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Scott, I was hoping for some evidence post-1967.

Mr SCOTT: I am giving you context.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: That is exactly what I am worried about.

Mr SCOTT: But now close to 80 per cent of students are completing the HSC. What we have clear evidence on—and I am happy to provide it to you—is an analysis that says that young people will need higher levels of literacy and numeracy than ever before because of the changing nature of the workplace, because they are going to have to have careers that are based on learning—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Scott, I would really appreciate you providing that on notice.

Mr SCOTT: In that context, with more and more students staying on to complete year 12, we have to be assured for their sakes that they are reaching a minimum standard of literacy—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Mr Scott, I am going to move on, but I would appreciate that on notice.

Mr SCOTT: We need to be assured—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask a specific question of the Minister about this policy.

Mr SCOTT: We need to be sure that they have reached appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy. I think there is bipartisan support for that.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Scott.

Mr SCOTT: I do not think anybody wants young people to go through without reaching those standards.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have a question for the Minister. Who was consulted before this policy was adopted by the Government?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will have to take that on notice. As you would appreciate, I was not the Minister at the time the policy was adopted but I am happy to find that information and provide it on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to be specific. I understand 24 people were consulted afterwards. Was anyone consulted beforehand? You can take that on notice. Minister, can you give parents and kids who are stressed out by these changes—I am sure that is the feedback you are getting; it is certainly the feedback we are getting—some hope today that this scheme might change or are you ruling out making any changes to this scheme?

Mr ROB STOKES: We are committed to having minimum standards of literacy and numeracy for every child as part of their HSC. That is very clear and the secretary—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But the implementation has been terrible. Will you rule out making any changes to this scheme?

Mr ROB STOKES: The secretary has been very clear on this point. I would be fascinated to learn whether the Labor Opposition is opposed to the concept of having minimum literacy and numeracy standards as part of the HSC.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: We are opposed to this appalling implementation. Are you ruling out change?

Mr ROB STOKES: That is a fundamental point. As the secretary indicated, since Harold Wyndham introduced the HSC 50 years ago there has not been a minimum standard in relation to literacy and numeracy like there has been in other States. Owing to the clear feedback we have received from business groups and universities in relation to the fact that—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Can you give them some hope though? Will you make some changes to this scheme? Can you tell us that today?

Mr ROB STOKES: Young people need to be equipped with appropriate skills in literacy and numeracy.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I have run through the groups who have concerns. Can you give them some hope today? Will you make changes to the scheme or are you ruling that out?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have clearly answered your question.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Point of order: The Hon. John Graham should give the Minister an opportunity to answer the question.

Mr ROB STOKES: I have clearly answered your question that a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy will continue to be part of our expectation for young people in receiving an HSC. I would have thought that would be something on which we could agree.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Yes, but are you ruling out making any changes?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have answered your question.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are not ruling—

Mr ROB STOKES: I have made very clear what the Government's position is.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Last year at estimates we were told 50 per cent of students would fail to meet the benchmark in year 9, and 70 per cent of students failed. What went wrong?

Mr ROB STOKES: Straightaway I do not accept the premise of your question. You are seeing a NAPLAN test, which is a standardised test, as a pass-fail proposition, which it is not. It is about demonstrating as a diagnostic tool a level of achievement to help young people, their teachers and their parents to identify where a student's learning is up to and then to identify individualised learning for that student and to identify where some of the challenges in their learning journey are.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: How many students will not have passed this standard by the time they finish year 12? What is your projection?

Mr ROB STOKES: This is our expectation of everyone involved in education across New South Wales: that every teacher, every student and every parent will work cooperatively to ensure that every student does as well as they possibly can. In regard to this standard, I cannot possibly identify performance in any future assessment by any student—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: But some kids will not pass—you concede that, do you not?

Mr ROB STOKES: No.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: No?

Mr ROB STOKES: As the secretary identified, about 80 per cent of young people currently are going to receive an HSC, so 20 per cent of young people are not seeking the award of that certificate. Clearly it is impossible for me to answer the question in those terms because I do not even know who is going to be sitting the HSC—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you concede some students will not make the minimum standard you have set out? Surely you can agree on that.

Mr ROB STOKES: Let me be clear on what we are talking about. We are talking about a level of functional literacy and numeracy. The HSC is an award. It is a qualification that means something. It is an achievement. It is something that young people should be able to celebrate. As part of that, we will give them every pedagogical support to ensure that they are able to be literate and numerate.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Surely you can agree that some students will not meet this standard; why the beating around the bush?

Mr ROB STOKES: I can say—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: At the end of year 12 will some students have not met this standard? It is clear, is it not?

Mr ROB STOKES: We are setting a minimum standard in relation to our expectations for literacy and numeracy as part of the Higher School Certificate [HSC].

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Some will need it and some people will not need it.

Mr ROB STOKES: If a young person wants to receive an HSC, it is not something that is just given away, it is something of meaning. It is an internationally recognised credential. The reality is the—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are out there providing reassurance. I want to quote you. You are saying no student will be excluded from sitting the HSC on the basis of their year 9 NAPLAN results.

Mr ROB STOKES: I stand by that statement.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I agree with that statement, but if they do not pass, they will not get their HSC certificate, is that correct?

Mr ROB STOKES: I think I have been very clear. I am happy to refer to the secretary, if he has got anything further to add.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I want to ask you, will some students not pass?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROB STOKES: You get to ask me the question, I get to determine how I answer it.

Mr SCOTT: I think there are a few points that come up from what you are saying, if I can take you through it. The situation we have now, around about one-third of the students in year 9 have already reached the year 12 level. The others are all going through three additional years of schooling before they get to the HSC, so

the first thing we can reasonably expect is that a third are already there in year 9, the vast majority have already achieved that standard in one of the three areas—50 per cent have achieved it in two, 60 per cent plus have achieved it at least one area.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This is all common ground. I am asking you about this small number of students—

Mr SCOTT: Let me address those students.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are addressing a totally different issue.

Mr SCOTT: No, I am not, because what will happen in schools—and I speak as a representative of the largest school system, but I have spoken to my counterparts in the independent and Catholic schools—there will be, and Mr de Carvalho can go into detail, many opportunities for young people to sit assessments that allow them to demonstrate they have reached that standard.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But that is the problem, is it not?

Mr SCOTT: No.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: As a mother with two girls in high school, one at St George Girls High School, where she would reach that standard in Year 9.

Mr SCOTT: Yes.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Another at Canterbury Girls High School.

Mr SCOTT: A fine school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Whenever there is a NAPLAN I have crying, I have stress, I have freaking out about the NAPLAN test; that is before you linked it to the HSC. Now you have linked it to an HSC standard while she is freaking out about her HSC.

Mr SCOTT: Let us talk about how it will work. It is not going to be like a NAPLAN test at all. There will be an online assessment that students will be able to take at the appropriate time, when the teachers think they are ready. It is not going to be a one day of the year, everybody sitting down and television cameras and media present. It will be less stress and focus than there has been around NAPLAN. But what there will clearly be in our school systems is a focus on appropriate interventions to help young people reach that minimum standard.

I think it would be of concern to all of us if young people were going through 13 years of schooling and at the end of 13 years of schooling were not able to demonstrate minimum standards in literacy and numeracy. What I expect will happen in practice will be if students have not achieved the standard that has been set down, there will be appropriate focus in schools around literacy and numeracy. The view of the systems would appropriately be what are we doing with students in years 10, 11 and 12, those additional years of schooling, if they have not reached those minimum standards.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are using a tool, a hard tool to measure these—

Mr SCOTT: Which is that hard tool?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: The test process, whereas, as a parent, I would be expecting rather than my daughter having constant testing, that teachers are actually teaching them literacy and numeracy.

Mr SCOTT: I think that is an artificial dichotomy, with respect, because it is not going to be a case of testing, testing, testing; it is going to be an appropriate focus on literacy and numeracy and then providing an assessment in a less pressured way than might be the case with NAPLAN.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: How is it low pressured if you have told children that unless they get this band 8, they will not get their HSC? That is not low pressure; that is high pressure. Children like Anastasia, who already freak out about the NAPLAN test, have another level of freaking out about this test because everything now becomes centred around the testing, rather than what we actually want our children to do, which is learn literacy and numeracy.

Mr SCOTT: I think we are in heated agreement that we want the outcome that young people have reached a minimum standard in literacy and numeracy. I think the whole HSC over the years has been about people demonstrating the skills that they have.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Yes, but we disagree on the process of getting there, because as a mother, I do not actually see that as tool and you have not convinced me yet that you have a long list of people that support this process you have put in. In fact, I can see a long list of people that do not support it.

Mr SCOTT: The Minister said he will come back to it.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Anyone that has my experience, particularly with teenage girls sitting those NAPLAN tests, will tell you exactly the same, that it is stressful and it is the same even with those high performing children that actually perform very poorly in the test because they put so much pressure on themselves when they are sitting in any test. I think anyone from a selective high school will tell you that.

Mr SCOTT: We think that schools will be able to provide good support over three additional years of schooling. We are at the stage where in year 9 already over a third have reached the year 12 standard.

Mr ROB STOKES: I would agree with you. The point of school is to teach, to learn, to work hard, to demonstrate achievement. The HSC is not designed to be a doddle, it is a proper certificate with real meaning.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Which of those two is it? Will anyone fail this at the end of year 12? Will anyone have not met the minimum standard? Should everyone relax or not?

Mr ROB STOKES: I would love my children all to receive 99.95 in the HSC but I cannot tell you with any certainty as to how they will perform in the HSC. That ultimately is a matter for them, for their teachers and for me, working in cooperation to help them perform as well as they possibly can. You are asking me for an answer that I cannot give. I do not know what individual student results will be.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You will not even confirm that some children will fail; you will not even confirm today that some children will not reach the standard at the end of year 12?

Mr ROB STOKES: The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR] as a result of the HSC is an index. On that index, some students will get a higher index than other students.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Sure.

Mr ROB STOKES: I cannot tell who is going to get what.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: On the minimum standard, will some children not meet it? Why can you not be clear about that?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If they have not passed this test, will they get their piece of paper is the question?

Mr ROB STOKES: If—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If they do not pass this test and receive a band 8 which you have set, will they get the piece of paper?

Mr ROB STOKES: You are linking this in a way that is not appropriate. I heard you say—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: But that is the question we are asking.

Mr ROB STOKES: Let me finish. I heard you say that if you do not get a band 8 you do not get an HSC. That is simply not true.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Do you get a piece of paper?

Mr ROB STOKES: You really should not be passing that information onto the community.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Just answer the question, do you get the piece of paper?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Let him answer the question.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Do you get the piece of paper if you do not get the band 8?

Mr ROB STOKES: You do not get a piece of paper if you do not pass the test upon which the piece of paper is based, no.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If you do not pass this band 8—

Mr ROB STOKES: I was very—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Just take us through it. If you do not pass this band 8 and you sit the HSC test, you still get the Higher School Certificate?

Mr ROB STOKES: Once again, there is no requirement to get a band 8 in a standardised NAPLAN test in year 9 in order to receive an HSC in year 12. There is a minimum standard in relation to reading, writing and maths in order to receive an HSC in year 12.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If you have not passed this test at any stage up to year 12—

Mr ROB STOKES: That is a different question. You are changing the question now.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, I am not, that is the question. What does this test relate to?

Mr ROB STOKES: I think I have already provided comments.

The CHAIR: The member's time has expired.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I come back to the English as an additional language or dialect questions I started on earlier. Schools receive equity funding for English language proficiency, staffing or as a flexible funding component and those that receive additional resources have to develop a strategy to meet the learning needs of their students. Can you explain how the monitoring of the compliance and accountability with those components to the policy actually works?

Mr ROB STOKES: In relation to monitoring compliance, I will refer it to Mr Dizdar.

Mr DIZDAR: The English language proficiency loading is one of our four equity loadings and with our four equity loadings through the resource allocation model, each school needs to account for what programs, initiatives and professional learning activities they put in place. With the total resourcing in our annual school report, that is a compulsory aspect. Alongside that is an annual school plan. It is a three-year plan that is revised on an annual basis. It is endorsed by a director of public schools in New South Wales, who oversees the principals of the schools. Those two things are the monitoring mechanisms—through the school plan for where it sits and how that school will best meet the needs of students with a background in a language other than English, and through the annual report.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So the directors who oversee those principals review the plans, look at the strategies that have been developed and determine whether or not those strategies are appropriate ways to deploy those additional resources to meet their needs. Is that what happens? Is it a relationship between the directors at that level and the principals?

Mr DIZDAR: That is a good summation, Mr Field. I would add that the director would also, in certain situations, position State office expertise—on-ground educational services expertise—where the principal and school may require it to best meet the needs of those learners.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: So it is not just additional resources that can be deployed at the school level; the department has additional resources—it may be personnel or a particular support team—that could be deployed to a particular school to help meet its strategy or plan.

Mr DIZDAR: Correct, in particular through our learning and teaching directorate in the State office sense. Then in an educational services sense, on the ground, there is significant expertise that can help supplement, support and grow that expertise in the school.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Can you explain a bit more about what that is? How many people are we talking about? Where are they located? What sorts of numbers of personnel or resources do they have to support principals to deliver on their plans?

Mr DIZDAR: I am happy to come back to the Committee on notice and give you that specific detail. Our educational services, in their entirety, have a total of 1,500 personnel. You are asking about this specific area so it is best if I take that on notice and bring the information back to you.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Given that the policy states that flexible funding can be used to employ English as an additional language or dialect [EAL/D] teaching staff, how many schools have used this? How many extra full-time equivalent staff have been employed to support schools to meet those proficiency requirements or targets?

Mr DIZDAR: We do not have a mechanism for keeping a centralised record of that. We monitor the effective use of those funds—both the flexible fund and the staffing resources—at an individual school level through those mechanisms I outlined earlier as opposed to centrally collating that data.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: If a school gets resources through the equity funding to meet the strategy and the school chooses to employ staff to do that, that is not centrally recorded. Is it just agreed between the director and the principal that that is an appropriate strategy but you do not record centrally how many people are employed specifically to support principals to do that work?

Mr DIZDAR: I might explain it this way to help with your question. It is our experience on the ground that many schools go beyond what is allocated through that flexible fund and go beyond what is provided in that loading through that resource allocation model, and utilise their total school budget. They may even supplement that further in order to have more additional resources and attention paid to students with a background in a language other than English.

I can give you a really good example—Fairfield High School. That is a fantastic school that has had a large number of refugee students and new arrivals. It has a fantastic intensive English centre which is another additional support provided to students who are new to schooling in Australia in a secondary setting. I know for a fact that that school uses more than just its flexible funding allocation through this loading to meet the needs of its students to best cater for their learning needs.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I was specifically talking about staff employed to deliver this. I know they may allocate additional resources to other matters but I was trying to get a handle on how many staff are employed across the department delivering these sorts of services.

Mr DIZDAR: We certainly have the figure for the permanent staff that are employed but the data for temporary staff—whether they are employed for a term, half a year or 12 months—is a lot more difficult to amalgamate at a central level. I am more than happy to bring back to the Committee the information about the permanent staff numbers.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I want to link to another area that I work in—gambling policy. You may be aware that legislation in New South Wales prevents a gambling establishment being built within close proximity to a school in New South Wales. Is that a policy that you support?

Mr ROB STOKES: Broadly, yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Would it surprise you that recent regulatory changes will allow gambling clubs in New South Wales to build early childhood education centres, childcare centres and preschools within immediate proximity to gambling clubs?

Mr ROB STOKES: Everything is a matter to be understood in context so I would have to look at specific examples in order to provide a comment on them. My focus is obviously in relation to the provision of teaching and learning, and doing so in a safe environment. The focus for all these matters is the safety of young people. Where any establishment in close proximity to a school posed a safety risk to children that is something that I would not support.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You would agree that it is pretty inconsistent to disallow a gambling establishment to be built next to a school but to allow a childcare centre or an early learning centre to be put inside a club?

Mr ROB STOKES: The focus must always be on the safety and security of young people. That would be the lens through which I would look at any of those policy questions.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Fair enough. I would like to bring you back to special religious education. A media release recently quoted a spokesperson from your office as saying that you would not be revising your position. That spokesperson said:

Any move to allow students to participate in formal classes during this time will unfairly disadvantage students who have a legal right to attend these classes.

Is that a statement with which you agree?

Mr ROB STOKES: I would cast it differently. Your question is in respect of those parents who opt for their children not to be engaged in special religious education or special ethics education and what is available for those young people to do. Obviously it is important that they be appropriately supervised and that they be engaged in activities that are of value. Equally it is important to recognise that there has been longstanding religious freedom to provide SRE within schools. We cannot have a position where some students are able to participate in a level of learning that is not available to other students at the same time. So we need to try to ensure that everyone is doing something of value and we need to recognise the right of parents to have their children engaged in SRE or special education in ethics [SEE].

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That is removing an opportunity for one child because of the choice of another child's parent. That seems like a totally bizarre way to look at how to maximise learning opportunities in this State, would you not agree?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, I do not agree. I appreciate that we are talking about issues of competing opportunities but the important point is that every child receives the same learning opportunities.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: If one of the children chooses not to go to special religious education classes or to ethics classes but wants to go down to the oval with the sports coach and run some laps—you have been talking about providing value—would that be seen as an unfair opportunity to the track and field athletes who are going to special religious education? They might not get an opportunity to do a workout. How far does this extend?

Mr ROB STOKES: This is a complex issue but at the same time I do not wish to detract from the fact that ever since 1848 our education system has reflected our pluralist society so that there are opportunities to provide SRE and for parents to seek that for their children. A majority still do. As a result, those opportunities are provided.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Can the Minister inform the Committee how many schools do not have adequate airconditioning in the classrooms?

Mr ROB STOKES: There has been a longstanding air-cooling policy within the department. It provides air cooling to every school in the State where, I think, the average January temperature is above 33 degrees. It is also policy to provide air conditioning in school libraries as well as in all classrooms where there are students with a particular or special need. In relation to air conditioning in other areas, we take a balanced approach. We also look at—for example, this is one of the things we are doing with the design of new schools—ensuring that they are designed in such a way to take advantage of site conditions: for example, to ensure that they have proper breezeways, proper cross-ventilation, proper insulation, and all of those things that can increase the level of participation in all of these buildings. I also asked the incoming chief executive officer of Schools Infrastructure NSW to review the air cooling policy to seek new and innovative ways in which we can increase the degree of thermal comfort for all students across New South Wales.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: There has been a recent announcement by the principal of a non-government school—in fact, a Catholic school—that he has made it optional now for the students whether they wish to wear a boy's uniform or a girl's uniform, which apparently is causing some confusion. Has there been any change in the Government's policy?

Mr ROB STOKES: There have been no changes in the Government's policies in this area. Students are expected to conform with the uniform requirements of the school.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Earlier we were talking about the anti-bullying program replacing the Safe Schools program. I am assuming that this is coming out of the State budget. What are the costs associated with the preparation and execution of the replacement anti-bullying program?

Mr ROB STOKES: It is not a replacement for Safe Schools because Safe Schools is not a New South Wales Government program. It never has been and never will be. In relation to the anti-bullying strategy, the costings were \$6.1 million over three years. The website is *antibullying.nsw.gov.au*. As I have mentioned, it has been prepared in consultation, or through the department, and has been peer reviewed by a number of senior academics in the field. It consists of the web resources that are available, professional development initiatives, a series of conferences and workshops that will be rolled out as well as, as I mentioned, the Youth Aware of Mental Health program, which is being augmented as part of the funding as well.

What we also seek to do with this program is recognise that these web resources are not static; that we actually welcome feedback from the communities about how they might be improved. We also recognise that they are providing tools not just for teachers but also for students and for parents because, again, my view of education is that it is ultimately a relational pursuit. It is a contract between parents, schools and students, and you need resources to work with all three to make education work effectively.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Which non-government entities have been involved in the replacement anti-bullying program's preparation and execution? That is, if they are non-government entities. I am assuming there have been some.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes. A range of different bodies and people were consulted in the preparation of these resources. I am happy to provide a list on notice. We welcome continuing involvement with the

community in relation to the continuing development of these resources, recognising that they are a relational tool so their development is ongoing. They are not just static.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Have any funds been allocated to those non-government entities and can you identify them?

Mr ROB STOKES: Off the top of my head, I am not aware of any funding of external bodies in relation to being consulted on these resources, except of course the peer review that was done in relation to checking the consistency of the approach with the relevant literature. But I am happy to provide those details on notice.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Has there been any consultation by the Government with community outreach in respect of formulating the replacement anti-bullying program? If so, who or what organisations have been asked for their opinion and advice?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will provide that information on notice, but a wide range of stakeholders were consulted. The Parliamentary Secretary for Education was very helpful in talking with a wide range of stakeholders as well.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: There was a recent announcement that, to improve the ability of the classroom teacher, the Government has introduced some new additional training for those teachers—class control or some other areas. Can you update us about that?

Mr ROB STOKES: I might refer that to the secretary.

Ms HARRISSON: I do not have the specifics of the program you have mentioned, but we provide ongoing professional learning to teachers in the latest research for behaviour management in classrooms. Positive behaviour learning programs is one of the key ones that we have been rolling out most recently.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Mr Scott, I know it was in the media that there has been some announcement by the department to improve the ability of the classroom teachers.

Mr SCOTT: We will just check that, Reverend Nile. As Ms Harrison said, we understand that an ordered environment is key to young people learning effectively. It is a key part of our professional development program and our support in schools. We are currently reviewing how we best provide those educational services to support schools. I am happy to give you more detail on recent initiatives in that area.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, let us go back to the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]. If you have not reached the minimum standard band 8, after you have sat the Higher School Certificate [HSC] and you have left school, do you get your HSC certificate?

Mr ROB STOKES: Once again, you are seeking to look at a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy in terms of year 9. It is a standard that is part of receiving an HSC. As the secretary already has gone into some detail to explain, this is not a standard that is required of students in year 9.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am saying that at the time you sit your HSC and you leave, if you have not passed this minimum standard test that you have set, the new one, do you get your HSC certificate?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am confused because—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are not the only one.

Mr ROB STOKES: —at one level, are you suggesting that you think that there are students who are not going to be capable of achieving a minimum standard after 13—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Well, let us go to your—

Mr ROB STOKES: No, no, let me finish. Is it your contention that you believe that students will not be capable of achieving the minimum standard after 13 years of education, or is your contention that teachers are not up to being able to prepare students with a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Let us just go to your media release:

Students will have a few more years after completing Year 12 to meet the minimum standard and receive their HSC certificate.

Mr ROB STOKES: No. Right back up to you—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: "To meet the minimum standard".

Mr ROB STOKES: I am interrupting you now.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: "To meet the minimum standard and receive their HSC certificate".

Mr ROB STOKES: But, really, which is it? Is it that you do not think that students are up to it, or you do not think that teachers are up to it?

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: "Students will have a few more years after completing Year 12 to meet the minimum standard and receive their HSC certificate." Minister, do you take it from that that if they have not met the minimum standard, they will not receive their HSC certificate?

Mr ROB STOKES: Once again—and I am happy to answer this question as many different times as you would like to ask it—we believe that as part of receiving an HSC a student should be able to demonstrate a minimum standard of reading, of writing and of maths.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: So the answer is that they will not receive the HSC certificate?

The CHAIR: Allow the Minister to answer the question.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will happily say it again. As part of receiving an HSC, it is our expectation that students should receive or should be able to demonstrate a minimum standard in relation to reading, in relation to writing, and in relation to mathematics, as is the case in South Australia and Western Australia—both Labor States, I should mention.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Even though they have not passed the online numeracy and literacy tests, they will still receive the HSC certificate. Is that correct, Minister?

Mr ROB STOKES: Once again, as part of receiving an HSC, it is our expectation that every student will be able to work towards, in cooperation with their parents and with their teachers, a minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. We believe that as part of receiving an HSC—it should surely be something we can agree upon—students should be able to read, they should be able to write, and they should be able to do a basic level of mathematics as part of achieving a certificate that is a highly regarded qualification internationally. We believe in the HSC. We believe it is an important qualification and we believe that students should, after 13 years of education, be able to demonstrate a minimum standard of reading, of writing and of maths.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, when will a student have to pass the online numeracy and literacy test to receive the HSC?

Mr ROB STOKES: Again, as part of receiving an HSC, as part of the Stronger HSC Standards reforms that I have already spoken about at length, it is a requirement that a student demonstrates a minimum standard of reading, writing and maths.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: When?

Mr ROB STOKES: As part of receiving an HSC. I have answered this now several times.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Students will not get a certificate unless they pass the test? Just answer this question: Will you get a certificate if you have not passed the online numeracy and literacy test?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have answered your question a number of times.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, you have not. Will you get a certificate? It is a simple question: Will you get your certificate if you have not passed the online numeracy and literacy test?

Mr ROB STOKES: Councillor, you do not need to yell—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am not a councillor, so stop calling me councillor.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Point of order: There is no need to be rude.

Mr ROB STOKES: You are a member of the Legislative Council and you do not need to yell at me. I have talked at length about—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, you have not. You have not talked about anything.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: Point of order: The member is beginning to badger the Minister.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, I am not badgering the Minister. It is not a point of order.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES: I am taking a point of order, and the member should not interrupt me.

Mr ROB STOKES: I have talked at length about the anti-bullying strategy, and I do not appreciate being bullied across the table.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Parents want to know the answer to this question.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: We want to know the answer to the question. Will students get their HSC if they have not passed the online numeracy and literacy test?

Mr ROB STOKES: Let me explain it this way. The HSC is the Higher School Certificate. It is a statement of achievement. As part of that achievement, we expect after 13 years of school that a student should be able to demonstrate a minimum standard of reading, writing and maths. It is really that simple.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Why are you avoiding answering the question, Minister?

The CHAIR: I think the Minister has answered the question.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Why will you not just tell parents the truth?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: If you do not meet the minimum standard you will withhold the certificate. Is that correct?

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Why will you not just tell parents?

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROB STOKES: You can raise your voices at me, you can yell at me all you want, but my answer is fairly straightforward.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Parents want to know and kids want to know, if they do not meet the minimum standard, do they get the certificate? It is very straightforward.

The CHAIR: I think the Minister has answered the question on quite a number of occasions.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, he has not.

The CHAIR: He has and I understand what he said.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, have you sat the test or seen the test?

Mr ROB STOKES: Once again, if you are asking me if I see the HSC papers, no, I do not.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: No, have you seen the online numeracy and literacy test?

Mr ROB STOKES: They change from year to year—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Have you seen the online numeracy and literacy test?

Mr ROB STOKES: Once again, I can say that all relevant test materials are prepared well in advance. I would have thought that something we can agree on—certainly, Labor jurisdictions in other States do this—is that as part of receiving a leaving certificate from school, which is a significant achievement, students should have the opportunity or there should be a clear expectation that there is a minimum standard of reading, writing and maths.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I want to ask about the kids who do not meet the minimum standard at the end of year 12 but have up to five years to do the test.

Mr ROB STOKES: I have answered this question repeatedly and I will happily answer it again.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Where will they do the test, bearing in mind that there might be 23? Are you seriously going to make them walk back through the school gate to do this online test to receive their HSC? Where will they do the test?

Mr ROB STOKES: I cannot be any clearer in relation to this. As part of our Stronger HSC Standards reforms, we introduced a standard relating to the HSC. The standard is that if you want to receive an HSC, and we encourage every student to do so because it is a great aspiration and a great certificate—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: You are not very encouraging at the moment.

Mr ROB STOKES: It is something of value and, as part of that, in order to have that value, it is attached to certain standards. That means—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Where do you go to the test if you left school five years ago?

Mr ROB STOKES: There are a variety of testing locations right across the State.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Do you go back to your old school or do you go somewhere central?

Mr ROB STOKES: I come back to the fundamental point that if you want to receive an HSC—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You have made your fundamental point a number of times. I have moved on, Minister, and I encourage you to move on. Where do you go? Do you go back to your school or to a central point? Has this been worked out, or is it part of the thought bubble?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, it is not, as you describe, a "thought bubble". This is part of a proper comprehensive set of reforms that were well publicised when they were initiated last year. They are currently being rolled out. You asked about test locations for online tests, and I am happy to take on notice the specifics.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Thank you, and I will move on to another—

Mr ROB STOKES: Can I just say that there will be every opportunity provided and every support provided to every young person across the State to meet the standards associated with the receipt of the Higher School Certificate.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I am hoping this is my last question on the plan. For the kids who do not meet the minimum standards and we think they have to leave school without the certificate—please do not comment on that—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Unless you want to.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: —the Government's message to the potential employer is that they cannot prepare a simple invoice, they cannot follow instructions in equipment manuals, they cannot follow written instructions to operate equipment safely. How are they going to get a job when the Government is telling potential employers this?

Mr ROB STOKES: If they cannot do those things do you not think that it is a significant problem? Do you not think that after 13 years of education, a young person should be equipped with the skills?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I do, but I am worried about the Government's message and its impact on these kids, when you are holding back their HSC. Are you worried about that, Minister?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, we are not at all.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: You are sending them out after they have completed 12 years of school, but this is your message and you will not give them a certificate. Does that not worry you, because it does worry me?

Mr ROB STOKES: If you want to receive an HSC, you will have completed 13 years of school; I put that on the record. In relation to skills, that is precisely what we are seeking to achieve at school. We are seeking to ensure that all children have the skills and when they go into the workforce they can demonstrate these things. If they cannot demonstrate these things, that is a problem. That is why we are putting into the HSC real rigor.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, I am sure you want to move on.

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to keep answering questions on this matter.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I would like to keep asking questions. How much money has the department paid out in the past five years in out-of-court settlements in relation to complaints from children with a disability?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will take that question on notice.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, school cleaning contracts are currently being redone. Are they done by area or per student?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer your question to the secretary, but I will make a preliminary comment. I suspect some of the issues in your question are related to specifics that the secretary will have to take on notice. I want to start by putting on record my gratitude to all the school cleaners who work hard in our

schools. They are part of the fabric of our schools. Obviously, we need to ensure that taxpayer money is used efficiently and effectively, but I want to acknowledge that in the schools I go to I observe—in fact, I make my business to observe—how clean they are. I think the cleaners do a terrific job.

Mr SCOTT: It is not done per student; it is done by the size of internal space. It is based around square metreage of internal floor space and a sense of how much space per hour can be effectively cleaned.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: If you have a school that is at half capacity and a school that is over capacity, how does that work?

Mr SCOTT: It is based on the floor space of the school.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: It does not matter how many students are at the school at the time?

Mr SCOTT: It is based on the floor space. One of the questions about capacity is that often, as we discussed earlier, schools can be full and demountable classrooms will go into those schools. The internal floor space will reflect the floor space that is in use. That will increase when demountable classrooms are put in.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, when you say that it is important that taxpayer money is used efficiently, is the Government expecting to make savings out of these new contracts?

Mr ROB STOKES: No, what I said is what I say. I would hope that you would agree that taxpayer money should be used efficiently.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I am not sure why you said that. Why is it not being used efficiently at the moment?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am not saying it is not. In fact, I said on the record that every time I go to a school, I compliment the cleaners on the work that they do. It is something that I look at when I go to schools.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Will you retain the existing model of cleaning contracts?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to take that question on cleaning contracts on notice. Just because I am suggesting that we need to constantly ensure that taxpayer money is used efficiently, you should not read anything into that. I mean precisely that cleaners do an excellent job in our schools, and I look forward to that work continuing.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: What discussions have you had with the Minister for Finance regarding the new contracts?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There was public discussion about it being six minutes a classroom. Is it your understanding that this translates into about six minutes a classroom?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will have to take this line of questioning on notice.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Six minutes really does not sound like much.

Mr ROB STOKES: I recognise that cleaning is a very important function within our schools but my real focus is on the teaching and learning.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Having spent a bit of time chasing around after kids and cleaning up, six minutes does not sound like very much. Our shadow Minister for Finance, Clayton Barr, has challenged the Minister for Finance, Services and Property and you to go with him to a local school and clean a classroom in six minutes. Will you take him up on the challenge?

Mr ROB STOKES: I know that Clayton Barr is a fit and active member of his community—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: As are you, Minister!

Mr ROB STOKES: I encourage him in his pursuits to clean up classrooms, but I would suggest that we have great, highly qualified cleaners who do that job well and I am happy to leave it to them.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, within a week of the release of the new senior English curriculum you were forced to intervene to restore the study of novels to HSC English. This must have been quite humiliating for you as the Minister for Education. Were you surprised that you needed to intervene in a curriculum-related issue like this?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer the specifics to the chief executive officer of the NSW Education Standards Authority. You are correct in that I did intervene to ensure that a significant piece of prose continue to be a key element of HSC English. I note that the NSW Education Standards Authority board is a representative board that includes a number of key stakeholders from various school sectors, the union and professional bodies, and it had gone through a long period of wide consultation. Overall I think the curriculums that have been delivered, with their focus on moving away from the social context, particularly in areas like science, for example, and in terms of English looking at the real skills and critical thinking that we are seeking to focus on in the HSC, have been well received broadly, but I will refer to the CEO for specific information. As you would appreciate, a lot of the development of this syllabus occurred prior to my appointment.

Mr de CARVALHO: Ms Voltz, do you have a specific question for me?

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I might ask this question—

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: I had a specific question for the Minister.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Minister, you were going to take the Federal Government to court over Gonski. What have you done on this matter to put pressure on the Federal Government regarding its decision?

Mr ROB STOKES: I have been very consistent in my view in relation to Gonski as—

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I understand your view and I commend it. What have you actually done?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to answer the question. Please give me a chance to respond. Yes, as is a matter of record, I have sought legal advice. I have subsequently sought senior counsel's advice in relation to those positions. There was advice, particularly relating to issues around estoppel. That relates to where a promise has been made by one party to another and where the counterparty has acted in reliance on that promise and acted to its detriment. Where that state of affairs has been allowed to continue, that can give rise to equitable issues around estoppel, as I have mentioned. It was confirmed within the legal advice. The Federal Government, as is now also a matter of record, has moved to remove the legislation upon which legal action might be based, rendering the whole issue moot. Of course, I cannot control what the Federal Government does in terms of its legislative agenda; I can only respond. We were very strong on that legislation while it existed. Now that that legislation has been replaced we are obviously in a new environment. I will continue to push the case for the full funding for New South Wales schools as agreed in 2013 as part of the bilateral agreement that was signed as part of the National Education Reform Agreement.

It would be remiss of me as Minister for Education on behalf of teachers, schools and parents across New South Wales if I were not asserting our clear moral expectation that the full amount that we anticipated under Gonski should be provided. It is also a matter of record that the \$1.51 billion to New South Wales Government schools and a further \$200 million to Catholic schools that we were expecting over the next few years will not be provided. Nevertheless, I recognise that the Federal Government's new approach recognises the heart of the Gonski reforms, which relates to the fact that school funding should be sector blind and needs based.

The Hon. LYNDA VOLTZ: Minister, can you turn your attention to Ashtonfield Public School? Are you aware of any cameras in the school?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am happy to refer the question to the secretary.

Mr SCOTT: The Department of Education has been working with Maitland police investigating incidents that have been occurring at the school. That matter is currently under police investigation, and I do not think it is appropriate to provide further comment at this point. [*Time expired.*]

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Minister, in your neck of the woods there has been significant community pushback regarding the expansion of Manly Vale Public School on the Northern Beaches. I believe you will break ground on the expansion later this week. The Greens support investment in education, but there are other things that a community needs as well. You will be aware that this expansion will clear the home of a number of species which will become locally extinct as a direct result. As a former Minister for the Environment and now Minister for Education, do you think we are teaching our children a good lesson when we destroy habitat for these sorts of expansions and, in particular, ignore what I understand was a majority community view that we needed a different approach to the school?

Mr ROB STOKES: As Minister for Education, there are difficult decisions that you must make. I am very aware of the environmental concerns around Manly Dam. It is an area that I know well. In relation to this particular matter I have had the opportunity to visit the school on two occasions. I have walked over the areas in

which the expansion of the school will be based. Within the time constraints I had upon assuming this position, I went to considerable effort to look for further ways in which some of the environmental impacts of this expansion could be mitigated. It went through a thorough process of investigation and went through the Joint Regional Planning Panel where a development consent was issued with strict conditions. Further to that, regarding the level of felling of trees in the area required for the asset protection zone around the school, the area of the impact into the adjacent Manly Dam memorial reserve has been halved and further work at a granular level was able to identify more than 60 additional trees that could also be saved as part of the work. There is an ecologist onsite to monitor the early works as part of this build.

However, I recognise as well that undertaking a planning process in terms of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 does—and this is consistent with the whole objective of sustainable development—seek to balance social, economic and environmental factors. We had sought to do everything we could in this situation to ameliorate those concerns. I also, in my role as Minister for Education, have a clear responsibility to ensure that we have the schools and classrooms available to provide a great education for the growing community around there. However, I want to acknowledge that a former principal of the school—we have a great principal there currently with Tina Lee—David Tribe is one of those who has been leading the efforts of environmentalists locally. I commend him for his advocacy. Certainly I have done everything I can to listen to those concerns and reach a solution that respects the local environment but also achieves the need, at a social level, to provide additional accommodation for the school.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Why was the decision ultimately made to expand this site into a megaschool, as it was described to me, rather than spread the upgrades across other schools in the area? This was extraordinarily sensitive environmentally. You have made comments today about having to best manage the space that you have and potentially make improvements, but at the end of the day there were options, as I understand it. People put options to me; they no doubt put them to you. Why was that decision taken?

Mr ROB STOKES: First, the design of the building was changed quite considerably in response to community concerns about impacts on the environment. That had an impact on the project budget but we were happy to do that to ensure that we did as much as we could to address those environmental concerns. Yes, there was an alternative site put to me. It would have resulted in a split campus, which I am advised is not the best educational outcome, and it would also have involved significant environmental challenges in relation to the alternative site that was offered, which had significant flood constraints. You asked why are we not looking at surrounding schools. We are doing that as well. I was recently able to announce the completion of the upgrade to Harbord Public School, which is one of the local schools. Manly Village Public School is much more constrained with its site and also has significant heritage constraints. This is just one example of the challenges we face in retrofitting our schools to meet increasing demand as parts of Sydney move from what could be described as an overall suburban character to a more urban character.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: With the expansion of the school in size will the catchment area that it draws from be expanded?

Mr SCOTT: We will have to take that on notice. We anticipate increasing student enrolments in public schools in Manly Vale. There is growth in that immediate area, but I will come back to you on the amount.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: You would expect in that instance it would potentially not be widened?

Mr SCOTT: No, I am not saying that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I am happy to receive it on notice.

Mr SCOTT: I am saying within the current footprint. But the current footprint is predicated around a much smaller school than the school will be once the renovation is done. The boundary will invariably change as a consequence of that.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: I draw the Minister's attention back to the anti-bullying strategy. I have had a look at the website you mentioned earlier. Are you aware that the mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning [LGBTIQ] youth is significantly poorer than for their heterosexual peers?

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: It appears from the website there is almost no specific material provided for parents, teachers or students that goes to the very specific challenges that LGBTIQ youth face in schools. Do you acknowledge that there is little information specifically to do with bullying of LGBTIQ students?

Mr ROB STOKES: I can say that these resources were developed in consultation with a range of groups, including groups representing the interests of LGBTI students. They were subject to an external peer review as well.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: That is fair enough but there is nothing specific to them in this bullying strategy, based on the website.

Mr ROB STOKES: The focus of this reform was to recognise that bullying occurs in a range of different contexts.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: Sure, but we just agreed on the significantly poorer outcomes of these particular students.

Mr ROB STOKES: Yes. Those resources will be of benefit in those situations as well as in a variety of other situations. The objective of this exercise was not to focus on any particular issue for which a young person may be subject to bullying. Rather, it was to provide a comprehensive suite of resources that could be available and flexible to be used in a whole variety of circumstances.

Mr JUSTIN FIELD: We are going through a very public process at the moment with the postal plebiscite. Have any additional resources been allocated through the schools? Have you made a direction to schools to watch out for kids from rainbow families who are being potentially affected or might be being bullied as a direct result of this public conversation that we are having about marriage equality, and some of the comments that are out there in the public suggesting that their families are not real? Have you directed any additional resources or support material?

Mr ROB STOKES: My expectation in relation to every school is that we ensure that schools are inclusive, safe places for every family.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: You probably have some of the recommendations of the upper House select committee. One was that the Minister for Education review the registration requirements for homeschooling so as to allow students from 4½ to 19 years to be registered for homeschooling. Would you review that age grouping?

Mr ROB STOKES: I will refer that to the Executive Director of Corporate Governance and School Standards.

Mr MURPHY: That particular issue was examined at the time. The Government's policy at the time was that the minimum age be six up to the age of 17. Subsequently there was a ministerial decision that extended the age range to 18, to allow students to complete in a homeschooling setting the Higher School Certificate [HSC] curriculum. At this point there are no plans to change the age below the age of six.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: There have been gradual changes over a period of time. It may come in the future?

Mr MURPHY: I cannot really speculate on that.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Because the homeschooling parents needed help, another strong recommendation was whether the Board of Studies would review the roles of staff involved in the regulation of homeschooling to create a new position of an assessment and support officer. The primary purpose of that position was to provide guidance and support to homeschooling applicants to ensure they are providing an educational program that meets the syllabus requirements and the child's needs.

Mr ROB STOKES: I will make a preliminary comment and then refer it to the chief executive officer. I had a very productive meeting with representatives of the home schools and subsequent to that I have asked the NSW Education Standards Authority [NESA] to look into ways in which we can provide appropriate assistance to every sector of education. The focus here is to ensure that a quality education is provided to every child in New South Wales and to have registration of schools and systems in such a way to facilitate that objective. I will hand over to the CEO.

Mr de CARVALHO: I will ask Mr David Murphy, who is responsible for the regulation of homeschooling, to respond to you.

Mr MURPHY: NESA already provides considerable support to homeschooling families. While we have primarily a regulatory role in registering parents of children for homeschooling, the role of the authorised person who conducts those assessments for registration also provides support. We also provide homeschooling families with a range of resources which, because of the quite extensive array of resources that we have on the

NESA website, have been of particular value to homeschooling families, particularly around NESA's syllabuses but also online tools, such as Program Builder, which are accessible by homeschooling families. As part of the consultation process that we are currently engaged with we are looking for ways to provide further support for homeschooling children.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Another recommendation following on from what was just said was that a consultative group be established, with four homeschooling representatives and four nominated by the Board of Studies, to carry through this consultation process. Is it being considered or could it be considered in the future?

Mr MURPHY: It has been meeting since 2015. It has met at least four times a year in each of those years since. It is that particular group that has been the focus of the consultation around revising the guidelines for the registration of children for homeschooling. That particular group has been of extraordinary value to ensure that we get engagement with the homeschooling community around those revised guidelines.

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE: Thank you for the progress you are making. Very encouraging.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: This weekend, and in spite of fierce opposition from the community, the Government is pressing ahead with the sale of 700 square metres of Department of Education land right next to Berala Public School in Western Sydney. Will you commit today, given what we have heard earlier, to stopping the sale this Saturday?

Mr ROB STOKES: Two points there. First, you said it is directly next to Berala Public School. It is not.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: I did not say directly.

Mr ROB STOKES: It is nearby. It is a detached, residential block of land. I understand that transaction is being handled by Property NSW. It is not a matter for me directly. But what I will say, to go over earlier terrain, is that land that is required for educational purposes is retained by the department. But if there is no current or future projected need from an educational perspective—the school you refer to, for example, is one where we do expect enrolments to increase but more modestly than in other schools in that surrounding area, and it already spans over 12 acres of land.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: There is a group called the Hope Group, parents concerned about the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] who have written to you a couple of times asking to meet. They are preparing a petition about the NAPLAN changes. They are coming to Parliament tomorrow. Will you commit to meeting with them tomorrow?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am very happy to meet with them. Unfortunately, I am travelling elsewhere in the State to talk about new schools.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: Will you commit to meeting with them down the track?

Mr ROB STOKES: I am very happy to meet with them.

The Hon. JOHN GRAHAM: One of their concerns is, a mother was told her—[*Time expired.*]

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister Stokes, and your officers for attending today's hearing.

(The witnesses withdrew)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.