

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Wednesday 2 March 2022

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING

The Committee met at 9:30.

CORRECTED

MEMBERS

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Mark Banasiak
Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam
The Hon. Wes Fang (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Scott Farlow
The Hon. Courtney Houssos
Mr David Shoebridge

PRESENT

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

* Please note:

[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered.

[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction.

[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

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 this additional public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2021-2022. Before I commence, it is the custom of the Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of the land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and I do that with all due respect. I also acknowledge other important contributors to the history of this site: those who constructed the Parliament House building, very often working in a dangerous industry, and the parliamentary staff over many decades who have supported MPs and made our work and representative roles possible. I acknowledge and thank them all.

I welcome Minister Sarah Mitchell and her officials for this hearing. I acknowledge and thank them for the work they will be doing with the flooded schools in northern New South Wales, which is obviously an immediate issue of huge concern. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio for Education and Early Learning. Before we commence I would like to make brief comments about the procedures for the hearing. Today's proceedings are being broadcast live from the Parliament's website and a transcript will be placed on the Committee's website once it becomes available. In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish. All witnesses at budget estimates hearings have a right to procedural fairness, according to the resolution of the House adopted in 2018.

There may be some questions that a witness could answer only if they had more time. Those can be taken on notice, but we do expect that material that is to hand in those extensive briefing folders is actually provided to the Committee. On that point, I received a document written by Ruth Owen on Monday that stated that last week and the beginning of week would be dominated by preparation for estimates. It states, "We had several rehearsals last week and have a few more rehearsals again today and tomorrow." I remind witnesses that today's hearing is not a performance that requires a rehearsal. Officials are here to provide straight, direct answers as part of parliamentary accountability. On other Committees there has been a bad habit of taking everything on notice and a deliberate strategy of not providing information to run some political exercise, instead of being direct and straight with the Committee. This has been a better Committee than others in budget estimates and I hope that tradition continues. I am not too sure the education department is going well enough to take up four or five days with rehearsals. I again remind witnesses that today is not performance.

If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do through the Committee staff. Minister, I remind you and the officers with you that you are free to pass notes and refer directly to your advisers seated at the table behind you. Finally, I ask that everyone please turn their mobile phones to silent for the duration of the hearing. Many of today's witnesses have been sworn previously to give evidence, and Minister Mitchell has, of course, been sworn as a member of the Parliament. I will ask those witnesses who have not yet been sworn to do so now.

Ms GEORGINA HARRISSON, Secretary, Department of Education, on former oath

Ms SIMONE WALKER, Group Deputy Secretary, School Improvement and Education Reform Group, Department of Education, on former oath

Ms LISA ALONSO LOVE, Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms RUTH OWEN, Deputy Secretary, Learning Improvement, Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms LEANNE NIXON, Deputy Secretary, School Performance – North, Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr MURAT DIZDAR, Deputy Secretary, School Performance – South, Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr DAVID WITHEY, Chief Operating Officer, Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms YVETTE CACHIA, Chief People Officer, Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr ANTHONY MANNING, Chief Executive, School Infrastructure NSW, Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr PAUL MARTIN, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority, on former affirmation

Mr DARYL CURRIE, Executive Director, Professional and Ethical Standards, affirmed and examined

Ms DIANNE VAN BERLO, Executive Director, Health, Safety and Staff Wellbeing, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 12.45 p.m. with a 15-minute morning tea break at 11.00 a.m. We will joined by the Minister in the morning, and then in the afternoon we will hear from all the departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.15 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and the crossbench only. If required at the end, the Government MPs can have 15 minutes of questioning, but that is normally not the practice of this Committee. I thank everyone for their attendance today. We will begin with questions from the Opposition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Chair, I am sorry to interrupt. Just before we start, obviously as you have mentioned with the flooding emergency up north I wanted to foreshadow that this afternoon Ms Van Berlo, who is the head of work health and safety—and potentially Mr Dizdar and Ms Nixon as school operations—may need to be in and out from time to time as they are managing some of the issues at schools. We are happy to speak to you about that in the lunch break, but I foreshadow it now for the Committee's benefit given the circumstances.

The CHAIR: I think the Committee would facilitate that in its entirety if any of that time is needed by those officials.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you. Sorry to interrupt.

The CHAIR: We would not stand in the way of emergency work on school sites in northern New South Wales.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Chair. Sorry, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, absolutely. Thanks very much, Minister, and everyone for coming this morning. I start by asking how many schools are closed today.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to provide that number from the secretary. It is more than 170 across the three sectors. I believe it might be 179 but I will get the secretary to confirm that number.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have 179 government schools closed today due to the flooding. There are a number of other Catholic and independent schools that are impacted and we are just working with those sectors around that information. We will be able to provide some further information on those sectors later on through the day.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Great. If you could on notice provide us, by the time we get the details back, of the extent of the damage to those school sites—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just on that, obviously at the moment for a lot of those school communities they are unable to be reached because of the floodwaters. There are a number of issues at play. We

know some of those schools need to be closed because the roads are cut and you cannot get there, and we do not envisage that there is necessarily damage to the schools. But of course, there are other schools that are in the middle of the floodwaters. I have been speaking to a few principals up there who know that they have lost quite a bit at their school. Once it is safe to be able to get on and assess the damage that is obviously what Mr Manning and his team will do. But again, I am happy to provide as much information as we can to the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: On notice will be—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Ms Houssos, it is 130 government schools, 28 independent and 21 Catholic schools, as far as we are aware at the moment. We also have a number of schools operating as evacuation centres in some communities that are impacted, so obviously there is disruption in those schools as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Absolutely. Thanks very much for that, Ms Harrisson. Minister, the train network was shut down by Transport for NSW on Monday 21 February. We now know that Transport for NSW was consulting widely within the New South Wales Government in the weeks leading up to the shutdown, including planning for a two-week shutdown. Minister, were you consulted by Transport for NSW during that planning?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Me personally?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you know Transport for NSW was planning for a two-week shutdown?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, but I am happy to ask the secretary what engagement the department may have had.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will get to that in a moment. Minister, when did you first know that the train network was shut down?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Early in the morning of the day, when I saw it on the news. It is not my portfolio area. It would not be something I would be briefed on.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It would not be something that you would be briefed on?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of decisions made those in the relevant portfolios, no. I saw it in the news that morning.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, are you aware that the Department of Education did make a submission to the Fair Work Commission about the impact on the education system?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am aware of that now but, as I said, I am happy for the secretary to provide information in relation to what that process undertook. I was not made aware of that until very recently, in fact.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When were you made aware of that?

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

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It was after the network was shut down?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. You were not aware when the affidavit was lodged?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, that was not brought to my attention. But again, I am happy for the secretary to provide more comment on that.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: This was a request we received from the Department of Transport and across government to provide advice on the impact of potential rail disruption on the delivery of our services. That is an operational matter for the department and we were asked to provide some information on that. The Committee will appreciate the reliance of our students and staff on public transport to get to their local schools and further afield schools—for example, our selective schools, where people travel a lot further. It was important for us to ensure that those implications of any industrial action or disruption to the railway network were taken into account.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The affidavit that was lodged with the Fair Work Commission outlines pretty significant impacts from a shutdown of the rail network. That is correct, is it not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: That is correct. Any time there is disruption to the rail network, for a variety of reasons, it will cause disruption to schools, so that is something that we are obviously interested in to ensure the smooth operation of schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrisson, you were aware that there was a submission made to the Fair Work Commission, is that correct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I was aware that we had been asked and we were responding to that request, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You were aware of the contents of the affidavit?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I was aware in broad terms of the contents of the affidavit, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In broad terms? Did you read it?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Ms Walker, who is here, provided the affidavit. It would not be normal for someone else in an organisation to step in when it is an affidavit from an individual. It was Ms Walker's affidavit and she made it in relation to the impact on schools. We discussed our shared understanding of the impact of rail disruption on school operations and then Ms Walker provided the affidavit.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you were aware that the Government was planning for a two-week shutdown of trains?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: No, that is not what I was aware of. We were asked to provide information around the impact of potential disruption to the rail network on the operation of schools. We were not made aware of potential action or other matters.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrisson, why did you not raise this? The affidavit outlines very significant impacts on school students. The question of this has been widely canvassed in the media. There was clearly planning going on within the Government about a potential shutdown. Why did you not tell the Minister that you were being consulted about this?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: These were operational matters in relation to the impact of disruption in another cluster on the operation of schools. That is not something that I felt needed political engagement in relation to that. This was very much—we were asked, operationally, what is the impact on schools of potential disruption to the railways. We provided that advice. I hope the Committee would understand, given the focus we have had on keeping schools open over the past year and certainly through this term, that that is our primary focus. I feel that we have discharged that responsibility appropriately in the affidavit in relationship to our responsibility to our service delivery in schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But, Ms Harrisson, the affidavit outlines very serious impacts. It talks about a risk of increased child protection issues and increased stress on families. In fact, the final paragraph says that there will be "significant harm of the mental health and wellbeing for our students". These are pretty damning statements. If an event is going to have that significant an outcome, do you not think it is worth escalating to the Minister to say, "We are being consulted about this issue. We are deeply concerned about the impact on students and therefore we think you should be aware of it"?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Had we been made aware that there was to be the shutdown that you are suggesting—we had one day in the end but, if there had been that extended shutdown, then of course. The Minister and I talk a lot about how important and valuable it is for schools to be opened. We have made that very clear through the response to COVID in this term. Those are issues the Minister would be inherently across in relation to the value of schools being open for our students.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: This goes to the question of who knew what about planning a two-week shutdown. It is pretty clear that within the New South Wales Government there was a broad discussion about what the impact would be. In fact, Ms Walker's affidavit says that on the Monday before the shutdown occurred, 55,500 train trips were made by school students. It would have a huge impact on the education department, a huge impact on schools and a huge impact on families and students. Why did you not tell the Minister that the Government was making these plans?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Ms Houssos, the reality is that there was not a two-week shutdown. Other Ministers will be appearing before various budget estimates committees who have responsibility for these matters. I think the secretary has very clearly outlined that the department was asked to provide advice

about what may happen if there was a significant disruption to the train network. Let us not forget that there are currently industrial issues at play and broad negotiations are taking place. The reality is that the department did what it was expected to do by being asked to provide advice from another agency in terms of what the impacts would be if there was a significant disruption to the train line. Most people would understand that, yes, there would be a significant impact on schools and students getting to school if you had train lines shut down. I can appreciate you trying to paint a conspiracy theory, but the reality is that the department was asked to provide advice to another agency and it did that. If you want to question why that information was sought from another agency, you need to direct those questions to those who saw the information from the Department of Education and not to my officials.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Harrison, this is a sensitive issue. Did you not consult with anyone in the Minister's office that this might be in the offing?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Not to my recollection. We were asked to provide operational advice on the impact of a shutdown of the rail network on the operations of schools. As the Minister has indicated, we did that and we did so clearly. These are the issues that have concerned us for an extended period now around schools not being accessible for students during COVID and other matters. We are also very conscious for our young people that any further shutdown that could be caused by other operational disruptions would compound some of those issues from the last two years. That is not something we would want to see in Education. We would want to make sure schools could stay open. As we have indicated, we were asked to provide the operational advice. We provided that advice with our understanding of the impact a further extended shutdown could have on our students and our schools. We have done so in a very transparent process because I would note that this—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Harrison, did it not set off alarm bells for you that you are being asked by another agency about a shutdown that was going to affect thousands of students? Did that not trigger some concern on your part that perhaps this is a matter that the Minister's office should be alerted to?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Had it escalated to that point then obviously that would have been the case. At the time we had no indication from the Department of Transport about the likelihood of that shutdown occurring. We responded to the request we were given; we responded to it factually and accurately. The affidavit is in the public domain. We have nothing to hide in relation to that affidavit. We provided the information on what we thought further disruption to school provision would mean for our students. I hope this Committee would appreciate that that is the thing we would be expected to do from our perspective in our portfolio.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The affidavit outlines the very significant effects that you thought the potential shutdown would have. As the Minister outlined, it is well known that there are industrial issues with the train network that are being negotiated through. What preparations did your department make as a result of those concerns and as a result of this advice?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I might ask Ms Walker to comment on the specifics of the follow-up. Obviously we were clear with Transport that if there was to be disruption, it would be helpful for us to be made aware of it so that we could respond and support our schools, but I will let Ms Walker provide you with some further information.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrison, you said you asked to be advised if there was going to be disruptions?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If the industrial action that we had been requested to provide information in response to was to be going ahead then, of course, we wanted to be made aware of that so that we could communicate with our schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When did you ask for that advice?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Walker to provide the detail, if that is okay, in terms of the conversations that have been had around that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When you say you "requested for Transport for NSW", was that you or Ms Walker?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Walker to provide the details. In general we have regular discussions with senior officials in government around these issues. Obviously I would expect that if there was something occurring in another cluster or agency that would have an impact on the operation of schools, we would be made aware of it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrison, were you made aware of the shutdown of the network prior to it occurring?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think these matters, as the Minister has indicated, have been well canvassed in other agencies. We were not made aware of the decision late on Sunday night that there would be a day's disruption.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Were you officially advised?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I would need to go back and check my records because I think everyone was made aware in the morning when they saw the news. Whether or not I also received a formal notification, I will need to go and check.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you are able to let us know today, that would be useful because this is something that is very significant. There were 55,500 students who travelled on the train network on the Monday previous. Obviously there were no students who travelled on the train network that next Monday. The fact that the Department of Education was not alerted at all is significant, so if you can check your records that would be great.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If I can check my records before we make any assertions about whether I was notified or not, that would be fantastic. Obviously I was notified with early warning from the media of those events because they were very public very early in the day.

The Hon. WES FANG: I want to raise the point that obviously Ms Harrisson has the opportunity to take the question on notice, and that does allow her to provide the answer within 21 days. Obviously, given what we know about flooding up north and the workload that they are under, you can rightfully request it by the end of the day, but—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am just asking her to check her text messages, Wes.

The CHAIR: Ms Harrisson has taken it on notice. She is going to check her records.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrisson, what preparations were made internally after this affidavit was taken that showed the significant effects it would have on students, and what alerts did you make? You obviously did not escalate it to the Minister. Did you make any preparations internally?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: All of our schools, especially after the last two years, are ready to change the nature of their operations when they are required to do so. There is full provision for learning-at-home materials available through the department and available through our teachers. Our schools, particularly at the moment, are on alert for how and when they might need to make that transition. I had confidence that our schools were and are ready to respond if that was required. Ms Walker can probably provide you with some further information.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I could just add too, Ms Houssos, again, we are not talking about a two-week shutdown that eventuated. I think it is important that the Committee is clear here. With respect, a lot of your questions are based on a hypothetical of a two-week shutdown that did not occur. The reality is, as the secretary said, our schools are very agile. They are flexible; they know how to respond if there are disruptions. I also know on the particular Monday when we did see the most disruption, we did have a slight dip in attendance but it was not of a huge level. There were obviously some students where it was challenging for them to get to school who did rely on the train network. But, again, hypothesising in this Committee about an area that frankly is not the responsibility of the Department of Education needs to be put on the record. I am happy to provide the attendance rates for that day on notice, but you are asking a line of questioning about a hypothetical scenario that did not actually eventuate. I think that needs to be clear.

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

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I have not seen that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. I have read the affidavit. It outlines catastrophic effects on the education system.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If there was a two-week shutdown, I believe, Ms Houssos, but that did not occur.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Any further disruptions would have caused significant harm—

The CHAIR: Order! The member can ask the question, please.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —on the mental health and wellbeing of our students. It is a hypothetical, but your bureaucrats went to the Fair Work Commission and talked about the deeply catastrophic effects that this would have.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Would Ms Walker be able to provide a comment as somebody who—

SIMONE WALKER: Can I just clarify what occurred for the formation of the affidavit? I was contacted by the Crown Solicitor as part of the work that it was doing in the Fair Work Commission. It was very much in the understanding that there were industrial negotiations underway and that this was to form part of that information. We were working in the context of having considerable shutdowns last year and also having a very strong and successful return to school that we were very keen to maintain. Face-to-face teaching has been our absolute mantra and we wanted to ensure that. We also know that creating uncertainty and anxiety for our students would have an effect, and I think, as the Minister said really clearly, one day versus two weeks was a very different circumstance, but it was my obligation at that time to make sure that we were thinking about student welfare and that is what I have covered in my affidavit.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Walker, what preparations did you make or did the department make?

SIMONE WALKER: There was no indication in any of the conversations that I had that anything was definite or certain. This was a negotiated process and we were providing information. There were no discussions between myself and Transport about the inevitability or the certainty of anything happening.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You are saying that this was purely a hypothetical exercise and that there were no practical impacts. You did not think that you needed to escalate it to the Minister's attention, even though an event that you said could cause significant harm to the mental health and to the wellbeing of our students may eventuate. You made no preparations as a result of it. You did not escalate it to the Minister. You just thought that this was purely a hypothetical exercise.

SIMONE WALKER: What we were really clear about is that operationally we can turn very quickly to learning from home. That has been the experience in the past. It really was an industrial negotiation that we were not a party to other than giving advice. As I understand, many departments gave advice about the impact of any action over the period. Again, it was one day. Attendance rates maybe dropped a couple of percentage points, but we can come back on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can take that on notice.

SIMONE WALKER: Absolutely. Minimal impact is how I would describe it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, I was one of the parents who was impacted by the disruption. Have you written to parents to apologise for your Government's decision to shut down the network and cause that disruption?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I have not written to parents. The reality is, as I think Ms Walker said, it was a few percentages of students in the attendance rates being down that day. On any given day there are reasons why people cannot go to school. But in specific reference to your question, no, I have not written to parents about that issue.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If it was only a few percentage points, how can you stand by your affidavit saying that this would have catastrophic effects on the education department?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because, Ms Houssos, it was a one-day disruption that I think deputy secretary Ms Walker has outlined.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: With respect, Minister, you have not read the affidavit, so why don't we ask Ms Walker or Ms Harrison?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You asked me the question so that is why I am answering it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I said: Do you stand by the affidavit? You cannot stand by the affidavit when you did not read it. Ms Walker, do you stand by this?

SIMONE WALKER: Absolutely, I stand by the affidavit. In the context of the information that was required of me, which was what would be the ongoing effects for students, that is what I have described in my affidavit and I stand by that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You have clearly done some analysis of the impact on students because you just mentioned, Minister, that it was only 1 per cent or 2 per cent. Are you able to provide to the Committee the data of absences for the Monday prior to the industrial stoppage—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have been collecting attendance data.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —and the data for that day?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. As I said, it was only a few per cent. I had said I would take that on notice. We are of course collecting attendance data regularly as we are returning to school each day, in fact knowing what the numbers are. There is a range of reasons, particularly at the moment, why students are not at school, particularly in relation to COVID and those who might need to be at home because they have COVID or they are a close contact. We are following the numbers quite closely. I invite the Committee to be aware of that when they look at the attendance numbers. But we are happy to provide what the attendance was on that particular day and also the Monday the week before for the Committee.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you, Minister, for coming. I just want to address a couple of issues about specific schools if I may.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Walgett high school—can we have from the beginning of 2019 till now the number of police attendances at that school?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond to that.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think we will need to take the very specifics of that question on notice in relation to Walgett. Mr Dizdar will have further information in relation to the school, and if that is your focus of questioning, we might ask him to come up to the table if he may.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: If he has it to hand, otherwise I do not want to drag him up if he is only going to take it on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will have to take that one on notice.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar, do you have the information to hand?

MURAT DIZDAR: Sorry? The number of—

The CHAIR: Do you have the information to hand?

MURAT DIZDAR: No, we will have to take that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I know that it is not only police attendances but there is a school safety notification that sometimes happens with it. Can I also get the school safety notifications as well for the same period?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Absolutely.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Yes. Sorry, that was from the beginning of 2019?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, let us say 2019 till now, given that obviously there has been some disruption to school with COVID. Wee Waa High School, Minister—my colleague Mr Butler wrote to you in November last year just wanting an update on whether there had been any, I guess, answers regarding the cause of the illnesses/allergies, and you said that work was still ongoing with the health expert. Do you have an update on that as to whether they have produced a result as to what the illness or allergy was?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask, probably, Mr Manning.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: That would be a matter for our work health and safety colleagues. I will see if Ms Van Berlo has that information to hand. If we could just have a second to check, we would be happy to provide that if we do.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will just do a bit of musical chairs, sorry, Mr Banasiak.

DIANNE VAN BERLO: Thank you for the question. The final report from the independent health study is still currently under review by the Hunter New England public health unit. We have not received the final report as of yet.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do you have an anticipated date as to when you may receive that?

DIANNE VAN BERLO: We anticipated getting that by the end of February, however we had not gotten it at that point.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I just might note that our public health units, as the Committee would appreciate, have been exceptionally busy over the last period since we were here talking about these issues. I would just ask that we give them the leeway to get us that. We do not see the extension of that timing as a problem, in a sense that they have been unable to complete it in the time, given they have been focused on the COVID response in those areas.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. That is why I asked for an ETA because I did not want to have to keep bothering you every five minutes with it. One more issue from my colleague Roy Butler. On the number of disabled children travelling to Gunnedah school, we did, I think with your help, Minister, organise a bus for them, but now the support worker who has to travel on the bus has resigned, which obviously means that it is not really feasible for some of those kids to be on the bus and travel by bus. We were wondering whether it could be fast-tracked in getting a new support worker.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am really happy to look at that. As you said, my office met with Mr Butler last week to talk about that. Obviously living in Gunnedah, it is an area I know well and a lot of families do travel for their children to come to GS kids school in Gunnedah, which is a great SSP. But because of the specifics of that worker resigning and what happens now operationally, we are happy to take that on notice and, as I said, continue to talk to Mr Butler about what opportunities there are available. I do not know if the secretary wants to add anything.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I have nothing to add on that specific. But, obviously, if we have disruptions to those transport networks, we do look very quickly to try and fill those vacancies. I am very happy to come back with some further information on that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: This might be a rarity: I am going to ask a money question—a budget question—in budget estimates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Wow, how unusual!

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: From the organisational chart—I have a copy of 19 June 2021 one and also the one from 23 August—I notice 13 new executive directors have been appointed and four new directors in various renaming or rebranding of positions. What is the total cost of remuneration of the new organisational chart as it stands now?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I would need to take that on notice on the specifics of the salaries of the individuals concerned. I would say to the Committee that we have sought to realign our organisation around the priorities of schools and receipt of our services. Overall, we have sought to reallocate resources within. Although you may see new positions, there will also have been potentially other positions that are no longer there. I would appreciate the opportunity to provide you with the details of that whole picture on notice, if I may.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes, I would appreciate that. On a more sensitive matter, Minister, I am aware from some concerns raised to me by local constituents that at Shell Cove Public School there have been three instances involving child protection issues, all three of which have ended up in litigation and all three have named the principal as a concern. Why is that principal still in that position if there are three cases involving litigation?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond to that one, Mr Banasiak.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am conscious about not going into the specifics of investigations in this forum. If I may, I will take that on notice and come back to you. I do not have the information that you are referring to in relation to allegations that may involve a particular member of staff. I will take that away. I think it is important that we make sure our understanding of these issues is accurate before we pass comment.

The CHAIR: Has it been referred to the PES?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That was going to be one of my follow-up questions. On notice can you include that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: And also include what involvement the director of educational leadership had in supporting that principal?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes. Obviously, the Committee will be aware that we have mandatory reporting requirements in relation to child protection matters throughout the education system. Those are taken very seriously by people throughout the department. Where those matters are raised, I would expect that we are in a strong position to respond to them appropriately. It would be my expectation that if any allegations of the nature that you have referred to involve a member of staff, they would absolutely be sent to the professional standards and ethics area to be considered, assessed and then investigated.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I turn to the teacher accreditation bill. During the debate, when I moved amendments you spoke about how a lot of the stuff that I was concerned about would be covered in internal guidelines with NESAs. Have those guidelines been produced and would they be available for the Committee or the House to view?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask Mr Martin to comment in relation to that. What I will say, Mr Banasiak, is that obviously at the time we did speak about making sure that there was an opportunity, particularly for yourself or for members who were interested in terms of what those guidelines would look like. That is absolutely the intention. But I will see whether Mr Martin can provide an update on where that work is up to.

PAUL MARTIN: Thank you for the question. Yes, the guidelines will be produced over the course of 2022. I think the Minister has given an indication that the public register of teachers will be in the first half of this year. We have to have NESAs as the teacher accreditation authority in place one year from the commencement of the Act, and the rest of the policy processes will go through the board and to the Minister over the course of the year.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do we have someone from PES at the desk?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes, we have Ms Cachia and Mr Currie.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How many investigators does PES employ currently?

YVETTE CACHIA: I will take that on notice, unless Mr Currie has the exact number to hand.

The CHAIR: We have the director of PES.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: He should know.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We will get Mr Currie up to the table, if we may.

YVETTE CACHIA: If it is going to be specific numbers.

DARYL CURRIE: I will take that on notice simply because we have just had a recruitment process finalised in the last week or so, so I want to get accurate numbers to you.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: While you are taking that on notice, you might want to take on notice how many deployed deputy principals are also currently working in PES, because I would imagine some of them may have been part of that recruitment process?

DARYL CURRIE: Not this particular recruitment process, but the previous one, yes, and they are working in EPMI. But I will take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Minister, a week ago I gave you a copy of this document, the document twice listed by the department in the SO52 index for the School Excellence Policy as coming from Lithgow High School that is dated 7 December 2020. It contains a comment that is completely condescending and inappropriate in public education, that the way to lift HSC performance at what we thought was Lithgow High School is "better breeding". What have you done about this since and what have been the consequences for the person who said this?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As we have discussed, and indeed as I said in the House, I think that those comments are completely unacceptable. I know that the secretary and I spoke about it immediately after question time. I gave you the indication that I would do that and you provided me with a copy of that particular document. There are investigations underway, which is appropriate. We need to get to the bottom of what has gone on. My advice is that minutes from another school meeting were inadvertently included in the files that were submitted to Parliament. That particular SO52 had more than 4,500 pages. It was important, particularly early on in the investigation, that it was made clear that the attribution of those comments to Lithgow High School was incorrect, and the department thought it was important to clarify that. At the moment they are looking into both the error of why that document was included in the SO52 and attributed to Lithgow High, but also the original comments, which are still being investigated. As I said, they are not acceptable and not in line with the values of public education in New South Wales. That is why an investigation is still underway in relation to that issue that you raised last week.

The CHAIR: How hard is it to know which high school it is from, given there are not that many in the Lithgow cluster. It is Kandos High School, isn't it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to provide comment in terms of the investigation. I think one thing that has been clear, particularly over the last week, is that we need to be completely sure of what is accurate, particularly when it is in the public domain. But I will ask the secretary to provide further comment.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Thank you, Minister. Obviously, following the misappropriation of those comments to Lithgow High School, we want to make sure that we are very careful and cautious in the way we respond because of the damage it can do to individuals in those communities, as well as to the community itself. We are continuing our investigations. Some of the staff we need to talk to are currently on leave for a variety of reasons, and so we are unable to talk to everyone we need to talk to at this time. But the investigation is underway. I reiterate what the Minister said. These comments do not align with the values of public education. They do not align with the values of our teachers in our classrooms across the State. This is not the message that we get back from our staff, and it is disappointing that such comments would be made in any circumstance in relation to public education.

The CHAIR: Do you agree that the person making the comments has no place in public education in New South Wales?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am going to tread cautiously, Chair, because I am conscious that this is people's careers. I am conscious that the individual themselves—firstly, we are continuing the investigations. As I indicated, we have not been able to talk to everyone we need to talk to because they are on leave for a variety of reasons. I do not want to make commentary in relation to those matters until we have been able to fully investigate the matter. But I do take the seriousness—

The CHAIR: It is a disgusting slur on a working-class community, originally identified as Lithgow because the department lodged it as Lithgow. Why did the department on Monday tell *The Daily Telegraph* that it was a relieving principal, ostensibly from Lithgow, who has been removed and is no longer working in the school system. Why was that put out as an official statement by the department?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, we were asked for comment in relation to a story that *The Daily Telegraph* was running over the weekend. We provided that comment. We have been continuing our investigations and they have reminded us just how important it is to make sure that we are clear on the areas we are providing comment on. I can confirm to the Committee that it is our understanding that it was a relieving principal, and that is a correct statement.

The CHAIR: At Lithgow. She was at Lithgow and now works in the PES, Karen Mahood, but that is not true, is it?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, the relieving principal of another high school—

The CHAIR: Because the document is not from Lithgow.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: No, but there is a—

The Hon. WES FANG: Chair—

The CHAIR: I mean, this is not a joke here. This is a disgustingly elitist and condescending comment about a working class community and this sort of semantical exercise, to run around the maypole, let us just get to the facts. The department put out a statement on Monday which gave, for all intents and purposes, the identification of a relieving principal now working in the PES in the Bathurst office. That was false, was it not? That was untrue.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, firstly, in relation to the comments you just made, please be assured—and I want to assure the whole Committee—we do not see anything funny in this matter and are not treating it as a joke. We are treating it very seriously. As I have indicated, these comments—

The CHAIR: Well, can you be serious enough to give us a straight answer, please?

The Hon. WES FANG: Chair, can—

The CHAIR: Why were those comments made? Why was that false statement given to *The Daily Telegraph*?

The Hon. WES FANG: Chair, I think it is appropriate just to allow Ms Harrisson to complete her answer before we—

The CHAIR: Well, I am trying to get to the truth.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We made a statement based on our understanding prior to the fact that we had identified that it was an incorrect piece of paper that was in the wrong section and provided through the Standing Order 52. I can confirm that it is a relieving principal overall in this investigation that we are having conversations with, or who was a relieving principal at a time in the system.

The CHAIR: Which school was she relieving at?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: So, Chair, I think as we have learnt so far in this process—and I have indicated—I am not comfortable discussing the individuals while we have been unable to talk to the individuals themselves while they are on leave. There is an investigation underway. We will complete that investigation and I am very happy to come back to you following the outcome of that investigation. You will appreciate that we do not want to name anyone until the investigation is complete. This is people's careers and livelihoods. This is a long term—

The CHAIR: Yes, well, you sacked 7,000 teachers at the drop of a hat for making their own health choices. Now you are telling me a week later it has been impossible to speak to Debbie-Lee Hughes. Is that the truth? You have been unable to speak to Debbie-Lee Hughes, the author of this document who is the director of education leadership in Lithgow. Is that the case?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Conversations are underway and the investigation is underway, Chair, and if I may just correct—

The CHAIR: No, no. I am wanting an answer. Have you been able to speak to Debbie-Lee Hughes, who authored this document, who clearly knows what the document refers to?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Nixon to come forward and talk about the conversations that have been had, but if I may just correct the record, Chair, we have not sacked 7,000 teachers for their health choices. We do take these matters very seriously. That is not a factually accurate figure. I just want to make sure on the record we are clear.

The CHAIR: Well, they have been stood down and they are not teaching, are they? So, look, why has anyone not spoken to Debbie-Lee Hughes, who is not sort of a junior woodchuck here? She is not a relieving teacher out the back of Bourke. She is the director of education leadership at the Lithgow cluster. How hard is it to speak to a DEL?

LEANNE NIXON: Thank you for the question. We have spoken to Debbie-Lee Hughes. She has been on some leave but I have been able to speak to her. This was an incident from 2020 and it was addressed by the DEL at that time. But, as has been indicated by Ms Harrisson, other people involved in this investigation are currently on leave. So the investigation is not completed.

The CHAIR: Okay. Well, what did Debbie-Lee Hughes tell you as to which school this is?

LEANNE NIXON: So, I am really not in a position, as Ms Harrisson indicated, until the investigation is completed. We have been in a situation—

The CHAIR: No, no, no. I am asking you a straight question. You have had a conversation with Debbie-Lee Hughes. You must have asked: Which school does this document relate to? This is a matter of huge public concern. A whole working-class community—their parents have been slurred about their breeding. About their breeding! Now I would like an answer on their behalf, please.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Chair, I understand the seriousness of this issue. As both Ms Nixon and Ms Harrisson have said, an investigation is underway. There are still people that need to be spoken to as part of that. I do not think it is helpful to provide a running commentary on a matter that is as serious as this. I completely understand why you feel strongly about it, Chair. As I said the comments are unacceptable and this needs to be looked at, and looked at properly, but we need to have the opportunity to speak to the people involved—all of the people—and the department needs to do its work in the investigation. As soon as we are able to provide the Committee and you with an update, as I gave you that assurance when we have spoken about this outside of the Chamber, very happy to do that when we are able to, when we have all the facts, and we know exactly what has gone on in relation to this matter.

The CHAIR: Well, Ms Nixon, there are only two people involved in the meeting. There is the DEL and Debbie-Lee Hughes. You have spoken to her. What is the school she has identified that she wrote this document about?

LEANNE NIXON: Thank you for the question but I really will go to what the Minister has said. Until the investigation is complete I am not in a position to have that conversation.

The CHAIR: It is Kandos, isn't it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think Ms Nixon has given her answer, Chair. We are not going to be providing a commentary in relation to—

The CHAIR: Minister, how can you in effect defend this culture of incompetence where the wrong document is submitted twice in the SO 52s and then a week later, given the disgusting nature of this slur, the community involved is not able to be identified, apologised to, reassured that this is not the way in which their local high school is run? How do you, as Minister, justify this culture of incompetence and defensiveness and just try to avoid the basic truth?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, I do not agree with the premise of your question, Chair. As you know, this was a matter that I took extremely seriously when it was raised, and that continues to be my position. I spoke to the secretary immediately after. We need to get to the bottom of what has gone on here. The reality is there are some people that the department needs to speak to about the procedural fairness of their investigation who are currently on leave. We need to do that properly, but it needs to be done because this is important. We need to know what has gone on.

The CHAIR: Why would anyone bother going to a government school where this is the level of incompetence and delay and cover-up about something so obvious and factual?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, again, Chair—

The CHAIR: Why would anyone bother? Why would anyone bother with you people?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I have said, Chair, this statement and this comment do not in any way—in any way—reflect the values of public education that I have as Minister and that the department has. It is serious. It needs to be investigated. That is exactly what is happening now and we need to make sure we follow that process appropriately so that we can get to the bottom of this issue, which is exactly what we will do.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I just want to come back to the flooding and the impact on students. Are you able to advise how many students are affected by the flooding?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Let me take that on notice. I can advise the Committee we have updated figures on the number of schools. It does, sadly, continue to rise and so we do now have 139 government schools non-operational due to floods, 32 independent schools and 21 Catholic schools, a total of 192. The number of students is running into the thousands at this point. So there are a large number of students impacted.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I appreciate that you can take this on notice but, given the community interest, I wonder whether you might be able to bring those figures back as soon as possible of student impact.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Let me see how quickly and what we can get to provide. Can I say we know in those communities the initial focus is understandably on the clean-up in those communities once the waters do subside. There are areas of the State where of course those waters are still rising and many people have severe damage to their properties. And we have damage to schools we will need to assess as soon as it is safe to do so. So we will understand the broader operational impacts in the coming days as those waters subside.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, I want to ask you about an article that ran in *The Daily Telegraph* on 29 January in relation to vaping in schools. You would be aware of that article?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I am.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It made shocking reading, I have to say—the article—and particularly it referenced variously described as an internal incident report or a critical reading report that talked about a range of circumstances in many schools relating to vapes and the use of vapes—the extensive use of vapes by students, particularly concerning threats to teachers. One incident talked about the threat to stab a teacher over raising the issue of vapes with a student. In another incident a student was found with a butchers' knife in their bag. There are various descriptions of students. One student talked about selling vapes using Instagram to conduct his "business". You have discussions about students using various forms of social media, Snapchat, et cetera, to sell vapes in school contexts.

Are we training up the next generation of drug dealers? Is that the kind of situation? The way it is described here, you have a whole lot of students engaging in sort of low level illegal activity in our public education system. I suppose my concern is, in the handling of this problem, is it going to create a much deeper problem as these students then graduate to more serious types of criminal activity?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks for the question, Mr D'Adam. I mean, I think, again, there are some hypotheticals in your question, for example, does one type of activity for a young person lead to another and obviously that is not something that I am placed to comment on. But in regard to the seriousness of vaping in schools and I suppose how we are supporting our schools and managing how we deal with this issue, it is a concern. Clearly we are seeing more vaping in the community among our young people.

E-cigarettes at schools are a growing concern, and our schools are smoke-free environments. Tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and vapes, are prohibited on school grounds and schools deal with that appropriately in terms of the various strategies they have in place. If students are found with these products, what they do in terms of disciplinary measures—you referenced in your question some allegations about weapons and violent behaviour and, of course, any of that is unacceptable and is dealt with appropriately at the school levels.

I think more broadly this is about how we as a community—not just schools as educators, but parents as well—address this issue head-on with our children. We are working with NSW Health at the moment really about a whole-of-government approach in terms of this, so they understand not just the health issues but also the seriousness of it. We have got a cross-government working group that has been brought together, which Education is a part of with NSW Health. We will have more to say about that soon, particularly including a campaign around how we educate parents to know what to look for and to know how to talk to their kids about these issues.

You mentioned social media in your question. Again, these are activities that happen outside of school that are contributing to the issue. This is something that we take seriously. I do think there needs to be a whole-of-government—and, indeed, a whole-of-community—approach to this and how we educate our kids about the dangers of vaping and also the potential legal impacts and police involvement if people are trying to sell these or have them when they are under 18, which is of course against the law. This is serious and we are taking it very seriously.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It paints a pretty poor picture of public education, wouldn't you say?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, I do not agree with that. What it does is make it clear that we have to make sure our schools are part of the solution in the education campaign when it comes to having students understand the seriousness of vaping. I do not agree with your question that this paints a poor picture of the public education system.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask you about the genesis of the document that lists all these incidents? What is the source of that? What is the context, I suppose, for that document to have been created—this internal incident report or critical reading report?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might ask the secretary.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Forgive me if I have got the language wrong.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Could I just add one more point to my earlier answer in relation to if this an issue for public schools? The reality is that this is an issue for independent and Catholic schools as well, Mr D'Adam, because these are young people that are seeing for whatever reason the appeal of vapes. This is not something that is limited to students who attend public schools. I think the inference that that is the case is incorrect. Ms Harrison?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Obviously, as the Minister has indicated, schools are considered smoke-free zones. We would not expect to see e-cigarettes; they are prohibited on school grounds. In your initial question you talked about the buying and selling of vapes—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you first, Ms Harrison, just address the specific question about where this report came from?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly. It is part of our work health and safety reporting framework. Where there are incidents of concern in schools, they are reported through an incident reporting framework.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Was this document specifically pulled together or is this—it seems like it was a document specifically focused on vaping and vaping incidents. It is not just in the context of a broader work health and safety reporting document. Is that correct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Obviously, as is the same with any employer, we are required to and do monitor our work health and safety reporting data. So, yes, we have access to that. I might ask Ms Cachia to provide some further details in relation to that reporting for you, if I may.

YVETTE CACHIA: Thank you, Secretary. I am just asking Ms Van Berlo to pull up any detail. Do you have a copy of the report, Mr D'Adam?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I do not have a copy of the document. In the article it says that Labor provided it, but I do not think that is correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That might be career limiting to put that on the record, Anthony.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Did you ask Courtney?

YVETTE CACHIA: In order to answer your question fulsomely, could I have a sense of what it was about? Was it specifically about vaping only and was it an incident report?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I believe so. I only have the Telegraph article to go on and all the incidents—the 39 incidents—in relation to vaping.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: David would not accept that as a source.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was an SO 52 on vaping. I think it might have been in that.

YVETTE CACHIA: Sure. It is probably, as the secretary said, an internal document where we have an incident reporting hotline and a reporting system and we tag and flag every incident that comes in and then that forms part of our basis in terms of our response. As the secretary said, we have very strong connections with local area youth commands.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Maybe I should reframe the question and ask if a specific report was generated on the question of vaping.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My recollection—and, Ms Houssos, you might know because this tends to be your area of expertise—is that there was an SO 52 on e-cigarettes in schools and documents were provided. That might be what you are referring to. In which case, as is the nature of SO 52s, it would have captured documents that already exist within the department.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is the first time I have ever heard a Minister use an SO 52 as a defence.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think it is interesting that the department is asking the Opposition for access to documents instead of providing them themselves, but we will let that one go.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have never heard that before; that is new.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: We have handed them all over to you.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Or that they are not sure about what is in the documents that have been provided.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In the department's defence, we have submitted a large number of SO 52s containing hundreds of thousands of pages of documents, so I will just put that on the record.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask about the status of the strategy that has come out of the round table? That is not a public document, is it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not at this stage, I do not believe. I am happy to ask the secretary.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Sorry, I did not quite hear the question, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It was about the work we are doing with Health and the round table in terms of the whole-of-government approach.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It is a whole-of-government approach. We are obviously collectively concerned about the impact of vaping on communities and on our young people. I will ask Ms Owen to provide some details. I believe she is the representative in relation to that.

RUTH OWEN: Thank you. No, the report is not available just yet. Just to reaffirm what the Minister and secretary were saying, the round table specifically focused on collaborative work with Health on making really clear to the community and to our students, in particular, the dangers of vaping. We have been working on communications that we will be sharing with our schools and communities to address some of the specific issues you just raised, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, you said it is not exclusively a public education problem. I wonder how the approach to vaping that has been taken in schools intersects with your new behaviour policy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not understand the premise of your question.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Under the new behaviour policy there is a limit on the number of suspensions that can be administered to a child. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Under the new behaviour strategy, which is out now and will start to be implemented next year for kindergarten, year 1 and year 2 students, it is five days with the opportunity to extend in conversations with the DEL, and from year 3 to year 10 there is a 10-day suspension policy. Again, it is not unusual that we would have guidelines or days in terms of suspensions that are available.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it fair to say that if you find a repeat offender on vaping the option for suspension will not be available?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Vaping is a cause for suspension. Because cigarettes and e-cigarettes are banned on school sites, vaping remains an issue that a suspension may be provided for within the guidelines. As the Minister has indicated, the number of days have changed but the sense that you can still suspend young people for inappropriate behaviour on school sites remains. That is the intersection of the policy.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Owen, you just talked about reports that are available. Can we save ourselves the trouble of an SO 52? Can you just commit to providing those on notice?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Ms Houssos, if I may, it is not our report to be able to make that commitment to provide it; it is a roundtable report of whole-of-government approach. But I am happy to go and check that and see if there are plans to publish that and make that proactively available for the Committee.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I ask about detection systems? Is there any move to look at vaping? I understand some private schools are looking at putting in detection systems in toilets around vaping to try and address the problem. Is there any consideration of that for public schools?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We are obviously working with our schools to understand the issues they face. In a sense, some of these issues are not new to schools—they have dealt with smoking previously and now it is vaping that they are dealing with, as schools know how to deal with those issues. If we got evidence to suggest that some form of monitoring system was the appropriate way to go, then of course we would look into that. At the moment we do not have information that suggests that is the case.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, your Government promised to remove all unflued gas heaters by 2012. Now, a decade later, we still have 16,400 teaching spaces across 1,200 schools with unflued gas heaters in them. What plan do you have to remove these unflued gas heaters from schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I would just say that I do question the premise of your question in terms of Government commitments in 2012. What I can say in relation to unflued gas heaters—and I will ask Mr Manning to provide some comment on this as well—is that those heaters that are in schools are regularly serviced. In fact, we have advice that they are safe to be used in our school communities. Of course, if there are new systems being put in place, particularly through our Cooler Classrooms, they are removed as part of that process. Again, Mr Manning can talk to some more detail in relation to that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I can stop you there because we know that from our questions taken on notice from the last budget estimates that Cooler Classrooms will remove only 3,000 unflued gas heaters, and there are still 16,400 teaching spaces across 1,200 schools with those unflued gas heaters. So, Minister, do you have another plan, something other than Cooler Classrooms, that is going to remove these dangerous heaters from classrooms?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I think the premise of your question is wrong. Insinuating that these are dangerous heaters is not correct. My understanding is that the high-NOx unflued gas heaters have been converted to low-NOx, and that is in line with all of the relevant health and safety advice. So the premise of your question that these are unsafe is incorrect.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: NSW Health warns against the dangers of unflued gas heaters. Your National Party predecessor was the one who promised to remove them all. Even if you do remove the 3,000, there are then still 14,400 classrooms with unflued gas heaters and no plan to remove them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But they are safe heaters, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They have been banned in every other State.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you want to answer this?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They produce carbon monoxide, which can poison you.

ANTHONY MANNING: The commitment, I think, was originally around the high-NOx heaters, and all the high-NOx heaters were dealt with, either removed or converted to low. From an unflued gas heater perspective, advice is provided to schools around ventilation to ensure that classrooms are properly ventilated in the use of those heaters. As the Minister has said, they are serviced on a very regular basis across the fleet to make sure that they are operating efficiently. On that basis, the advice that we received was that they were safe to be in operation, and we continue to work with schools to make sure that ventilation is provided to support those heaters.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you table that advice?

ANTHONY MANNING: Sure. Absolutely we can. It was a report done some years ago.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: NSW Health currently warns about the dangers of unflued gas heaters, saying that people most susceptible to the health effects include those with heart disease, infants, unborn babies and the elderly, and that breathing in high levels of nitrogen oxide can cause irritation of the respiratory tract and shortness of breath.

ANTHONY MANNING: And the guidance that we issue to all schools is that the rooms need to be ventilated as part of the use of those heaters.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That means they need to open the windows while they have the heaters on? Is that correct?

ANTHONY MANNING: They need to provide some ventilation in the room as part of that. It does not mean the windows need to be fully open, but they need to make sure there is ventilation going into the room.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: They work against each other, don't they, opening windows and turning the heater on?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Shoebridge makes the exact point that I was going to make, which is generally you would be turning on a heater to warm up a room, not to warm up outside. Is that correct?

ANTHONY MANNING: Having ventilation in a space is important regardless of the weather outside. It is about oxygen levels in rooms and a whole range of other things. The advice that has been provided to schools is that unflued heaters are fine to use and schools are provided advice in making sure that the rooms are ventilated as part of that use.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, you have just undertaken to table the advice that the heaters are safe. Can you also—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I believe there might be publicly available reports in relation to these issues as well, Ms Houssos. But we are happy to take on notice what you are asking.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can you provide the advice that it is the basis for your decision that these are safe? Can you also provide the advice saying that the Government would only remove high-Nox-filled heaters?

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

ANTHONY MANNING: We will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. You talked about Cooler Classrooms, Minister. How many of the round one Cooler Classrooms projects have been completed?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Let me find just my note; Mr Manning might have it to hand. Can I say, while I do that, obviously this is a significant investment of \$500 million to upgrade the heating and cooling across hundreds of schools. I know that the rollout is certainly on track, but Mr Manning might have the updated figures in terms of Cooler Classrooms.

ANTHONY MANNING: I will take the exact number as of today on notice. Of the 959 schools, 912 have either had systems installed or are in the process of installing them. As of the end of November last year, more than 5,000 learning spaces—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Manning, you talked about nine hundred and—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Nine hundred and fifty-nine schools have been approved.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. I am asking specifically about round one. How many in round one have been completed?

ANTHONY MANNING: So round one was—is 959 schools. The commitment was more than 900 schools and 959 schools were selected, of which 912 have either had the work done or we are in the process of installing systems at the moment. I can get an up-to-date list of exactly how many rooms and how many schools on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me when they will all be completed?

ANTHONY MANNING: It was a five-year program, from memory, so we are expecting to be completed next financial year.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Completed next financial year. Any yet to start?

ANTHONY MANNING: Sorry?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Any yet to start in round one?

ANTHONY MANNING: As I said, 912 of the 959 schools have already had systems installed. So more than 50 per cent of the 900 schools have systems installed that are operational, and I will confirm the exact number.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I asked whether any have started yet. Are there any that have not commenced work?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. There are 47 schools where we have not started work as of the date of this note.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Have not started any work?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. They will have been designed and scoped, and it is a matter of rolling through the procurement to complete it as part of that process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And you can guarantee that they will be finished?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I believe some might be on hold because there are major works to happen at some of those schools as well.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously if there is other work underway, as you would appreciate, Ms Houssos, it makes sense to line things up and do them at the same time. That is my understanding as well. But I am happy, as I said, to provide those updated figures as of today to you on notice. Obviously there is a lot of work underway and things are being completed at a rate of knots, which is great.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I do not think anyone would characterise Cooler Classrooms as at a rate of knots.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I disagree.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Maybe a tangle.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can I ask whether any of the round two Cooler Classrooms projects have commenced?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Any of the what, sorry?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Round two, the 15 schools in round two, have any of those commenced?

ANTHONY MANNING: I will have to take that on notice, those 15 schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is it safe to assume that none of them has been completed yet?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: He said we would take that on notice.

ANTHONY MANNING: No, I would not say it is safe to assume that at all. Let me take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Were there any schools in the first round that did not have air conditioning installed because they already had it?

ANTHONY MANNING: There were a number of schools that were assessed where parts of the school already had air conditioning and therefore it did not need to be air-conditioned.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So of those 959 schools—

ANTHONY MANNING: Again, I will take that on notice in terms of the numbers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As you would recall, Ms Houssos, in the first round schools that had a mean maximum temperature above a certain amount were automatically included. When the department did the work, there were a number of them that were assessed as already having fit-for-purpose air conditioning in those eligible spaces. That is that number, but happy to take the specifics on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: On notice, can you tell me the number of schools and the names of those schools that were excluded, please?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, they were not excluded. They were automatically eligible because of the mean maximum January temperature in their community, but they already had the air conditioning that they needed. To say that they were excluded is incorrect, but happy to give you the list of those schools.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, nice to see you and the team.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks, David. Nice to see you for your last estimates hearing.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, indeed.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Senate estimates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is right, gearing up for Canberra.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is those last glooming days. Minister, you were asked some questions about unflued gas heaters.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you provide on notice how many unflued gas heaters there remain in New South Wales public schools and which schools have them?

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

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The Rural Access Gap Program was a \$334 million commitment. How much of the \$334 million has been spent?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you for the question. We might take on notice the exact figure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I know that we have had significant upgrades underway to more than 1,000 schools and also devices for teachers' and for students' updated learning.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright. We will come to some of that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the spend to date, we might take that on notice, unless Mr Withey has it to hand.

DAVID WITHEY: We will have to take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: When did the chief information officer sack the project team, and how many in the project team were sacked who were responsible for the delivery of the Rural Access Gap?

DAVID WITHEY: I reject the characterisation of that question. We had a number—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, removed their employment in the Rural Access Gap Program then. Call it what you like.

DAVID WITHEY: We had a number of resources who were at the department on a contract basis. Some of those contracts were not renewed, as is often the case when contracts come to an end, or the department decides that they want to bring in some slightly different resources. I would have to take the exact timing of those decisions on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Roughly when? You are on top of this, Mr Withey. Roughly when?

DAVID WITHEY: I would have to take that question on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Was it last week? Was it the last fortnight?

DAVID WITHEY: It was not last week. It was last year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Towards the end of last year?

DAVID WITHEY: Last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Mr Shoebridge, Mr Withey has said he would take that on notice. Let him do that to make sure he gives you the accurate date.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To be quite frank, Minister, if you cannot tell us the month that the Rural Access Gap team was sacked by the chief information officer or had their contracts not renewed or terminated, however you want to describe it, if you cannot even tell us the month that happened, there is a problem.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think wanting to provide accurate—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So I think it is perfectly within my right, and I am going to ask you—

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: When did it happen?

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, this comes to my opening comments. The briefs have been prepared, some of them you cannot jump over, and the rehearsals have been had. Mr Shoebridge has asked a perfectly legitimate question, and you would expect the officer to actually know that rather than taking everything on notice.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: The point of order I raise is separate, and it is that Hansard will have an absolutely terrible time trying to decipher everybody talking over each other.

The CHAIR: That is why I called the meeting to order and I have made the point that it should be a legitimate matter that Mr Withey answers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I add, Mr Chair—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Just tell me the month. You are not here to speak to the point of order, Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, I would like to be able to answer the question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Tell me the month.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am going to raise the same point of order—

The CHAIR: A question has been asked. Mr Withey, can you inform us of the month?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Mr Chair, I would like to answer the question. The Committee would know that my department officials and myself take this process very seriously. We want to provide the Committee with accurate information in relation to the question Mr Shoebridge has asked. Witnesses are well within their right to take questions on notices. That is what Mr Withey has done, and he is allowed to do that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are cavilling with the Chair's ruling.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: People are allowed to take questions on notice, David.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Withey, you must know the month.

The CHAIR: We have asked if the question can be answered. Given the extensive number of bureaucrats' rehearsals and briefing notes here, surely that question can be answered.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Harrisson will provide extra comment.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, there have been some realignments across the organisation, Mr Shoebridge. We discussed some of them in—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am asking you about one. When was the project team sacked?

DAVID WITHEY: So—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You cannot tell me?

DAVID WITHEY: So—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Okay, we will move on, I have other questions.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, if I may—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I do not want more of this.

The CHAIR: Order! Mr Withey is trying to give an answer.

DAVID WITHEY: If I may, I do not recall the exact month. It was in the second half of last year. I will get that information and provide it later in this conversation, but again I just want to clarify that the Rural Access Gap project team were not sacked. The director, who was a contractor, had his contract expire and we did not renew it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: To get a handle on this, Mr Withey, why do you not provide us with the PricewaterhouseCoopers' sanitisation review that pointed out problem after problem after problem and table that with the Committee? Then we will be able to get the date and find out what happened. Will you table that, Mr Withey?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr Shoebridge, if I may, I think we started some questions before you joined the Committee about the realignments and new structures in the department.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, no.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have already agreed to take some of those items on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That was not my question, Ms Harrisson; that is your answer to a different question. Mr Withey, give us the sanitisation review.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am going to have to raise another point of order. While I appreciate the robust nature of estimates, I think what we need to do is ask a question and allow the witnesses to answer, primarily because Hansard will have no chance to actually record what is occurring.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am happy to address that.

The CHAIR: As Chair, I do try to get one speaker at a time, but I can never understand why, just because there has been some realignment, people cannot answer questions.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I 100 per cent agree with Mr Wes Fang. I asked Mr Withey a question and Ms Harrisson is running interference and I would like Mr Withey to answer. So I put the question.

The CHAIR: Yes, next question to Mr Withey, please.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Will you table the PwC's sanitisation review into the mess that is the Rural Access Gap program?

DAVID WITHEY: I do not recognise the work that you are talking about as a sanitisation review. In line with the approach to most significant capital projects we run regular check-ins and assessments and health checks on the projects. I am very happy to take what we can provide on notice and come back to the Committee with what we can provide in terms of specific documentation.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Tell me what you call PricewaterhouseCooper's review into this program. What do you call it?

DAVID WITHEY: A health check.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I called it a sanitisation review; you call it a health check. It showed it was very unhealthy, did it not?

DAVID WITHEY: I think, as with most health checks, it is to come in and look at potential issues with the running of the program—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, the best health check is that you are healthy—you go and get a health check and you are healthy. This did not say it was healthy, though, did it, Mr Withey? This said that the patient had serious problems.

DAVID WITHEY: A number of issues were raised in the health check report and in line with approaches to many significant capital projects we have then mitigated the issues that have been raised and we are now on track with the completion of all of the recommendations of that health check report and the project is in a healthy state.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How long after the health check report came in was the project team sacked?

DAVID WITHEY: Again, the project team was not sacked.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How did they cease to do the work they were doing and have to find another job after the sanitisation or health review was done?

DAVID WITHEY: Again, the entire team was not sacked. The director of the Rural Access Gap had his contract come to an end and he exited the department at that point.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How many were sacked—

DAVID WITHEY: I would have to take the specific interval between those two dates on notice; I would not want to provide incorrect numbers of days, but I am very happy to come back to the Committee with that further information.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can we agree on this timetable? Something seems to be a problem. The chief information officer gets PwC to do a health check, the health check comes in and there are wholesale changes in the project team—I say sackings and you say something other than sackings. That is the time frame, is it not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr Shoebridge, if I may—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Withey—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, the secretary can answer the question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is that the time frame, Ms Harrisson?

The CHAIR: I call the meeting to order. Mr Withey has not had a chance to answer the question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think the secretary wanted to add something, Chair.

The CHAIR: The practice is that if it is directed to an official who is here he has a right to provide an answer. If he cannot, then the secretary can perhaps fill the gap. Mr Withey?

DAVID WITHEY: Sorry, can you repeat the question, please?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I won't. Is that the time frame?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, sorry, with respect, witnesses deserve to be treated with procedural fairness. To have asked for the question to be re-asked and for Mr Shoebridge to say, "No, I won't", is very discourteous. He can repeat the question.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Withey, this is like pinning the tail on a jellyfish. There is a problem. There is a PwC report. The PwC report comes in and then there are wholesale changes in the project team. That is a sanitised language about the health review. Is that the time frame?

DAVID WITHEY: The PwC report was a health check commissioned by the department—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I am asking you about the time frame, Mr Withey.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: He is answering the question.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order—

The CHAIR: The witness should be allowed to answer the question.

DAVID WITHEY: It was commissioned by the department to check on the health and the deliverability of the program. The program team has not been sacked. We have made a number of changes as people's contracts have come to an end, and we are using a number of contractors in this program and some leave, some depart. The broad chronology that you have outlined, in that the report was made, we made some changes to make sure we were able to respond successfully to the recommendations made in that report and we are now on track to deliver, is correct.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, you know there were no cost-benefit analyses as part of the program, and that was identified by PricewaterhouseCoopers as a pretty gross failing, was it not?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I think that this is a program that is about giving opportunities for rural and regional students to have access to a great strategy—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you would answer my question, Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am not sure why there is an issue with investing in digital infrastructure and opportunities for regional students. There was a business case submitted as part of this and usual processes were followed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Chair, could I ask you to direct the witnesses to be directly relevant to the questions?

The CHAIR: I started the day with that direction.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Has it been like this all morning?

The CHAIR: Yes, it has. Your time has expired; we will have to do better in the next round. Maybe Mr Currie could come forward for my next question. The department has publicly announced that this document written by Debbie-Lee Hughes is under investigation by the PES. Mr Currie, when did your investigation start?

DARYL CURRIE: My understanding is that the investigation started when it was referred to us earlier in the week.

The CHAIR: Have you spoken to Debbie-Lee Hughes?

DARYL CURRIE: I have not, but PES has on two occasions thus far.

The CHAIR: What has been established thus far?

DARYL CURRIE: I am not able to talk about that at the moment; it is an ongoing investigation and it would be inappropriate to do so.

The CHAIR: How hard is it to investigate, given that she wrote the document, she was at the meeting, she knows the school involved, she knows the principal involved? How hard is this to investigate and when do you expect it to be finished?

DARYL CURRIE: Hopefully it will be finished in a timely fashion. I do not involve myself directly in investigations because that would be inappropriate, but I know at the moment that the preliminary investigation team have that investigation underway and, if it is to proceed to an investigation, that will take place in a very timely fashion.

The CHAIR: Minister, when the facts are known to you, will you publicly outline a variety of things: clearly, who said the comment about better breeding; why was there the original error in the department listing this in the SO 52 as a Lithgow High document; why was a false statement given to *The Daily Telegraph*; and what are the consequences for the school principal, permanent or relieving, in saying that her school community needs better breeding?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Chair, as I have indicated to you already, I am happy to provide, once that investigation is concluded, what advice we can in relation to those matters. I have already given you that undertaking, as you would be aware

The CHAIR: On an earlier point about the number of teachers sacked or stood down, is there an update on the answer to my question 1800? That was, as of 21 January 2022, there have been 116 permanent teachers sacked under vaccine mandates, 1,950 stood down for investigation and then, in the combined numbers, 447 non-teaching staff either sacked or stood down. Is there an update on those numbers as of today or earlier this week? Also, is there a number for casuals and temps, including the cancellation or the non-renewal of temporary contracts?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Chair. I will ask Ms Cachia to provide what figures she can in relation to that. Obviously, as you would appreciate, investigations are ongoing. There are opportunities for people to get vaccinated. That has happened and we get new attestations quite frequently. But I will see what advice Ms Cachia can provide in terms of those numbers and the best update for you, Chair.

YVETTE CACHIA: Mr Latham, you are right, the numbers move. I have not got it as at today, but I do have it as at 21 February. The numbers are significantly lower than the numbers you have, and I understand we are here today to help the Committee with those correct numbers. Just to step through the different dismissals by employee type to date: 125 teachers and one principal.

The CHAIR: They are permanent teachers?

YVETTE CACHIA: Correct. School executive, seven; non-school based teaching staff, 60; and people working in corporate, seven. That is a significantly lower number than the 7,000 that you have referenced there.

The CHAIR: But stood down and under investigation?

YVETTE CACHIA: There is obviously a difference. Even if we were to take a global figure—and as the Minister said, that number is coming down regularly because we have got Novavax and people are availing themselves of that. As you know, the investigation process is one where we work with teachers individually. The

whole aim of this—and we have worked with the federation on this—is to use the word "remedy". It is the federation's word and we have adopted it. The idea here is to get every teacher compliant. We are so fortunate that we have got more than 99 per cent of our teaching staff compliant with that public health order, so this is a very small cohort of staff.

To help you, Chair, to step through those numbers: As at 21 February 3,959 employees were referred PES. Obviously some of those people were on leave and some had not vax attested yet, so there are a range of issues there. Some 2,593 cases have been closed, as the Minister stated there. Many of those are compliant. We regularly keep track of those numbers as they go in to vax attest those people having shown that they are compliant with the public health order by indicating that they have had two doses of COVID-19 vaccination. Some of those have happened after 8 November and we have obviously had them in the investigation process as part of that. We have had 1,300 employees become compliant during that investigation process and 334 employees have chosen to separate from the department, but that may not be a consequence of them being terminated. They may make a decision that they do not want to be vaccinated despite us reaching out and working with them, and despite speaking to their healthcare professional. They make the decision they do not want to become compliant with the public health order and they choose to separate from the department.

The CHAIR: And casuals—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just ask how many were teachers, of those—

YVETTE CACHIA: Sorry, Mr D'Adam, I did not hear you?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —334 voluntary separations? Of the 334 voluntary separations, how many were teachers?

YVETTE CACHIA: I will take that on notice and come back to you. But if you look at the percentage of workforce that was open cases, it is 1.2 per cent of teachers, and closed cases by type, 125.

The CHAIR: And casuals?

YVETTE CACHIA: I will have to take that on notice unless—

DARYL CURRIE: We would have to take that on notice for pure numbers. Casuals were not referred to PES for investigation. It was a different mechanism.

The CHAIR: Yes, but letters have gone out to these casuals. My office was informed by an official at one stage—I am not saying that we have a document on this, but there was certainly a phone call to say there were 13,000 separation letters that went out.

YVETTE CACHIA: We would characterise it, Chair, as not a separation letter. We would characterise it as a letter informing staff—whether they are casual, temporary or permanent—about the fact that there is a public health order and these are the requirements we need you to comply with. The onus, as you know, in a public health order is on the individual. If I am working in a school, the onus is on me to become compliant with that. I think as the employer it is the right thing to do to let our workforce know, whether they are casual, temporary or permanent, that this order is in place. It is there to protect our students and staff. The vast majority of our staff have become compliant. It has made our schools safer. I think it is the right thing to do to be letting casuals know what the process is—

The CHAIR: If the casuals have not provided their vaccination evidence, what is the next letter?

YVETTE CACHIA: Well, I think let us talk—

The CHAIR: And how many of those went out? I think that is—

YVETTE CACHIA: I can take the number—

The CHAIR: —the data that I am looking for.

YVETTE CACHIA: Chair, certainly, and we will get you that data. I will take that—

The CHAIR: So you have not got that available to you now?

YVETTE CACHIA: I will have to look through my notes. But I can give it to you today, Chair—

The CHAIR: You will take that on notice. And temps, either contracts cancelled or not renewed for the same reason?

YVETTE CACHIA: As I said, the numbers I will give to the Committee today, in terms of taking those on notice. I should be able to get those very quickly. But yes, absolutely we have told casuals, temporaries and

permanent staff that these are the compliance requirements. Those temporary and permanent staff have gone into a process whereby we will work with them to see whether the noncompliance can be remedied and then there will be a process to move those on. Obviously there is an appeals process and there is also a process through Fair Work where people can take those matters to Fair Work if they so wish, like any employee right.

The CHAIR: That is an interesting point, Ms Cachia. What is the appeal process? I have received umpteen complaints from teachers saying there was no appeal mechanism. All they got was the offer of a final termination interview with Mr Currie and a letter saying, "If you have got issues, go take it up with the Teachers Federation and the PSA," both of which support the vaccine mandates. What is this appeal process, and why was this never notified to the teachers who have been stood down or sacked?

YVETTE CACHIA: It was, Chair.

The CHAIR: What is it?

YVETTE CACHIA: I will let Mr Currie talk to the specifics of the appeal process but there is absolutely one. Thank you.

DARYL CURRIE: In terms of internal review or appeal, there is not for PES decisions. The appeal process is to go to the IRC for either an unfair dismissal or a public sector appeal.

The CHAIR: So there was no PES appeal process?

DARYL CURRIE: In terms of the process going forward, all of the people subject to allegations get two chances to put their position forward: in an initial response and then in a submission after the preliminary decision. As you said, they can request an interview with me as well.

The CHAIR: But why does that final letter just say to take it up with the two unions that will not help them instead of notifying people of their rights at the Industrial Relations Commission or with the Fair Work Ombudsman?

YVETTE CACHIA: Chair, I think that Mr Currie has answered the question. It is quite clear that you receive a number of letters explaining what compliance looks like. You have an opportunity to talk to our staff. You have an opportunity to have an interview. As I said, 99 per cent of our staff are compliant. At some point it becomes clear that there are some individuals who simply do not want to avail themselves of that.

The CHAIR: Just finally, redacted, can you provide copies of these letters where people were told of their rights of appeal to the IRC or the Fair Work Ombudsman?

YVETTE CACHIA: What we can do, Chair, is give you copies of letters that have gone to staff outlining the compliance of the PHO and the—

The CHAIR: No, that is not what I am asking. If you are sacking people—

YVETTE CACHIA: Chair, the same—I can, Chair—

The CHAIR: —instead of referring them off to two useless unions who will do nothing for them—

YVETTE CACHIA: Chair?

The CHAIR: —where are the letters, redacted—

YVETTE CACHIA: Yes, Mr Latham, I can give you the—

The CHAIR: —that tell them their rights of appeal under the industrial relations laws of the State and the Commonwealth?

YVETTE CACHIA: I understand. I—

The CHAIR: Because people have said they have never seen them.

YVETTE CACHIA: Alright.

The CHAIR: Let us clear that up by producing the redacted letters. We were scheduled for 15 minutes' morning tea at 11 o'clock. We will take that now, given the cycle of questions has concluded. We will come back at 11.13 a.m. or thereabouts. Thank you.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: We can now resume the Committee. It is the turn of the Opposition.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrison, do you have the updated figures on the student numbers affected by the floods?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Because the situation is changing, if I may, I will take that on notice when we have got the figure for the day because it is moving consistently at the moment.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. But we can safely say thousands of students are affected?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes, it will be based on the number of schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: At this stage—and I appreciate that you are going to take that on notice. Minister, will you now provide us on notice a list with the names of the 1,200 schools with unflued gas heaters?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I said I would take that on notice. I think Mr Shoebridge asked for a list of the schools and we said that we would do that, in his questioning.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Didn't you take that on notice in the last estimates?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: They took the number; they did not provide us with the list.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: They did not provide the list. You have been asked that question—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, I want the names.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I don't think we were asked for the list. But we will take that on notice. We said we would take it on notice.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Now they are providing you the list. Be grateful.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So let's come back to Cooler Classrooms. How many round two projects have been commenced, Mr Manning?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think Mr Manning took that on notice in the earlier line of questioning, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Sorry, then I need to get to the next question, which is how many have been completed?

ANTHONY MANNING: I will take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think we took that on notice in the last round too.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell us when all of the round two schools will be completed?

ANTHONY MANNING: No, I will have to take that on notice as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can you confirm that there are only 15 schools in that round two?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So far.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, at the moment there are only 15.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: At the moment? Minister, when do you plan on announcing any further schools in round two?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, we have given the advice to those schools that they are successful. Those assessments have been underway, and if there is an opportunity to add more schools as part of that, that is something that we would look at.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So will there be a round three or will it be an assessment of the existing schools that missed out in round two?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We will continue to look at the schools that have applied in round two, and that is what we have said. Obviously we have been able to let those schools know who have been approved, which is what we have done, but we will continue to look at the applications that are in there, in the first instance, to see what more we can do to assist those schools.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will you be making an announcement in the next budget? Will all round two schools have an answer on their application by the end of the next budget cycle?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, we will be working through those round two applications in terms of the numbers of schools that are in round two already and where they are up to. We have said that we will take that on notice and that is what we will do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, you talked about the establishment of School Infrastructure NSW, a specialist agency in order to construct and maintain our schools.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Why then did you need to contract out the business cases for round two of the Cooler Classrooms program?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy for the secretary or Mr Manning to provide some information in relation to that. I don't know who would like to take that question.

ANTHONY MANNING: As an agency, we regularly use consultants and designers to support the work that we do. So I am not sure what you are actually referring to in terms of "contracted out" round two.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, I can provide you with a copy of the document that appeared on the eTendering website that tendered out the process for the Cooler Classrooms round two business case services.

ANTHONY MANNING: When putting business cases together, we use consultants to actually write then develop the business cases for us, like we would do for any capital project.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You do not have the capacity to do that internally?

ANTHONY MANNING: As I said, we use consultants. So, no, we do not write business cases internally. We organise that to occur and we engage consultants to write them on our behalf.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you do a business case for every single school upgrade?

ANTHONY MANNING: Anything over \$10 million requires a business case from Treasury. For anything below that we would put a short-form document together.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who did the business cases for round one of the—

ANTHONY MANNING: I would have to take that on notice. I could not tell you which consultants we engaged. There is often a range of consultants, depending on the work. So some would be providing us with technical advice, some would be providing us with economic and financial advice in terms of cost-benefit analysis, and others would be involved in the project management and the collation and the development of the document itself, because business cases can be quite complex documents.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, have you looked at producing these documents in-house? This particular business case—or the evaluation of those—cost \$303,000. Why can't you do that inside this specialised agency?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Ms Houssos, decisions of that nature, which are an operational matter, are really up to the department to determine in terms of their use of consultants. I would note that our spend on consultants is extremely low. It is a very small percentage of the Department of Education's budget. But the secretary might want to add further comment.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Obviously, we engage any consultants under the framework in place for the whole of government. In relation to the production of some of these business cases, they bring together a range of specialist skills that can be hard to attract and retain within the public service, which is one of the reasons we would go outside for that specialism. There are people who do this full-time for a living. They are very good at it and so we engage those consultants to enable us to put those business cases together and support the Treasury process. As Mr Manning has indicated, a number of those specialties are very technical and so they are not in widespread supply across the State as a whole, and there are many, many organisations that would be drawing on similar expertise in that way.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Well, Deloitte managed to find them and they charged us \$303,000 for it. The Minister likes to talk about the extensive school building and upgrade program. Surely there is a need to be able to do business cases internally?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: There is a need for us to be able to develop those business cases. We do so by drawing on external expertise to support us. It also ensures that we have an independent assessment, and so we take those business cases forward with a clear and independent understanding of the cost and benefits of that work for the State of New South Wales.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, the contract to complete the work—the evaluation of the round two business cases—concluded on 23 December 2020, and yet you did not announce the successful applicants until October 2021. What was the cause for the delay?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to take that on notice in terms of the time frames between when that was completed and when those announcements were made, unless someone wants to add something?

ANTHONY MANNING: No, we have to take that on notice. I have not got that detail with me.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What was the cause of the delay? If Deloitte had finished the business cases, what took 10 months to determine that only 15 schools were going to be successful out of 447? It had taken you months to turn around the announcement for the 959 schools in the first tranche, 447 schools were left in the lurch for nearly three years, and then your department sat on it for a further 10 months after the business cases had been concluded.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, we will take on notice the time frames. My understanding is that there were processes in terms of the approvals that were given, but I am happy to take that on notice and provide some more advice to the Committee.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes. The business case is one part of the process. Obviously, then further work is required and that is undertaken. I am very happy to provide, as the Minister has indicated, some of that information you have requested on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, what does being assessed as "no scope" under the program mean?

ANTHONY MANNING: I would have to check exactly on that, but it could well be that the school already has—if we are talking about the Cooler Classrooms program?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

ANTHONY MANNING: It could be that the school already has fully air-conditioned classrooms and therefore there is nothing from the Cooler Classrooms scope to be added.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay—if you can provide that on notice. How many schools in total have been assessed as having no scope under the Cooler Classrooms program?

ANTHONY MANNING: I think, in a previous question you asked earlier, we agreed to take that on notice to actually understand how many, if you remember, of the 959 schools actually did not need a great deal of work at them.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So that would be the schools that were assessed as having no scope?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, so I have already asked—

ANTHONY MANNING: You have already asked that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Right. Can you provide a list of those schools on notice?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, we can.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The actual schools—not just the number, the actual names of the schools?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Great. You have told me that there are 912 schools that have been completed. Can you provide on notice how many teaching spaces have been upgraded and how many also are yet to be completed?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. As of the end of November last year there were 5,219 learning spaces and 367 libraries that had had air conditioning—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, can you say that for me again? There were 5,219 and?

ANTHONY MANNING: And 367 libraries that had had systems installed. I will get an update for that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, because that is from the end of last year, those figures, but we will get a new, updated number.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is November, yes. But you are going to provide me with the updated list?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are there any schools where no air conditioning has been installed been included in the program's numbers?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, I do not understand your question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are there schools that have been included in the number of schools in the program that have had no air conditioning installed?

ANTHONY MANNING: Again, I will have to take that on notice because some or part of the school may already have air conditioning and therefore does not need it. I will take the question on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That goes back to the earlier comments I made, Ms Houssos, that some schools were automatically eligible because of the temperature in their community. We did take that on notice in the earlier session.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But we have established that those are the schools that would have been assessed as "no scope", is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

ANTHONY MANNING: That would be the right interpretation, yes. I will confirm that on notice as you have asked.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to be clear that we understand what information you want on notice so that is what we provide because I was confused by your line of questioning. I just want it to be clear.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, earlier in the week there was an article in the Herald around the first results from the statewide New South Wales phonics check. You are familiar with that article?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I was interested in one of the observations that said:

... 40 per cent of year 1 students do not read as well as they should and the problem is most acute among disadvantaged children, with two in three failing to meet the expected standard in the first statewide NSW phonics check.

Would you agree with the proposition that the problem of declining standards is a problem of disadvantages and inequalities in our education system, particularly rural and class disadvantages? Do you think that is a fair assessment of what is driving the issue around declining performance?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. I think particularly to call out the phonics data that you have mentioned, which we released earlier this week, this was a check-in that we put in because we want to make sure that students, particularly in the early years, have the fundamental understanding of phonics and how to read. I am pleased by the check-in data that we have received, as you indicated in your question. When we did it as an opt-in in 2020, we had about 43 per cent of students meeting the target, and that is now up to 57 per cent. That is an increase in that 12-month period. We also saw a significant increase for our Aboriginal students. In 2020 they were at 18.4 per cent, and that is now up to 29 per cent. That gives me great comfort as the Minister that the work that we are doing to embed phonics in our schools—the fact that it is part of the mandatory K-2 curriculum that is rolling out in schools from this year means that we are focusing on evidence-based reform, particularly when it comes to learning to read by focusing on phonics. We need to make sure that we provide that opportunity for all students, regardless of background and regardless of circumstance. We need to make sure that the public education system serves them all.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I clarify that you do not accept the proposition that disadvantage is one of the drivers of declining standards in the system? Your own department commissioned a report some years ago that identified the issues around particularly rural disadvantage as being one of the factors that is leading to poor performance on international and national measures. Do you not accept that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I accept is that for some of our students who have more challenging backgrounds there is a gap between rural, regional and metro, and that is something that we are focused on trying to eliminate. Obviously we have our new rural and remote education unit within the department. There is a lot of work that we are doing in that space to recognise the issues that do exist with distance. But the

fact is I think we need to be doing more to help more students to be their best, Mr D'Adam. That is the role of the public education system in New South Wales.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So you are not particularly worried about disadvantage and addressing the issues of disadvantage in the system? You do not think that a strategy of addressing disadvantage—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Let me finish the question. You do not think that a strategy of addressing disadvantage is the way to actually improve the overall performance of the system?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We need to help all students to lift and we need to make sure that we provide targeted support to those students who need it most. That is the goal and the work that we are all doing. I do not know if the secretary wants to add a comment in relation to that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Clearly, as is well known in the public, public education and government schools have a greater proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Clearly it is a key part of the areas that we are focused on to ensure we lift standards. We have a needs-based funding model in place to support that. We had some further announcements yesterday around our ambassador schools. One of the things we are really pleased to see in that is some of those schools in some very challenging communities demonstrating some exceptional, world-class practice in supporting their students and achieving their goals. Of course, for us, disadvantage and equity are very important issues and we are focused on them in the way that we approach our work. Even in the target-setting process we are looking at how we make sure we are taking that disadvantage into account as we set those targets for growth in our school system.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That disadvantage tends to be geographically concentrated, does it not, in rural areas, in south-western Sydney and in western Sydney?

The CHAIR: Public housing estates.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: There are geographical elements to the socio-economic status of various parts of the State, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In terms of the additional support, measures like the Intensive Learning Support Program, is that the kind of thing that we do need to continue in order to address disadvantage?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I will say in relation to that is that obviously that was a program that ran last year and is running this year. The way that the metrics have worked out in terms of the amount of funding and support that goes to each school under that program does look at the needs of the school, the results and the time that they were in lockdown for as well, most particularly in the year of funding this year because, as you would appreciate, in 2020 everyone really had the same period of learning from home. In 2021 we had some regional schools that might have been out for four weeks and some parts of south-western Sydney were out for more than a term. The calculation and the methodology of the funding that flowed to individual schools did look at those circumstances as part of that. We also announced last week a particular support package for south-western Sydney as well.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, I was going to come to that. Is it fair to say that you are pretty satisfied with the ILSP program?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is a great program. It is working well in our school communities. We get good feedback from principals in terms of the use of it. Obviously we will need to look at the data and analyse the success of it.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a program that is based on small groups.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Small group tuition, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Low ratios of teachers to students. They are the kinds of programs that get results. It is fair to say that we are going to need more teachers than we currently have. If we are going to look at those kinds of measures like the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program, we are actually going to need more teachers than we currently have. Is that not correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I could make a couple of comments. Obviously—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, I am asking a specific question.

The CHAIR: Order! The Minister is entitled to answer the question.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I did not ask for comments.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am going to answer it by making some comments. The COVID Intensive Learning Support Program has been set up, as the name would suggest, specifically in response to the COVID pandemic and the disruptions of learning from home. Small group tuition as a mechanism that schools can use to support students is something that principals have said to me, particularly while it is available at the moment, that they are enjoying. Some have said that it is something that they will look to do with their existing budgets going forward, particularly if they find that it has been something that their students have benefited from. I would also call out that as part of that program it has provided us with an opportunity to bring in final year university students, retired students, and we also have some schools where their SLSOs are using those roles. So there is a range of different support available to schools to run that program. As I said, it is a specific response to a global pandemic and disruption to schools unlike anything we had ever seen in New South Wales, which is why we have more than \$700 million invested in that program over the two-year period. It is targeted for a specific purpose following the events of a global pandemic, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But it clearly requires more staff than we currently have. Is that not correct, Ms Harrison?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We have plenty of staff running that program.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Obviously a program of this magnitude requires a significant resource to make it effective and to allow it to operate. But as the Minister has indicated, this program and the scale it is at across the whole State is a response to a set of circumstances around the pandemic. What we are seeing from our schools is they are placing incredible value on that work and so, as we move forward, a number of them may look at the way they continue to support learning in this way. There are a number of elements to this program that help with that, including the regular assessment work that is underway as part of it. We are excited to see what the evaluation will show us about this program and to then go into the process to look at how we take the lessons from that and apply them more broadly.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Coming back to the question around how schools are going to fund these additional equity programs, can I ask about equity funding. In an answer to supplementary questions on notice on the School Budget Allocation Report, you indicated that in 2021 there was \$1 billion in equity funding. That figure remains the same in 2022. Can you explain why that has not escalated to take into account inflation increases?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: The needs-based funding model is based on a set of formulas that are driven by student numbers in particular loadings within the school funding allocation model. That is a needs-based model. It looks at issues such as equity. It looks at issues such as low-level disability, and it is based on a student requirement. I am happy to provide you with some further details on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You are saying that that need is not increasing with inflation. Those costs do not need to be escalated?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am really happy to take the details of those programs on notice, but they are driven by the student need and it starts at the needs of the student. That is where we base the calculations from, and I will be able to provide you with some further detail of that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Minister, I asked a question in late November about the Network of Inquiry and Innovation, and you came back with an answer where part of it said that the Network of Inquiry and Innovation are international research leaders who have a longstanding professional relationship with the NSW Department of Education. My question was specifically about the New South Wales version, not the organisation that is funded by the Canadian Ministry of Education. What is the relationship with the New South Wales version of the Network of Inquiry and Innovation?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will need to take that on notice, I am sorry.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay. Can you also perhaps take on notice how they are funded and whether they are funded through the Department of Education?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am happy to take that on notice also.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Did the five principals from Middleton Grange Public School, Sackville Street Public School, Lurnea Public School, Glenmore Park Public School and St Helens Park Public School who are seemingly leading this organisation complete a secondary employment declaration?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am happy to take your line of questioning on this matter on notice, yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure. I am not too sure whether Mr Martin might be able to help with this, but, given that they seem to be providing professional learning, are they actually registered with NESAs as an approved provider?

PAUL MARTIN: I will take that on notice, but I should be able to get you the information reasonably quickly.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sure, thank you. Given that it seems they are collecting money from professional learning, which obviously the schools will be charging, does it concern you, Minister, that this Network of Inquiry and Innovation NSW does not actually exist in terms of Fair Trading or having an ABN number?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I think as the secretary said, Mr Banasiak, we will take these questions on notice and get some more information and we are happy to come back to you in relation to those issues.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay, thank you. I will just quickly turn to the newly formed Student and Parent Experience Directorate, or SPED as it has been abbreviated. Who came up with that name?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not me. I had never thought about it as an acronym to be honest.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I have seen a document where it has that acronym.

The CHAIR: What is it? SPUD?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: SPED.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Am I missing something about that being an issue?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes. I would strongly suggest that it is a derogatory term used for special education students.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Right. Sorry, I was not aware of that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I would suggest that it might need to be renamed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If I can just add, that is clearly not the intention—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I am sure it is not.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —and if that caused any offence to anybody, then I would apologise profusely.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What prompted this new directorate?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thanks, Mr Banasiak. There are a few things. One of the things that we found, particularly during the learning from home period, is that we did have a lot of great engagement with our parents. Most of us—and I know a few around this table had the same experience as me—got to see very intimately what our children were learning each and every day and be more engaged with their education. We wanted to use that experience to really capitalise on that relationship between parents and the school community. We know that children perform better at school when their parents are engaged in their education, so it is really about making sure we have got good systems in place and good advice to schools about how they can better engage families.

I think it is an exciting piece of work. We are looking at everything from how we engage in the earlier years all the way through to careers. We have had some interesting trials about updating parents each week with a simple SMS text that lets you know what your kids are learning about so you can continue that discussion at home. I think, as parents, we often think we know what is going on, but it is nice to have that and better mechanisms existing. There is a range of work that that body will do. I think Ms Owen could provide some more information if you wanted, but in terms of the intention behind the unit that was really what was driving that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Owen, is it also to deal with the growth in complaints from parents?

GEORGINA HARRISON: Firstly, if I may before I hand to my colleague, as the Minister has indicated, we are really committed to being a student-focused and parent-focused organisation. That is who we are here to serve, and so I think the establishment of this unit shows a really good step forward for us in relation to that commitment to our students and parents. We know from the survey that we run called Tell Them From Me that there is room for us to improve in that engagement. Because the evidence shows us that parental engagement is a driver of student success, we are absolutely committed to making sure that our parents can engage with their own children around their education effectively. I think it is a really positive step that we have set up this unit. I think it shows the commitment that the organisation has to those issues.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Good morning, Minister, and good morning to all of you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Hello, Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I have a few very unrelated issues. I will start first of all with the sexual consent education. It was a very welcome announcement two weeks ago that the national health and physical education curriculum was going to embed consent from kindergarten. Congratulations on signing on to that. I know that New South Wales also announced a consent package for the New South Wales curriculum in May last year, which was welcomed for its intent but did have a few criticisms about the way it was developed. What changes to the New South Wales curriculum will be occurring now as a result of the recent announcement?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously a few things, and I think we have canvassed this in hearings before. Obviously we have consent embedded in our curriculum. I believe that was a few years ago—Mr Martin can correct me if I am wrong—and that is starting to be now taught in our schools. I think that might have commenced from this year, which did reflect some of those updated changes to be more explicit in terms of the teaching of consent. Obviously what now happens—I guess there are two parts—the education Ministers from around the country are due to meet next month in April to finalise and sign off on that Australian curriculum. You are right, that does contain the much more explicit teaching of consent. My recollection is that I think it was only referenced in supporting documents previously in the Australian curriculum and now of course it will take more of a focus.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many advocates for this. We had Chanel Contos address all of the education Ministers, as was publicly reported on. Now what happens in terms of how we then adopt the Australian curriculum changes into our State curriculum is that there is a process. Pleasingly, I think that New South Wales is in a pretty good place when it comes to what we already do in our schools, particularly given the work that we had done a couple of years ago. As you would be aware, our syllabuses are currently being reviewed at the moment as well. We are doing all of them from K to 12 across all subject areas over the next few years, so we will make sure that what is in the Australian curriculum is matched in our curriculum. Not to be derogatory about other States, but I think we are in a pretty strong position in terms of what is already in our content, which is good.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, great. Thank you. The pilot program for free period products in schools, I know it was originally slated to run for two terms but there have been delays with COVID. Where is the program up to now and when can we expect an evaluation to come out?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I would expect announcements about how we would like to address these issues in schools to be made imminently, Ms Boyd. I do not know whether anyone in the room wants to provide anything, but what I can say is that the trial has been successful. I think it is clear that there is a need for this in our schools and the Government will be making announcements very shortly about the future of those sorts of programs. I might leave it there.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Excellent. The financial literacy in schools—I understand the school banking programs are no longer being run in public schools from this year. Congratulations on making that decision. With regards to I understand it is the Treasurer's Financial Literacy Challenge pilot program—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is right.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Am I correct in understanding that that is being run on an opt-in basis?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that is right. That is something that we are offering the opportunity for our schools to take part in. It is probably not dissimilar to things like the Premier's Reading Challenge that is on at the moment—open this week. Everyone sign your kids up and get them reading books. It is a great thing. The concept behind that is very similar. There is a separate package for primary school and then there is a high school one. My recollection is that in primary schools it is about the responsibilities and the costs of owning a pet and what you would need to do to go through that. I apologise to the mums and dads who then have lots of requests for puppies after doing that program. But it is about teaching young kids in a context that they understand about those financial responsibilities. In a high school setting, I think it might be about purchasing a car—is my recollection—but it is the same concept. That is open to schools to take part in. I do not know whether the secretary or anyone else wants to add any more information.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think that you covered that exceptionally well. We are looking forward to running the pilot and seeing how it goes in our schools, and evaluating it and looking at how we spread the benefits of that program.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: How long is the pilot period?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Can I take the specifics of that on notice?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes. Is the expectation that once the pilot concludes, on the assumption that it concludes successfully, financial literacy will be included in the standard curriculum for all schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There are two separate issues, and I might ask Mr Martin if he wants to respond about how financial literacy and those matters are in the current curriculum.

PAUL MARTIN: Elements of financial literacy occur in HSIE in kindergarten to year 6. They also occur in the commerce syllabuses in 7 to 10, and the economics syllabuses in 11 and 12. But in terms of the everyday information that students need, it would mostly be in HSIE in K to 6.

The CHAIR: Minister, on another unanswered question of mine on the *Notice Paper*, 8101, I asked for what I thought was fairly straightforward information as to where the new teachers are coming from, where the department hopes to recruit a certain number of new teachers from, to overcome the teacher shortage crisis in New South Wales. I presented various categories: retired teachers, student teachers—that has been mentioned publicly—corporate volunteers, other volunteers, teachers from overseas, casuals converting to permanent, teachers coming back having been stood down after mandates and other categories. But there was no answer given. Why are you so reticent in telling the people of New South Wales where the new teachers will come from?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, Chair, we are very happy to talk you through that. I am sure Ms Cachia or the secretary might want to provide some comments, particularly in terms of some of the initiatives that we have underway in our Teacher Supply Strategy. I note that in that question I think you asked about recruitment in anticipation of staffing shortages in 2022. The Teacher Supply Strategy is looking at the next 10 years and what we need to do to boost the workforce. I think we canvassed that quite extensively when we were before the Committee last time. I think as Ms Cachia indicated to you earlier in the hearing today, the number of teachers who are no longer working due to the vaccine mandate is very low. But I am happy to provide—again, Ms Cachia might want to talk to some numbers in terms of the other programs that we have around our teacher retention under that supply strategy.

The CHAIR: Can I get an answer to the question that was not answered? Ms Cachia, have you got those categories available? A member of Parliament, myself, asked for them last year. You would expect that these category numbers would be known to the department.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, some of the categories you have referenced are not necessarily the same categories we would group the data under. We are very happy to provide you with—

The CHAIR: They are the ones you announced: retired teachers coming back, student teachers, corporate volunteers, overseas. You announced all these categories.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Those specifics, particularly the retired teachers and those corporate staff, are part of our COVID support programs. We can definitely provide you with the details in relation to the additional teachers who have been made available to support schools through staffing shortages if there are COVID outbreaks. But that is probably separate from the strategy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is right. In terms of the different questions that you asked, Chair, it was a combination of that COVID contingency that we said we had—our workforce on standby. I would say respectfully that there were concerns about teachers being unwell, themselves having COVID and then not being able to be at school. So there is that issue. There is also the teacher supply issue, which is part of our Teacher Supply Strategy, which is where we were looking at things like mid-career and overseas. In your question, there were a couple of different staffing mechanisms, so that is why we tried to be honest about that in the answer. But, as I said, we are happy to provide you some more specifics.

The CHAIR: There was no answer. You cannot be honest about a non-answer. There was no attempt to answer it.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We are very happy to answer the question.

The CHAIR: What is this?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will focus on those programs that we have in place to support the Teacher Supply Strategy, separate from the COVID contingency that we have referred to. We have had over 2,800 expressions of interest from interstate and overseas teachers interested in coming to work in New South Wales. The FASTstream program is underway, and we have had good uptake and interest in our mid-career program, which is also about to start, and Ms Cachia will have the details. In relation to that COVID contingency, we are also happy to provide you with the details of the different categories, the number of retired teachers and principals who have returned, and the number of corporate staff available. We will get back to you on notice, if we may.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, why are the RATs ending in our schools, given that they are by far the most effective way of keeping COVID out of our schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They are not ending, Chair. There is still the opportunity for parents to get that stack of rapid antigen tests, the family pack, that we are providing for parents to use.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That don't work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry?

The CHAIR: It was said that they don't work.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I didn't realise you were health experts.

The CHAIR: Why aren't we continuing the twice-weekly RAT testing in our schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We had always said we would do it for four weeks and then make that assessment as a surveillance measure. We work with NSW Health to update our school settings, and we are certainly moving to that. In the same way that we find in the general community, we are asking parents to use them when their children are symptomatic. I know that schools have been given enough allocation for each student to get an additional eight rapid antigen tests that parents can have. We have certainly got some in the top of our kitchen cupboard now. If you notice that your kids are symptomatic, if you need to keep them at home, you do not need to go looking for a test; we have provided it. Some parents may wish to use them if they get notifications of positive cases in their child's school. They will be able to do that. That is why we have provided those to parents to use between now and the end of term. And, as I said, it has all been based on working through our school settings, and that has been done in conjunction with NSW Health.

The CHAIR: That is optional. Why isn't it mandatory to have this twice a week, given it is by far the most effective way of keeping COVID out of our schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I would say that there is a layered approach to how we have been making sure that our schools are safe. They are safe and sensible measures that we have had in place from COVID. It has been in relation to a range of issues over the two years of the pandemic that we have done in conjunction with health experts. It is vaccination, ventilation and using mask-wearing as we have needed to. Yes, we have had rapid antigen tests as part of that. Our school settings will change based on the advice from Health and based on what we are seeing in the community when it comes to COVID. We are now at the point in our school communities where we are largely able to operate still in a COVID-safe way, but many restrictions have been able to be eased because of where we are up to in the pandemic. I think parents and school communities understand that the advice we provide is based on the best of intentions and the best Health advice that we have, working in collaboration with Dr Chant and her team.

The CHAIR: Wouldn't the best policy response be to keep the RAT testing going twice-weekly and end the vaccine mandates to get those teachers back into the schools, and we have not got the numbers of casuals and temps who have ended their working relationship? Minister, would you acknowledge that while the vaccination program was successful in keeping down hospital and ICU numbers, in other respects it has underperformed. We got to 95 per cent vaccination in New South Wales and then the case numbers exploded into the tens of thousands because of the new Omicron strain. It was like the flu jab that you got jabbed for for last winter's flu, not the one that was current in the community. And in the figures for fatalities from COVID, 72 per cent of people who have died in New South Wales this year with COVID were fully vaccinated. So why are we continuing with a vaccine mandate that adds to the teacher shortages in New South Wales and not continuing with the RAT tests that actually keep COVID out of schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the specifics of your question in relation to the data around case numbers, as you would appreciate, they are questions for NSW Health to answer or to respond to the Committee or yourself if you have questions of that nature. In terms of the vaccine mandate, if you are asking whether it something that I support or that I back—absolutely. I think it is very clear that vaccines are an important measure that we have in place in our community when it comes to managing COVID. I continue to be very happy with the high percentage of our staff who have been vaccinated. I think it is important that we are vaccinated as a community, and I stand by that.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, if I could add, the Health advice on vaccinations has been consistent from all levels of government at all times in terms of vaccines being the most effective mitigant we could have in place. I am sure the Committee would be aware that the debate around the value of rapid antigen tests at different times during a wave of COVID in the community has been more varied. There were comments made by—and there are a lot of acronyms here. I think the AH triple-something C—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: —I always get them wrong—commented on the relative value of rapid antigen tests being appropriate at the right point but not an appropriate ongoing mechanism. We are absolutely following the Health advice here. Those tests are far more reliable when there are large case numbers in the community as a screening tool. And, as those case numbers drop, their reliability as a screening tool in the community wanes. The vaccination is the thing that all the medical advice has told us is the most effective mitigant we can have in place.

The CHAIR: It didn't look that way in January, did it? Minister, I will read to you a letter I have received from the husband of a teacher in the Liverpool district:

My wife is a teacher at a nsw public school. She got the double dose of vaccine to keep her job last year but since then she has fallen pregnant with our second child. She is only in the first trimester and is refusing to get the booster due to the increase in miscarriages since the vaccines. She's been told that unless she gets a booster shot she will lose her job.

...

At this stage she's going to walk away and lose it all for the safety of her pregnancy which as a loving husband and father I will support her with this decision. The guilt that would come with getting this vaccine just to keep a job and then something happening to our unborn child would ruin my wife.

Should there not be an automatic medical exemption for pregnant women?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In relation to that specific matter, Chair, I am very happy to offline in the Committee. I am conscious of not speaking about people's personal circumstances in this Committee, but if you wanted to share that correspondence with me or my office, the door is always open, as you know.

The ACTING CHAIR: Yes. But, more generally, should there not be an automatic exemption for pregnant women and furthermore why this teacher feels she needs to leave the teaching profession now because she is being coerced into the booster shot?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, as I said, if you are comfortable to provide the specifics of that particular teacher to us, we are more than happy to reach out. Can I say in relation to, I guess, the medical contraindication, my understanding—and I will ask the secretary to comment—but there is advice in relation to what classes as a medical contraindication. Again, my understanding is that it is safe for pregnant women to receive the vaccine.

The CHAIR: Secretary?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: And so, yes, we follow the advice put out by the health bodies in Canberra in relation to what are considered medical contraindications for the vaccine. Those are the standards that are in place in relation to our compliance with the current public health orders. Those current public health orders require staff to be vaccinated. We would obviously want to support individual cases. We have taken a very personalised and case management individualised approach to these matters and we will support staff anywhere we can within the bounds of what the public health order requires us to do.

The CHAIR: But you understand the anxiety that people naturally have about their unborn child. That will overlay any of your advice or what you get from Canberra and blah, blah, blah. These are real-life circumstances where we are losing good people, teachers, unnecessarily.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I absolutely appreciate that anxiety. Obviously, as the Minister has indicated, if there is a particular case that we can talk to you about offline, we will be happy to do so. I do not want to go into people's individual circumstances. I am not aware of that specific teacher that you have raised and I do not want to make assumptions. But our understanding, as the Minister has indicated, certainly from the health advice, is that for the general population the vaccine is safe for pregnant women and therefore that is not considered a medical contraindication under the advice that we operate under.

The CHAIR: There is no point bringing forward the individual case, is there? I mean, you have lost her and many others. The Opposition?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you. I am going to tender a document—two documents actually. Before I move onto the document, I might ask the Minister about the comments by Knox Grammar headmaster, Scott James, who said that teachers need to be paid more because they are often forced to look beyond the classroom for career progression and increased salary. He then went on to talk about how independent schools have a competitive advantage: They are able to offer extra payments. Given we acknowledge that there is a teacher supply crisis that requires a Teacher Supply Strategy, what do you say about the comments of Mr James in relation to the need to pay teachers more?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, I do not agree with the premise of your question that we have a teacher supply crisis. As I have canvassed many times before, Mr D'Adam, we have a Teacher Supply Strategy for both now and into the future for the next 10 years to make sure that we have the teachers that we need in the subject areas that we need and also the places that we need. The \$125 million that has been allocated for that program across a range of different initiatives to help boost our teacher supply is something that we take very seriously as a Government. There is good work underway in relation to those programs.

My understanding is that those comments yesterday at the SMH summit—I think that is what you are referring to when that principal made those comments—the reality is, as you would well know, we currently are in the middle of an award negotiation with the Teachers Federation in the IRC around teacher pay. I am not going to be canvassing these issues in this hearing. It is important that the department and the Teachers Federation can do that in the IRC, which is the appropriate body. You know there is a lot of conversation about this issue at the moment largely due to that negotiation being underway, which I appreciate. The reality is that we have been able to offer teachers pay increases year on year under our wages policy, the most recent one in January this year. We will continue to negotiate those matters with the federation in the IRC.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Thank you. I might turn to Mr Martin. I am going to ask Mr Martin some questions about the documents that I have tabled. I ask him to look at the question on notice 7777. This is data that is provided by NESAs, as I understand it. I want you to look at the answer that was provided to question 1 (c) (v). That is the 2021 data. The question that was asked was:

How many teachers held the following levels of accreditation as of 30 June of the relevant year

This relates to proficient teachers. The bulk of our teaching workforce are in this proficient teacher category. Is that correct, Mr Martin?

PAUL MARTIN: Yes. That is correct.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: And you stand by that figure that is provided of 147,747?

PAUL MARTIN: That is the figure that was provided by my office, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes. That is how many proficient teachers we had in 2021. Now can you take a look at the answer that was provided at 1 (c) (iv) for 2020? You can see that there were 144,482. That is a substantial drop, is it not, between 2020 and 2021 in terms of the overall number of proficient teachers in the system?

PAUL MARTIN: It is a drop of some 4,000 teachers, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, 4,000. Can I ask you about a question on notice 7969? Can I take you to the answer provided to the question for 1 (c) (i) and the number provided for 2021, which is 6,463. That question asked: How many of those proficient teachers held provisional accreditation in the year before? Right? So these are the new teachers that are going from provisional into the proficient cohort, so they are relatively inexperienced compared to the cohort of proficient teachers. Is that correct?

PAUL MARTIN: Well, they had just gone across from provisional to proficient.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Provisional to proficient.

PAUL MARTIN: The previous year the teachers that would be proficient have been there for two years, so they are relatively more experienced in a smaller way, and that will continue right through to the pre 2004s.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In terms of the numbers that are reflected on 7777 at 1 (c) (v), that 140,000—

PAUL MARTIN: Yep.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —if you look at that number, you have added in 6,463 teachers who have gone from provisional to proficient. So actually, the total number of people who have ceased having proficient accreditation is 10,198. Is that not correct?

PAUL MARTIN: Yes. Look, it appears so on the surface. I would have to have a—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So in 2021 the New South Wales teaching profession lost 10,000 teachers in one year, and not just teachers who are relatively inexperienced but experienced teachers and they have been replaced by less experienced teachers. So I ask you, Minister—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: —given that your Teacher Supply Strategy is promising 3,700 teachers over 10 years, is that not totally inadequate for the loss that we are anticipating, given the numbers that are reflected for 2021 in terms of loss of teachers in the profession?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No. Can I say, Mr D'Adam, in terms of the figures that you have talked about here in referencing these two different documents, I think Mr Martin said he did just want to have a look at those figures and check those figures. The reality is there would be a range of reasons why people in any profession from year to year move on. And I think, given the opportunity to check that data against each other and just for Mr Martin to be able to do that, that is fair.

PAUL MARTIN: I would prefer to be able to do that.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The reasons are not relevant. It is the absolute number, surely, Mr Martin.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I also add, you referenced the 3,700 as part of the Teacher Supply Strategy. That is in addition to the annual teaching supply that we know that we are going to need. Again, I think we talked about this at the last estimates hearing that they are about specifically targeted staff in areas where we know we need subject expertise and also focused in rural and regional areas as well. I think that the particular document makes that quite clear. That is in addition over that 10-year period to the annual hiring that we would expect to do in our system as well. Ms Cachia might want to add some more comment on that. Is it inadequate? No. It is \$125 million invested to literally bring thousands of new teachers into the profession.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You do not think losing 10,000 teachers in a single year is a crisis, Minister?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Like I said, I want to check the assertion that you are making in that question in relation to those figures.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You signed off on this answer, Minister.

The CHAIR: Let the Minister finish her answer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, I want to check with what you have put in front of us today. Yes, these are responses to questions on notice, but I do want the opportunity to look at that data more closely. As I have said, we are working extremely hard in terms of our Teacher Supply Strategy, both now and into the future. We have more teachers employed in public schools at the moment than we have ever had. I do not agree with the assertions that we have a crisis. Our vacancy rate is incredibly low for an organisation of our size. What I do agree with is that, as a government, we have a responsibility to fund and to help train our next generation of teachers that we need. I am extremely pleased by the Teacher Supply Strategy and the work that is underway and the interest already in its early establishment for many of the programs that we have. I think we are doing a lot of work in this space and I am proud of what we are doing.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Minister, can I draw your attention to the answer in 7777 at question 2, particularly the answer in (e)? The question was: For each of the following years, how many teachers who held accreditation in the preceding years cease to hold accreditation—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, can you just repeat that?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: This is question 2. The question was: For each of the following years, how many teachers who held accreditation in the preceding years cease to hold accreditation in each of the respective years? You returned an answer that not only dealt with the question of how many lost accreditation, but also added supplementary information to try and make the numbers look a bit better, it seems.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is not correct.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You say for 2021 that 32,808 new teachers were accredited but that is not true, is it? We know from the answers in 7969 that in fact of the 12—that answer of 32,808 is a product of adding together those who got conditional accreditation in 2021 and those who got provisional accreditation in 2021.

PAUL MARTIN: That is correct.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is right. So you have added those together. In fact, because of the answer in 7969, we know that of that number—that 32,000—9,199 of them held conditional accreditation in the previous years, so they are not new teachers. And 16,789 held provisional accreditation in the previous years, so they are not new teachers either. So that is actually not a correct answer, is it, Minister?

PAUL MARTIN: I would argue that it is a correct answer. I am happy to take all of the specific questions on notice, including the adding or subtracting of the previous year's provisional to the following year's proficient—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Perhaps, Mr Martin, you might also—

The CHAIR: Let Mr Martin finish please.

PAUL MARTIN: When the question is about the number of teachers accredited it means the numbers of teachers accredited at particular levels. It is possible that within a year a teacher could go from provisional to proficient or conditional to provisional to proficient. But they are three acts of accreditation, and they are separate acts of accreditation.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: But the answer provided says that they are new teachers. They are not new teachers, are they?

PAUL MARTIN: Again, I would have to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The 25,000 of that 32,000 are not new teachers.

PAUL MARTIN: The specifics of the question and the cross-referencing across two or three sets of figures would require me to go back and have a look to make sure that I have provided you with accurate answers and to add the numbers together as you have requested in relation to the specifics of these questions.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I might ask you, Mr Martin, and perhaps the Minister as well, if the draft answer that was provided by NESAs to your office contained that additional information or whether that was something that your office inserted in the answer to the question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to say that I think it is important that we provide context to giving answers. I think providing context in relation to these questions is entirely appropriate.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Erroneous context.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You guys do have a bit of a habit of taking things out of context. We are able to answer the questions on notice as we see fit.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, can you provide on notice how many high schools do not have qualified maths teachers, and a list of those high schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to comment in relation to that.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, in terms of the premise of your question, all of the teachers operating in New South Wales schools are qualified teachers. If your question is specific to the specialism within that—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I would be happy to take that on notice and see what information we have available centrally to provide.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many of those do not have a specialised maths teacher teaching in the junior years?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Again, I will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, not how many of those. How many high schools do not have a specialised maths teacher teaching the junior years?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am happy to take that on notice. We do provide support to those teaching out of field—as we would refer to them in the department—through a variety of mechanisms, including head teachers within schools and a variety of resources and supports that are made available. But I am very happy to provide the numbers on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you. Minister, you attended the site of the long-promised Googong public school on Friday 28 January. Is that correct?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am assuming it was that day. Yes, I have been there recently. I will take your word for it that it was the twenty-eighth.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you use taxpayer funds for that trip?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes—actually, no. Let me take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Were there any other announcements at the school on that day?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will have to check my diary in relation to what else I did on that trip. Certainly, we did the sod turn and met with members of the community and announced the new principal and name for that school. So we did the name, the principal appointment and the sod turn for works to begin

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who attended the sod turning?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice. There were a range of department officials there and members of the community, so I will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who issued the invitations?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What invitations?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The invitations to the sod turning.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We put out a media alert to say that we would be there to do the sod turn.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide on notice when that media alert was sent out?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you aware that The Nationals candidate was inviting people to this as well?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am aware that The Nationals candidate was there at that event and members of the community also attended as well.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: The member for Monaro.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Actually, now the member for Monaro. Good point. She is newly elected as of yesterday.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: She was The Nationals candidate at the time. That is an important distinction to make. She was issuing invitations to the event. Were the Googong Residents' Association invited?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding is that The Nationals candidate at the time and the now member for Monaro, Nichole Overall, did put on her social media that I would be there that day. Members of the community did attend. I did meet a couple of parents who were part of that association. They came and had a chat to me afterwards and we had a conversation about how the school project was going. They spoke to some of the departmental staff that were there as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did the Googong Residents' Association receive an invitation from the department?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I doubt it, but I will take that on notice. With respect, Ms Houssos, the media alert publicly lets people know where you are going to be and what you are there to do. That was issued out publicly.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, but the Googong Residents' Association have been key in campaigning for this school. They have been involved in the campaign for a long time. The Nationals candidate was sending out invitations on your behalf and no-one invited—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Nationals candidate was well within her rights to let the community know that, as the education Minister, I was going to be in town that day and what I was doing. As I said, there were a couple of parents who spoke to me at the event who were there. There were other families and other community members who were walking past who came and had a look at what we were doing. I spoke to a few of the members of that community Facebook page who gave me their views, and they were also speaking to the department staff about making sure that they are kept up to date as the project progresses.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Was the mayor invited?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You can confirm that the mayor was not invited, but you are going to provide the invitations on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With respect, I do not believe that the department would have issued invitations to anybody. We put out a media alert, as is common practice when we are going to visit certain schools

for certain events. We do it most days when we are going to do things, to let people know where we are and what we are doing. This is a State Government project. The local government is not involved in this in any way so there would be no reason to invite the mayor, nor the Federal member; they were not invited either for the same reason.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Why then did The Nationals candidate issue invitations to the event?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: She did not issue invitations.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Why then was she emailing out to community members on your behalf, inviting members?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Houssos, the premise of your question is not correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I can table a copy of the invitations that she provided.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding is that, as the local candidate, she let members of the community know that I would be in town and that is what I would be doing. I think you were there the same day. Did you let people know that you were going to be there?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I was, but I was not opening a government project, I was not using taxpayer funds to get there, and I certainly was not using my government driver to get me there.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, I was there as a Minister of the Crown, turning the sod for a new school that the Government is delivering, which is entirely within my remit as the Minister for education, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Exactly—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So I do not really like what you are inferring in your question.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is it appropriate then that a Nationals candidate is issuing invites on your behalf, if this is an official Government announcement?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, the local candidate, now member for Monaro, let the community know that I was going to be there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Minister, did anyone from your office talk to Nichole Overall about the event?

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

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did anyone from your department speak to Nichole Overall about the event?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Not that I am aware—there were members of the department at the sod turn. I cannot guarantee that they did not have a conversation, as they did with other members of the community, which is exactly what Ms Overall is—was then and is now the member for Monaro.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: When was the brief requested for the event from the department?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will take that on notice. My recollection is that we had very recently, prior to that event, had the planning approval given, and so we wanted to go down and share with the community that construction was due to start and it was getting underway. We know it is an important project for the Googong community, and we wanted to share that news and celebrate that sod turn with them as soon as we were able to, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: It is a well-overdue announcement, but there is no reason for the National Party candidate to be issuing alerts.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As a strong—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If it is an official Government announcement, it should be issued by the Government.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As a strong—well, I did. I put a media alert out to say that I would be at that site, Ms Houssos. The reality is that Nichole Overall, as a strong advocate—I think that is why she has been elected the member for Monaro—was able to let the community know what was happening. That is her right as—did your candidate let people know that you were going to be there?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I put a media alert out as well—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There you go. So we are the same.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —but I was not using taxpayer funds, Minister. It is a very important distinction.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I went there in my capacity—Ms Houssos, I do not like what you are inferring. I went to Googong in my capacity as Minister for education to complete the sod turn of a capital—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Then why was The Nationals candidate issuing invitations?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Because she is a member of the community who came to that event.

The CHAIR: Order! Minister, it does look like a National Party campaign event.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I disagree, Chair. I was there in my capacity as Minister for education to do the sod turn for a new school that this Government is building and delivering.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Did you support the branding of National Party logos on a project to announce Cooler Classrooms in Myall Lakes?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am not familiar with what you are referring to, Ms Houssos. I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I can provide you with a copy of the photo that has the National Party cheque, handing over an announcement for Cooler Classrooms. This is a pattern of behaviour.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Like I said, I am not familiar with that.

The Hon. WES FANG: The initial question was about branding on the announcement, not on a cheque. That is a completely different—the phrasing of the first part of the question did not indicate that it was—

The CHAIR: The Opposition's time has expired in any case. Mr Banasiak.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I will go back to the question I was asking around the Student and Parent Experience Directorate.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Harrison, I think you sort of finished your answer, but I want to turn to you, Ms Owen. Was this prompted in part by a growth in complaints from parents and students? Is this seen as a way of more effectively or efficiently dealing with those complaints?

RUTH OWEN: First of all, it was not initiated because of the volume of complaints that we were receiving. It was initiated for the reasons that the secretary and the Minister have described, in terms of our desire to deepen our engagement with parents and students and make sure they have a really strong voice in our school improvement activity. I am sure the Committee is aware there is very strong evidence of better student outcomes when families are engaged in their child's education, therefore brigading all our activity together into one place as part of the department to really understand: How do we bring parents as partners in their children's education closer to what we are doing in the department? That is underpinned by that evidence and that desire to improve our engagement with parents. That directorate will include improving the way that we handle complaints, because we have identified there are ways that we can improve the handling of complaints as part of our engagement with parents.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Will it include eliminating principals from the complaint process, if they are directly involved or somehow tangentially involved?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, the vast majority of our complaints are handled locally at a school level—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: As per the policy, yes.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes, and resolved incredibly successfully in the vast majority of cases in that way. The nature of the complaints that generally get escalated to the department tend to be those that cannot be resolved locally. They are currently managed within the line management chain of the principal. We are seeking to move that to this new directorate.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Where will that directorate sit within the organisational chart? Will it sit with you, Ms Owen?

RUTH OWEN: Yes, it will.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Do we have a cost for that additional unit being set up yet?

RUTH OWEN: We are still building that case.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: You would probably have to take this on notice, but gathering data on complaints, for the last three years how many complaints were made against principals by staff?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Depending on the nature of those complaints, there is an important distinction here between complaints and conduct issues and where those were handled. I am very happy to take the specifics of that on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I am happy for you to—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: To divide them up?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: —decipher complaints versus conduct, how many complaints were made against principals by parents for the same time period and in general how many complaints were made in total by parents.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to take those questions on notice and provide them back to you.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Thank you.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Just so I am clear, that will only include the complaints that are escalated to the department. We do not have details on every complaint raised across the system at a school level because some of them are very minor and resolved incredibly easily that way.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I am cognisant of the fact that some parental complaints just go directly to DELs et cetera; they bypass the principal.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Can I just go back to my questions on the Network of Inquiry and Innovation. The second part of your answer said:

Schools make decisions regarding attendance at professional learning events after considering the overall professional learning funds
...

In providing advice to the Minister to give that answer, what investigations did you make at a school level to respond to my question? You also say:

There is no evidence that teachers have been mandated to attend professional learning sessions hosted by NOII organisers.

What investigations did you do, particularly at these five schools, to ascertain whether there was any evidence?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think we have indicated we will take the questions in relation to this matter on notice and very happy to add that to the questions that we come back to you on.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Okay. Additionally, the Aboriginal Education Network is also partnered with this Network of Inquiry and Innovation. They also are not a registered organisation. So, on notice, perhaps you can include what their standing is with the department?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to provide that. May I just ask that we are careful about any assertions that are made prior to us having the full facts in relation to those institutions. I am conscious that when we do that in these forums, at times it has a significant impact on organisations that turn out to be valid and operating appropriately. So I do just want to make sure we have the time to assess the question you have asked us and come back on notice with the details.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: That is fine. I will not blow anything up until I get your answer, if I blow it up at all.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, Northbourne Public School was opened last year for 1,000 students, and as part of the opening the demountable pop-up school was removed. Do you remember that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Once the PR had finished and the photos had moved on, you then put 20 demountable classrooms onto Northbourne Public School. How much did that circus cost?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Well, I might ask whether the secretary or Mr Manning wants to provide some specifics in relation to Northbourne. I do not agree with the premise of your question that it was a circus. The pop-up school was needed while we were finishing construction—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much did it cost?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Let me finish my answer. The pop-up school was needed while we were completing construction. Obviously if there is a need for demountables with population growth in the students, that is what they would have been put in place for, but Mr Manning might be able to provide some more detail.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, this was not one demountable or 10 demountables; it was 20 demountables.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Let me finish. The PR happened—

The CHAIR: Mr Manning has the floor. Mr Shoebridge, before you proceed, Mr Manning just has—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It is not PR, David.

The CHAIR: Sorry?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mr Manning was going to provide a brief answer, is that right?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Tell me how much.

ANTHONY MANNING: I do not have that information with me here. We will take that on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That was very helpful, Minister.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How do you defend that? How do you defend that? You go down and you say, "We've got this new permanent school." You spend heaven knows, you cannot tell us how much, scrubbing away the demountable pop-up—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, no—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Let me finish. Then in a few months you whack down 20 new demountables. You cannot tell us how much it cost, but how do you defend that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I say, firstly, Mr Shoebridge, I would appreciate being spoken to in a respectful manner. The advice I have is that part of that pop-up school, some of those demountable buildings, did remain on site. My understanding is that that cost was within the project budget, but, like I said, we are happy to take the specifics available on notice and provide you with more information in relation to that issue.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How do you defend it, other than on PR grounds—a huge amount of money scrubbing the demountables?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That is not right, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The photos are taken and then you whack 20 back in afterwards. How do you defend that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, Mr Manning may—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Point of order: The honourable member just asked the Minister the same question that he had already been provided an answer to. I would ask that he move on.

The CHAIR: I think the answer was taken on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you want to add anything, Anthony?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, I think one thing we will also take on notice is that I am not 100 per cent sure of the assertion that the pop-up school was fully removed and then brought back. My understanding of the situation was that the pop-up school was scaled back to the size that we needed as part of that process, so I will take on notice the assertion that we had a school, we removed it and then we put it back after. I think actually it was always there and it was scaled back to what we needed as part of the opening of the school. I will take the facts on notice and come back to you for sure.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you could provide the media release that you issued at the time in that answer on notice, that would be helpful.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The media release would be publicly available; you could probably go to that, David.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, will you provide the PricewaterhouseCoopers health report about the way in which the Rural Access Gap fund had been operating? Will you provide that or do we need another SO52?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think, as Mr Withey indicated in his earlier answer, health checks are part of the standard government processes when we are undertaking large-scale investment in capital projects. I think he also indicated that, as a result of that health check, we have responded to every single one of the recommendations and addressed those appropriately within the organisation. I am happy to provide what I can in relation to that report on notice, but I would also ask that the Committee accept our update report in relation to the activity that we have put in place since that report to remediate the issues that it may raise.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, will you provide a copy of the report? It is a simple question.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Which I do believe, Mr Shoebridge, if I may, we just answered.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You said you will provide the response to the report. Will you provide us with a copy of the report?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I said I would provide what I could in relation to the report, subject to any elements that may be, for example, commercial-in-confidence, so I will need to check that, but I am very happy to provide the report alongside our response so that you can see and have confidence that the issues that were raised have been addressed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Excellent. Minister, right now you are recruiting for the lead IT person in the department, the executive director of digital learning. Can you explain to me why that role, as advertised, does not have a single requirement for IT skills?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond, and Mr Withey might want to add to that as well.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, we are not recruiting for the lead role in the department in relation to IT. That individual is in post; they are our chief information officer and she is an exceptional IT professional. I will ask Mr Withey, having clarified that point, to provide you details of the other role that you have referred to.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The executive director of digital learning—can you explain why, Mr Withey, there is not a single requirement for IT skills?

DAVID WITHEY: Across the team that sits underneath our chief information officer, we have different skills in different roles. That particular role is one that is very focused on the interface with our schools. It is something we are very keen to do to make sure that schools' voices are very well represented in the work we do in our IT directorate. Across some of the other roles we are recruiting, there are very deep and very technical IT skills required to undertake those duties. For that particular role, absolutely, there are IT skills required, but the more important aspect is an understanding—and a deep understanding—of how schools work and how schools interface with technology. The person who is currently acting in that role is a former teacher, a former member of the technology reference group in the Primary Principals' Association, and those are the sorts of skills that we are looking for in that role.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, you are happy with the executive director of digital learning not having any IT skills? You are comfortable with that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As Mr Withey said, that role is very much involved in putting—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are comfortable; that is okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They have a teaching background, the person acting in the role, David. I do not think there is a problem with having teachers working in the department to have good processes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sure. The executive director of digital learning knows nothing about IT—tick.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, Mr Shoebridge, we have answered your question. Despite your demeanour, we have answered the question and given, I think, appropriate context around the many roles within that part of the department and the different skill sets required.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sure. I heard the answer.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If I may, the digital learning role is there to support the use of technology in the classrooms. It is not there to be an IT programmer; it is not there as provision of IT infrastructure. It is there to support learning in classrooms.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I hear you are all comfortable about it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Last time you told us we did not have enough teaching experience in the department. Now we have a teacher in a role and you have an issue with that.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why did you not have a transparent, open recruitment process for the chief information officer? Why did you backfill it as temporary and then make it permanent without having an open recruitment process?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We followed all of the appropriate recruitment requirements under the PSC Act. There was an individual already at level with the expertise that we required and, under the GSE Act, we are able to appoint people at level. It is part of mobility across the public sector. Those are the rules under which we operate and we follow them to the letter, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, for a position as critical as that— *[Time expired.]*

The CHAIR: Minister, do you appreciate how demoralised, and indeed humiliated, teachers that have had to go through the mandate PES process have been? From their point of view—and I have extensive correspondence—they are wondering could it have been done a different way rather than charging them with misconduct to group them with thieves, drug users and paedophiles in the school system when they were just wanting to make their own health choices?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said in an earlier response to your question, Mr Chair, I do stand behind the vaccine mandate that is in place in the public health order and the rationale behind that. In terms of how the department has managed those processes, I will ask the secretary or Ms Cachia to speak to the specifics that you have raised.

YVETTE CACHIA: Chair, I would not characterise the noncompliance with the public health order in the way that has been characterised in letters to you, although I absolutely acknowledge that that—

The CHAIR: They have been charged with misconduct, have they not?

YVETTE CACHIA: They have not been charged with anything, Chair. What happens when somebody is noncompliant—and we know that the compliance date under the public health order, which is an order set by Government, was 8 November. By 8 November staff knew, whether they worked in a teaching role or in an administrative role, anyone who worked in a school needed to be compliant with the public health order and, as I said before, the onus is on the individual to do that. We have to have a process to make sure that we have a situation where our schools are safe. The public health order is designed to do that from a health and safety perspective, and we have a duty of care to our staff. Can I also just preface what I am about to say about the compliance process itself in PES with this: Prior to that public health order coming out, we actually surveyed our staff extensively and the vast—

The CHAIR: No, this does not go to my question. I have limited time and you are not going to my question.

YVETTE CACHIA: I will get to that, Chair, in just a moment, but the vast bulk of our staff said that they actually felt uncomfortable—

The CHAIR: I know this; this is a filibuster to eat up my time. I will move on, if you do not mind, if you have not got an answer relevant to my question.

YVETTE CACHIA: I will answer the question, Chair.

The CHAIR: I know the survey.

YVETTE CACHIA: I will not talk to the survey.

The CHAIR: I am asking why the misconduct was put on them.

YVETTE CACHIA: We did not charge anybody with anything.

The CHAIR: No, they lost their jobs.

YVETTE CACHIA: What we did was that when people were noncompliant and they were not vax attested in the system, we put them into an investigation process and, as I said earlier, we gave those people an opportunity of a number of weeks to tell us why and to tell us if they desired to comply with that public health order. Those cases were also triaged in a number of ways and we also had a lot of—

The CHAIR: Ms Cachia, you are not answering the question about why it had to be misconduct, so I will come back to the Minister. Minister, do you understand that many of the people we are talking about are fitness fanatics—highly commendable—who are on a strict diet and training regime, and they have, as part of that, a standard in life that they do not put any foreign matter into their body, and they feel totally humiliated that people a lot less healthy and fit than them are have kicked them out of the system? Why have they been humiliated in this way when you would say they are some of the healthiest and fittest people we can find in our society?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said earlier, Chair, we have that vaccine mandate through the public health order and I support that. It is up to individuals to make those decisions and the process is as it has been.

The CHAIR: Minister, the Umina Beach Public School ran a gender fluidity class for year 2 students, so we are talking about six- and seven-year-olds, and gender was referred to as the way you feel on the inside, not anything according to a science book, and it might be expressed by how you dress or how you behave and so forth. You chose not to make a comment about it publicly, but can I ask why a Safe Schools resource was used as part of that lesson, and what is the point in having a ban on Safe Schools in New South Wales if it is not observed and enforced out there in the schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to address this particular issue, in terms of what happened at that school. Ms Harrison?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, I think it is important for the Committee to be aware that parents were offered the opportunity to withdraw their child from the lesson that you are referring to. Staff at Umina Beach Public School—

The CHAIR: Yes, those who got the note.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: —planned for and conducted a lesson regarding gender for their 2021 year 2 students. The intention of this lesson was to build the knowledge and understanding for year 2 students who have a current peer who is transitioning gender at the start of 2022. Teachers consulted with the school principal, school counsellors and department delivery support staff around the lesson design and content. Parents were offered the opportunity to withdraw their child from the lesson. Resources used for the lesson were a modified Safe Schools Coalition activity, which was provided inappropriately—and I accept that—by a Department of Education learning and wellbeing officer. The school's learning and support team adapted the resource to ensure that it met the needs of the community, given the current circumstances in that community.

The CHAIR: To answer my question, what is the point of having a Safe Schools ban if these resources can be used in schools and you have obviously got no problem with it, and Mr Currie would support it at the PES? The Safe Schools ban has just become an unenforceable joke, has it not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It was an updated resource relevant to the community and the needs of that community at the time.

The CHAIR: Minister, do you support the Claire Chandler bill, supported by the Prime Minister, to allow girl-only—meaning biological girls only—sport and take this as a model for what we should be doing in our high schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I will ask the secretary to respond to how—

The CHAIR: No, I am asking your assessment as a public policy question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: —we manage sport in our schools. You are asking my opinion on a—

The CHAIR: Yes, I am asking you as a big public policy question for you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you repeat the question? Sorry, Chair.

The CHAIR: Do you support the Claire Chandler bill, supported by the Prime Minister, that is to say it is not sex discrimination to have girl-only sport—meaning biological girl only sport—and take this as a model in our high schools?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We would be required to comply with relevant legislation in terms of those issues. I have to confess, Mr Chair, I am not intimately familiar with that bill so I do not want to give misinformation to the Committee. But in terms of how we manage school—

The CHAIR: Do you feel though, Minister, that there is an emerging issue that people born male and with the strength, size and testosterone advantages are smashing smaller girls out of their sporting competitions in football codes, cricket and the like, and that in our high schools it should be biological girl only sport to protect the development of young girls' sport, which is so crucial?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Like I said, with respect, Mr Chair, this is not a matter that I have given extensive consideration to.

The CHAIR: You have given no consideration to girls playing sport and how they can be bruised and bashed out of the sport and give it up because they have got to compete against a 16-year-old biological male? You have given no consideration to that? These are real-life issues.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: As I said, with respect, these are matters, as you have rightly said in your question, that are being canvassed at a Federal level—looking at sporting codes outside the school settings, as well. I am happy to defer to the secretary if she is aware of these issues in our public schools.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, as I think we have canvassed at this Committee before, at New South Wales public schools we support individual students and their individual needs, and we do so in the context of the whole community. This is not a widespread issue across our system. I would acknowledge that where it is an issue, it reflects a whole set of personal circumstances that can pose challenges to families, individuals and the whole community. Our schools manage these issues sensitively at a local level at this stage. Based on what we see across the system, it is not something that has warranted further investigation for a statewide policy—although we are very happy to take further information on notice and come back to you, Chair.

The CHAIR: We have now got what looks like seven minutes running up to 12.45 p.m., which we will split with three minutes to the Opposition and two minutes each to the crossbenchers. The Hon. Courtney Houssos has the call.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much. How many schools currently send weekly text messages to parents?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We did that as part of a trial with the parental engagement. I think there were a number of schools involved in that and someone might have that detail. I am not sure whether that trial has now concluded though, Ms Houssos, but if Ms Owen wants to add to that—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is alright. I will ask Ms Owen about it this afternoon. Minister, can you guarantee that there will be funding for additional schools under the Cooler Classrooms Program?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I can say, Ms Houssos, is that we are committed to rolling out the \$500 million program that is currently underway. That is our focus. As Mr Manning said, that is due to be completed in the next financial year. That is what we are doing, but we will continue to assess the applications under round two.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is that why your ministerial office told the department to shift away from the round one versus round two language?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not appreciate the premise of your question. As I said, we have taken a number of questions on notice in relation to this particular matter and we will provide that information back to the Committee in due course.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a site yet for the new selective high school in south-western Sydney?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I am happy to ask Mr Manning to comment on that matter—I know it is one that we have canvassed in the Committee before—and where we are up to with that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is okay, I will ask Mr Manning this afternoon. When will the Gregory Hills Primary School be delivered? When will it will open for students?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: With the new school at Gregory Hills, we are going through the planning process. The expectation is that the construction will start later this year. That is the latest advice that I have. Obviously once we go through the planning process and get those approvals, that gives us a better opportunity to give the families there a more correct time line. We are looking, I believe—and Mr Manning will

correct me if I am wrong—at a modern method of construction build at that particular school site as well. Once the planning approvals have been given we will be able to have a better time frame that we can share with families, including when we anticipate that school opening.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Has the State significant development application been lodged yet?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Let me check, I might have that here. Not yet but shortly, is my understanding.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You did promise with the then Premier last year that construction would commence last year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I do not believe that is correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I can give you the *Camden-Narellan Advertiser* article, if you like. Has construction commenced on the new support unit that was promised for Moruya High School?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Mr Manning, do you have that information?

ANTHONY MANNING: I do not have that information.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We will see if we have that for you this afternoon.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That would be great. It was supposed to begin in mid-2021.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. We will take that on notice in terms of where that particular project is up to.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Ms Houssos, if I may, obviously we had some disruptions to construction in mid-2021. There was a period, you will appreciate, during last year's lockdown where construction ceased on a number of projects. I will ask that we take that on notice but that context is understood in our answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. I think that is about my time.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Just quickly, I will pick up on questions from Mr D'Adam regarding teachers leaving the profession. I will give just a couple of examples. Rainbow Street Public School lost 15 teachers at the end of last year. They walked out of the profession. That school has an enrolment of about 360 students. South Coogee Public School lost 13 teachers as well in the same year. That is concerning. As someone who has been in the system and knowing what the average turnover is from year to year, that is concerning. Does it concern you, Minister, that you are having that much of a turnover at the primary school level?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What I would like to do, Mr Banasiak, is take that specific detail and those numbers on notice and find some more information in terms of whether those were staff that transferred to other schools, and what the vacancy rate currently is at those schools as well. Again, I think context in these debates is important, so I would like to have the opportunity to get more specific information about those two schools that you have raised.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Regardless of whether it is a transfer to another school, leaving the profession—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There is a difference.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: —or being promoted, there is a loss of what you would call "corporate knowledge", would you agree? When a teacher leaves for whatever reason there is a loss.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But teachers might move to schools or move into different areas in the department for a range of personal reasons, Mr Banasiak, as you would know from your time as a teacher. Again, I think the context in terms of staff that may have moved from specific schools or for what reason is something that we would probably have to look at with those specific two schools that you have called out in your question.

YVETTE CACHIA: Thanks, Minister. It is a really important question and something that we look at closely. Just to give you a little bit of context, though, as the Minister said, we have a very low turnover rate in the department. Our separation rate is 2.1 per cent and retirement rate is 1.8 per cent. If you compare that to some other industries like technology, for instance, which is over 11 per cent, or professional services at around 13 per cent, it just gives you a bit of context. We placed 6,400 roles last year. As the Minister said, we have got a lot of mobility, and I would look at—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, can I quickly pick up on retirement?

YVETTE CACHIA: Sure.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How much of that retirement is forced medical retirement—of that 2.1 per cent—and how much of it is of their own volition?

YVETTE CACHIA: We will come back to you with that number. But it is exceedingly small.

The CHAIR: Minister, with the creation of the SPED unit, is it not also important to give parents a legal right to take their children out of classes that do not accord with their moral, ethical and social values? If we do not give parents this right, is there not a pattern now of parents just taking their kids out of the government system because of some of the woke leftist rubbish that is in the classroom, and this explains the rise of homeschooling and how the government system is losing numbers to the non-government system?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There are a few things to unpack there, Chair. Firstly, I would say that a lot of those are issues and matters that are raised in relation to your private member's bill and the committee report, and the Government will be providing a response to that shortly, going through the appropriate Cabinet processes. I am not going to provide commentary on that in this forum. What I will say is that the Education Act does state that parents have responsibilities for the education of their children. In terms of homeschooling numbers, it is a very low number of students who are homeschooled comparatively when you look at the number of students in New South Wales.

The CHAIR: It is rising.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There is every opportunity for parents to be engaged in their child's education. I think it is particularly something that this new unit will make clear for families, that they do understand their rights and responsibilities as parents. I do think that is important. As I said earlier in response to the original questions about that unit, one thing that we found during COVID is that we did have parents more engaged. I think it is a good thing when parents are involved in their child's education. It is something I value as a mother. I am sure other parents on the Committee would also agree. Knowing what their children are up to at school, how they are learning and how they are progressing is an important part. If there are things that we can do to improve that engagement with parents, that is what we want to do and that is what the new unit will focus on.

The CHAIR: Minister, will the Government update bulletin 55 about transgender students in the government school system, given that it is now eight years old and these issues are dramatically different to what they were in 2014?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, Chair, I believe that they are matters that have been canvassed with this Committee in its report into the bill. A Government response will be coming on that shortly.

The CHAIR: Minister, thanks for your time through this morning's session of the budget estimates PC 3 committee. Thank you very much for your attendance. We will come back with all the officials at 2.00 p.m.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Thank you, Chair. Just on that, and with the indulgence of the Chair, what we may do is allow Ms Van Berlo to not be here this afternoon. Given her work with work health and safety and the emerging flooding situation, I think there are SEOC meetings and things that she really does need to be at.

The CHAIR: Okay. She will not be able to attend?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have got an objection to that.

The CHAIR: You have got an objection to it?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sorry? You do not want her to be doing her job dealing with the flooding emergency?

The CHAIR: I do not think you really do object.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Okay.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We do have Ms Cachia here, who is the line manager of Ms Van Berlo—

The CHAIR: Anthony, I would not object if I was you.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: —so we are happy to take questions on the subject matter throughout this afternoon. I just would ask, if the Committee is okay, that we let Ms Van Berlo go and attend the senior government emergency response committees that she is part of this afternoon as we continue to respond to the floods.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is accepted. Thank you very much. We will see everyone other than the Minister at 2.00 p.m. Thank you.

(The Minister and Dianne Van Berlo withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The CHAIR: It being 2.00 p.m., the Committee will resume with officials from the Department of Education and NESAs. We will turn to the Opposition first.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you to everyone for coming back this afternoon. I wanted to ask about the before- and after-school care program vouchers. Is that being administered by the Department of Education?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have worked in partnership with the Department of Customer Service in relation to that voucher program. A bit like a number of the other voucher programs that are available to the community, they will be administered through that system.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: In terms of accrediting the centres to participate in the program, is that conducted by the Department of Education or by Service NSW?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Manning to come back to you on the specifics of that commitment.

ANTHONY MANNING: As the secretary has said, we are working with Customer Service to make sure the providers are logged onto the system and can use it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you give me some sense of whose area of responsibility is the actual approval process?

ANTHONY MANNING: The voucher system architecture is Customer Service's. The mechanism that we worked through with them, we have worked through with them with a number of stakeholders to make sure they have access to it. To a large extent, it is our responsibility to make sure that works with Customer Service providing the IT and the software to make sure that happens.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you are providing the software and the IT to the centres?

ANTHONY MANNING: No, Customer Service is providing the IT. We are providing the process and the system and liaising with the stakeholders to make sure that those access arrangements are working. Where some services need some assistance to log onto the system, we are working with that to make sure that all works in accordance with what they need to do.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We have been told that there have been quite significant delays. The Government obviously announced this several weeks ago. Some centres have been told that they will not be able to use the vouchers until term two. That implies that it would be an entire term that parents are waiting to access these vouchers. Are you aware of this?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: What I might say first, Ms Houssos, is that the Government announced the voucher program and indicated that the vouchers would be available for parents in a number of weeks' time. I do not have the specific dates in front of me. During that time we will build up the program. Those vouchers are valid for an extended period of time. Term two is just a matter of weeks away. In terms of your question, it was announced that it would be delivered, that the system would be up and running and that parents could claim their vouchers from a particular point and then it would be operational for services from there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, but it was announced and parents have factored this into their calculations. They are expecting that they can access it quickly. Now they are being told by the centres that the process is quite difficult to apply for them to get accredited. I want to know whether that is being conducted by the Department of Education or whether that is Service NSW?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It is a web-based system that the providers are using and Mr Manning can provide detail.

ANTHONY MANNING: It is us, in answer to your question, Ms Houssos. There are a number of providers that are having difficulties with the system and we are working with all of those providers to try and make sure that they have access as quickly as we can possibly get to them. There are a number of services that can access it very easily, but a few are having some difficulties with it because of the process of matching up school places and school names with the voucher and allowing that process to flow through. There is a small

number that are struggling and we are working with those to make sure that they can access those services as soon as possible.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If I may assure those services, the system opened for registration for before- and after-school services on 9 February and will close on 30 September, so there is an extended window in which those services can seek to be registered on the system. Applications for parents opened this week on Monday 28 February and close on 30 September.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many before- and after-school care centres are actually up and running as at today's date?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I would not have that information to date, as you will appreciate, as the registrations only went live for providers on 9 February, but I am happy to provide you with the data as of today on notice because I do not have that with me today.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, you said that there is only a small number of providers who are struggling. Do you have any information there?

ANTHONY MANNING: No, we do not. The briefing I got from my team was at the beginning of this week. We can provide that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you see if there is any way that you can come back to us today with a rough idea of how many? Let me ask you this question: Can you come back today and see if there are any centres that are currently offering vouchers and taking vouchers from parents as at today?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will repeat that parents were able to access the vouchers on Monday this week and it is only Wednesday. It is, therefore, unlikely that they are being used at this time. But it is possible, so I am very happy to come back on notice with that detail.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: If you can come to us today, come back to us today.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We will certainly try, but I want to make sure we take it on notice if we are unable to.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wanted to ask also about the selective high school in south-western Sydney. Do you have a site for that yet, Mr Manning? Last time we spoke there were five sites under consideration. How many have you got?

ANTHONY MANNING: Last time we spoke, if you remember, we were working around Leppington Town Centre. We are working with both Landcom and the Greater Sydney Commission in partnership with council to look at the civic centre design. We are still working through that process now. We have not made enough progress to narrow that down because that process has taken a little bit longer than we would like it to, but we continue to work with Landcom, the Greater Sydney Commission and council to get the civic centre fixed and then we will know what the school location can be in relation to the civic centre. We still see enormous value in the school being very proximate to the railway station because a lot of the kids will come that way to the school, so we need to make sure that the civic centre design is right in order for the school to fit into that process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you still working with five sites, Mr Manning?

ANTHONY MANNING: As I say, until the civic centre design is finished, yes, there are five sites under consideration. But it is not really possible for us to narrow it down any further than that because we may pick a site and then find the civic centre design changes and that site is no longer appropriate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a time frame for when the civic centre will be done?

ANTHONY MANNING: We hope that by the middle of this year that will be resolved.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: By the middle of this year you are looking at having a site?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. But the civic centre design should be finished and then we will have a very clear direction around the site that works best for us.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me on notice how much money has been spent so far on that project?

ANTHONY MANNING: I am happy to take it on notice, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrisson, can you tell me how many vacant positions there are for school counsellors as at today's date?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Owen to provide that number.

RUTH OWEN: There are 34 vacancies.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide me with a list on notice of the schools that those vacancies are at?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: For clarity, they are permanent vacancies. There will be additional vacancies from short term, leave and other arrangements, but that is the data we have on current vacancies.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a figure for how many of those additional vacancies there are?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: They are not counted in the system as vacancies as they are people taking leave, so it is harder for us to pull that data from our system. But I am happy to have a look and see what is possible.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have a current breakdown for the ratio of students to school counsellors in New South Wales schools?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As the Committee would be aware, the Government committed to make sure that every high school had access to a full-time equivalent counsellor. We do not measure it in the sense of ratios to students, but we could certainly calculate one and provide it on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wanted to ask about the COVID recovery projects. These are the projects where schools have to provide some of the funding. Where should I be directing those questions to, Ms Harrison?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: They will be with Mr Manning, but I am happy to support him.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to provide a list of those projects with the breakdown of how much the school is contributing and how much the department is contributing on notice?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes. This program was put in place to help schools fund some of those minor infrastructure works that they wanted to on the ground but with support from the department. As I understand it, it was a matched funding process, but as we kicked that off we have looked at various options to meet the school needs. Mr Manning will be able to provide some further information on that.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. I am happy to report there are about 1,500 projects across 1,300 schools and the school contribution varies between 20 per cent to 50 per cent of the value of the project with the State making up the rest. Of those 1,500, almost a third have been completed, another third are in construction and commenced, and the rest are in planning and at tender.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Could you on notice provide me with a list of the schools of those projects and then the proportion of funding for each of those schools of what is being provided by the department and what is being provided by—

ANTHONY MANNING: Some schools will have multiple projects.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is fine. If you can, would you provide a breakdown by project rather than by school. I think if you are providing me with a list by project, then it is going to include the school name as well—let's say, for clarity's sake, the project, the school and the proportion of funding that is being received and then the suburb that it is in.

ANTHONY MANNING: Sure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That would be great. Sorry, and then the progress—whether it has started, is underway, or is completed.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I wanted to ask about the process for the appointment of the assistant principals, curriculum and instruction. I think we raised this in our last estimates hearing. This is a program that is in place of the Early Action for Success DP positions. Is that correct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It is accurate that we have now provided an assistant principal position for every primary school in the State. That has allowed us to take a finite amount of resources and apply it to more schools, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, and the finite resources that you have taken from schools is the DP for EAS. Is that right?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Following an evaluation of the Early Action for Success program and our other priorities to ensure that evidence-based teaching practices were embedded across the system, we have looked at the benefits of that for everybody and found that this was a most appropriate way to meet that need. We have assistant principals now for every primary school to support them in their teaching of reading—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I read the evaluation of the Early Action for Success program and it was a positive assessment of that program. It actually worked. That is fair to say.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: They are exactly the lessons that I am referring to in terms of what we have now applied more broadly. I do not think the evaluation was conclusive on what level within a school was the right level for those positions to sit at.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am not sure that is actually correct. One of the observations in the evaluation—and perhaps you can offer some comment on this—was that these were cultural change positions, the DPs for Early Action for Success, and the intention was to have those positions at a level that has sufficient status within the school community to be able to provide that cultural change leadership.

The Hon. WES FANG: I am going to take the opportunity to make the point that Ms Harrisson had not finished her answer at that point and maybe she was actually getting there before you interrupted her.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I do not think that is the case.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Cultural change is important in schools when we are seeking to see evidence-based practice embedded. We have, alongside the running of the Early Action for Success program, adapted a number of other measures through the system that place a much clearer accountability through the system for the use of evidence-based practice. That means that we can reassess where and at what levels things are sitting. We are confident that an assistant principal for primary schools across the State is a really strong investment in quality teaching and learning in our schools and that it will be able to provide that support in our schools. I think it was a widely welcomed decision by primary principals across the State to have that resource available for all of them.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just ask about the progress of the recruitment? Are you able to advise the Committee of how many have been recruited into those AP positions?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly, and I think in this morning's hearing you heard from Ms Cachia where she referenced that the number of recruitment activity that we undertake every year is in the thousands given the scale of our system, but we do have the specifics on that. I will ask Ms Owen to provide them to you.

RUTH OWEN: Thank you. The AP curriculum and instructional leader roles are being recruited in a number of phases. Phase one was to recruit for this term, term one, to aim to have 1,160 leaders in 790 schools. Seventy-nine per cent of those roles are already filled; the others are already within process. That is 921 roles already filled. Phase two is for term two this year, where we will recruit a further 340 roles in 290 schools. Phase three is for term one next year, and that will be for a further 775 roles in 680 schools.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Of the schools that have had their roles substantively filled, how many of those roles—if you have got the information available, that is great, if not, take it on notice—were filled by the former occupant of the Early Action for Success DP positions?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to take the specifics of that on notice. I think it is worth the Committee being aware that the Early Action for Success roles at DP level were always temporary in the system. What we have done is replaced those with ongoing roles in relation to an assistant principal for curriculum to provide that instructional leadership for all primary schools.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, thank you. Ms Owen, do you have that number?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think I indicated we would take that on notice, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sorry, it was not clear that that was the case. Can I just ask a question about temporary teachers? I asked a question on notice about conversion of temporary teachers, and there is a mechanism there for converting staff who are temporary into permanents and we also know from the return of a question on notice that there are 25,000 staff who are of a contingent status—that is, they are not in permanent positions. The numbers were very low. I think in 2020, 74 positions were converted; in 2019, 57 positions; and in 2021 there were 114 positions. Why is this mechanism not being used more widely?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: The mechanism is constrained to some extent. It is set out in our staffing agreement with the NSW Teachers Federation, and it is only in certain circumstances and when certain criteria are met that it is possible to make that transition. With COVID last year, we had an opportunity to convert more

temps last year in the second half of the year, but due to the COVID disruption in schools, that was not the focus of principals, as you would appreciate, and that agreement for that broader application of a process expired at the end of 2020.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a drop in the ocean though—114 out of 25,000.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I indicated, we have constraints in relation to that process and how it is able to operate.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: On notice, can you tell us how many of those temporary staff were converted to permanent positions in that window?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to do that. I think it is important to note that the reasons we have temporary teachers in our system are wide and varied. They are not automatically a bad thing. If we have someone going on maternity leave, for example, for a period of time, it would be expected that that is a shorter-term contract cover for someone else's permanent position. I do not quite agree with some of the painting of the picture around our temporary teachers and the way they are put forward because it is slightly different between casuals and temps.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is the proportions. Surely you are concerned if out of 70-odd thousand teaching staff, 25,000 are in temporary positions. That is just out of control. That is just not a reasonable proportion of your workforce to have in insecure employment, would you not say?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I have indicated, there are a number of reasons why individuals may be in temporary positions through our system, including covering a variety of leave arrangements—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, you have said that.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: —and including short-term temporary positions embedded in a school for particular reasons, for example, to meet curriculum demand within a school context. It has always been a feature of our system. I hear the challenge around whether the number is right, and I think that is a reasonable challenge to pose to us, but I just want to make sure that in responding to that we are cognisant that we are not assuming that every temporary position is a bad position. Most of them, the majority of them determined by schools locally to meet local community need, are appropriate positions or used to cover leave. Ms Cachia might be able to provide some further detail on that process that you have asked about.

YVETTE CACHIA: Mr D'Adam, in a workforce of our size, about a third of the workforce being temporary is not that unusual if you compare its size with other cohorts—in Health, for instance, or Transport. As the Secretary said, it is really important to have that temporary cohort. To give you a sense of the number of roles that we advertised last year, there were 3,811 permanent position advertisements in 2021 that people could apply for or put an application in to be transferred to. We do have a tremendous amount of mobility inside our workforce. I understand from the numbers, being a large workforce, it can look quite alarming, if you look at it globally.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to move on because I have limited time.

YVETTE CACHIA: Sure.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to ask one more question. I asked a question about the funding for temporary teaching positions funded under the RAM loadings. The advice from the department was that that information is not available. Given the proportion of funds that are available under equity loadings, how is it possible that the department does not have information about how that money is being spent on employment?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I do not accept the assertion that we do not know how that money is being spent. Schools set out in their school improvement plans and in their annual reports how they are planning to spend, and account for how they have spent, their money. In relation to particular temporary positions, these are decisions best made locally by a local school. If you have a student cohort seeking to take a certain type of elective, for example, that requires you to have a specialised member of staff for a period of time, that would be a temporary position. By the nature of our workforce, we are more dominantly female, which means we do have a high proportion of people going off on maternity and parental leave, and those impact on our numbers. So we see temporary teachers being required across our system for a wide variety of reasons. To have the IT system that would be able to report on that would be a very complicated and challenging task, and it is not one that we currently have available to us.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I invite Ms Cachia to clarify the evidence she gave in relation to Mr Latham's questions around the vaccine mandates and misconduct. I draw her to the document *Management of Conduct Related to Non-compliance with COVID-19 Vaccination Requirements Guidelines*, in particular sections

5.2.3.7 and 5.2.4, which directly deal with the fact that you are essentially standing down people for misconduct if it is proven. I also draw people's attention to examples of letters that have been sent to staff that say:

It is alleged you engaged in misconduct by:

1. Failing to comply with the directions issued by Ms Yvette Cachia, Chief People Officer, on 22 October 2021 and 1 November 2021, to show your principal a copy of your vaccination evidence by 8 November 2021.

Can we be clear, the department is standing down people, whether it is temporarily or permanently, because you allege that they have engaged in misconduct because they have made a personal choice.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Because the legal requirement on our staff is for them to be vaccinated in order to work in our schools. I think Ms Cachia was very clear in her evidence this morning, it is an individual's responsibility to comply with that public health order. It is a Minister for Health public health order that applies to our workforce. As you would expect with any legal requirement on a public servant, if they were not complying with that legal requirement, they would be in breach of their employment conditions. They are the policy settings that we are working within and implementing.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: When you wrote that into the Teaching Service Act, Ms Harrisson, did you—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I was just very clear: This was a public health order-related matter.

The CHAIR: But the question is about the use of the word "misconduct".

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Given that you have mentioned legislation, when you wrote this into the Teaching Service Act on 18 October 2021—I have it here, signed by you—did you give consideration to the fact that the public health orders end on 22 March but your determination ends in June 2022?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, it is not written into the Teaching Service Act; it is a condition of employment. Our conditions of employment are that you meet the legal requirements as part of your employment. The public health order is one that has come into effect, and we are required to implement it appropriately. You would have seen that we are into the second public health order, which expires on 22 March. We have taken Health advice in relation to the appropriate settings for our workforce. The Health advice very clearly and strongly, from every corner of the health community, is that vaccines are the appropriate way to go. It is a department of health public health order that we are required to comply with.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I turn to your decision to include booster vaccinations. I note that you sent out a circular to all staff at the start of this term. How many staff at this point in time have registered that they have had a booster vaccination, and what time frames are you giving them before you issue further letters alleging misconduct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, we are in a period of consultation with our staff around those boosters, and we will complete that in due course. Of course, we will continue to advise our staff that being fully vaccinated, which the Health advice now indicates includes a third dose to be fully vaccinated, is the best thing that they can do. So that is what we are doing. We are updating our vax attest system to capture that data. Once it is available, I will be very happy to share it with you.

The CHAIR: Ms Harrisson, you need to provide an answer. What proportion of the staff have the booster?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We are currently in the process of updating the IT system that was built to capture this information to include the additional vaccine. Once that has gone live and we are able to capture that data, I will very happily provide it to the Committee.

The CHAIR: You say you will do a booster mandate without knowing how many staff have the booster?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I have indicated, and we have been open with our staff about this, we are updating the vax attest system that will allow them to meet the requirements.

The CHAIR: You have no idea?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: At that point we will be able to report back to you on the data. Obviously, as I am sure people in the Committee who have been through the process will appreciate, there are a number of variables in terms of timing in relation to the booster, not least when you have the second shot. If you then add into that whether or not you have had COVID in a period of time, it is a personal time line as much as anything. So we are very conscious of that in the way that we are engaging with our workforce on that issue.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: How do you plan to manage that variable time line if you still want them to adhere to the determination that you made in the Teaching Service Act?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: The determination applies to our corporate staff and the public health order applies to the teaching service, just so I am clear on that. As I have indicated, we will do so through the vax attest system, once it has been updated, to capture that information.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I will start by asking you for a figure of how many children are being homeschooled at the moment.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: In terms of learning from home because of COVID disruption?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: They are both good questions. The first question is how many are officially being homeschooled or are registered for homeschooling? Secondly, I would like to know how many parents have chosen to keep their children at home because of COVID. I do not know whether or not there is overlap between those two groups, so any information you can give me.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will let Mr Martin provide the details on homeschooling. While he finds those numbers, we have had exceptionally high attendance through this term. I think the work that went into making sure that schools were a safe place for students to return to and to maintain that community confidence in the settings has been very effective. At the end of term four we saw higher attendance rates at the end of 2021 than we had seen in 2019. Again, those measures were effective through the end of the Delta outbreak and then again at the start of this term.

We have followed up with every student who has not returned, and we have a good understanding as to why they may not have. The vast majority of those individual cases are due to underlying medical conditions in individual students. In those circumstances some of that anxiety is very much understandable. I visited Karonga School the other week, which has worked very closely with parents and carers for children with very significant underlying health conditions to make sure that they can demonstrate that the environment is safe and get those students back to school, because the thing we recognise consistently is that is the best place for our students to be. I will see if my colleague Leanne has any of the details on the number of students who have been learning from home while Mr Martin comes to the homeschooling.

PAUL MARTIN: Thank you very much, Secretary. If I may also just supplement an answer from this morning, financial literacy is also in the maths syllabuses, and the consent material began being rolled out in 2019. They were two questions that arose this morning.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you.

PAUL MARTIN: In relation to homeschooling, I will just clarify that homeschooling or home education as opposed to learning from home is regarded very differently by the people who apply for homeschooling. We currently have exactly 8,995. So nearly 9,000 students were registered as at 31 December 2021.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that a decrease?

PAUL MARTIN: No. It is an increase on the previous year, which was 6,700-odd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Is that then a consistent increase in those registered numbers?

PAUL MARTIN: It has increased sequentially over years but still slightly larger from 2019-20 to 2020-21, but these are very small numbers of students in comparison.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Within that group, though, what percentage of those are children with a disability, or other special needs, that they feel perhaps cannot be taken care of within the public education system?

PAUL MARTIN: People who elect to homeschool do not have to provide the reasons for that, so we do not have complete figures in relation to the reasons for homeschooling, which may go to, as you say, special education needs et cetera. I am happy to take that on notice to provide whatever information we have.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Secretary, back to the point you were making, my office has been contacted by a number of parents who were very concerned about the return to school before children had been fully vaccinated because they have children who were at risk of COVID. What percentage or how many people are still learning from home because of the concern over COVID? Do you have any figures that show us that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: What we have are our attendance rates from the start of term. They are currently sitting—and I will provide the very specifics on notice—at around 87 per cent, which is within a kind of margin of error for what we would expect to see across the system as a whole. We also have had in place throughout the return to school time and case management support for those students, so the thing I can assure the

Committee about is that we know who every single one of the students is at a case level who has not returned and why. In the older years of high school some of those are to do with very complex family circumstances where families are making choices about employment and balancing the needs for that in their household. A range of reasons are at play. What we do know is we are making the environments as safe as we can in the context of COVID. For the vast majority of students—sadly, not for all students—COVID is a very mild illness.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What percentage then is people with a disability?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will come back to you on notice if I can from that casework team who have been following up with individual families and making sure we know where they are. We have made sure we know where every student is and that they are accounted for and we know that they are safe.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Chair, I understood that I had all of Mr Shoebridge's 10 minutes.

The CHAIR: No. There are two participating members on the crossbench—yourself and Mr Banasiak—so we split five minutes and five minutes. But there will be other rounds.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We can talk about that but that is not the understanding.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge gets the full allocation of time because he is a Committee member.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That is right. I am substituting for him at this moment.

The CHAIR: I have not been told that, I am sorry. But we will look at that in the next round and sort it out. Sorry if there is any inconvenience.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That is all right, thank you.

The CHAIR: I am just acting on what had been arranged earlier in the day. Secretary, are the department and the system expecting further industrial action from the Teachers Federation?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think the Minister answered some questions on this earlier. We remain in industrial negotiations with the Teachers Federation. That matter is currently being arbitrated before the IRC. I would note the IRC's determination requiring the NSW Teachers Federation not to take industrial action. I also note that they have chosen to do so on one occasion already. I am not privy to their plans—I guess, nor would you expect me to be—and I hope that they will act in the best interests of students.

The CHAIR: Is there a time line that the federation has set? They seem in their social media to be saying that Perrottet has five weeks to sort this out with an implied inference that industrial action would commence after the five-week period.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We are working within the legal frameworks that are appropriate for us to work within. We have an IRC determination that requests that the New South Wales federation will refrain from industrial action at this time, but we will be before the IRC in May for the next stage of that arbitration process.

The CHAIR: Is it time to do something substantial in harmony with teachers and their representatives about the status of teaching in New South Wales? The feedback I get is that your brightest students finishing up the HSC think teaching is kind of like social work and think, "I'm going off to do something that is more substantial." The remuneration is seen as relatively poor. I have got many letters from teachers demoralised by what has happened over the mandates and being charged with misconduct and being run through this horrendous process. I cannot remember a time in my lengthy period looking at the teaching profession and education policy when teaching was so far down the list of things that our best and brightest would want to do as a career. Is it not time for not only a substantial pay increase but starting to treat teachers as true professionals, as we would do in the private sector, with performance pay and other professional recognition and do something significant about the status of this profession which is so vital to the future of our State?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly, Chair, I can agree with you on the status of the profession. You would not find anyone on my team here with us today who would not very clearly recommend teaching as a very significant career choice that people can make. I certainly know from my colleagues who have taught—they would say that it is the best career in the world. Many of our teachers feel that way and have that passion for what they do. So you will not hear us talking teaching down, Chair. You will hear us talking up our teachers and the incredible work they have done, particularly over the last two years where I think the whole community has seen the value that teaching brings. I cannot comment further in relation to the arbitration and pay matters that are before the IRC.

The CHAIR: Have you put a package up to the Minister for improving the status of teaching, not only remuneration but public reputation, which appears to be at an all-time low? This is quite a crisis. The shortage of teachers points to it as well.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly, Chair, I think there has been some media coverage about work that we have had underway to try to attract people to teaching. We have been consistently committed to making sure that we are opening up pathways into teaching, that we are seeing teaching for the valued career it is and the value that it provides in the community, and we have further work underway on that.

The CHAIR: But have you put something up to the Minister along those lines?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly as part of the Teaching Supply Strategy there is a strand of work, which I believe the Committee would have seen referred to in the media, called "attraction to teaching". We are absolutely focused on the things we can do to support new teachers into the profession.

The CHAIR: As you know, I am not an advocate for the federation. I am not normally seen as someone fiscally profligate, but I think this has got to be an absolute area of priority. There is no doubt about it. Can I come to Mr Currie and correspondence I received from a teacher in the western districts of New South Wales, which reads as follows—I will not mention the name of the school or the name of the teacher: "I wish to inform you that a definite mismanagement of my private medical information has occurred by the PES team. In January 2022 I was cc'd in an email from a teacher at"—name of school—"informing that a PES staff member had forwarded to her my private medical information. The teacher also received in the email to her the letter that was sent to me by Daryl Currie, Executive Director, PES, stating his findings of my investigation." How can these rank and distressing privacy breaches occur?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, just to start with, obviously the department would take any confirmed breach of privacy very seriously and would report it to all of the appropriate channels, including the Privacy Commissioner. We are a human endeavour and so there will at times be the odd error made. We make sure that we are correcting those whenever they do occur. I will let Mr Currie talk to the specifics of your statement.

The CHAIR: But that is your life story, isn't it? "We've made a mistake. We won't do it again." There has got to be some accountability about this, hasn't there? Mr Currie?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: So I think, Chair, if I may, that is why we have institutions such as the Privacy Commissioner, who we are required to report breaches of privacy to.

The CHAIR: Yes, but they are patsies for the Government. When did they ever find a privacy breach?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I cannot answer for the way that they do their work.

The CHAIR: They are completely ineffective. You have to police this yourself. That Privacy Commissioner is in the pocket of the Government and utterly useless. Mr Currie?

DARYL CURRIE: Thank you, Chair. I am not cognisant of the person you are talking about and I do not want to go into specific matters. When matters like that come to our attention, we do put in changes to procedures and ensure that it does not happen again. We do take responsibility for those situations and we try to ameliorate it as quickly as we can.

The CHAIR: How do you do that?

DARYL CURRIE: With regards to situations of that nature we would talk to the people who had actually been involved in that, counsel them about the procedures that they took and then put procedures in place to ensure that it does not happen again.

The CHAIR: Okay. Again, that is the life story. Can I ask about the deployment of the investigators at the PES? I understand their four-month contracts are starting to come up to their expiration dates. Are they going to be renewed in any capacity?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Just to confirm, Chair, I am assuming that your question is in reference to those that came in to investigate the vaccination—

The CHAIR: Yes, the Hays recruitment people—the private eyes that have been snooping around people's private arrangements. I understand they were on four-month contracts. Is that going to be renewed?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Cachia to come in on this issue. It was a very small number of contractors brought in to deal with a surge in capacity and additional requests on the PES team in terms of the workload created by the vaccine mandate.

YVETTE CACHIA: Thank you, Secretary. Thank you, Chair. Yes, there are 31 contractors. We are currently looking at our numbers and ascertaining whether we need to extend some or all of those contractors. As you know, it is a small cohort, given the number of people who were referred to PES as part of that process. We will obviously be happy to advise the Committee around that decision when it is made.

The CHAIR: How do you calibrate the number you need going forward if you do not know how many staff have got the booster?

YVETTE CACHIA: Because it is not simply about the booster, Chair. It is about the number of people who are still perhaps on leave and who will be coming off leave and need to go through the process as well of coming through that vaccination attest process.

The CHAIR: The other outfit that has been part of this policing is Sonic HealthPlus. Why was there not a competitive process for hiring these people? How much money have they been paid so far and what are the projections for the future? Is it sufficient to just say they were on some Public Service Commission panel? Did they not need to have some specific expertise in the area of these medical exemptions for vaccination? I have again got a pile of correspondence saying that this outfit have not only been intrusive, but incompetent as well.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, I will provide some of the answer and then hand to Ms Cachia. Sonic Health will have gone through a competitive process in order to become an approved provider with the Public Service Commission panel. They are an organisation that specialises in this type of work. If there are individual cases where people feel like they were not treated appropriately, I think—as we have indicated and continue to do so to the panel—we are very happy to take evidence and investigate if that is the case. We do not have evidence to that effect from our own interactions. I am very happy—

The CHAIR: I have got evidence here. In Australia we are very lucky to have an established Medicare system and a very strong local network of GPs. Why was it not sufficient to take medical exemptions from GPs instead of Sonic ringing up these GPs and quizzing them and, in some cases, urging that the exemption be reversed and sort of standing over them in what again is a breach of privacy?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, I think as we indicated in answers this morning, the official definition of medical contraindications approved at the Commonwealth level is a very narrow set of conditions that would be appropriate to be considered. It is reasonable that we are checking that because in some instances that may not be the exact reason that is provided by the GP. In order for us to confirm whether or not someone's contraindication sits within the approved parameters, we would need to ask those questions. At times GPs might use a very general statement and we are requiring something quite specific in relation to this, given the definition that has been provided by health bodies from Canberra.

The CHAIR: Hardly anyone has ever heard of Sonic. Who are they and what expertise have they got to overrule a GP who could have had decades of contact with the medical circumstances of a teacher?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Sonic Health have a number of health experts, doctors, nurses and others on their staff. They are a health provider organisation that work specifically in this space. Ms Cachia can provide you with some further detail.

The CHAIR: They are a for-profit company, are they not? They make money out of this.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have been, I think, open and transparent that we have gone to a panel and have sought the independent advice. Can I just assure the Committee that we take these matters seriously. We do not take decisions about the employment of teachers lightly. We do not want to see staff separate from the organisation for this reason. We would be delighted if those teachers went and got vaccinated; they would be welcome back at that point. While we have a public health order that is required to be complied with, that is the situation that is required to maintain their employment.

YVETTE CACHIA: I think it is worth noting as well that a large number of employees who provided us with a medical contraindication certificate that required further information—so maybe it was not fulsome enough or it was redacted—have subsequently through this process become compliant and have been given a medical contraindication certificate and have been able to go back to work. That is the purpose of the process.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Harrisson, I listened to your answer earlier about raising the professional standing of teachers, and the department seems to have a strong emphasis on the attraction side. I am not sure why there does not seem to be an equivalent or greater emphasis on the retention side. I have had conversations with teachers working in western Sydney and I know that this is a hard job and a demanding job. It does not seem to be that the department acknowledges how difficult the job is. It has got a leadership who are predominantly not teachers and who have not had that direct experience. When is the department going to start by acknowledging how hard a job teaching is and start to address the issues of retention?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr D'Adam, I think we have consistently at this Committee when we have come before you been very clear that our teachers work exceptionally hard and do exceptionally good work in their communities. I note the commentary around the make-up of the executive, and I think we have also traversed those issues before. The vast majority of our senior public servants in the departments are indeed from a teaching background. We definitely have that expertise available to us and it is drawn upon. In terms of the work on retention, I might ask Ms Cachia to provide you with some work. But of course we want to maintain and retain our teachers—of course we do. I would obviously not sit here and say anything else. We have fantastic teachers working across the system, day in and day out. They work exceptionally hard with the interests of their students at heart.

YVETTE CACHIA: Thank you, Secretary. I think we mentioned the figures before around retention. It is absolutely an important question because it is not just about attraction, you are right; it is about retaining as well, and retaining in a way that is sustainable. In terms of the numbers themselves, our retirement rate is 2.1 per cent, which is quite low. We know that a lot of our teachers who retire end up keeping their approval to teach in teaching as well. The resignation rate is 1.8 per cent. I think it is fair to say—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I just pick you up on those figures?

YVETTE CACHIA: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I asked a question on notice about turnover. While I accept that the data in terms of permanent staff—which is what you are referring to there—perhaps does not paint as bad a picture, you are not actually looking at the full picture, are you? We have already established that a very significant proportion of the workforce are in contingent roles—they do not have job security—and you do not actually measure the turnover of those staff. You do not actually know how many of them you lose from the department each year. You do not actually know why those staff are leaving. Is that not a problem? How can you have a retention strategy when for 30 per cent of your workforce you are not actually measuring whether they are coming or going?

YVETTE CACHIA: We do track our temporary—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is not the answer that was returned by the Minister.

YVETTE CACHIA: I am not sure the Minister referred to—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You said that for temporary staff you could not measure staff turnover.

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: I think that Ms Cachia needs the opportunity to respond to what is quite a lengthy question. Perhaps in that response she will capture some of the points that you are actually trying to address, Mr D'Adam.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, Mr D'Adam, by the very nature of contract employment, retention numbers are in themselves complex. At the end of a contract you have not left the employment. You have finished that point of employment, but you have not necessarily left teaching as a profession. These would not be a simple set of numbers to provide you in terms of the turnover of temporary staff because of the nature of the contracts those people are employed under. I will let Ms Cachia talk further in relation to temporary teachers, but that is why we cannot provide you with that data that you have referred to in the previous question on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I accept that it is complex, Ms Harrisson. But the problem is that you are not actually collecting the information. You are not even making the effort to collect the information. Is that not the problem?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr D'Adam, you will appreciate that we think very carefully about what reporting requirements we place on schools to provide to us, given the workload implications of those reporting requirements. In order to collect that data, it would have to be done currently manually by a school and by every school in the State.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is not correct, is it, Ms Harrisson? The data is collected centrally. These are all employees on a central database. You know when a contract starts; you know when a contract ends. That is collected centrally.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I do not believe we do have the contract start and end dates available centrally. We certainly have payroll information centrally, but that is not the same as contract information.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The contracts are not managed at a central level? So you do not know how many people are on temporary contracts, how long those contracts should last for? You do not have that information centrally?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I indicated in my earlier answer, those are local decisions made by a local school in particular circumstances. They can be a very wide range of reasons.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If that is the case, how do you know when you need to cease paying a person if they are on a contract?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I indicated, we have a payroll system. Ms Cachia?

YVETTE CACHIA: It is simply a matter of the way that you cut the data right. As Ms Harrisson said, a principal will know that when somebody comes to them and says, "I'd like to take parental leave; these are the dates I'd like to take it from", anything in excess of four weeks is going to attract the employment of a temporary teacher. Those people will be engaged at the local level. Obviously they will be paid by payroll for that period and that is through a return that is placed in by the principal. In terms of generating a report to know in terms of a contractual report, it is slightly cut differently. So I think the difference in what you are asking for is just a semantics issue.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I might move on. I want to ask about confirmed COVID cases amongst teaching staff. What is the current advice to staff about what type of leave they should access if they confirm that they have COVID?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Cachia to provide the specifics in relation to that.

YVETTE CACHIA: Sure. We were really pleased to be able to provide special leave and extend that to casual staff as well. Obviously casuals have played a very important part in our workforce planning for this period. What we say to individuals is this: If you are sick with COVID, obviously you take sick leave; if you are, as many of our teaching staff are, involved in caring for somebody who might be at home with COVID, you can take up to 20 days of special leave. We also know that some of our staff might be seeking treatment for other illnesses, and we do not want them to necessarily run out of leave, and so for those people we will consider those cases on a case-by-case basis.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: How do you reconcile a direction to staff to access their sick leave if there is an existing presumption that they have COVID, that it has been contracted at work and that, therefore, constitutes a workers compensation claim?

YVETTE CACHIA: Mr D'Adam, I think they are two slightly different things. What we say—you are absolutely right. The presumption at present is that if you contract COVID as part of your employment, you contracted it at work. You have the opportunity, quite separately from taking leave, to make an application for workers compensation—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Are you advising staff to take applications for workers compensation in that circumstance?

YVETTE CACHIA: In terms of are we advising them, I think it is fair to say we have told staff about the various streams or limbs available to them in terms of if they have suffered injury or some sort of personal damage as a consequence of that, yes, they can make a claim.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am going to ask you again: Is there any explicit advice to staff that if they contract COVID, they should lodge a workers compensation claim?

YVETTE CACHIA: I am not sure that the characterisation of saying "you should lodge" would be the way that we have phrased it. I am happy to take that on notice and come back to give you the exact—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: If they have COVID, they must self-isolate.

YVETTE CACHIA: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: They must be away from the workplace.

YVETTE CACHIA: Yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Why are you not advising those staff to lodge a workers compensation claim?

YVETTE CACHIA: That is because there is a difference between taking sick leave for a case of COVID that you may have, where you have minor symptoms for three days, and lodging a workers compensation claim, which would be—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is still lost time from injury. It is still lost time from injury, is it not?

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order: I have been listening intently, and I appreciate that Mr D'Adam has limited time. However, I think for Hansard and also the witnesses, procedural fairness is that we need to allow them to finish their answer before we continue. The constant interjecting is really difficult.

The CHAIR: Ms Cachia, have you finished your answer?

YVETTE CACHIA: I will just add something. Thank you, Chair. To round out the answer, I suppose I would say that our teachers are in regular contact with their line managers. That might be a head teacher or a principal. I know that if a person who contracts COVID as an employee suffers some sort of ongoing need for medical treatment, they would absolutely make a workers compensation claim and that would be assessed by the workers compensation insurer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a lost-time injury, is it not, Ms Cachia? It is a lost-time injury. If they contract COVID, they cannot come to the workplace. They must—that is lost time.

YVETTE CACHIA: It is—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes.

YVETTE CACHIA: —for which sick leave is payable.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr D'Adam, it would be normal in most workers compensation claims where someone initially takes sick leave for that to be the case while their work health and safety claim is considered. Individuals make the choice about whether to make a work health and safety claim. We provide information transparently to our staff about how they may do that. If they choose that avenue, then, yes, of course that will be considered through the work health and safety process.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I suppose my question then is: Why are you not proactively advising staff that this should be the process? I mean, you are requiring line managers, principals, to advise when they have staff off with COVID. They are reporting that to the department, are they not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: They are, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So why are you not then, as part of that process, advising staff that they should be accessing workers comp?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I would like to take on notice the specifics of the advice we are providing to staff through that process. It is reported to the work health and safety directorate. As I have indicated, it would be normal for any member of staff to take sick leave in the first instance if they chose to then put in a work health and safety claim. That would be assessed and go through those normal processes. But I am happy to come back to you on notice with the advice provided to staff on these matters.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Okay. Thank you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Manning, can you confirm we have the average temperature data for all schools?

ANTHONY MANNING: Average temperature?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: The average mean temperature.

ANTHONY MANNING: We collect the Bureau of Meteorology data about maximum temperature in the hottest months. If the Bureau of Meteorology have average temperature, we could access that, but we do not keep average temperature information, no.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you source it from the Bureau of Meteorology?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes. When we did the Cooler Classrooms program, I think it was an average over 10 or 20 years in the hottest months of the year, and it was the Bureau of Meteorology that we got that data from.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So you do not keep the data of the mean temperature in all of our schools?

ANTHONY MANNING: No.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I would just add, Ms Houssos, we are obviously able to access the current means from the Bureau of Meteorology any time that we need to do so.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Well, then can I ask you to provide us with—we asked for a list of the schools with the unflued gas heaters earlier. Are you able to provide me, on that list, with the mean temperature for winter for those schools?

ANTHONY MANNING: We will have to go away and check the Bureau of Meteorology data exists, at which point—yes, but I would have to check that that information exists.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Ms Houssos, we do have an understanding of, in a sense, the temperature across the State, and Mr Dizdar might be able to provide some further information on this in relation to schools that considered of being in—we call them the isothermic schools, schools that are in colder climates across New South Wales. We can certainly highlight in our response to the question any of those schools that are considered isothermic, in that they get colder during the winter months.

The CHAIR: Mr Dizdar. We have not heard from Murat.

The Hon. WES FANG: We did, briefly.

The CHAIR: Too brief.

MURAT DIZDAR: I am happy to just add to what the secretary said. It has been longstanding that the department has got—I can give you the exact number—about 70 schools in the system that are classified as isothermic schools. Our staff get an additional allowance for working in those schools in recognition that their utility bills in the winter months would be larger, given the colder conditions there. We do know them generally as the colder schools, in layman's terms.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am just interested to get the data for all the schools, but if you want to isolate on there that they are isothermic schools that would be helpful. I want to come to one of the key policies designed to address the teacher shortages. Is a program called Recruitment Beyond NSW?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes, that is correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to tell me how many teachers were recruited under this initiative in 2021 and 2022?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: The Committee would appreciate that the teaching supply strategy was launched—and I will take the specific date on notice—around September last year. We have had 2,800 expressions of interest from interstate and international teachers at this stage and we are working through those applications and interest at this time. Ms Cachia might have some further details on those for you.

YVETTE CACHIA: Obviously we are very focused on getting 500 of those in terms of STEM, but we currently have NESA looking at and reviewing the accreditation of 100 of those applicants, so we are working through those 2,800 now.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: NESA is reviewing the accreditation of 100?

YVETTE CACHIA: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So that means that none of them are working in schools yet?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think, as I indicated, Ms Houssos, the strategy itself was launched in around September last year. It is only just March. We have already had 2,800 expressions of interest. We have moved 100 of those into the next stage of the process. Obviously, with people coming interstate and internationally, we want to make sure that they meet the accreditation requirements and standards of the New South Wales teaching profession. That is underway for the first 100 of those as we work our way through the 2,800 expressions of interest.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Will the program be eligible for teachers from overseas that are already in New South Wales?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Teachers from overseas who are already in New South Wales, if they are not already teaching, we are of course interested in recruiting. Whether or not we would classify it as being part of this program or not I will need to take on notice; it will depend on their current visa arrangements and whether there might be very specific requirements around individuals on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many of the overseas teachers in the initial 100 and also in the 2,800 are from New Zealand, and how many are from the UK?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will need to take that on notice. I can certainly provide you on notice with a breakdown by the State or country. We are obviously looking interstate as well as internationally. I am very happy to provide that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That would be great, thank you. I want to come to the issue of Bungendore High School. I understand that the process of compulsorily acquiring the land has already begun. Is that correct?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, that is correct.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You understand that there is overwhelming community opposition?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have been engaged with the community in Bungendore on these issues. There are parts of the community that are opposed to the current site and have a preferred alternative site. Obviously we are making decisions based on where we think is the best suitable site to build a school and will continue to work in collaboration with the community around those decisions.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Is it true that the Department of Planning entered into negotiations to acquire a larger and more suitable site elsewhere?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Manning to provide some details on this.

ANTHONY MANNING: Not that I am aware of, no.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me what the capacity of the school will be when it opens? I think it is projected for 2026. Is that correct?

ANTHONY MANNING: I do not have that information on me, but we will take that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, if you can tell me the projected capacity when it opens and will it have any potential for increasing?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think we will be able to provide you with some detail at this stage on the projected population of students, but obviously until we have a site identified and have gone into the design for that site it will be a bit difficult for us to talk about projected capacity of that school. We want to make sure we are meeting the population demands now and into the future, noting that those might change over time. I am very happy to come back to you with details on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I think there is a site because it is being compulsorily acquired at the moment.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It is being compulsorily acquired, but until that process is complete obviously it is not confirmed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I said that until the process of the acquisition is complete and until we have settled with the community on the site in Bungendore, the site itself is not confirmed. Mr Manning?

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, so it is not just the compulsory acquisition of the land itself, it is in the planning permission that goes with it. To the secretary's point, until the school is established, we might understand what we think the demand is in the area, but to be clear about the number of kids that will actually access the school we need to be a little bit further down the line to having the school open to understand what other students the school may or may not attract.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But if you are in the process of compulsorily acquiring a site you can tell the community what site you are acquiring. The idea that there is some secrecy about it—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: You misunderstand me, Mr Shoebridge.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: David, it is my time and I understand. The community understands that the site is being acquired. They do not want them to acquire that site—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I know they do not.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But they are in the process of doing it.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Surely you can tell me what the internal projections of the department are, what the population will be—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly, which is what I was trying to indicate.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: —when it is currently projected to open and what you are planning for. You have got to have some idea of how many kids will be going to the school.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Absolutely, and that is what I was trying to refer to in my answer.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you tell me on notice how much has been spent on it already?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We will be able to give you some project costs in relation to Bungendore on notice, yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And what the consultation process has been with the local community—if you can provide a summary of what the key dates have been.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly, and I wonder if I might ask Mr Dizdar because I believe he has been involved in some of those community consultations in the last week or so, possibly two weeks.

MURAT DIZDAR: I recently went and briefed, alongside my infrastructure colleagues, the council. There are new council members there.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Who voted against it?

MURAT DIZDAR: From my understanding of the meeting, there are some council members that are supportive of the project and its location. I indicated to the council that, from an operational sense, we will be commencing with years 7 and 8. I think there was a unified message that I got from the council that they are looking forward to high school education provision in their community and, like you indicate, some of that is contested by some members of the community, which Ms Harrisson has also indicated. But there is a universal sentiment that a secondary provision in their locality will be really welcome. We were able to clarify a number of pieces of misinformation that may unfortunately have circulated in the community.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: With respect, Mr Dizdar, I think council has a position that they are opposed to that particular site.

The CHAIR: We will have to take that to the next round.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Dizdar, the Minister said that the Tarago site was ruled out because of its proximity to the Bungendore recycling centre. Was that actually the reason?

MURAT DIZDAR: Again, my infrastructure colleagues are better placed to answer, but we ran through a very detailed time line and analysis for the council at the meeting that I referred to.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was asking specifically about why the Tarago Road site, which would have not seen the same kind of community opposition, was ruled out. Was it, as the Minister said, because it was near the Bungendore recycling centre? If you cannot help—

ANTHONY MANNING: I am happy to answer that. There were a number of issues with the site that did not lend itself to a school, not least the fact that it is not a serviced site both for water and sewerage. It also floods. It has some significant environmental issues and, as you say, it is in close proximity to a waste transfer station, which I think a number of members of the community would have an issue with if we decided to put a school there.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What is the current budget for the site? Last time I saw it was \$34 million. That is likely to be over-capacity when it opens. What is the current budget?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think we have already taken that question on notice when it was asked by Ms Houssos, Mr Shoebridge, so we are very happy to come back to you on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Is it still \$34 million though?

ANTHONY MANNING: Is that the project or the site?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is for the site acquisition, I think.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I have indicated, I am very happy to come back with project costs on notice.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, I think we will clarify. That sounds like a lot of money for a site in Bungendore.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Why did you break off negotiations with the council and decide to go to compulsory acquisition? Is it because of the opposition of the council?

ANTHONY MANNING: No. We did it because we were having a conversation with the council about the complexity of the land transfer, issues in terms of council administration and the problems around getting it valued. The agreement with council was that as we moved to compulsory acquisition that was a much cleaner, clearer way to deal with it and also gave us security around the site being delivered so we could progress with the development. It gave everybody clarity around what the value would be.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Have you resolved the Aboriginal land claims?

ANTHONY MANNING: There are a number of issues we are still working our way through, and the team are working their way through that. I will come back to you specifically on that item.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Harrisson, since 2017-18 there has been budget funding put aside to allocate Randwick boys and Randwick girls' high schools for upgrades, but nothing has happened. Indeed there has been no move to establish a co-ed public school in that part of Sydney. Why, five years on, do we still have no action?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Dizdar to provide you with some further detail in relation to Randwick boys' and girls' high schools.

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Shoebridge, as you are fully aware we ran a community survey some time ago to get sentiment from current students, past students, prospective students, families and our staff in both settings—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Dizdar, I know that. Two-thirds of parents said they wanted a co-ed option, and we are sitting here today and there is nothing.

MURAT DIZDAR: We formed the view, after analysing all the results, that there was not a substantive position adopted by the community. There was strong sentiment expressed for single-sex provision. What I can say is that we have been working with both principals and leadership teams on what we might be able to achieve by way of this infrastructure enhancement—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But, Mr Dizdar, 67 per cent of parents supported having a co-ed option—two-thirds. More than two-thirds of parents supported having a co-ed option, and that overwhelming support has seen zero action.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr Shoebridge, could I please clarify the data that you are quoting to us there and its source?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That was the survey sent to parents and carers of students at Randwick Girls' High School and Randwick Boys High School.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Are you referring specifically to the survey the department sent, just so that I am clear on that?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am referring to the most recent survey of Randwick girls' and Randwick boys' parents. Some 67 per cent wanted a co-ed option. Do you disagree with that data, Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: It was one of the pieces of data that came out. When we did a deeper dive with the data, Mr Shoebridge, and looked at prospective enrolments, there was not a clear sentiment expressed around the changing of the type of provision in the area.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So you get two-thirds of parents wanting a co-ed school option and you manage to analyse that data with such detail that you decide not to provide a co-ed school option? That is genius data analysis.

MURAT DIZDAR: I am trying to answer your question and trying to give it the fulsome respect that it does deserve. We do not just take the one figure on its own. We then did a deeper dive around the entire survey and what we found was that there was not a clear-cut position. There was division in the community around wanting co-ed provision or single-sex provision. There was strong representation by stakeholders, as well as through the survey, that the single-sex provision was important in the area.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If you could, Mr Dizdar, on notice could you provide all of those other data points that meant that the overwhelming majority wish from parents has not been implemented? Can you provide that on notice, Mr Dizdar?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Shoebridge, we did put out a public report at the time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you provide a link to that?

MURAT DIZDAR: We are happy to do that.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think you will find it on our website, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Martin, what went so horribly wrong with the scaling in the HSC and International Baccalaureate that we saw such a massive over-representation of IB students in the top ATAR results?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Just while Mr Martin is coming to the table, if I may, just for the Committee's information, NESAs do not have any role in relation to the International Baccalaureate and its scaling. That is done by UAC and the ATAR calculation process. But I am sure Mr Martin will try to assist where he can.

PAUL MARTIN: Thank you. As the secretary has indicated, the Universities Admissions Centre, UAC, determines the mapping of IB to ATAR, as they do the HSC. It is not something that we have any role in or control over. My understanding is that there is a technical issue in relation to the number of data points in the HSC in comparison to the IB. We have initiated, at the Minister's request, some conversations with UAC to see if that issue of fairness can be addressed or if it actually needs to be addressed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You surely accept it needs to be addressed. Some 55,000 students sat the HSC and 48 achieved the highest ATAR rating. Some 600 students sat the IB and 35 achieved the—that is so appallingly unfair, is it not?

PAUL MARTIN: As I indicated, we do not control that mapping process. The issue that you have raised has been raised with us by a number of people, including by the Minister, and I have initiated conversations as recently as last week with the Universities Admissions Centre to discuss the mapping.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry, I misstated the unfairness: 55,000 HSC students sat the HSC and 48 achieved the highest ATAR rating; 600 students sat the IB and 41 of them achieved the highest ATAR rating. The 55,000 students who sat the HSC have been cheated, have they not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, I think Mr Martin has answered the question in relation to—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Well, Ms Harrisson—

The CHAIR: Yes, the UAC is run by the Commonwealth Government, isn't it?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It is not run by us.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But you are responsible—

The CHAIR: That is one for the Senate.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: —for representing the interests of those 55,000 HSC students.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, it is run by the unis.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a private company.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are responsible for representing the interests of those 55,000 HSC students.

PAUL MARTIN: And as I have indicated—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: What are you going to do—

The Hon. WES FANG: Point of order—

The CHAIR: A point of order has been taken.

PAUL MARTIN: As I have indicated, Mr Shoebridge, we have initiated conversations with the Universities Admissions Centre to discuss the matter of HSC and IB mapping.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Martin, I am not saying—I know you are not responsible for that final outcome. But in terms of being advocates for those 55,000 HSC students, I want to make sure you are in there

testing what went wrong and being advocates for fixing this gross unfairness. I am not saying it is your fault, but it is surely your collective job to fix it.

PAUL MARTIN: I think I have answered the question, Mr Shoebridge.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You have said you will get some data. What does that mean?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If I may, Chair, I think Mr Martin has also indicated that he has met and is meeting with the vice-chancellors and with UAC on these issues. He is of course advocating for our students in New South Wales and for those that sit the HSC.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Can you give us an idea of what they think went wrong? What do they think went wrong?

PAUL MARTIN: I am not going to get into a technical discussion this afternoon. But I am quite happy to provide on notice when I have had the proper conversations with UAC. If the word "advocate" on behalf of HSC and New South Wales students is the word that you would like me to use, that is what we are doing in these conversations with UAC.

The CHAIR: Mr Shoebridge, Minister Henskens tomorrow has a remit these days over the university sector, so maybe—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, we have been there before.

The CHAIR: Well, let's try again with the new Minister.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is a do-nothing thing, as you know.

The CHAIR: Yes, I know.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Harrisson, were you partly responsible for the change of the tendering process for out-of-hours school care that a bunch of parents and NGO providers have complained about—including to my office and, I am sure, to you—that prejudice them as against commercial operators? Were you responsible for that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr Shoebridge, if I can clarify, I think that you are referring to the categorisation of different providers of before and after school care and whether or not they are P&C run, in which case they fall into one form of arrangement with us, or whether they are a commercial outfit. We have categories A, B and C for this. Mr Manning can provide some further detail in relation to that.

ANTHONY MANNING: I am happy to, thank you. As the secretary says, we have three categories of service provider. Category A are incorporated into the P&C Federation, category B are not-for-profit and category C are for profit. Certainly since I have been at the department in 2017 there has been a running issue with a range of providers who believe that they are category A services and therefore do not need to go to tender for services. Following consultation with a number of the stakeholders, including Network and a few others, we agreed that we would do a review to clarify once and for all the position of the providers that we have—and as to whether they are actually incorporated into the P&C Federation and therefore are category A and do not need to go to tender, or whether they are actually not-for-profits and not incorporated under the P&C Federation and therefore fall into category B, and therefore would need to go to tender.

I think we have identified 37 services that we were of the view were category A and therefore did not need to go to tender but are actually category B. We are talking to each of those services individually and giving them an opportunity to transition to be P&C-incorporated providers. The time frame for that is before their current licence expires. For some of those providers, those licences do not expire until 2029. If they do transition to a P&C service incorporated under the Act, we can then grant them an eight-year licence in order to continue to operate. We continue to work with those services. Nothing needs to happen today. As long as it happens ahead of their licence expiring, we can then assure them that they can run through as a category A service. If they do not want to be incorporated under the P&C Act then it would be a category B, and under the procurement regulations we would be required to go to tender for that service.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. I raise the case sent to me of a teacher at Carramar Public School in the Fairfield district. She told her principal she was always intending to get vaccinated and was waiting for Novavax, but she was stood down and told by the principal to get out of the school. Then when she tried to clear her personal effects she was refused access to the school—before or after school, or on the weekend—and a box of her personal effects was left on the footpath outside the gate for her to collect. She was further told that if she set foot in the school they would call the police. In the status of teaching how can people be treated this way?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, if I may, I am not aware of that specific case. As I think we have indicated consistently, we are happy to take any specifics of that case on notice. What I can say about the way we have approached the situation is that Novavax was not available as an approved vaccine in Australia until recently. As soon as it was approved, we contacted everybody who had not yet been vaccinated in our system and indicated to them that Novavax was now available to them as an option and that, should they wish to avail themselves of that vaccine, we would be willing to give them the time to do so and complete that. I will see if Ms Cachia has any details on the case, but I certainly have not been informed of it directly.

YVETTE CACHIA: Secretary, I do not have specific knowledge of that case, but I would like that individual—if you could encourage her, Chair—to be in touch with me because I would like to talk to her and hopefully resolve the situation.

The CHAIR: Yes, she wrote to me and I have spoken to her by telephone. She is obviously very upset, but the case seems legitimate. I just cannot believe that people are treated this way.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I do hope the individual concerned, if they were waiting for the Novavax vaccine, is aware that that is now available. We have certainly contacted everybody in our system who has not yet availed themselves of a vaccine and indicated that this was available and that we would be happy to pause any processes and give them due time to avail themselves of the Novavax vaccine.

The CHAIR: I have Mr Currie's letter dated 27 January, but why did it come to having to unscramble that situation when a whole bunch of teachers said they were waiting for Novavax? We knew it would eventually come in Australia, so why were they under investigation and why was the allegation of misconduct levelled at them instead of taking them on trust to say "Novavax is coming" and most likely, as it turned out, before the beginning of the school year they could fulfil that commitment?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, you will appreciate that we cannot operate within a legal framework on those hypotheticals. The vaccine had not been approved. As soon as it was approved we took appropriate action.

The CHAIR: But is not this the fundamental problem, Ms Harrisson? You have used the public health order to jettison normal, decent, standard industrial relations practices to run what is regarded as tyranny among the workers. Why would not any normal administrator wait for Novavax over the school holiday period and take the teachers on trust? We talk about the status of teachers. These people feel like—with the charge of misconduct and the way they have been treated—nobody in the system trusted them. They were always going to take Novavax and then the letter goes out to say, "Hang on, we have flipped now. The investigations are called off and you can get your Novavax"—and they did. How can you jettison normal, decent industrial relations practices and continually hide behind the public health order?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I do not accept the premise of the question that we are hiding behind a legal instrument that places an obligation on our staff to meet vaccination requirements.

The CHAIR: Your obligation was to have these people vaccinated before the beginning of the school year. You could have easily said over the holiday period, "Novavax is coming"—all of these teachers have said they are going to do Novavax but they are just waiting for it—instead of putting the investigative dogs on them and saying that this is misconduct because they were waiting for a valid vaccination and they were going to take it.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Obviously the requirement to be vaccinated in our schools and on our school sites came into effect in November. It is not the case that we only took action during the school holidays. The process had already commenced because of the requirement to be vaccinated coming into effect in early November. We also did not have knowledge of when Novavax would be approved. As soon as it was approved by the health authorities we took appropriate action to ensure that those staff, firstly, who had indicated to us that they were waiting for Novavax, but also any other member of staff who was under investigation in this process, was able to opt for that option, and they have been given time to go and get that vaccine.

The CHAIR: All I know is you have a whole cohort of former teachers spreading the word, "Whatever you do, don't work for the New South Wales Education department." Here is another example, a teacher in the Hunter Valley drawing my attention to the department's code of conduct section 9.1.2, which states, "Employees or their representatives may request a review of a direction." She wrote to Mr Currie saying she wanted a review of her matter under investigation at the PES and nothing ever happened. Is that another case where you hid behind the public health order and jettisoned your own code of conduct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Currie to answer. If I may, Chair, just to keep the numbers in perspective, this is a very small number of teachers in our system. We are not jettisoning large numbers of teachers. This is in the hundreds in relation to those—

The CHAIR: It is 1,800 who were stood down or sacked of the permanent staff and you were not able to give us the number about the temps or the casuals earlier today. You keep saying that but you never deliver the full data.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Let me ask Ms Cachia to confirm the data we have, but I will ask Mr Currie—

The CHAIR: We heard the data earlier on. I added it up and that is the figure. What about this code of conduct section 9.1.2? "Employees or representatives may request a review of a direction." Who ever got a review?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Currie to come in and answer the question.

DARYL CURRIE: In terms of the review of the directions by Ms Cachia, that was not carried out by the PES. We do not review those directions. Part of that section of the code of conduct also says that while those reviews are taking place, if they do take place, people are expected to follow the directions and actually comply with them while that is going on. In terms of the reviews of those directions, that was not part of the investigation process.

The CHAIR: So the code of conduct was ignored, effectively?

DARYL CURRIE: It was not part of that process that we were undertaking in the investigation.

The CHAIR: But the code of conduct did not apply. Can I raise a specific case that requires investigation? He has given me permission to use his name. Jeff Chaseling, a PDHPE teacher at Lake Illawarra High School, has been on sick leave since 1 November last year. He has uploaded his medical contraindication form as per guideline 8.4 and he says that he is being done over unfairly. Can I get a report on what has happened in his circumstances? He has provided me with a lot of correspondence that looks like it checks out. There you go losing a teacher down at Lake Illawarra.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Very happy to provide that on notice. If I can clarify the numbers, Chair, it has been a total of 200 staff across the department who have been exited as a result of this process.

The CHAIR: There are others under investigation.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Under investigation currently open cases is just over 1,300. I do want to make sure that we are clear.

The CHAIR: There you go. They are stood down and they are not working, are they?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: They are unable legally to—

The CHAIR: At Cromer High School they finish early on a Thursday and at Kempsey High School they have them in the high school and they cannot teach them. These are 1,300 teachers who are not in schools, are they?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Legally they are not currently allowed to work in our school settings, that is correct.

The CHAIR: I come to an example, a teacher from the shire district, who has sent me correspondence indicating again that under the mandates her carer's leave was ignored. She has been turfed out even though she is on carer's leave. There are other experiences, are there not, of other people under investigation who have been stood down while on maternity leave, workers compensation, annual leave and sick leave—the list goes on. Again, why were normal industrial relations standards ignored and these people were not allowed to complete their leave period before their status in the system was established?

YVETTE CACHIA: Chair, no industrial relations rules have been breached. For anybody who is on leave, if they are noncompliant with the public health order, that investigation is on hold. I cannot talk to the specific carer's leave, and I do not think it is appropriate in this forum to mention the name of an individual, but I do know that a person on carer's leave or parental leave may not be on full-time parental leave or full-time carer's leave. That means that if they are on leave for two days a week and the other three days a week they actually need to go into a school but they cannot or they have not complied with the public health order, we are unable to allow them to do that. It is important to look at each case on a case-by-case basis to get a full picture of the facts.

The CHAIR: I come back to calling the police. Is it right that parents who are unvaccinated can now enter school?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Previously we had a restriction where we were asking parents not to come onto school sites. We are now able to invite parents onto school sites. That is the nature of our service, that we serve the whole community. One of the reasons that it is so important that we are protecting our workforce through vaccination is that they are in the course of their duties potentially going to come into contact with people who are unvaccinated.

The CHAIR: Why can that not apply to unvaccinated teachers who have been stood down? At bare minimum can we stop principals from saying they are going to call the police on them?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly in the current circumstances. There will have been a point, depending on the particular timing, where there was a difference in community settings in relation to vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals—they were set by the Department of Health and not us. There would have been a requirement to comply with those at the time. Obviously now we are at a different set of settings and I would expect that anyone needing to go into a school to collect their belongings would be able to arrange to do so at an appropriate time.

The CHAIR: That brings us to the afternoon tea break. Apparently now that Mike Pratt has gone we have an afternoon tea trolley, which cannot get in the door at the moment because of the back bench. Our largesse is back.

(Short adjournment)

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: First of all, on notice, can I ask for, for the period from 1 July 2021 the number of teachers who have had confirmed COVID cases; the number who accessed sick leave; the number who made workers compensation claims; the number of days sick leave taken for COVID, the total number of days; the same, the total lost time due to injury on account of COVID; and also any advice provided on directions to staff who have COVID?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly. I can confirm from your earlier line of questioning, Mr D'Adam, that we are transparent with our staff about their opportunity to access WorkCover. It is included in the guidance on our intranet website for our staff in relation to those cases. I am very happy to take those specifics on notice.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Before I move on, has there been a direction to directors of educational leadership or to principals to reduce or minimise the access to part-time work?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly not to my knowledge or understanding. Part-time and flexible work is a core part of any employer's remit. We have a number of part-time arrangements both in our administrative staff in schools but also in our schools where we see really successful, particularly job share, arrangements amongst teachers sharing that load, and Mr Dizdar can provide some—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is not a strategy that has been deployed to try and take pressure off in terms of staffing constraints. You are not trying to make staff work full-time loads who might want to avail themselves of part-time work?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr D'Adam, Ms Nixon and I line manage the directors, educational leadership, through the executive directors educational leadership. We connect with them formally every five weeks.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The answer is no then.

MURAT DIZDAR: I can tell the Committee that that has not been the case.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I turn to the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program? Where are we up to in terms of evaluating that program?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Thank you for the question. The program started in 2020 and I am pleased to say it was not overly disrupted by the lockdowns of last year. The vast majority of schools were able to maintain their COVID Intensive Learning Support throughout the lockdown period through the use of technology. I will ask Ms Owen to provide some specific details in relation to the evaluation.

RUTH OWEN: Thanks, secretary. The interim evaluation was completed at the end of last year, alongside—I think you are aware we also had the—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Was the interim evaluation an internal evaluation process?

RUTH OWEN: Internal evaluation conducted by our CESE colleagues.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is the report on that in the public domain?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think Ms Owen has indicated it was internal. I am very happy to go away and check whether we are able to provide that on notice or whether it was prepared for Cabinet consideration as part of broader discussions around education policy, but I am very happy to go and have a look and see if that is available. I do not think there is anything in it that we would be concerned about, so I am sure we will be able to provide it on notice.

RUTH OWEN: The interim evaluation was timed specifically to feed into the design for the program for this year. As the Committee will be aware, we also had the Auditor-General of New South Wales audit the program simultaneously, and you will have access to that audit report.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Right, I see. In terms of the measures, how are you actually measuring the success or otherwise of the program? What are the metrics?

RUTH OWEN: It is a range of measures, as you would imagine. For the interim report, because we did not have time for educational outcomes at that stage of the year, it was mostly survey work or feedback from students, parents and educators. As we come into this year and we go into the full evaluation report, we will be using the check-in data—the tests that we have done with our students over a variety of stages in the schools to identify, of the lost learning that we identified the previous year, how many of those students have caught up and what outstanding gaps are there in learning.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There is no hard academic data in terms of the success of that program for the interim evaluation. Is that correct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As Ms Owen indicated, we have gathered that data through surveys. What I can say from my experience of visiting schools running this program is that the data our schools now use in assessing where students are up to and where they need to progress to is now very sophisticated. In particular, I am sure if you visited schools, data walls would be the thing that our schools would refer to. They are coming back to us with their understanding of how their students have progressed and are doing, so from a basis of understanding where they were and where they are now. It may not be that academic growth has been captured yet in our check-in assessments or in, say for example, NAPLAN results, but what we would expect to see is that our teachers have used their local assessment data in contributing to that survey. We feel confident in our teachers use of that data in returning their views to us.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is quite a labour-intensive program, is it not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have invested a significant amount of resources into this program, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Do you believe that it has compounded the issue around the casual pool?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly. We have seen an impact in the number of teachers that are operating in the COVID intensive learning program at this time. I think you would expect any large investment in resourcing and teachers will have an impact on our casual pool by default. That certainly will have occurred. We have sought to minimise that by extending and opening the program up to final year teaching students and others, for example, from universities and other walks of life with the appropriate qualifications and experience to support the implementation of that program.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: In terms of the impact on the casual pool, has there been a clear pattern of an increased requirement for split classes, for example, as a result of the loss of that flexibility because you have absorbed many casuals into the ILSP program?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: When you are dealing with a finite resource, it is obviously always about some of those priorities. It is probably relevant to talk in some respects about our planning for the return to school this term where we looked very closely at the needs of our schools in relation to those temporary relief and casuals. Mr Dizdar will be able to talk about how this works locally in a school. When we take supply out and focus it on a priority, it will have broader implications for the remaining supply, and we want to make sure that we are giving the best possible opportunity and access to all of our students. Schools will make local decisions about the way they do that when they are dealing, for example, with an unexpected sickness absence. Mr Dizdar can provide some examples of that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, Ms Harrisson, I wanted to add to the Committee, I think it has provided a tremendous fillip for a number of our retired teachers and leaders. I have spoken to a number who are not willing to come back to a full-time teaching position or a full-time leadership position but have been really willing to come back to work with students in small groups who have got gaps in their learning and—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Sorry, can I bring you back? My question was about split classes and whether you have noticed—you are collecting data on split classes now, are you not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will let Mr Dizdar talk to the way—

The Hon. WES FANG: Mr Dizdar was answering the question.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: He was not addressing that issue.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, he was not.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: No, he was not answering the question.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: No, he was not addressing that issue.

MURAT DIZDAR: I definitely want to tell you about split classes, but I was just making the point that there is a proportion of the workforce that we would not have had with us who are now willing to be part of closing the gap with small groups of learners. I think that is a big fillip. I also think it is a massive fillip to have final year students, who are going to be in the classroom and in leadership positions down the track, accelerating their capacity and abilities to be ready to hit the ground running. They have been a fantastic fillip for the system.

In terms of split classes, we have schools that maintain their own databases around that. We have had to provide them to the House a number of times when we have had questions about particular schools, which we have. We do not centrally maintain that data because that data would be very difficult to maintain centrally. At a school, operationally—as you would appreciate—you can have a number of reasons why you may need a casual teacher to come in. It could be because a teacher is sick. It could be because a teacher is out for the day from their normal duties because they are undertaking professional learning, on site or off site. It could be because the school has asked that teacher to undertake another internal activity. There is a range of reasons why that data would be very difficult to centrally maintain.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There was a story in relation to the issue with classes. It suggested that there had been some direction from the senior leadership of the department around speaking to the media or raising issues around staff shortages. I want to ask Mr Currie about whether you have any current cases investigating staff for breaches of the code of around engagement with the media.

DARYL CURRIE: I would have to take that on notice and get back to you with current cases. I do not know the stage of any particular case at any particular time.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: There are requirements under the employment of pretty much all public servants in relation to their role as apolitical public servants supporting the implementation of government programs. That extends to teachers. There is an expectation that, as part of those employment conditions, our staff raise their concerns internally first. That is certainly what I would expect and ask our staff to do. We have a number of internal mechanisms where we engage with our staff and gather their feedback. But it is a requirement of our staff, as I think you will have seen across many areas of the public service, that our staff are not permitted to talk to the media about their work in that way. They are currently the guidelines we operate within and they are set out within our code of conduct.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is there not a public interest for parents to know that the quality of the education that is being provided is compromised by the shortages of staff?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly, there are many avenues where those issues get raised and talked about. This is one of those places, where you are able to draw on and seek information from us. Of course, our staff have views on those issues. Often they do not have access to all the information that goes into some of those decisions, particularly in some of the instances that Mr Dizdar will talk to where the decision to split a class may be made for curriculum reasons or it may be made to support an individual to go to a medical appointment on one day. These are not in and of themselves systemic issues, even if they are particularly localised issues. There is the potential for those things to be taken out of context and to be discussed without the understanding of the underlying issues or the underlying circumstances that are at play.

All I wanted to do was to set out for the Committee that there are requirements under our employment conditions that our staff are asked to abide by. It is important in positions that our staff hold in communities that they are careful and thoughtful about the way they engage publicly in the nature of their work, for exactly the reasons that you raise, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrison, how many academics have been recruited to work in New South Wales schools under the New South Wales Government's program?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Could I clarify which program you are referring to?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Under the Teacher Supply Strategy I think there is a paper called "Recruiting Academics".

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have recruited some academics, and certainly those from universities and final year students, into the COVID ILSP. The mid-career entry program is the program where we would be seeking to attract people with significant prior knowledge, such as someone from the higher education sector, to make the transition and conversion into teaching. I would need to come back to you with the specifics of how many of those applications were from the universities sector and how many were successful. I am very happy to come back to you with that detail.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You referenced a different entrance point.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: In terms of our supply and strategy for supply, it would be through the mid-career entry route program.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But before you said that, you said something else.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: For the COVID Intensive Learning Support Program, we have also opened up other employment avenues for those who are not accredited teachers but who have relevant experience. I can also provide you with information in relation to how many individuals in that program come from a university background.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That would be very helpful. I want to ask about Captains Flat preschool. I understand the department recently facilitated its move because it had high levels of lead in the soil on the site where they were operating previously. But there are some issues with their new site. They do not have any sun sails for shade and they do not have sufficient drainage, so the site floods whenever there is some rain—which is particularly pertinent at the moment. Concerningly, they also do not have flyscreens, so they cannot open windows for ventilation. This is particularly a safety concern about kids climbing out. Given the current situation, that is very concerning in terms of ventilation. They have been told to rely on air conditioning all the time. I am happy if you want to take this on notice, but are you able to provide any further details on that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to take the details of that service on notice. There is a grants program that those services can apply for to support the upgrade of their infrastructure in relation to this, but let us take the specifics on notice in relation to that preschool and come back to you.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Ms Harrisson, you might want to direct this to Ms Owen, but the behaviour strategy—there was a webinar last week with principals, deputy principals and teachers. Ms Owen, you were quoted as saying that there is legislation coming onto our statute which sets out what practices are prohibited and what practices are restricted, and that we had to act now. What legislation are you referring to and what department practices are you referring to that would be restricted or prohibited?

RUTH OWEN: Thanks for that question. That is in relation to the restrictive practices policy that has been released as part of our Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools package, which I think you are familiar with.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes.

RUTH OWEN: The conversation we were having with our principals last week was explaining the timing and the importance of the whole package and of how all these changes in procedures and policies are brought together to increase the inclusiveness of our public education system. I think the quote that you are referring to that I made at the time was about that there are a number of reasons why this package is important right now, one of which is the recommendations that we have already received from the disability royal commission in relation to restrictive practices. Another piece of proposed legislation—I think it is by the Department of Communities and Justice—on restrictive practices is New South Wales Government overall legislation. With those two recommendations in our minds, and with our overall determination to make our schools more inclusive and to do the right thing by our students with disabilities, we brought that package forward together. I think that is what you are referring to.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Are you aware that there seems to be overwhelming opposition by principals to this policy, particularly changes to the behaviour management, to the point that the Teachers Federation has now advised them not to implement the policy come term two. What is your response to that direction being given by the Teachers Federation to its principals to not implement this policy due to its concerns?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think we have been clear throughout this process that our focus is on the needs of our students. We have sat before this Committee on many occasions and talked about the number of suspensions and the fact that we have too many students absent from school for too many days. I think the Minister

has been clear in her commentary on this, that if the current system is not working then it is important that we look at how we change that system and improve the outcomes for those students.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But if you do not have buy-in from the teachers and the principals who are meant to be implementing the system, no matter how well intentioned your strategy is, it will not be implemented properly and consistently, will it?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I have confidence that we have the right supports in place for our system to support the implementation of the policy. The first thing that I have said, and will continue to say to all those with challenges, is to read the policies and procedures first. They are very clear that the protections our teachers are seeking in relation to the use of suspension remain in place, which tends to be one of the flashpoints in the debate around this issue. But teachers are still able to take decisive and immediate action in relation to any threatening behaviour in their classrooms. That is still permitted. What we have sought to do in this policy is to reduce the time that students are excluded from school, to increase the accountability of the system to provide the support to those students that they need, and the support to the teachers that is needed in order to maintain those young people in their classrooms and to ensure that if we are going to embark on a series of multiple suspensions, which we have seen and discussed in previous hearings, that we do so, knowing what the support is that that student needs and that we have a clear pathway for their return to the classroom.

I think those are already valid reasons for us to be looking at this reform and implementing it in the way we are. Our door remains open to engage with those stakeholders. We are working very closely particularly with the Primary Principals' Association on the implementation of these changes. They are now the policy expectations of the Department of Education. The Minister has been clear in her commitment to those and we are focused on implementing them effectively.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: What was the reasoning or research behind your decision to use the same criteria for suspension for a year 3 student as for a year 12 student, given that they have different developmental stages and different cognitive abilities? What was the research or reasoning that underpinned that decision?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Owen to comment. One of the things that has been very consistent from our stakeholders is the need for consistency across those settings. That has definitely been the preferred position of our workforce—that it is consistent in terms of the way those suspensions are applied. It is obviously important that the policies and procedures we have are clear, can be understood by everyone and actioned. I will let Ms Owen come back to you, if I may, on the evidence base.

RUTH OWEN: The most important thing we are trying to achieve here is that every child, every student, across our system has access to education, no matter what their circumstances and any disabilities in particular that they have. So, in terms of the suspension policy, when looking at the duration we wanted to reduce the amount of time students spend away from their school and we wanted to increase connection and engagement with their school and continuity of learning. So that is why we have taken the action we have to reduce the duration and reduce the potential number of multiple suspensions a student could experience. The reason we have made a change for the K-2 in particular is just in recognition of the importance of those first few years in school. The Committee again, as Ms Harrisson has said, has heard many times the number of times young kindergarten students have been suspended from school. We thought that needed particular attention and to minimise those early days lost in their education.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Boyd?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Continuing on with that line of questioning, I understand there were questions about suspensions and exclusions earlier. I do know the policy has recently changed et cetera. Has anyone asked already for the latest numbers on suspensions? If I could have the latest numbers on suspensions, expulsions and broken up with percentages of those who are children with disability as well as children who are First Nations individuals, and also a breakdown by gender. That would be really helpful, either now or on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And a breakdown by year.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: And a breakdown by year, thank you.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Ms Owen, I believe, has that data and has that available to share with you now.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Fabulous.

RUTH OWEN: I do not have the gender breakdowns. I will make sure that we can take that on notice if we have got that. But looking at the calendar year 2021, let us just be clear because we count different things for different purposes. So you are asking for the number suspensions or the number of students?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, the number of suspensions.

RUTH OWEN: Number of suspensions, okay. The number of suspensions that occurred in the calendar year 2021 was 57,682 of which the number of students with disability was 30,423, which is 53 per cent.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How many students were suspended?

RUTH OWEN: Do you want me to finish this answer and come back to that one?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes, please.

RUTH OWEN: So let us just go through the suspensions data and then I will come back to students. I have got both sets. So, going again with all students in 2021, 57,682 of which 30,423 were students with a disability. Again, of that overall total, a number of those students who were identifying as Aboriginal students is 17,173, which is a 30 per cent proportion of that number. Is there another breakdown?

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I think you said you would have to come back on gender and if we could have that by number of students as well.

RUTH OWEN: Again, I know Ms Houssos asked by year. That is quite a lot of numbers to read out so it is probably easier to give the data.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That would be great, thank you.

RUTH OWEN: If you want the overall headline numbers by students for Ms Houssos, again looking at the 2021 calendar year the number of students suspended during that calendar year was 33,870. Of that number, 15,462 were students with a disability, which is 46 per cent, and 8,713 were students identifying as Aboriginal students, which is 26 per cent of the overall total. We can provide you that with year by stage.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you. And in terms of trend from previous years?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think it is worth noting in 2021, obviously we had a very disrupted school year with large parts of Sydney and Greater Sydney in extended lockdown, which will have impacted on the number of suspensions in the year. So we would expect those results—it would be hard to call a trend for 2021.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sure, but would you expect it to be lower, given that, although there were disruptions, there was less time in the school?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We would expect the totals ideally to be lower, but we have seen growing trends over time.

RUTH OWEN: It is fair to say that is linked to the previous questions—the reason we have taken action on our Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools was because of the growing trend we had seen in suspensions. As Ms Harrisson says, the data is not comparable because so many students spent a large amount of time learning from home last year, but we have, as I think the Committee will have heard in its previous hearing, seen an increasing trend, which is why we have taken the action that we have.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Right. I find those numbers quite devastating.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As do we, Ms Boyd.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Yes. In terms of, I guess, the transition of people with disability back to school, were additional resources put in place for children with disability going back into school to make sure that they were—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As part of the COVID return to school, is that—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Were there specific funding and resources given for people with disability as opposed to the general cohort?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As a system we provide funding that addresses the needs of our individual students, so there is both a loading through the Resource Allocation Model that in our mainstream schools provides adjustment for students with low levels of disability. We also then have access funding called Integration Funding Support. That also provides the school with additional funds to support that student. But in terms of central support

for their return to school, our focus has been on the COVID ILSP as the main intervention. It has also been provided to supporting students with disability.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: But then it has not been a specific pool of money to recognise their additional challenges?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Not beyond the existing funding available in the school to make those choices around their individual students. So we would expect that schools—or we know that schools have supported their students to return to school through this time. There has been a lot of work done between individual schools and individual families to make sure the right things are in place for those students.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: So, when it comes to implementing the new policies to try to turn this around, what training and resources have been given to teachers and schools to help them to implement this correctly?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Thank you for the question. I think your colleague referred to the webinar, which in a sense was the awareness-raising in the first instance around the policy of making sure that our staff are engaging with the policy itself rather than the narrative that is being circulated about the policy—inaccurately and with misinformation, in our view. I will let Ms Owen talk to the broad range of supports that we have available. We have a significant amount of professional learning as well as human resources available to go in and support schools.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That is good to know. I also would love to hear you say that there will be additional, let us say—basically, what I am trying to get at, to understand, is whether the burden of implementing this policy will be put on teachers who are already very overloaded, or whether they will be given special leave or something else in order to go and do this training and actually engage in it properly.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Those settings will be determined by the school and our schools manage the release time of the teachers to engage in professional learning of this nature. We also have over 2,000 staff that are available across the system to support schools with individual cases and to support individual students. Ms Owen can provide further information on the overall support going into the system for this policy.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Okay. Thank you.

RUTH OWEN: I understand where you are coming from on that, Ms Boyd. We are really trying to do our best at system level to support every school to have the right capabilities, confidence and skills to address this important issue. We have been doing so since we released the behaviour strategy, which was about this time last year. A lot of new professional learning was released last year in anticipation of the policies and procedures changing. So we have been engaging with our workforce probably for a couple of years now on this topic and kind of leading up to the change. Right now, after we released the actual specific policies and procedures, we are in a period of familiarisation. The webinar was the beginning of that.

We are inviting schools now to start to undertake that professional learning, which we will be releasing centrally through the system that has already been developed. As Ms Harrisson said, we specifically invested at system level and at school level to make sure we have got additional resources there to support principals and teachers across the system. In that full spectrum of behaviour management, we often talk about suspension but actually it is about the full range of different behaviours that are seen in the classroom. Wherever possible, the specific investment we want to make is in prevention and early intervention and supporting teachers to adapt to new practice.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: At the beginning of the school year a lot of parents had difficulty—and I think I mentioned this before—getting their children to comply with various restrictions when their children have special needs, particularly those with sensory issues, children with autism and children with ADHD. Ms Harrisson, you were quoted in the media as responding to those concerns in a very, sort of, general way and it was criticised by Autism Awareness Australia and other advocates for being perhaps not as sensitive to the needs of particularly children with autism as we would expect you to be. What is your response to that? Do you regret the comment? Has there been any learning, I guess, from that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am not sure I am aware of the specific comment, Ms Boyd. However, what I can say and what I think I said in the media responses at the time was that our schools are working very closely with individual families to meet the needs of individual students in the return to school. That is what we would want our schools to be doing with those individual families. There are specific cases where there can be challenges with that, and our schools have worked really closely with families to support that. When I visited Karonga School just the other week, the principal talked about the exceptional lengths that staff had gone to to go and meet with families off site to talk them through the plans that were available to support exactly the type of students you are referring to in your question, to make that transition back to school successfully.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Within the department is there mandatory training on autism, for instance—autism awareness or ADHD awareness—so that everybody has a full understanding of the impact of policies on children with autism?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We recently made some of the disability training mandatory for our school leaders. It is an area we have been looking at very closely in relation to what we make mandatory for everyone versus what is available, and the information we expect people to engage with in the discharge of their professional duties. Of course, we would expect our teaching staff—and many of them, in fact—

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, just to clarify, I was not saying teaching staff; I am talking about the department.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I think we have got further work to do across the whole department in their understanding certainly of some of the conversations about the way we can support our schools to do their work in support of students with disabilities. I think we have further work to do, and it is work we are undertaking around the way that we can provide support across the school divide. I think some of the responses to the behaviour strategy that has been alluded to in this room indicates that that is a task that is something for the whole system. That is why this package of reforms around inclusive, engaging and respectful education reforms are so important for us to implement effectively.

The CHAIR: Secretary, would you agree with the proposition that a great untold story—a very damaging story, during the 107-day Sydney lockdown that started out as a three-week lockdown—is the horrendous impact the lockdown had on young people, who were isolated from their friends and unable to go to school? The physical and mental health strain on them was dreadful, and some subsequent reports have borne this out. Would you in future give very strong advice to government not to ever repeat such a long period of lockdown, which is damaging to our young generation?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: One of the things that I think many people may have learnt during this pandemic period is to never say never. What I can say is that we are ready to respond in a variety of ways. We have got a full suite of practices and mitigations in place that we can deploy to keep schools open. That is clearly our focus. I have to commend Dr Chant in her work with us throughout this period, who has also been a strong advocate for ensuring that we can open schools whenever it has been safe to do so. I hope, as I am sure everyone on the Committee does, that we are now past the period of the pandemic where school closures will be required. We have seen this term some small instances where, due to a localised COVID outbreak, some cohorts have had to learn from home for a very short number of days while we try to break the cycle and stop further disruption to the system. But we are very clear that our focus is students in classrooms with their teachers undergoing their learning.

The CHAIR: Were you advocating for that during the 107-day lockdown?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We continued to work with Health on what was possible at any given time and what would need to be in place in order for schools to open safely.

The CHAIR: Health caused this terrible youth health problem. Dr Chant was part of the locking up of our young people and this Health consequence. Should you not be a stronger advocate for our students and our young people?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As many have commented through this pandemic, it has been a balancing act at all times from the various pieces of expert advice that came in, on both the physical health needs as well as the mental health of the community, as these decisions were made by government. Of course, my job is to have students in schools learning. I think we did, and I would like to thank our staff across the State, who I think did an exceptional job supporting learning from home last year and have done an exceptional job welcoming students back in our schools. I am sure people saw the coverage of the lengths our schools went to, particularly at the end of the summer holidays, to make sure that we could implement the settings for the start of this term. It was again exceptional. I think they have shown the whole community just how agile and responsive they are to the community's needs.

The CHAIR: All I can suggest is that there must be a lot of people in the system who do not have children who suffered dreadfully during this inhumane beyond belief period. But why did the PES charge with misconduct a department employee who was part of the anti-lockdown protest in Sydney in his own time? It was in his own time and had nothing to do with the schools.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Currie to provide some detail in relation to that matter, as far as he is able to.

DARYL CURRIE: In terms of your question, we have said this a few times. We do not charge people with misconduct; we actually put allegations of misconduct to them to answer.

The CHAIR: Semantics.

DARYL CURRIE: In terms of the lockdown protests, people referred to us were actually given allegations of misconduct because of a couple of reasons. The main reason was that, as public servants, they were not actually complying with the public health order.

The CHAIR: Oh, for Christ's sake.

DARYL CURRIE: Therefore—

The CHAIR: For Christ's sake.

DARYL CURRIE: —they were possibly bringing the department into disrepute. So we had an obligation under the code of conduct to actually put allegations to them so they could answer that.

The CHAIR: Why would anyone work for this department? You cannot in your own time go out and protest against something fundamentally wrong—this lockdown—because it infringes a public health order. Most of us should have been charged for breaching public health orders. I am sure every single person in this room, in some way, breached those draconian public health orders. What have you done to this person who protested in his own time? Is he still with the department or is he out too?

DARYL CURRIE: I will have to take that on notice.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If you could provide the specifics to us, Chair, we would be very happy to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: It is in the answer. I am following up the answer you have given me in the specifics to my question 8224, where you have charged someone in their own time—a department employee—for campaigning and protesting against this lockdown because it infringed public health orders. I could give you, I do not know, dozens of instances where those wretched orders—draconian and tyrannical—were breached by everyone that I know and myself, for very sound reasons. I mean, does this department ever do anything other than policing these public health orders in a way that is beyond any reason and compassion and care? Why would anyone be sacked or disciplined in this department—we will find out whether or not he was sacked—because in their own time they went out and protested against something fundamentally wrong that was hurting children all over the State? I just find that remarkable. Anyway, we will get further details. Mr Currie, on behalf of my colleague, the Hon. Walt Secord, could you give an explanation as to why you refused his GIPAA, arguing last year that—

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: He trusts you?

The CHAIR: Sorry?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I am saying, he does not trust the Opposition to ask his questions. He gives them to you.

The CHAIR: I take many matters from many parts of the Chamber, as you know, Scott. I always ventilate them with as much integrity and thoroughness as I can. This one is from the Hon. Walt Secord. I will raise some of yours later, if you wish.

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: I will give you the list.

The Hon. WES FANG: I do not have any. I think the department is great, just saying.

The CHAIR: Back to Mr Currie. You have said there was an overriding public interest against the disclosure of the fact that a contractor with the department posted on the Australasian Union of Jewish Students Facebook page under a picture of Adolf Hitler that, "It's such a shame he didn't finish his job." Now isn't it very much in the public interest to know such a thing could have been posted by a contractor of the department and within a nanosecond that person would have their contract terminated and never be seen ever again? Why the denial of a GIPAA to a member of Parliament? We are looking for something worse than better breeding at Kandos High. Well, we have found it here in putting under Hitler's photo, "It's a shame he didn't finish the job" to a union of Jewish students. How bad can it get?

YVETTE CACHIA: I can respond to your question, Chair, thank you. For precisely the reasons why an investigation has to be conducted thoroughly and properly with due process—

The CHAIR: I am not talking about the investigation; I am talking about the GIPAA, the FOI.

YVETTE CACHIA: I will come to that in just a moment, but before I come to that can I just explain the process? The GIPAA was requesting information in relation to those allegations while the investigation was underway. So when PES receives allegations, obviously they are taken seriously but to protect the integrity of the process—if we do not protect the integrity of the process, the person against whom allegations are made and subsequently proven can take action against the department and potentially be reinstated. So we need to make sure that at all times we are very careful and methodical about protecting due process.

The GIPAA came on a few occasions, from my recollection, during that process. The investigation follows these stages, Chair. A preliminary assessment is made. Information is gathered. Allegations are then put to the person against whom allegations have been made. There is an investigation report compiled. Findings are made. Then a proposed disciplinary action decision is made via a committee to make sure that the decision-maker at all times is furnished with the full facts, all the information, and then a final decision is made. If a GIPAA comes during that process and we believe it will compromise the integrity of that investigation, we absolutely will state that at the moment an investigation is proceeding and in order to maintain the integrity of the investigation it would be improper to release details.

The CHAIR: Ms Cachia, with all due respect, you can say that. But you do not exactly need the Nuremberg trials, do you, to work out that someone who has posted under Hitler's photo to a union of Jewish students, "It's a shame he didn't finish the job"—when you say "investigation", what exactly do you engage in? What, days and weeks of hand wringing, agonising over this or just the immediate commonsense knowledge that this person has to go?

YVETTE CACHIA: The answer to that question would very much depend on the nature of the issue.

The CHAIR: What about this one? It is hard to imagine anything worse.

YVETTE CACHIA: I might just add that it would not be—there are people who have their accounts hacked or somebody accessed their account and post things. I do not know all the ins and outs of the factual matrices that could exist.

The CHAIR: Why are you talking to us if you do not know the ins and outs?

YVETTE CACHIA: Because I am answering your question, Chair, to say—

The CHAIR: No, you are not. You just admitted your ignorance of the facts. That is not answering anything.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, I do not think that is a fair—

YVETTE CACHIA: No, sorry, that is not what I said at all.

The CHAIR: You just said you do not know the ins and outs of the matter.

YVETTE CACHIA: Chair, what I am doing is—

The CHAIR: What do you need to know?

YVETTE CACHIA: I am answering your question, Chair, and I think I have. What we say is to protect the integrity of the investigation it is entirely appropriate to say, if we get GIPAAed during that process, that we will be in a position to provide further information, if appropriate, when the investigation has concluded.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, if I may add, one of the standards that we have to hold is that these decisions can be upheld. If we make a decision around someone's employment, disciplinary action, the individual can take their own proceedings to the IRC and we need to make sure that the decisions we have made will hold up in that setting, which is why it is appropriate that we follow the due process.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Ms Harrisson, my colleague asked some questions about teachers with COVID. Are you able to tell us how many teachers had COVID in term one?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I do believe we indicated we would take those figures on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: But he asked for a longer time period, so just term one.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: You would like specifically term one?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you know how many classes in schools were closed due to COVID in term one?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I might ask Mr Dizdar if he has those numbers with him. I would just say that it is obviously a bit like the flooding conversation we had earlier: a moving feast in some respects. It has been

very minimal, the disruption, overall. I think some of the commentary before the term started indicated that we may not—that things were going to be dire. That has not been the case at all. We have been in a very positive position. We have taken more decisions to move to remote learning in relation to some of our schools for students with additional needs, due to the nature of the cohort that they are serving and the need to ensure there are those extra protections, but I will ask Mr Dizdar to provide that detail.

MURAT DIZDAR: The pleasing news, Ms Houssos, has been that every school has been open since the start of the term. I am putting the floods aside; I am talking to COVID.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I understand.

MURAT DIZDAR: We have had instances, small number, where we have had schools communicate with their parent community where a particular cohort or a particular class may have engaged in a period of learning from home. That has been based on advice and work with us with our health safety directorate. We have had instances where you might have had half a class of students, for example, with COVID. So it makes sense to have them learning from home.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sorry, Mr Dizdar, I just have limited time. Can you tell me how many of those classes there were in term one? I am happy if you need to take it on notice.

MURAT DIZDAR: We had a very small number of schools where that has come into play, and we are happy to take the number on notice and give that to you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, if you can tell me the number of classes at the number of schools.

MURAT DIZDAR: What I think we will do is take it on notice and give you what we can.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Of course.

MURAT DIZDAR: We can definitely tell you the number of schools, which has been very, very small in a system of 2,200 schools. If we have the information, we can give you the particular cohort at that school as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Fantastic. Thank you very much, Mr Dizdar. Ms Owen, I think this is best directed to you. Can you give me the number of students who were formally expelled under the age of 17 in 2021?

RUTH OWEN: I will take that one on notice, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you provide me with the numbers then for the year for 2020, 2019 and 2018?

RUTH OWEN: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: We will then go for the same data as we did from suspensions—so it will be for the school year, by gender, if they have disabilities and if they are First Nations peoples, please.

RUTH OWEN: For expulsions?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

RUTH OWEN: Yes, I will provide what we can. Thank you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much. Can I ask if it was a policy decision of the department, Ms Harrison, not to give parents access to last year's check-in data?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Owen to provide some further detail in relation to the check-ins. This is a tool that has been developed by the department to support our teachers in the classroom. So the check-in data gives the teacher insights into the next learning progressions for those students. It also, when they get the results, points them to the resources and areas of evidence that can support them in those particular domains. So it is very much aimed at being a tool for teaching in the classroom, and I will ask Ms Owen for any specifics in relation to the communication with parents.

RUTH OWEN: There is no explicit decision. As Ms Harrison says, the check-ins are one of many ways that teachers assess the progress that their students have made. So they would feed into parental reports from a classroom teacher, which I am sure Mr Dizdar can talk more about. They feed into an overall assessment, including other ways that the teachers will assess the progress of their students.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I just want to be clear: There is no explicit policy that said that information should not be provided to parents?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Not that I am aware of, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: No, that is fine. That answers my question. Thank you. Can I also ask about the number of students in term one who were diagnosed with COVID or who had COVID? Do you have that number?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly. Where we have that data, we are very happy to provide it for you. That data for students with COVID, parents do provide locally. We do collect, then, the staff data centrally but schools are not required to report to us, but we can seek that information. It might be best sought from the Department of Customer Service in relation to the reporting of tests through the Service NSW system.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Lovely. Thank you.

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Houssos, if it is okay with you, I want to take one question off notice because I have just been given the data.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Of course.

MURAT DIZDAR: We have had 23 schools out of 2,218 where we have had to send a cohort home for learning from home this year for a very short period of time.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you very much, Mr Dizdar.

MURAT DIZDAR: Thank you.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Let me just move on to a different area. I wanted to ask about how many new permanent positions you are planning on hiring, Ms Harrison, in this financial year.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Just to be clear, permanent teaching positions we are looking to hire?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, that is correct—permanent teaching.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Ms Cachia to provide the specifics if we have them. I would note that some of the programs we have talked today have obviously increased the demand for permanent positions, including the assistant principals for the curriculum, literacy and numeracy support, and those positions supporting the implementation of the new inclusive education reform package. I will ask Ms Cachia if we have those details with us.

YVETTE CACHIA: Thanks for the question, Ms Houssos. Some of that question I will need to take on notice, but in terms of staffing we do not actually say that we will have this number and that number. What we would do is look at the overall supply and demand levers, so as a position becomes vacant, obviously that position is declared vacant and then it is filled. Last year, I think I mentioned to the Committee earlier today, the recruitment team filled 6,400 roles across the system. I think 785 of those were new entrants to the system. I can certainly take on notice the breakdown of the supply strategy and the indicative numbers that we are looking to recruit there.

I do have some further data for you right now. In terms of fast stream, we had 207 applications. It was oversubscribed by four times. Fifty of those started in term one. Nearly 50 per cent of those are located in rural schools, which is pleasing to see. We had over 100 applicants for mid-career—I think this matter was taken on notice earlier, so I am just rounding that out now—and we have made 50 offers and had 30 acceptances. I think that number might have moved again today. In terms of our Inclusive Practice in Education scholarships, we had 155 of those, up 25 per cent from 2020-21, and 92 teach.Rural scholarships, up 50 per cent. Thirty-six of those started in term one. Also pleasing, speaking to the recruitment team this week in our catch-up, we have been triaging personally every new applicant who puts that they would like to work anywhere in the State, so we contact each of them individually, and we are up 30 per cent on placements to rural areas as a consequence. There are some really pleasing trends here in relation to that strategy and this is something that we can build on and grow into the future.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am interested—and perhaps you will want to take this on notice—in the new teaching positions, for example, at new schools that are going to be opening. If you can give me a breakdown of those by school, how many teachers you are looking at hiring at those schools and then how much you are projecting that that will cost for the next financial year?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Just so we are clear, Ms Houssos, you would like the number of permanent staffing vacancies forecast for our new build schools?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes.

YVETTE CACHIA: Given enrolment.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Given our expected enrolments?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, that is right, and also how much you are expecting to pay each of those, so what is the unit cost? What are you expecting—

YVETTE CACHIA: So type of employment?

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, that is right, and tell me how much you are going to be budgeting for each of those positions.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I am going to pass you a page out of the budget papers which I do not expect you to have with you. It references the Department of Education. There are two highlighted sections and I am interested in the second highlighted section on page 6-177. It says:

Department of Education, which was \$116 million lower than the 2020-21 Budget estimate, due to reduced contractor expenses and deferral of expenditure for existing programs.

I can understand the deferral of expenditure might have been around capital works that were delayed because of the shutdown in construction. What were the reduced contractor expenses?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Withey if he has the specifics on that. Contractor expenses will refer to the total expenditure, I would expect, of contractors across the department, but I will let Mr Withey come up to the table and provide some detail on that. As he gets his papers in order, he might just need a second.

DAVID WITHEY: Thanks for the question, Ms Houssos. I am not sure I have anything to add to that at the moment. As the secretary has suggested, that was I think related to a reduction in the number and amount of contractors we were using given the lockdown, but we might have to take any additional details on notice to the extent that we can provide it.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Yes, if you could provide an explanation on notice. If you turn the page over, it says there was a "major reprofiling of grant expenses in 2020-21", which included lower than forecast expenditures, and that was \$395 million in the Department of Education. Can you provide any insight on that one, Mr Withey?

DAVID WITHEY: Same answer on that one, Ms Houssos. I will have to take the detail and the breakdown on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sure.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: You will appreciate for a number of these programs some of the interruptions we experienced. As you indicated, the infrastructure program, which would include the employment of a number of contractors, would have been disrupted and so would have captured some of that delay of expenditure.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I will pass to my colleague.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I want to ask about mandatory training. Can I just confirm that teachers are required to do child protection mandatory training?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: They are, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Corruption prevention mandatory training?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I believe so, yes. I believe that is on the list. I think we will have a full list here for you, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Data security mandatory training?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Ms Cachia can get the full list of mandatory training requirements for you.

YVETTE CACHIA: I do not have the list on me.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is okay, you can take the rest on notice.

YVETTE CACHIA: Certainly, but I believe that is one of them, yes.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The three that I have mentioned—are they all delivered online?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr Dizdar will have some details.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a yes or no answer. I have very limited time. The question is: Are those courses—child protection, corruption prevention and data security—delivered online?

MURAT DIZDAR: Some are annual training, some are refreshers—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I did not ask whether they are annual. Are they delivered online or face-to-face?

MURAT DIZDAR: Things like child protection are delivered face-to-face, often with the whole staff. There are online learning modules with it as well, but in my experience child protection is one where schools tend to like to do that face-to-face.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: There are online modules, are there, for child protection?

MURAT DIZDAR: There are online modules.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr D'Adam, those online modules are both an opportunity for staff to engage with the content on their own but also a resource that schools may draw down to use, as Mr Dizdar has indicated, in delivering that professional learning within their own school context to their whole staff.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is corruption prevention online?

MURAT DIZDAR: You will find that a lot of our mandatory training has the capacity to be engaged with whole staff, where there are PowerPoint scenarios that can be unpacked with staff, or with the flexibility, Mr D'Adam—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: It is a very simple question and it is a yes or no answer, Mr Dizdar. I do not need a commentary; I just want a yes or no answer.

The Hon. WES FANG: I raise a point of order because, while you might want a yes or no answer, Mr Dizdar is providing a very wholesome answer and I think that the Committee is very interested—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Fulsome.

The Hon. WES FANG: No, it is very wholesome. It is very genuine.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I have limited time.

The Hon. WES FANG: I understand that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: You have made your point.

The CHAIR: Let us get back to the question.

MURAT DIZDAR: What I am trying to indicate is that you will find that a lot of our training, mandatory or compulsory training, has the capacity to be delivered face-to-face or online. It has that flexibility.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, it is both. In the delivery of the training, is relief time provided from face-to-face so that that can be done in school hours?

MURAT DIZDAR: That is a very good question. Of course, you would appreciate—the Committee would know—that there are five school development days which are designed around professional development and dialogue for the school.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Is it the case then that this training is delivered wholly in school hours?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It is not delivered wholly in school hours because, as Mr Dizdar has indicated, a number of our schools kick-off the year making sure their mandatory training is complete during the professional development or staff development days at the start of the year.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: That is school hours; that is what I am talking about.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It should be available for our staff to complete largely during school hours. There will be times when we will offer flexibility outside of that to meet the needs of individual staff within their local context, so there is opportunity provided for that mandatory training to be done within school hours. I could not confirm whether all of it does—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Where it is not delivered in school hours, including staff development days, how are staff remunerated for the time that it takes to do the training?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: They are not.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: They are not? Is that correct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If staff are unable to complete their training—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Sorry.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I thought someone from the panel might have given that answer.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, there was no outbreak of veracity. We are going to go straight back to the actual answer.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: So no remuneration or compensation is provided if staff are required to do the time outside of school hours? It is a yes or no answer really.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I have indicated, opportunities are available throughout the school year with release time and those staff development days for staff to complete the training during—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Yes, I understand that, Ms Harrisson. My question is, if it is not delivered—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, if I may, it is very difficult to answer the question.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You are not answering the question that I have asked.

The CHAIR: I think the secretary should be given the chance to answer the question.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I was trying to explain, Mr D'Adam, staff are offered opportunities throughout the year to undertake professional development both during staff development days and during release time from face-to-face teaching in the year. If staff are concerned about the programming of that professional development within their school, they should talk to their line manager within their school context and work with them locally on determining when they will be able to set aside the time to do that training.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Mr Martin, are these courses—child protection, corruption prevention, data security—accredited by NESAs to count towards the hours required to maintain proficient teacher accreditation?

PAUL MARTIN: The department is able to accredit its own courses in relation to teachers maintaining. However, the priority courses that were determined a year or so ago related to curriculum, students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students et cetera. But that was for the mandatory hours, the 50 hours required. For the other 50 hours these other courses can be used, I believe, to count towards 100 hours of maintenance.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If I could add to my answer, Mr D'Adam, teachers have quite a lot of flexibility throughout the year in the way they use their paid time. There is paid time during the school holidays also available to teachers. Under the award arrangements teachers have—and I will check on notice that this is correct—four weeks' paid annual leave. The rest of the holiday period is a flexible time where their hours are not mandated in the way that they are during the very timetabled nature of the rest of their year. But there is also time that is paid during the school holidays to recognise the fact that our teachers do some of that work during the school year in a more intensive way, given the nature of their employment.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I am going to move on. There has been a decline in enrolments in public schools vis-a-vis the other sectors. Can I ask whether the department does analysis of the prospective enrolments within a catchment that might possibly enrol in schools? Is there analysis looking at ABS data, for example, of how many school-aged children there are in a catchment and how many of those end up in a public school?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As part of our planning for our infrastructure—I think we have canvassed at this Committee previously the various data sources that we now use to look at the demands for public schools across the State. In terms of the current enrolments for this year, our school census is not yet complete.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Ms Harrisson, I have limited time. I just want to know whether you do that analysis.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: As I indicated in my answer, Mr D'Adam, yes, as part of our planning for the school infrastructure needs for public education, we look at a variety of data sources to ascertain and project the demands and needs of public schools in particular areas.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can I then ask on notice for you to provide the capture analysis for all schools in New South Wales?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: For each catchment area, the capture analysis for each school.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am certainly happy to go away and look at what we have available in a form that we can share in relation to this. We have a number of modelling programs that will be difficult to provide on notice. But I am happy to provide to you on notice any information we can that goes to the issues you raise.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I might just quickly move to one more issue, which is about work health and safety. I know we foreshadowed that we would ask some work health and safety questions of the director.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: She is the relieving executive director, just for the record.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: I wanted to ask about the application of the Work Health and Safety Act to children. I have asked this before. There was an application or a request by some parents at an inner west high school to be represented on the work health and safety committee. Are you aware of that, Ms Cachia?

YVETTE CACHIA: No, I am not, Mr D'Adam.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: You are not aware of that?

YVETTE CACHIA: No. When did that occur?

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Last year—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: That would be a local work health and safety committee I believe, Mr D'Adam. If we could take that on notice, I would need to understand whether that request was made to a school-based work health and safety committee, which I expect our schools to hold—

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: The request was declined. My question is, in the absence of a representation on a work health and safety consultative structure, how do you consult on the work health and safety implications of school decisions on children?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to take on notice the specifics of the question you have raised in relation to the school in particular. If you would like to provide us with details of that case we would be very happy to follow up, and also to provide you on notice with the way that we work through our work health and safety committee structures through the department.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Harrisson, the now-renamed Quality Time Action Plan: Are you familiar with that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: As I understand it, that plan is trying to deal with the 200 hours of administrative work that the average teacher does in a given year and reduce that.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I know that those are your figures, not our figures in relation to that administrative load. But yes, it is work that is aimed at ensuring our teachers can spend their time doing what our teachers can only do and what our teachers do best, which is supporting our students in classroom.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You say it is my figure, but you sent correspondence out to teachers about the action plan and what your target was. It stated:

Our target is 20%—

a 20 per cent reduction—

for our teachers by the end of 2022. This equates to a reduction of 40 hours of low-value administrative tasks per teacher per year.

You run the education department. You can do the maths, can you not?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I can, thank you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes. Do you agree with my 200 hours now?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I agree with your 200 hours.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Alright, terrific. Starting there—

DAVID WITHEY: If I might just clarify a point on those numbers, Mr Shoebridge, just to be clear about the setting of that target: We calculated that target using an OECD TALIS survey in 2018, which suggested that teachers spend 4.1 hours a week on general administrative tasks. Over the course of a 40-week school year, that equates to 168 hours. In the calculation of the target, we rounded that up to 40 hours to set ourselves a stretch target. I just wanted to clarify that point for you.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So it is not even based on New South Wales figures? You have picked an OECD figure. That has got Turkey, Greece—

DAVID WITHEY: No, this was teachers in Australia.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How did the OECD collect that data?

DAVID WITHEY: I would have to take that on notice.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: It is a survey of teachers, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: You are telling me that you did not ask your own teachers but you relied on OECD survey?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr Shoebridge, you will appreciate the irony that we would not hear— we obviously did not want to go out and ask further questions of our staff that they had already been asked and answered. We used data that has been provided to an international body that reflects the workload of teachers in Australia to set ourselves an ambitious but important and achievable target in relation to increasing the amount of time our teachers can spend doing what they do best.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: That is a 40-hour reduction by the end of this year, is that right?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: That is our target, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: In the three years before that, your previous action plan managed to reduce it by 10 hours in total after three years of effort, is that right?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Withey to clarify the numbers on teachers. I would say to the Committee that our focus in the first phase of this action plan has been on the workload of our leadership cohort in schools. We have now turned our attention to those issues impacting our teachers. I will ask Mr Withey to clarify the—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have made the mistake of reading your action plan and taking figures directly from the action plan, but it could be wrong, Mr Withey.

DAVID WITHEY: No, the numbers are correct. As Ms Harrisson says, the focus between 2018 and 2020 was largely on principals and school-based non-teaching staff. For principals, we validated 105 hours of savings a year and for school-based non-teaching staff, we validated 25 hours of timesaving during that time. As you said, for teachers during that period it was 10 hours, but that was before we turned our attention to teachers more squarely.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Are you on track?

DAVID WITHEY: Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: How much have you reduced it so far?

DAVID WITHEY: We have taken that 10 hours that we saved between 2018 and 2020 and set that aside, so we have reset the target. The target is 40 hours from 2021. We are on track. We estimate that we have saved 29 hours in 2021, leaving 11 hours to come over the course of this year.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Perhaps on notice you can provide me with what you have done and how you have come up with the 29 hours?

DAVID WITHEY: I am very happy to talk to that now, Mr Shoebridge.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: No, I would much rather—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, if I may, in terms of procedural fairness, I believe we are entitled to answer the question if we are able to. We have been asked a question—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Chair, through you—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: —and we have the answer here. We would like to provide it.

The CHAIR: Thank you, secretary. Mr Shoebridge?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: We have limited time. We are able to allocate as questioners the time that we would like devoted to this matter. I am very happy to have the detail provided on notice.

The CHAIR: In all fairness to Mr Withey, you are able to ask him to take it on notice to save you time.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Indeed, which is what I have done.

The CHAIR: That is what you have done.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If the Government wants to ask questions at the end, it is welcome to.

The CHAIR: That is procedurally fair. There is no denial of an answer. It will be given on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: If the Government wants to do it in its 10 minutes at the end it is welcome to. Ms Harrison, the department's ventilation and asset use audit, do you remember that, the one that was delivered initially on 12 October?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I do, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It said, "The Department of Education has reviewed all windows, fans, ventilation systems in more than 150,000 spaces across more than 2,200 public schools" and come up with the numbers of how many students or people could occupy spaces. Do you remember that?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I remember that, yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Did the final set of numbers that were produced have anything at all to do with the number of windows, fans or ventilation systems in the spaces?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will ask Mr Manning to go to the details of the question you are asking. We have taken expert advice in relation to the ventilation requirements in classrooms.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: My question was quite specific.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We provided that advice to the audit that you refer to, Mr Shoebridge. I am happy to ask Mr Manning to provide you with further information.

ANTHONY MANNING: The answer to your question is yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I have been provided with an analysis of that audit. The analysis of that audit shows that the only variable for all classrooms and spaces was floor space and that there is a 100 per cent correlation between the occupancy rate and how it determines as against before floor space. It is a 100 per cent correlation. How is that?

ANTHONY MANNING: So the original—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: If I may, you are referring to analysis that is not our analysis and not analysis that we have access to. I am very happy to provide commentary on analysis if we have it available to us and if it can be validated, Mr Shoebridge. Mr Manning—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is the data in your audit.

ANTHONY MANNING: I can walk you through exactly how the process occurred and how we got to the numbers and then how those numbers were amended going forward. To the secretary's point, we did get into 150,000 spaces to look at what we had available to us in terms of what needs to be repaired. We were also able to gather information on window sizes. We commissioned some expertise that was peer reviewed to give us a sense of the airflow. We are looking for 10 litres per second per person. With a BCA standard for window openings, based on a very conservative estimate of airflow, we were able to start off with a baseline of the number of people that that room could contain at 10 litres per second. That was issued to schools, and when we spoke to schools we said very clearly to them, "There may be rooms here where there is effectively a lower level of number of students that we think you can contain compared to ones you want. Raise that issue with us, we will go down and reaffirm the actual window sizes and the actual window orientation. We will work with you to review that number and see whether you could put more students in that room" because the window sizes were in excess of BCA.

That left us with just shy of 2,000 spaces where we knew that, by adding air purifiers, we could boost the airflow. That gave us an initial assessment of a baseline capacity for each room. We were then able to tailor that for each individual school that came to us and said, "That baseline number doesn't work for us" to make sure that we were able to support the number of kids they needed in each room. That was done locally, individually and it was either a validation—because what we found was, whilst the BCA might have said 5 per cent of window area to floor area, we found that the windows are a certain size so we might end up with 8 per cent, 9 per cent or 10 per cent because that was the number of open windows in a space.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Manning, every classroom was assigned category A and every administrative space was assigned category B. After this whole extremely complex process, every classroom got category A and every administrative space got category B.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: We have been clear in all of our responses in relation to the ventilation order that we—

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It was just a magical outcome that that happened, Mr Manning. You go through that complex process—

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Mr Shoebridge, if I may finish speaking, please.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But I have not asked a question of you, Ms Harrisson.

The CHAIR: Order! The secretary is trying to make a contribution.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: But I have not asked a question of Ms Harrisson.

The CHAIR: I know, but the secretary has the right to come over the top.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Mr Manning just gave a very detailed answer, which I was testing him on and Ms Harrisson is running interference.

The CHAIR: Briefly and relevantly, Ms Harrisson.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Very briefly, we have been very clear in our responses to all questions about this audit that we audited learning spaces through the schools. We have been very clear on that throughout. We have been consistent in that response. Mr Manning can continue with answering your question.

The CHAIR: I think Mr Manning should take the question on notice.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: The only analysis that was done in that audit, Mr Manning, was that you determined the capacity for every classroom by applying the same—or whoever did the audit—equation: 0.95 times the size of the room divided by two and you round it down. That provides the outcome for every classroom under the audit, does it not?

ANTHONY MANNING: I have just explained to you in detail why that is not the case.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: So you say.

ANTHONY MANNING: Yes, I do say.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Except that the analysis of the data is entirely contrary to that.

ANTHONY MANNING: That was the question you asked me and that is what I am able to affirm.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Which is directly contrary to the analysis of the data.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Chair, we are being asked to comment on analysis that we have not seen and that has not been provided to us.

The CHAIR: Yes, in procedural fairness it is incumbent upon the questioner to provide the analysis, which is from the federation or something.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry?

The CHAIR: Do you want to table the analysis so that the department can respond in detail? Is it from the federation?

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, absolutely I will provide that. I will speak to the author and then I will provide it.

The CHAIR: You can do that as part of a supplementary question. That is the only fair way in which the department can respond. They just cannot respond to a puff of smoke.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Not without opening the window.

The CHAIR: Yes, good segue. To the secretary, when you were deputy secretary you appeared before us several times and spoke of the importance and effectiveness of the targeted assistance program. Has that been subject to a valuation? It was always presented as a new, whiz-bang disadvantaged schools program that would uplift the most disadvantaged schools in the State.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Thank you for the question, Chair. We did look at the impact of targeted support on our schools. We have seen in a number of schools that that support was provided to, and there is a particular school that I have in mind around Bankstown, I think it is a P-2 or P-3 school, where we saw an example—which Mr Dizdar might be able to provide further detail on—of a very significant lift. Since that time the Government has taken the learnings of that and applied it to the School Success Model. The Minister spoke about this yesterday at the Sydney Morning Herald Schools Summit. We have been very clear in terms of where schools are at in relation to their targets, which have been set with a really rigorous methodology underpinning them, and where they are up to in their school improvement journey.

Those schools that require strategic support now get it—I think you will recall, Chair, when this first started it was a negotiated process—based on the school's performance. The decision about whether or not that support is provided, there was a clear determinate around that. We have also now provided much enhanced and improved guided support for our schools based in evidence-based practice so that all the support coming from the department aligns behind the evidence—and we spoke about phonics earlier today. Then we have the schools that are exceeding their targets or are on track to achieve their targets, where there is universal support, and that is also entirely based in the evidence, it is quality assured, with a literacy and numeracy hub and it is full of effective resources to support teachers in classrooms to lift student outcomes. That is our core business.

The CHAIR: But the question was: Has there been an independent evaluation? Not just at a school in Bankstown, which sounds like a great story, but the overall program and the scores of schools involved.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: There has not been an independent evaluation. There has been internal analysis that has supported the transition to the School Success Model.

The CHAIR: Is there any intention of having an independent evaluation? It is good for the department to look at itself, but nothing is better than an independent, thorough review in such a critical area as uplifting performance.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I agree. We are engaged in a number of evaluation processes regarding the School Success Model and the support provided. One of the things that I have been—

The CHAIR: The targeted assistance program?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: That has, as I have indicated, Chair, shifted now and we are referring to it as "strategic support". We have taken away that negotiation piece and now it is a requirement from the department that schools engage in that process and we have identified the schools for this year that will receive it. In the way that we are designing the support, it is being led by the same area of the department behind the Best in Class initiative where we have a very central evaluative mechanism where we are learning by doing. We are evaluating the impact we have during the process so that we can refine and ensure we are achieving the outcomes that we are seeking to achieve. It is a very rigorous analysis. The executive director who leads that area is a really strong educator with really strong credentials in the adoption of evidence-based practice, in research-based practice and how you refine practice using research and evidence. That is the approach we are taking throughout this program.

The CHAIR: In its origins, was the program known as the school development review?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: No, that is a separate process. I will let Mr Dizdar talk to that. It is a very specific term in the education system—a school development review—that is used in very specific circumstances. I will let Mr Dizdar provide you with the details of that.

MURAT DIZDAR: Chair, a school development review is not a new process. That is where an external team to the school of educational expertise comes in and looks at a particular program or initiative or direction in the school that either the school itself has put its hands up for and wants that external assessment or the system has determined it is an area of concern or in need of examination. It normally involves that panel coming in for three to four days, with classroom observations, speaking to a range of professionals inside the context. As an example, if we wanted to do a review of our pathways offerings in that school, we would have pathways experts on that panel and we would have secondary experts on that panel.

The CHAIR: It is ongoing and it is different to what is now known as the strategic support program.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes, they are two different things.

The CHAIR: That clarifies it for me, so thank you very much.

MURAT DIZDAR: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Could I just refer the secretary to a document that came out of the Hon. Courtney Houssos' SO52 on the School Excellence Policy. It was an early paper on the targets update. At page 5 it presented suggested uplift for schools measured off the family occupation and education index, and showed that some 320 schools in New South Wales were performing below that index prediction. Is there an update on that data, which in this document is from May 2019?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to provide an update on the data on notice, if I may, Chair. The way the targets were set for our schools and the analysis that underpinned them—for us, it was really important that it was fair and equitable for our schools. We identified schools that are statistically similar to other schools and looked at their performance relative to one another. Regional settings with particular socio-economic and population make-up would be compared to other schools like them so that we could get a real sense of the performance span across our system in those domains. We then set targets in relation to that. Certainly, we refer to it as FOEI, but it is a socio-economic indicator, and that was one of the inputs into that process. Mr Dizdar may have some updates available.

The CHAIR: Are you still using FOEI?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: FOEI is a well-known, well-respected measure that is used across education to look at educational disadvantage.

The CHAIR: Can we get an update on this data on page 5? Back then, there was one school performing at 30 per cent below its FOEI prediction, 29 at 20 per cent below and 290 at 10 per cent below. Can we get an update on that data for 2022, because this is from May 2019?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: You can take that on notice, thanks.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to.

The CHAIR: Thank you. At the back of this particular document, there is a table on "Across the system schools strongly prefer to focus on some elements over others to inform their school planning". Does this point to a particular cultural problem that has emerged, where 86 per cent of the schools would reference wellbeing in their reporting processes but only 3 per cent would reference student performance measures, which is atrocious?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Firstly, Chair, as you have indicated, this document refers to the situation in 2019. This is exactly why we have put the School Success Model in place. It is exactly why we have set the series of targets that we are now working with our schools on and it is why in that new school planning process, all schools are required to have a target relating to academic growth and student academic outcomes.

The CHAIR: I know, but does it point to a cultural problem? We know from the documents about Ashcroft that the principal had this to say of your targets of student growth and attainment: "This is not a direction. In fact, it is inexplicable, determining whether a level of improvement has been achieved. What specifically are we supposed to be improving? At what level? Is this in fact just NAPLAN?" He just thumbed his nose at the whole idea of focusing on growth in student academic performance.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am sure the Chair would appreciate there are wideranging views in relation to a number of the different measures that are used across education systems. We have set targets in relation to NAPLAN, in relation to student growth, in relation to the HSC—a wide range of measures we are seeking to use to address those issues. I think our focus on improvement from the department is very clear. Our schools are coming on that journey with us. They are brought into their targets. They have undergone the planning. Do I think we needed a cultural change? I think the conversations we were having in 2017, 2018 and 2019 indicated we had work to do. That is why we have put this reform in place, Chair. For many in positions like mine, we could talk about nearly every change being some form of culture change because in a human system in turn you then have to change human beliefs in terms of delivering your outcomes. There is, of course, an element of culture change within it.

The CHAIR: In the accumulated performance targets under the banner of outcome-based budgeting, on Monday Treasury said there is no Treasury sanction or even pressure on a system like Education to fulfil outcome-based budgeting. Have you found, three years into that process now, there is no change in the interface between Education and Treasury in how your budget is determined?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I do not necessarily agree with the premise of that question that there is no pressure or expectation on us to deliver, Chair.

The CHAIR: That is what it said. That is what Treasury said in this room two days ago. I can only report what I heard in response to my question. What is your perspective on it?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: My perspective, Chair, is that we have an outcomes-based business plan. It has a set of targets in it and we report on our progress towards those targets regularly to government. I certainly, and I know my team, feel the accountability of that. I think you have heard the Minister talk consistently about her commitment to both raise the standards in education and raise the accountability through the system, including through the department. I think my team would say they certainly feel that accountability, whether it is through the outcome-based business planning process or our own ambitions for the system.

The CHAIR: That is what Treasury said from its end. It sounded pretty weak. But, anyway, we cannot dwell on that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wanted to ask about the asset sales. Mr Withey, are you on track to meet the \$90 million target?

DAVID WITHEY: Yes.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: So there will be \$90 million of asset sales achieved in the Department of Education this year?

DAVID WITHEY: The \$90 million asset sales was a Cabinet decision that has been passed on to the cluster. The \$90 million is a cluster target rather than a departmental target. We are on track.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Can you please provide on notice a list of the sites that have been sold already?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am happy to provide that and also happy to provide information on the amounts of investments in assets we have also made.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Sure.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: The Committee will appreciate that a divestment strategy, when you have an asset base of the scale and size of ours, is an important part of effectively managing your assets and their utilisation.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Can you confirm that the Mollymook site will no longer be sold off? Is that correct?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I will need to take the specifics of that site on notice. I do not have that detail with me today. Mr Manning may well have it.

ANTHONY MANNING: Just on that one, we undertook, at last, that we would enter a consultation process. That is happening now. We have yet to complete that process to understand the Mollymook site.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay. Are you able to provide a list on notice of the sites that have been declared surplus to the Department of Education's needs?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am certainly happy to take on notice, firstly, whether we have that type of list in existence. We obviously do the analysis underpinning any decision to divest an asset. Often it will be because we have an alternative asset investment in mind that would be better suited to our needs.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Mr Withey, can you provide on notice, as at today's date, how much money of that \$90 million has actually been received?

DAVID WITHEY: Received by the department and—

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: How much of the \$90 million has actually been sold as at today's date?

DAVID WITHEY: I am happy to provide that on notice.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Great.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Given that incidents reported to the Incident Report and Support Hotline do not actually achieve a notification summary being sent to the person to validate for accuracy, how can these reports be utilised in litigation?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: So I am clear on your question, you were referring to reports to our instant hotline regarding work health and safety incidents?

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Yes.

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Obviously we receive those incidents from school principals or from people who have been involved in incidents. I will ask Ms Cachia if we have some further information on that.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: They are not actually validated for accuracy. The person who makes the report does not get a summary after the phone call where they can crosscheck that it has been received accurately. My concern is how can those incidents be relied on in litigation or in any sort of process where it has been tested if there is not a validity check or an accuracy check?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: What I will do to assist the Committee is provide details on notice of the process that is undertaken internally in relation to those reports, what happens when they are notified and what we do with them from there. I am very happy to provide the detail of that process on notice.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: On notice, can you also provide for the past three years how often those incident reports or summaries have been contested by the person who gave it?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: I am very happy to look into that, Mr Banasiak, and see what we can provide.

The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM: Can you also provide the context around what triggers an incident notification? Can you provide some details about what triggers an incident notification?

GEORGINA HARRISSON: Certainly, we can share the guidance that we have around that. There are clear policies and procedures in place that require people under work health and safety legislation to report incidents. I am very happy to provide the details of that on notice, Mr D'Adam.

The CHAIR: We can end the examination of witnesses at that point. I thank the government officers for their attendance today. It has been a very good session. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in the near future regarding any questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions, working on the assumption that Government members have no questions?

The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW: Your assumption is correct.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: There were major procedural concerns throughout the inquiry, so now is the chance to clarify.

The CHAIR: We do not need to do that at 5.15 p.m.

The Hon. WES FANG: I think the witnesses have acquitted themselves very well.

The CHAIR: We will end on that happy note. I thank the witnesses again.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.