

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

**Monday, 4 April 2022**

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

## **EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING**

**CORRECTED**

**The Committee met at 10:00.**

### **MEMBERS**

The Hon. Mark Latham (Chair)

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam

The Hon. Scott Farlow

The Hon. Wes Fang

The Hon. Courtney Houssos

## **CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS**

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

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



**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the further public hearing for the inquiry into budget estimates 2021-22. Before I commence, it is the custom of this Parliament to acknowledge the traditional inhabitants of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and I do that with due respect as well as acknowledging 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 role possible. We acknowledge and thank them all. I welcome senior officials from the Department of Education to this hearing about schools and early learning.

Before we commence, I will just make a few comments about the procedures. Today's proceedings will be broadcast live from the 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 about the Committee's proceedings. All witnesses at the estimates have a right to procedural fairness according to the resolution of the House in 2018. There may be some questions that a witness could answer only if they had more time or with certain documents to hand. In these circumstances witnesses are advised they can take a question on notice and provide an answer within 28 days. Finally, everyone should please turn off their mobile phones or turn them to silent for the duration of the hearing.

**Ms GEORGINA HARRISSON**, Secretary, Department of Education, on former affirmation

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

**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

**The CHAIR:** Today's hearing will be conducted from 10.00 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. with a 15-minute break at 11.30 a.m. There will be questions from the Opposition and the crossbench members only. If required, an additional 15 minutes is allocated at the end of the session for Government questions. Thank you everyone for your attendance today. We can begin with questions from the Opposition.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Thanks very much, Mr Chair. Thanks everyone. Lovely to see you all again. Can I start by asking, I think it would be to Ms Cachia, about the program to recruit teachers from overseas. When teachers who are recruited from overseas have a curriculum that is not similar to the New South Wales curriculum, will there be any programs that are designed to get them up to speed or is that just purely through the assessment process?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Thanks for the question. We are very pleased with the fact that we have had 3,000 expressions of interest. They are from a number of countries, as we took a question on notice and provided the Committee with that information recently. It is important to recognise that no matter where a teacher comes from, and no matter where they have been trained, they will need to be accredited in accordance with the same guidelines as all teachers, and they are the national standards. We work very closely with NESAs to make sure they are very much part and parcel of having the qualifications that any teacher in our system has.

The other part of the program—the international and interstate recruitment piece—involves the requirement to have two years of teaching experience. When teachers start, obviously the experience is supplemented by many different things. They are mentored, and my colleagues Murat Dizdar and Leanne Nixon can certainly talk to what actually happens operationally when a teacher begins in our system. They are provided with that wraparound support to make sure that, to your point around curriculum, they are getting the support they need. I think it is really important to be clear that there is no requirement of an international teacher who has been trained overseas that is any different to any of the other teachers that we have by way of accreditation here in New South Wales.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** In terms of when they are trained overseas, is there a requirement for only three years or is it a four-year training requirement?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** We have had 3,000 expressions of interests and we are working our way through those at the moment. Clearly, we need to look at, as part of that assessment process, where people have trained and what the equivalent standards are. That is all, as I said, part of that NESAs accreditation process to make sure that teachers who teach here from overseas jurisdictions are very much accredited in the same way and to the same standards as other teachers.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** But, Ms Cachia, I asked a specific question. As part of that assessment, will it be a three-year requirement or a four-year requirement or is there no formal requirement?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I think the answer is that the requirements are the same as they are here, so the standards of teaching and academic instruction need to meet the thresholds and the criteria of the assessment process here. I am not sure whether you are referring to a specific jurisdiction. I am more than happy to take that on notice if you like and we can get back to you with further detail.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Ms Houssos, if I could add, it is NESAs that hold the standards for that accreditation and anyone we recruit from overseas will need to meet the standards as set out by NESAs for that process. We would expect them to meet the qualification requirements that NESAs already have in place. You would appreciate that in a global city, and a global market overall, we do have people who come here with teaching qualifications anyway and find themselves on visas able to work. They would also go through that NESAs accreditation process, so there is a process here that is not as well worn as we are seeking to make it but does exist, and certainly NESAs can provide you with further detail on the requirements for accreditation from overseas.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So, Ms Harrison, if they are going through the existing process already, then what is new and different about the Government's process now?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** That is because we are actively going to attract those teachers to bring them in, Ms Houssos, which is not something we have done before.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** What is the process in terms of actively attracting them?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will ask Ms Cachia to fill you in, but we have worked with engaging with teachers directly overseas to make sure that we can attract people here. We are looking at the visa requirements and how we support those visa requirements into our system. But Ms Cachia can provide you with some further information.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Ms Houssos, could you just elucidate on exactly what you are looking for, just so I can understand the specifics of what you want?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Ms Harrison just said that there is an existing process in place and that they will be accredited through the existing process. This has been trumpeted by the Government. You have just talked about the 3,000 applications that have been received. Let's be clear: One hundred and thirty-nine are currently being assessed by NESAs. So I am just trying to get a sense of what is actually involved here.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Just to put in context my previous comments, they were in relation to people who migrate to Australia of their own accord. Coming to Australia, they may be the partner or spouse of someone who is on a sponsored visa and also have a right to work. They might seek employment with us directly under those requirements or directly with a school, and it is that process that I was saying existed. What is different in this instance is that it is a centralised recruitment activity aimed at attracting people into the profession from overseas.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Are you paying for their visas and relocation?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will ask Ms Cachia to provide the details on that.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I will have to take the specifics of the exact package on notice. We are trying to facilitate the entry of teachers particularly in STEM subjects, so we are very focused on that to make sure that those teachers are available to go to the more difficult-to-staff regional and remote locations.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Ms Cachia, do you have a budget to pay for visas or to pay for relocations?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Not to my knowledge but I will take that specific issue on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Perhaps you can tell me, there are 139 that are being assessed at the moment by NESAs. Does that mean those 3,000 applications—are you working through those? The 139 out of those 3,000—is that it or are you going to have an ongoing assessment of those?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Just to be clear, it is 3,000 expressions of interest, not necessarily applications. We will work through those. Obviously we are looking for the people in the first instance who meet all the requirements at first pass, and then we will be working through the others in due course.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So you are working through those other applications.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** We are.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Just for context, Ms Houssos, we announced this initiative I think it was back around the beginning of September. To already have had the expressions of interest go out and come back in that volume, we are really pleased with the level of the expressions of interest that we have received. But, obviously, it will take time for us to work through those expressions of interest for suitability and to work through NESAs and with NESAs on the appropriate accreditation processes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Of course. We are just interested in knowing what the requirements are and what programs are in place around that. If their visa and relocation costs are paid for, do you have a requirement for them to stay in a position for a certain period of time?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Ms Houssos, I might take on notice the specifics of that question along with the visa issue that you have already raised. In terms of the question you just asked about the requirements and very explicitly what those are, I will provide those back to you on notice as well.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That would be helpful. There have been 3,000 expressions of interest. Do they then need to lodge an application in order to then be assessed by NESA?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We will come back to you with those details on notice.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I can answer that, secretary. Yes, as part of their expression of interest, it is an application per se. What we will do is if there is anything missing, we will go back to them and ask them to provide the further details.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So when you say there are expressions of interest, 3,000 people have lodged applications.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** There are 3,000 people who have expressed interest. Obviously, if we require further information, we go back to them. We call them "expressions of interest" because they are not necessarily a formal application, the reason being that if they specify a particular region or location we may require further information. It is a nuance around that but a lot of people will apply as an expression of interest to begin with. They may not fulfil all the criteria and then we will go back and as part of the formal application process we will say, "To complete your process and to complete our administrative requirements, we need you to go back and furnish us with this further detail".

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Does that mean that there are only 139 in the first cut who actually fulfilled all the criteria?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Not necessarily. Obviously, we would want to run this as a parallel process, so we have got people who are expressing interest, we have got people we are going back to ask for further information and we have got people that we can identify readily that are ready to be moved through the process. There are many different streams happening at the same time, concurrently.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I draw the witnesses' attention to the answer supplied to supplementary question No. 59. The Opposition asked:

Could you please provide a list of the number of injury incidents on NSW school grounds in 2020 and 2021 respectively, broken down by school, State electorate of school, the number of enrolments at each school and including whether any incident lead to hospitalisation or death?

The answer returned was:

The Department has an obligation to maintain privacy and confidentiality of all staff and students and does not release incident data by school. Releasing data by school may enable the identification of staff or students in schools that could be harmful to those involved and damage the reputation of schools. It could also act as a major disincentive to the future reporting of incidents.

I want to clarify. In returning that answer, you have effectively said you have the information. That is correct, is it not, Ms Harrisson?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We do have information on incidents that are lodged with us, yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The answer effectively says, "We are not going to give you the information". Is that not correct?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I think the answer says that we are unable to give you that information in a form that would put it on the public record because of the considerations outlined in our answer.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You are obliged to provide answers where you have the information at hand. Is that not correct?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** As you will see from the answer, Mr D'Adam, we sought advice on the appropriateness of handing that out from our general counsel. The advice we have been given is what is relayed to you in the answer. We are not interested in withholding information from the Committee; we do want to be able to answer you. But there are some instances where you would appreciate that in work health and safety matters there can be a number of complexities around those issues for the individual and the individual in their current workplace. Those are the issues that have been considered there. As I indicated, we are unable to share that data in such a way that would put it on the public record but might breach someone's privacy.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You are aware that the Committee has a process that enables the information to be provided on a confidential basis, are you not, Ms Harrisson?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes, I am. But this was in a supplementary question and that was through that process, as I understood it.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Did you engage with the secretariat to see if there was some other way you could meet the requirements of returning an honest and complete answer without necessarily—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: The implication by the Hon. Anthony D'Adam that Ms Harrison had not provided an honest answer I think is—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I withdraw the suggestion that it was dishonest.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Thank you.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** But did you obtain any advice from the secretariat about how you might provide an answer that meets the requirements of the Committee while also satisfying the concerns about privacy?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, I will take the specifics of that question on notice. The only thing I would add is that we received—I think it was in excess of 250 supplementary questions to be answered within the time frame. Obviously, the focus of the organisation was on getting those answers back in a timely fashion. If following this hearing you would like us to use that process to provide that information to you, we are certainly open to that process being used.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is it possible to get an answer provided on a confidential basis to question No. 59?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am very happy to take that on notice and come back to you, Mr D'Adam, on that basis.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** In question No. 60 you were asked about violent incidents. There were 8,006 violent incidents in 2020, and the answer for 2021 was that there is no data available. What constitutes a "violent incident"? What is the threshold?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will ask Ms Cachia to provide you with an answer on that from the work health and safety perspective and, obviously, Mr Dizdar and Ms Nixon have experience of those issues in the schools.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Thanks, secretary. A violent incident refers to all assaults, intimidation and offensive conduct. Staff and community members are included in that category. Many of the incidents, as you would appreciate, involve disputes or fighting between students.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What happens when you get a notification of a violent incident? What does the department do? What is the response?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I will ask my colleagues Ms Nixon and Mr Dizdar to talk through the operational responses to those, but I can inform the Committee that we work very closely with local police. We have regular consultations with them; we talk about trends and issues emerging in different regions and locations. We are very much tied in with local agencies to make sure that people in schools are supported when these issues arise. From an operational perspective, obviously the principal and school's leadership are the first port of call to make sure that those issues are managed on the school grounds. But we also then, of course, work closely with local area command to make sure that any of those violent incidents are managed more fulsomely. I am not sure, Mr D'Adam, if it would be useful for my colleagues to talk a little bit further about that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I will just wait for a moment. I obviously read on the weekend about the terrible situation at Katoomba High School, and I note in the account that there was initial report of harassment. That would have been notified under your notification system, would it not?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I think if you are referring to Katoomba High School, it is important to note that there are current matters afoot in court, and I do not think it is appropriate to talk about the specifics of that matter. I can say that, as you can well imagine, we work very closely with police when we are asked—and we are often asked while there is an investigation occurring—to put any kind of internal investigation on pause while that investigation continues. But it would not be appropriate to talk about the specifics of that matter while it is before the court.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I am more concerned about the procedural aspects—what lessons the department has taken and whether the systems that were in place in relation to what happened in Katoomba are robust enough to avoid a situation like that emerging again. What can you say to the Committee that will satisfy us that the systems are robust enough to avoid that situation emerging again?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, it would be our expectation that where the alleged incidents have occurred on a school site they will be reported to our incident hotline. Where there are broader incidents in



the community they are often referred to the school and the school will report them, but it is not always the case because it has not occurred on a school site. So if we have an incident on a school site the policy and procedures are clear and they should be reported, if there is violent incident, to the incident reporting line.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Nixon or Mr Dizdar?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** My operational experience is exactly what the secretary indicates. Principals are acutely aware of their reporting responsibilities. I find that principals, in fact, over-report, and we support that. We say to them that no matter how big or small the matter may be, even if resolved at that school level and worked through, that the reports still take place, exactly why Ms Cachia indicated. Because our unit then can look at analysing trends that may occur in a school and make sure that that school gets the appropriate support if there is a pattern, for example, in a particular area or a particular locality or geography or a group of schools, and my operational experience, as I know Ms Nixon would confirm, is that then that support is galvanised.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I ask you then about the answer to question 133 in the supplementaries where you were asked, "Since 2011, how many acts of sexual assault have been reported in the toilets of NSW government (a) primary schools, and (b) high schools?", and the answer that you returned was, "The reporting system used by the Department of Education's Health, Safety and Staff Wellbeing Directorate records whether the incident being reported occurred on or off school grounds only". So you are actually not collecting the data necessary to do the due diligence or the proper analysis. Is that correct, Mr Dizdar?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What I can say to the Committee is my working knowledge of the reporting groups include violence, welfare, emergency situations, physical injury, criminal activity, weapons, health conditions, substances. So it would be my expectation that if you are referring to—did you say, Mr D'Adam, 133?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Yes, the answer to question 133.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That was sexual assault. There are appropriate categories there in which that would be captured under by our health and safety experts that run that unit.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What are they?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I am happy to take on notice the exhaustive nature of those categories because I have just gone off my working knowledge of some of those categories.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I ask about just general incident reporting? Obviously, serious incidents go to the work health and safety directorate, but in terms of behavioural incident reporting, how is that captured by the department? How do you monitor the issues that arise in terms of minor behavioural incidents that might be not a significant threat to the health and safety—like a kid turns up their table or does something disruptive in a class that is not consistent with good behavioural practice? Can you perhaps provide some information on that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr D'Adam, every school has got to have welfare and discipline structures, so they normally communicate with staff how to appropriately report both positive behaviour because we want to encourage the right behaviour in schools and what reward and award systems that leads to, alongside what negative behaviour monitoring is required. It is really important, your question, because it is often low-level things that could be reported—for example, a year 7 student across seven subject areas that then says to the welfare team and the year adviser we need to intervene here, something is going amiss. These are not significant events that should lead to, for example, a suspension or an intervention with the family at that point but there are enough low-level things that the teachers are reporting to for the year adviser and the welfare team to check in. So it is my working knowledge that the schools have systems that they clearly articulate to their staff on how to undertake that process.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** There is no consistent system across schools, is there?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** As you would expect, Mr D'Adam, at Westfield Sports High School, with 2,000 students or close to, they have a down-pat structure and a technology system that allows that to be the case, whereas if I take you to Yeo Park Infants School, with one class, it is a different structure and system that is utilised there. What is important is that the school has a clearly articulated welfare and discipline system that the staff understand, that the students understand, that the community understands.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just follow up on that with the crossbench time? Question 133 was mine. How can the department make a judgement about the design of new toilet blocks if it does not collect data about incidents, assault, sexual assault, in certain types of toilet blocks?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I can answer that, Chair. We do collect the data in an incident report so the information is available, but it is not available publicly for obvious reasons. But that information is obviously held

by the school in terms of feeding through to our directors of educational leadership and to our infrastructure teams as designs for schools are considered et cetera. So I agree with what Mr Dizdar has said there in terms of there is a point in time where you have got a policy response to things, and we have certainly got at that local level all of those—the hotline, the incident reporting, those local things in place—but also we do feed back information around issues that are occurring in schools to the executive.

**The CHAIR:** If incident reporting is fed into design issues, how was it at Mona Vale Public parents have been left absolutely stunned that at that school six years ago two 12-year-old boys were arrested for raping a six-year-old girl and the response of the department was to say, "That happened in the toilets, so now what we're going to do with the new toilet block is have a common space where the boys and the girls intermingle: the boys' cubicle is on the left, the girls' on the right, one unisex at the end, but a common space between the girls and boys under the one roof"? Can you understand the absolute dismay of the parents that this has been the design response to that terrible incident six years ago?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I might ask Ms Nixon to answer that, but if I can just clarify in relation to the incident reporting: the locations are not in one of the text box checks; they are in the free text part of the report, which is why we were not able to extract it and provide it in the answer. But I will ask Ms Nixon to go to the specifics of Mona Vale.

**LEANNE NIXON:** The toilet block you are referring to actually has an open hallway down the middle so that teachers monitor that and it is very visible to everyone. One side is the boys' toilets, one side is the girls' toilets and it is monitored, as all toilet blocks are during break times and during class times in most schools.

**The CHAIR:** But how did the school respond to that incident in 2016 by thinking that a terrible thing had happened in the toilets so the answer was to have a shared space? Is it not logical that a separate space for boys' toilets and a separate space for girls' toilets is the safest way of avoiding these sorts of problems?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I think good design is a really important part of making sure we can avoid these problems, and certainly I have visited schools where all of the facilities are unisex but every door or cubicle opens out on to a very visible area of the school and so it is a really clear and safe space. As Ms Nixon said, we are at work with the Mona Vale school and community to address their concerns.

**The CHAIR:** The other concern was lack of consultation. I know you had a couple of P&C members on a consultative committee, but that does not mean all the parents know about it, and there is a whole range of parents who say the first they knew about it was, some say, a notification to go to the school and inspect the design, which busy people have not got time to do, and then when it was being built. So how did this lack of consultation, particularly after the dreadful incident in 2016, how was this allowed to happen?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** What I can say is as soon as I was made aware of the situation at Mona Vale in relation to these toilets and Ms Nixon escalated them to me, we put in place remediation immediately. I am very happy to provide to you on notice any details of what had occurred up to that point.

**The CHAIR:** Why did the department fail to answer my question on the supplementaries about the number of new toilet designs where the girls' toilets, in particular, the doors had to be replaced because of the case at Mona Vale: they were not long enough, they were not floor to ceiling and there was an immediate problem of boys, for whatever reason—some prank, some other reasons—thinking it was appropriate to put their head under the girls' cubicle door in the shared space?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I do not have every supplementary question and answer with me but I am very happy to go away and find out what has occurred there and what we are able to provide you.

**The CHAIR:** Is it a common problem with the new toilet designs that the girls find boys are sticking their heads under the doors in the shared space, or is it just Mona Vale?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We do not have any reports to suggest that it is something of significant concern. But I am very happy to go away and have further conversations with the teams that lead that work.

**The CHAIR:** But you are replacing the doors at Mona Vale to make them floor to ceiling, yes?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes, we are replacing the doors.

**The CHAIR:** Can I get an answer then as to has this happened at other schools and what has been the cost involved in what is obviously a design flaw? I do not know why an answer was not given in the first place.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** One of the reasons we may not have been able to answer that is because of local works that occur by the school. But I can certainly provide you on notice any that we are aware of at a

central level that have been escalated to us and resolved through the asset management units. Through our work, I will endeavour to get you the clearest answer we can, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Why haven't the boys got a urinal anymore at that school?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will need to take that on notice and come back to you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** You really need to take on notice the fundamental of how boys go to the toilet and why they have not got a urinal at Mona Vale?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** No, but in terms of specifics of the design at Mona Vale school, I will need to take that away and come back to you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** As secretary, Ms Harrisson, do you find this amazing that what had been standard designs of toilets—separate areas and the boys having a urinal—has been discarded for some other theory as to how these areas would work? Have you looked at the Facebook posting about how these toilets operate? Wouldn't any normal, rational person think that is a less safe type of design compared to the traditional approach?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I will refer you back to my previous answer. As soon as Ms Nixon reported to me concerns with that toilet block design, I authorised Ms Nixon to press for the works to occur to address the situation.

**The CHAIR:** Will it be happening at other schools? Can we nip this in the bud and stop this problem from spreading under whatever weird design theory the department has now adopted for toilet blocks?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I can assure you, Chair, we will be taking that seriously in our new designs, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Can I turn to the question that I asked the Minister in Parliament last Thursday. Undoubtedly the department wrote the answer for the Minister about the 52,274 staff members with an employment ID number and a departmental email address but a blank space under "vaccination status" in the spreadsheet. The answer came back to say that only school staff that were currently being paid could attest up until 27 January and the bigger number now is a product of so-called "inactive" staff being included on that spreadsheet. What is the definition used for "being paid"?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** It would be that you have had a pay period in which we have paid you in a specific period of time prior to that point. In collecting that data we pulled off all of the records relating to staff in order to then work out who was captured by the public health order and who was not. Of course, we have focused our attention very much on those teachers that are active in our system and working on our school sites. The number you referred to would include teachers who have separated from the department or who have retired. There are a whole number of reasons. We have not taken their departmental files away and their records still sit with us and so they come up in those systems.

**The CHAIR:** What is the pay period that you mentioned?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will ask Ms Cachia to provide some further detail.

**The CHAIR:** Is it a fortnight or a month?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** It is fortnightly. But I think it is worth clarifying that, as the secretary said, the reason from 27 January why that number of inactive staff appeared on the document that I think you have, Chair, is because we wanted to make sure that if people who were inactive—that is, as the secretary said, have an inactive engagement and are not currently working on one of our school sites—we want to make sure that before they returned to a school site, should they decide to re-engage with the department to work with us, that they were able to go on and vax attest. We see this as part of any other credentialing that you need to do—Working with Children Check, criminal background check et cetera. I think it is a useful cohort to have at the ready because, as you can imagine, we have a very large workforce. We need to have the ability for anybody who is deciding to re-engage with us to work to go on to that vax attest system and actually attest. The other part of that cohort, Chair, are new teachers, people who are joining the department and getting up to speed in terms of their accreditation. It forms a suite of all those administrative things that they need to do to be able to safely work on one of our sites.

**The CHAIR:** You are saying that if there is a casual who worked in a school a month ago for a week but they are not in the current pay period, they are defined as "inactive"?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** No, they would be captured because they are currently engaged within the system to work.

**The CHAIR:** How far back in time does that engagement go?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I will have to take on notice the specifics around the cut-off from an engagement. As you can imagine, a casual teacher works on a day-to-day basis; that is how they are engaged and that is the nature of their employment. But many of them work in different schools for periods of time. Those people are already captured because if you have worked lately, you would be part of the casual cohort that has already attested.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, we are very happy—

**The CHAIR:** You must know for the purposes of providing this answer and the information system in front of you what the cut-off time is. Is it a fortnight? The secretary said it is payment in the past fortnight. Ms Cachia is saying it is some other time period. Is it a fortnight, three weeks, four weeks, six weeks, 10 weeks or 15 weeks?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Sorry if I caused some confusion there. It was that they had been paid in a recent pay period, not necessarily the last pay period. We will take on notice the specifics.

**The CHAIR:** What defines "recent"?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We will take on notice the specifics of that.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: Ms Harrisson is trying to provide an answer. If you are asking a supplementary question of her while she is trying to talk, it makes it difficult for Hansard. She is obviously trying to concentrate on the answer she is giving.

**The CHAIR:** What are you saying—I am interrupting?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** I was trying to do it in a nice way, Chair, yes.

**The CHAIR:** What is the cut-off for being "active" as opposed to "inactive" on this list?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will take the specifics of that on notice. You will appreciate that we have long-serving staff who accrue significant amounts of leave who might take long periods of leave without pay as part of their employment with us, so it will be a reasonable period. I will come back to you on notice on that, if I may.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I think a point to note, Chair, is that if you are a casual teacher who has been inactive and then you have engaged with the system, you vax attest. We make sure that anyone working on our school sites is vaccinated in compliance with the public health order. We are after, in that cohort of people, capturing people who, as the secretary has said, may have been on leave for some time and may be due to come back at some point in the future. We want to make sure that they have got that at the ready so that they can adhere to that public health order requirement as required.

**The CHAIR:** I understand what is said to be the purpose of this, but I am just trying to get my head around the fact that you have come to this hearing having provided the answer on Thursday and cannot actually define what "active" and "inactive" means for the purpose of this question. I would also like to know how many are "active" among the 52,274 and how many are defined as "inactive".

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We are very happy to provide those answers on notice, Chair. I would say that obviously the judgement we are making here is that we do not want to be chasing after people for vaccination status updates who are not required to give one, which is why we have a reasonableness test around that cut-off. I am very happy to come back with the specifics on that.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I have got the active number as well for the Chair, if you require those. Those active people are, in terms of fully vaccinated, 98.8 per cent of our workforce is vaccinated, that is 128,183 school staff; 0.1 per cent are partially vaccinated, that is 137 people; 0.6 per cent are not vaccinated, that is 828 people; and 0.5 per cent have a medical contraindication that has been recognised by the department in accordance with the ATAGI guidelines. That amount is 613. In terms of corporate—would you like me to go on, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** No. We have had these numbers before. It is one of the reasons we are here. Whenever I ask this question about those who have not attested a vaccination status, I get those particular answers. I am asking for who among the 52,274 are active staff and how many are inactive and what is the definition of active and inactive. One of the frustrations this Committee is garnering is that certain answers can be given, but for answers that perhaps do not suit the question of controversy or suit the department, there is no answer available at these hearings. How hard is it, having given this answer to the Parliament on Thursday, to have a clear definition of "active" versus "inactive" and how many are in those categories among the 52,274? Ms Cachia, why can you give me that data but not the data I am actually seeking?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I can give you the explanation, Chair. We are here to help the Committee understand the processes, so I apologise if it is not clear. I think we can say from the numbers that I have just given you that those people are what we call "active". They are actively going onto school sites to work. There is a cohort of people, as we said, in that larger number that you have, who may not have been on site for some time.

**The CHAIR:** What time period?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** It will depend on when they choose to come and work for us, Chair. If you are a casual teacher, and you have not worked for six months, before you go onto a school site to work on a day for us you need to vax attest. A casual is engaged on a day-to-day basis. So once they have attested once, they are in the system as "active" even if they subsequently decide, "Hey, I'm not going to teach for three weeks because I've got something else I need to do."

**The CHAIR:** But of these 52,274, how many are active versus inactive? Because it is a big number, isn't it? It is a huge part of the people in your workforce system—those who have not attested a vaccination status.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Our understanding is that they are all inactive.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Yes.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** From recollection—

**The CHAIR:** They are all inactive now?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** The 52,000 are the inactive—and by "inactive", from recollection—but I do just want to check the specifics because I do not have it here in my notes. It is around 18 months, the cut-off, for being active, or considered active versus inactive, so you will not have been paid within the previous 18-month period, there or thereabouts. But I can confirm the very specifics of that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Why then did the Minister, in the answer written by the department, furnish to the Parliament material saying that that 52,000 included "active" and "inactive" if they are actually all inactive?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Let me take the specifics of that on notice, Chair. In jumping to say the 52,000, I may have been too eager to assist you. But that 50,000 by bulk will have been people who have been inactive over the past 18 months. It may include a small number of people who are on paid parental leave or similar, or unpaid parental leave who are returning to work and therefore starting to become active in our system. So there will be a grey area between the active and inactive.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I think a good way to think of it, Chair, and a helpful way perhaps, is to think of the "inactive" as people who have not yet attested. Once you have attested for us, you do not need to re-attest. So these are people who have worked—

**The CHAIR:** I have now found out that the 52,000 are all inactive and that 18 months is the cut-off. Why was that not the answer five minutes ago?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I did just check with my colleague my recollection, being 18 months. That is my recollection, but I just want to make sure we give you on notice, as I said, the confirmation of that.

**The CHAIR:** All these 52,000 have an employment ID number. If you retired from the teaching service 10 years ago, how do you keep an employment ID number on your systems?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I might ask Mr Withey to provide detail on that, just in terms of our payroll system and why we would maintain people on there for a period of time.

**DAVID WITHEY:** I would have to take the details of that on notice in terms of when employee IDs are rolled off when an employee has been inactive for a period of time. I could come back to you, hopefully at some point later in this hearing with that piece of information.

**The CHAIR:** You are the chief operating officer, but you cannot tell us when an employee loses their employment ID number because they have written to you and said, "I'm retiring now, I'm finished," or "I'm resigning." Wouldn't normal practice be that you would lose your employment ID number when you finish in the teaching service by resignation, retirement or some other means?

**DAVID WITHEY:** No, Chair. I think the normal practice would probably be that that number was retained for a period of time. What I am not able to confirm—but I will take that question on notice—is what that period of time is.

**The CHAIR:** What if someone dies? Do they keep their employment ID number?

**DAVID WITHEY:** Again, within the system I would anticipate there is a period of time where that employee ID number is retained in the system. At some point it will be rolled off, but I would have to take that period on notice.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr Dizdar can provide you with some of the practical reasons as to why that would occur, Chair.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Chair, one of the boxes on the retirement form for those with a teaching background is would they want a casual ID number, whether they intend to do it at that point straight after retirement or down the track. It is my experience that most with a teaching background tick that box so they can have a casual number that verifies that they were of good character and good standing when they were working with the department. These are some of the people who we have then employed under the COVID intensive learning support program. They have got the beauty of choosing when they want to work and if they want to work. From time to time they undertake casual work in schools. You will find that of those with a teaching background, on retirement the vast majority will tick the box to say, "I want a casual number," and will have that number in the system with them and will become active at different points in time post those years.

**The CHAIR:** In relation to the answer that the department wrote for the Minister and the Minister gave to the Legislative Council on 22 February, which was on the same topic of non-attested staff, why was mention not provided in that answer of the 52,274 who have an ID number and a department email address but a blank space, that is, they have not attested a vaccination status? If that was true as of 22 February, why was it not provided in the answer to the Parliament?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will ask Ms Cachia to provide you with some details on that.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** The reason is, Chair, that what we are doing here—I think we need to go back to the purpose of vaccination attestation. The purpose of vaccination attestation is to make sure that the health of our students and staff is paramount and that we are complying with the public health order. Ordinarily, whether someone is inactive or active is not relevant. What is really relevant for the Committee is the number of people that we have working in our schools and the number of those people who are compliant with the public health order.

If somebody is retired and they have been retired for a few years and they are not coming back—some of them, as Mr Dizdar said, come back as casuals for our casual workforce. If they come back as a casual, they will attest before they attend a school site. So I think it is important to just think of this cohort as a way of making sure—it is like a safety net. We can capture anyone who needs to vax attest because they then need to attend a school site. Anyone else in the numbers we have already given the Committee—and these numbers change regularly. I think from 18 to 27 March we have had over 800 new attestations. The numbers of "inactive" to "active" are constantly changing. I

**The CHAIR:** I will come back to try to get an answer to the question that I asked.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Ms Harrisson, I come to the issue of the rezoning of schools in Queanbeyan. We asked several questions about that in the House last week. In response to a supplementary question for written answer about consultation, the Minister replied:

Consultation has been ongoing since 27 May 2020 with approximately 12 consultation meetings occurring during this time.

Can you tell us who that consultation occurred with?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will ask Mr Dizdar to talk to the specifics of the rezoning that you are referring to.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Houssos, this is rezoning in Queanbeyan with two new high schools and one primary school coming on board. It is a necessary part of the operational requirement there.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Just one primary school is coming on board?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** These are new schools: one new primary school and two high schools.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Being Googong Primary School, Jerrabomberra high school and Bungendore high school. Is that correct?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Correct, Ms Houssos. That is quite unusual, to get three schools in that sort of proximity and geography all coming on line together. That has necessitated boundary adjustments for all surrounding schools because our premise in public education is to try to make sure that every school is a viable and strong public school by way of both current enrolments and projections of future enrolments. My understanding, having spoken to our educators on the ground there, is that we have consulted with all of the

relevant principals in that locality around what the boundary adjustments need to look like. My understanding is that we consulted with the regional P&C president for the area and, upon release of the boundaries, we have indicated and provided a feedback form to the community and have contacted each of the P&C Presidents—I think upwards of 15 different P&C presidents—to make sure that they are across the feedback form. If I have got it right, we have given until week two in term two to make sure that we obtain all the necessary feedback and make any adjustments to those boundaries that we put out into the public [inaudible].

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mr Dizdar, I am sure you are right across the fact that the regional P&C president—you just said he was consulted with. He has been very clear publicly and said he was briefed on the changes. Can you tell me what you consider the consultation process to be? Let me say this, when I consider consultation, I think that you are presented with the information and offered the opportunity to provide feedback that may then influence the outcome. It is very different to being briefed and told, "This is what we are going to announce." The regional P&C president, as I am sure you are aware, was briefed on the changes the day before they were announced.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Houssos, it is a very good question. It will vary from context to context. If we have got an established school and we are looking at moving one street, for example, in that boundary we may well consult with the school principal and the P&C president, and it may not require what we have done here in Queanbeyan with a public opportunity for a feedback form.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Sorry, Mr Dizdar, before we talk about what is going on now, let us talk about what happened before the announcement. Let us not conflate the two issues. Let us be really clear. I am asking questions about what occurred prior to the announcement. I understand there is a feedback form. I understand parents have the opportunity now to participate. I will ask some questions about that afterwards. I am asking now, specifically, about what happened before the decision was announced.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure. I am more than willing to assist, as best as I can, with your questions, Ms Houssos. I think I did that in the coverage by indicating that we consulted with the principals. I used the word that we "consulted" with the P&C regional president. I think you are saying, "That is not consultation, Murat, it's 'informed' or 'briefed'." I am happy to take that on notice. What I got informed was that there was a consultation with the regional P&C president. I indicated that, on release of the feedback forms, we have made contact with all of the relevant P&C presidents to make them available and we have a thorough public consultation that is out there, and it should be the case.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mr Dizdar, the answer that was provided to the Chamber, or to myself, said that there were 12 consultation meetings that occurred between 27 May and prior to the announcement. When you say that there were 12 meetings, were they all with the local principals—is that who the consultations were with?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Houssos, I would have to take it on notice if those principals were done as a group, all together, or were done in geographical groups or individually. I am not across that. What I do know is that they were all consulted with, but I would have to take on notice the specifics of what that looked like.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I am interested in knowing were those consultations just with principals. Who was in those meetings?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure. Let me take the detail on notice. Because that is a bit of detail that you are after, that I do not have in front of me.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That is not a problem. Can you tell me if any of those consultations occurred with the local member of Parliament?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Around the boundary changes?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I would have to take that on notice. I am not sure myself.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Are you aware if the local MP was briefed prior to the announcement of the boundaries?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I would have to take that on notice. What I do know is that the local MP is briefed of the public feedback process that we have created. I do know that we have been in contact with her at an executive director level and director level on the ground and taken her across what the suggested boundary changes are, the community feedback mechanisms are, the contact we have made with P&C presidents. But I would have to take on notice your specific question about whether there was any briefing prior to the release of the boundaries. I am not across that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And if there was a briefing with the local MP can you tell us when that occurred?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, separate to the briefings I have indicated—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I understand.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** You are asking me about prior to the release—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Prior to the release. My questioning is specifically about prior to the release.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure. Let me take that on notice and get back you to.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Thanks very much. I understand what you are saying; this is a very significant change in terms of new schools coming online and so there is a need for a bit more of a radical redrawing, perhaps, than there normally is.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Are you able to tell me if the local MP is usually consulted when redrawing school boundaries?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Normally, it is my operational practice and coverage that we would take the local MP across that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Usually, you would?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Anything of significance that impacts on multiple schools, not the one street example I gave you but multiple schools, normally, we would. Normally, we would.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And, usually, is there a public consultation process?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, that is not my experience. Normally, what we would do is, we would certainly work with the principals of the new schools, the impacted schools, the geography that we are covering. We certainly would intersect with the P&Cs, because they have got current children in the system and have a strong vested interest in what that would look like. They would be given about how we go about the consultation. We would not necessarily do an open feedback forum that allowed anyone from anywhere to give input.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** But you would understand, Mr Dizdar, that families moving into an area often closely consult with school boundaries?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** They do.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** It is part of the consideration when a family moves into an area.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** They do.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I just want to be clear. You are saying that, at the moment, if there is a change to that school zoning prior to them starting school, there is no consultation with those families?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Houssos, as you would appreciate—and we have given this answer in other budget estimates hearings—with the revised enrolment policy, if you are in area for a school and the enrolment boundary changes and you have got siblings, you are still able to attend that school because you were in area when you were living there. The boundaries have been changed by the system, so you are still entitled to attend. So a person in that situation may not be aware of the enrolment policy, but they are actually not impacted—if they have got a sibling, they can still attend because we are the ones that have changed the boundary. It is for subsequent and future enrolments.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes, but there are still families who are affected who would have strong views and you are just explaining that they have no ability to feed into that process at all?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, I am not indicating that at all, Ms Houssos. What I am indicating is that under the policy they have got a safeguard in place, which is great, and I concur wholeheartedly and I said that on major changes of this kind we would consult with the P&Cs of the relevant schools. They have an important voice to provide in any subsequent changes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Are you able to tell me when the brief was prepared that advised the Minister that you were considering changes to the zonings?



**MURAT DIZDAR:** I can do that on notice. I do not know that we—we would have asked the Minister to note the changes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I understand that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It is an operational matter, so we would have asked them "to note".

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Would the Minister have been told prior to the local consultations beginning on 27 May?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I will have to take on notice, like I said, when the brief was sent to the Minister's office.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. I am interested in knowing if the Minister was alerted to the start of the process.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Let me take that on notice because that goes to the concept of the briefing that you are referring to.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I am also interested to know if the Minister was briefed through the process.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure, I can take that on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And then, when the final decision was made, when the Minister was briefed on the final decision.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There has not been a final decision. That is why we are out and in consultation with the community. The final decision will not be until mid term 2. The consultation will close on Friday of week two in term 2. We will have to take the feedback on board, and you would expect us to be diligent with that feedback. There may well be information that is brought to our attention through that forum that says that we need to recalibrate those boundaries that we have gone out with. When you seek feedback there may be some good, pertinent views that have come through that need to be taken into account. We will then provide a final briefing of note to the Minister with what we suggest as a department should be those final boundaries.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** How many times have you previously reviewed decisions using this kind of feedback mechanism?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** In my operational experience, boundary adjustments are a constant. I have been formerly the executive director in what was Ultimo. So I was in Sydney in a part of the State where there is strong growth and demand for public education, so boundaries were constantly being monitored, adjusted, considered. Another large-scale one—inner Sydney, recently, that we spoke to the Committee on. My operational experience is that these are constant. We are always examining the planning data. We are always listening to our principals around what current enrolments and future enrolments look like. Because I said to the Committee, "Our job is to make sure that every public school is a viable and strong public school," so it is a constant, and it is certainly a given when you are looking at a new build.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mr Dizdar, if you can provide on notice—I do not expect you to have this here today—how many boundary changes for schools there have been this year, last year and the year before that, by calendar year.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. Why don't we do our best, Ms Houssos, on how many boundary changes—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I appreciate that, thank you.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** —noting that they vary from moving one street to what we are describing here.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I understand, and I am happy if you want to make that distinction between minor and more significant changes, but I am interested in how many.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We will work with our school infrastructure colleagues and see what data we have got.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I appreciate that, thank you. Mr Dizdar, what is the standard process for consultation that usually occurs? I understand you have outlined a process that has gone on for—I think it started in May last year and obviously the announcement was in March—quite a significant period of time. Is that the normal process, consultation with local principals or briefing of the local P&C representative? Is that the normal process and is this public feedback usually provided as well?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. So, the bare bones of a normal process where there are a number of schools impacted, Ms Houssos, would be that the principal has been briefed; it would be that the relevant P&C has been briefed; and mechanisms to capture input from the P&Cs, such as the feedback form we have used. On ones that impact on multiple schools, on ones that are smaller in scale is what I am trying to describe, that will not be necessary.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So, when you say you have briefed the local P&Cs, does that mean you go to the local P&C specific, or the specific local P&C affected, or does that mean that you brief the regional P&C and you expect that their process briefs them?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It could be both, Ms Houssos. It could be the regional P&C and it could be then the relevant P&Cs. It could be phone contact to indicate what the information looks like. It could be attendance at P&C meetings.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. Can you take that part on notice to tell me whether you do usually attend local P&Cs or whether you usually brief the regional P&C?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I am not sure that we need to take that on notice, Ms Houssos, because what I am trying to help you with is to indicate that we would make contact with the relevant P&Cs. That could be for the P&C president and it could be the coverage of the info and that suffices, or it could be that they want us to attend a P&C meeting as well.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mr Dizdar—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Contact is made, information is provided, and the feedback mechanism is then, you know, available.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes. Mr Dizdar, when I am interested to know is: Is there a document in the department where you go, "Right, we're changing the boundaries. Let's pull out this 10-step process." I am interested if you can just provide to me on notice. I mean, I do not—I would place on the record and I would reiterate what the Chair said, which is that we did find some of those answers to questions on notice provided last time were quite evasive. I am looking for a specific step-by-step process. Obviously we have other avenues that are available in the House to try to pursue and to find those documents, if we need to. Let's save us all some time. Let's just get, if there is a 10-step process, what is that 10-step process?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Sure, and I do not need to take that on notice. There is not a stepped-out document.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** So there is not?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There is not a stepped-out document on boundary changes. What I have been unpacking to you—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I am sorry. I misunderstood. There is, or there is not?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There is not a stepped-out document on boundary changes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What I have been explaining to yourself and the Committee is how we operationalise small and larger boundary changes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** But surely there is some kind of standard operating procedure, or are you saying that you reinvent the process every time that there is a boundary change?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No. I am not saying that at all. I am saying that the operational arm of the department, which is the directors and executive directors that work with School Infrastructure, has an operational way of going about this as well—that is well known and well understood—and enact that to good effect.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay, but I am just trying to get a sense. There is community uproar down in Jerrabomberra, in particular. I am sure you would be aware of that. I have seen several emails that were sent and addressed directly to you, Mr Dizdar. I know I have received many representations on this issue. I know that the department is receiving representations on this issue. I know that the local MP is receiving representations on this issue. I know that you have established a special website to provide feedback on this specific issue, so it is clearly a red-hot issue. I am interested to know whether this is the way school boundary changes are normally handled, or whether this is different.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What we have done—I am across the correspondence you refer to. I have had people write to myself and it has been captured as part of the feedback. Let me reiterate to the Committee that this is a good problem to have. This is three brand-new public schools coming on board that are necessitating the

boundary changes in a very close-together geography of existing schools. So, this is not boundary changes that are just being thought of on the cuff of a whim or wanting to make adjustments to schools. This has been necessitated by three new schools and a thorough process has been put in place after engagement with the principals and the regional P&C to make sure we are capturing—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I think it is important, Mr Dizdar—I do not like interrupting you—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I will take that—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I do not like interrupting you but I think it is really important because you have just repeated that the regional P&C was consulted—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** And I am just going to take a point of order

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And I am just going to correct—no, you do not need to, Wes. My time is about to run out but I think it is really important that we do not do that.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: I am going to continue to take a point of order. You have actually just admitted, Ms Houssos, that you have interrupted him—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I have been very patient.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Well, I think 18 minutes of questioning because Bryce lost the seat twice is probably not the best way to use your time.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I am going to take—

**The CHAIR:** We will not take that as a point of order. We will just move on to the questioning, please.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** If the Deputy Chair wants to start with personal character assessments, then we can start. But let's just have a productive day, shall we?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** We shall. I just do not know if it is productive.

**The CHAIR:** Next question, please.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mr Dizdar, can you tell us how many of these boundary changes have been reviewed previously and overturned?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Houssos, I have done my best to answer your question. It is a similar one to the one you asked earlier. We are constantly looking at boundary changes. They are an everyday practice in schools, particularly in schools that are experiencing growth, particularly in schools where there are new schools slated in its surrounds. These are constant things operationally that principals, directors and Infrastructure are looking at. It is my experience that when we take P&C feedback, principal feedback in the normal processes we use, we make adjustments to boundaries.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Mr Dizdar—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We make adjustments in line with that feedback. That is why we have gone out in this locality, to get the feedback. If there are sensible—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Mr Dizdar, we are just about to run out of time. I have just got one question.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Well, allow me to finish. If there is sensible and poignant feedback that we have missed in releasing those boundaries, we will need to make adjustments to them.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mr Dizdar, I am happy if you want to take it on notice if you can just provide me—you have told me you will take on notice the number of them taken. If you can tell me the number of those that have changed as a result of public consultation—consultation outside of the department.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What I will do, Ms Houssos, is take it on notice and work with my Infrastructure colleagues to see if we keep that data.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Is it still the department's answer that of this 52,274, they are all inactive going back 18 months?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I think the thing I just want to make sure we are clear on in this is that 52,000 people are people who are not required to be vaccinated, and that is why we have them as inactive and

we are not pursuing them. They need to be, in order to be considered active—it is as I said before: It is 18 months since you have been active in the system. If you have not been active in the system, we do not need you to be vaccinated and so we are not going to come and ask you to vax attest in our system. I believe that number updates quite regularly and it is a kind of live number on the system, so I understand that as of today it is around 44,000 inactive on the system, with that figure constantly in flux as either people are removed and rolled off the system, in the process we indicated earlier, or become active and, therefore, are required to get vaccinated and to attest in the system.

**The CHAIR:** Can you explain that then how in the last couple of days I have been able to speak to several of your staff who work for you every day and who have been able to find their employment ID number on that list?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I would need to take that specific on notice. That is not something that I would be aware of. I can ask Ms Cachia if she has any further information.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Cachia, how can I speak to a number of your staff who work for you every day and who find their number on the employment ID list of what was the 52,000, now the 44,000? How can that be possible?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I think, as the secretary said, we would be happy to investigate that and come back to you but I suspect that the reason is because, of that cohort in inactive who are not vax attested or perhaps have not been working for us for a while, they have not been compliant with the public health order; and, because they have not worked for us for a while, their employee ID would show up on that list.

**The CHAIR:** No, no. They worked for you last week, every day.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** If they worked on a school site—is that what you are saying?

**The CHAIR:** I am not saying where they work but they work for the department and were paid by the department every day last week.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I will have to take that on notice. That is highly unusual and I would need to know the specifics of the—

**The CHAIR:** It is a very unusual. Can I just come to my frustration—

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Can I say that if we do have those issues in our data, we of course want to make sure that we are going through and clarifying that and ensuring that the data is accurate. I am very happy to come back to you on notice with those clarifications.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Can I just come to my frustration? I have tried four different ways to get a number on the casual staff who have been identified as noncompliant on your records. I have tried through the department, through estimates, through a question on the notice paper and then the supplementary. The supplementary answer you gave last time was to refer to Question on Notice No. 8383, which was a "none" answer. Why is the department so reluctant to give the number of casuals on your database who are noncompliant with the public health order?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I will take that, Chair. It is because of the nature of the way casuals work. In our workforce, we have permanent full-time teachers, we have temporary teachers, we have casual teachers. When you are a casual teacher, your engagement with the department begins and ends on any given day. The casuals who are currently working in active engagements in schools will be vax attested and will be part of the numbers that we provide the Committee in any forum, either this or on notice. That number changes regularly, as the secretary said, because a casual may not have worked for a while and then decides to work. We do not investigate casual noncompliance because those people only work from day to day or for periods of time. What we do is we approach it by saying, "If you are a casual teacher and you are engaged with us, when you come onto a school site you need to have vax attested," so we can be sure that casual teachers who are working on site are vaccinated and they are vax attested. Casuals who are inactive for whatever reason working somewhere else, doing something else, are part of that inactive list.

**The CHAIR:** On 22 February, in this answer to me from matters raised last year in the Parliament, the Minister said, "Correspondence was also sent to approximately 1,000 casual and temporary staff who were also identified as noncompliant advising of the allegations of misconduct", and that they could not teach on a school site. What is the latest number there of how many casuals have been advised by the department that they are noncompliant and they are ineligible to teach?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** It is about characterisation. It is not simply saying, "You're noncompliant." What we have done, Chair—and we did this when Novavax came out—we wrote to everybody and told them, "If you want to re-engage with the department as an employee, whether that is casual, temporary or permanent, you would

need to be vax attested." That is why we wrote to them and told them that because we want to make sure that before people come on to site they are compliant with the public health order.

**The CHAIR:** You did that for Novavax. When you say you wrote to everyone, how many people was that?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I will have to take the specifics of the exact number of how many letters we have sent to people on notice, Chair. The substance of what I am saying is that we want to make sure that people are compliant. That is the overall objective and purpose, therefore if you are a casual teacher with a casual number, we have written to you to tell you that we would like you to be aware that before you come and re-engage with us you will need to vax attest.

**The CHAIR:** You did that for Novavax saying, "Novavax is now available. Please go and have the vaccine. If you do that, you'll be able to teach"?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I use Novavax as one example of a letter of communication that we wrote to our staff. Prior to that and well before the public health order came into effect on 8 November last year, we wrote to our staff several times to inform them about the changes in the public health order and what it meant for their employment.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Cachia, have you got any recollection of the email that was sent to you by Justin Cheung, the senior briefings and correspondence officer, on Wednesday 23 February, "Subject for approval: Unattested staff and eCPC flag"?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, if I may, if there are questions about specific documents it would be useful if we could have access to them.

**The CHAIR:** It is Ms Cachia's own email that was sent to her by her senior briefings and correspondence officer. What is an eCPC flag?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** If I may, in terms of due process it would be helpful for Ms Cachia to be able to assist the Committee if she had a copy of that in front of her. She may or may not be able to access her email from February.

**The CHAIR:** I am asking her a question. Has she got a recollection of the email sent to her by Justin Cheung on 23 February about unattested staff and an eCPC flag?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: Perhaps what might be a fairer option is that Ms Cachia be permitted to recall the email and perhaps this line of questioning could be done after the break, so she has an opportunity to read it and refresh her—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** That is not a point of order.

**The CHAIR:** I am assuming that the chief people officer would have a recollection of this. It was a week before our last estimates hearing, and she responded to the email. It was headed, "Unattested staff and the eCPC flag". What is that flag?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Chair, is the question, "What is eCPC"? Is that the question?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** ECPC is like a flagging system, Chair. Say you are a casual teacher and you go onto a school site to do a day's work as a casual. You attend the site. You may have worked somewhere else last week, so you are already vax attested. If you are not attested, the school staff member who is charged with looking at your vaccination status will have a flag in the system. Also, if you are booking a casual for the day, there will be a flag to say whether or not somebody is attested. If they are not attested, that flag will come up. That is what the eCPC system is.

**The CHAIR:** That is what the flag is. Can you remember how many people you told were flagged and not attested as a product of this?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Chair, I really want to be helpful to you and answer the question, but unless I can see the email and give some consideration to it—you will appreciate that Justin Cheung works in my team; he handles hundreds of pieces of correspondence every day. So I would need to have a look at that to be able to give you a fulsome answer.

**The CHAIR:** He was seeking your approval, and you gave it straightaway, to send a letter to 9,000 staff that they had this flag and that they were not attested and were not eligible to work in schools. Do you remember he also said you were sending out a text message to each of the 9,000?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** People Group works very closely with the COVID task force and, obviously, as an executive team we work through the processes that we are going to follow as a department to comply with the public health order. I have not seen the email that you have from my team, but I would say that it is very much part and parcel of the administrative process and procedures we follow to make sure that we are constantly reminding our staff who are not attested that they do need to be attested before they attend a school site for work.

**The CHAIR:** There were 9,000 casuals ineligible to set foot on a school site as of 23 and 24 February. Six or seven days later when I asked those questions at the estimates committee, you said you would take it on notice. You said it was easy to access and you would come back later that day. You never did, and you still have not provided the number. Why is it, Ms Cachia, that it takes a member of Parliament to find a document for you to actually give the truth to this Committee?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Mr Latham, I do give the truth to this Committee. That is what we are all here to do.

**The CHAIR:** Why did you not in this instance?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I can answer the question—

**The CHAIR:** Six days earlier you authorised 9,000 letters going out to casuals. I asked how many had gone out. You said it was easy to access, and a month later, here at this hearing, you still have not provided the information.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Chair, I will answer the question. I am here to tell the truth, and that is what I do on every occasion. Firstly, I do not think that there is anything untoward here. I think that casuals will make a decision to attend a school site at any given time, so the number is constantly moving. It is not a static number. We have new casuals coming into the system who may not have worked for months, and so the number constantly moves. In terms of your reference to me not coming back on the last occasion, I may not simply have had the opportunity to do that. I apologise if I did not do that. I am certainly happy to give an updated number on notice, but the number constantly changes, Chair. That is why it looks like—it is a number I should have mentioned on the last occasion. That number now would be quite different to the document you have, which I have not seen.

**The CHAIR:** I am talking about 2 March when I asked what the number was, and you said you would come back later that day. You did not. I asked the supplementary. It was also taken on notice, and no number was provided. The only reference that was given was for me to go to my own question No. 8383, when again no number was given. Ms Cachia, the number was clear; it was 9,000. It is in an email that was sent to you by Mr Cheung. Do you recall on Thursday 24 February at 9.30 a.m. when he said he was sending the letters and the SMS out to the 9,000, you answered, "Approved"?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, if I may, I think Ms Cachia has indicated that she is very happy to consider the email and provide you with the information in response to it. I am conscious that she is currently commenting on numbers and data which she may not have the full context of without the information in front of her. So I would appreciate her having the opportunity to consider that, because I do want to make sure the Committee is given the information that you are requesting.

**The CHAIR:** As the secretary, do you acknowledge there was every opportunity—in fact, five opportunities—to provide that number of 9,000 and a deliberate attempt was made to keep this Committee in the dark?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I do not accept that there has been any deliberate attempt to keep the Committee in the dark. I do not have the questions in front of me that you are referring to. I do not have the email in front of me. I cannot confirm they are asking for the same thing. I am very happy to take it away and look at it, as I have indicated, and make sure that we are giving the Committee the right information.

**The CHAIR:** I asked five times for this number, and six days earlier the chief people officer authorised an email from her staff member to send a letter out to the 9,000. Apparently there has been no recollection of that in the months since, not on the day, not on the supplementaries, not on notice and not earlier under questioning. Can I go to Mr Withey. Mr Withey, do you recall also approving this particular email from Mr Cheung and sending out the 9,000 on Thursday 24 February? You wrote, "Ditto".

**DAVID WITHEY:** Again, I do not have the email in front of me. I receive a large—

**The CHAIR:** I am not asking that. I am asking, do you recall approving the 9,000 on 24 February?

**DAVID WITHEY:** Without the detail of the email in front of me, I do not have immediate recall of that but I am very happy to look at the email and take it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** You are happy to sit here at this estimates knowing the 9,000 number and never pipe up and say it was 9,000?

**DAVID WITHEY:** Again, I do not have immediate recall of that number. We deal with an inordinate large volume of emails into my office and Ms Cachia's office every day. I am very happy to take a look at the detail of that email and come back to you on notice.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Chair, could I just add to supplement that—and I hope this is going to be of assistance—that 9,000 casuals does not mean that they are noncompliant. All it means is that they have not yet attested but they have not also worked at one of our sites. As they decide that they want to re-engage—and they may not decide so that group will be different now. It will not be 9,000; it will be a smaller number perhaps because somebody will say, "I want to do some casual teaching," and then they will attest and go onto a school site. The 9,000 does not bear necessarily a correlation between people who are noncompliant, and they will not be investigated for noncompliance. We are simply writing to them as a department to say, "You are on our records as a casual teacher and if you want to come and work for us on any given day, we will require you to vax attest so that you can be compliant with the public health order." I think that is all this is about. As the secretary and Mr Withey have said, we are more than happy to have a look at the exact emails that you have a copy of and we will provide the Committee with a fulsome response.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Cachia, that is not what this is about. What this is about is that you knew the number. You were asked the number and you did not provide the information when asked. That is the problem. You knew it.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Cachia, on what you have said then and what you think this email is about—and it is an email that was sent to you from your staff—why then would Mr Cheung say at the beginning of the email, "Following up on the next steps from our executive paper"—it was not just an email, it is an executive paper—"on unattested staff and the placement of the flag, which includes, one, notifying active staff"—not inactive—"of the requirement to attest prior to being engaged by a school." These are active staff who are being told, "You can no longer work in a school." Is that not correct?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I would have to have a look at the email, Mr Latham.

**The CHAIR:** I just read it out to you.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I am unable to go into the specifics, but I can assure the Committee that I have not misled the Committee. I take my appearances here very seriously, as we all do, and I acknowledge that I may not have come back on that day. I may not have had the time to do it or I may not have been called to do it. It may have slipped my mind. I think I have answered the question to the best of my ability.

**The CHAIR:** Why would you consider this not to be a contempt of the Parliament?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Chair, I might just suggest that—

**The CHAIR:** Secretary, why would you consider this not to be a contempt of the Parliament.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: For procedural fairness, given there has been an indication from both the person you are questioning and the secretary—

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Mr Withey as well.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** —and Mr Withey, that fairness would dictate that both respondents have the opportunity to avail themselves of the email, I am sure that they will have an opportunity during the break, which is coming up shortly, to seek the email out and re-evaluate it and come back to you with some more answers after the break.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. It was sent on Wednesday 23 February 2022 at 5.49 p.m. to Mr Withey and to Ms Cachia.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the consideration.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Given that the witnesses have obviously got access to this information, they can produce that so that we have the information available for the next session.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Can I please confirm the specific data that you are after so we can make sure that we are identifying the right one just in the—

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** It is the same thing I have asked five times and being told that it was easily available, but it is never produced and that is the number of casual staff unattested, active in the system who have been flagged that they are not allowed to set foot on a school. The number is 9,000, which clearly would

help a lot, massively, with the staff shortages we have all over New South Wales. Can I further ask: I am assuming most are casual teachers, but are there any among the 9,000 who are non-teaching support staff? That is a question too.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Okay. We will take that away and see what figures we can come back with within the time frame of the hearing, and if not we will take those specific figures on notice.

**The Hon. MARK LATHAM:** Can I ask: What is the status of the section 83C review of the Catholic Education Office Diocese of Parramatta where school funds have been used to purchase two parish properties with no apparent educational use and the very clear suggestion that these properties have been purchased by Mr Whitby, head of the diocese, to bail out a parish priest who is a friend of his in financial trouble in the management of the parish? What is the status of the investigation? Given the clear inference that this may well involve fraud—the misuse of public funds in the manner I have described—have the police been notified?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, obviously with matters currently under investigation and of interest to the Committee, I will make sure that we provide information that we can back to you on that issue. I do not have any details of that current investigation with me today, but I am very happy to take that on notice and come back to you.

**The CHAIR:** Under section 83C reviews, is it the practice of the department to notify the police if there is a clear fraud?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Where there is reason to notify the police of potential criminal activity, we would absolutely notify the police of that in our standard procedures.

**The CHAIR:** Is anyone able to tell me the stage that the investigation is up to?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am happy to, in the break, contact my colleague who leads this panel. You will appreciate that it is not something that I would delve into day to day or try and influence the decisions of. It sits as an independent panel that runs these investigations, and it would be appropriate that it does so. I am happy to check in on the timing of that and come back to you.

**The CHAIR:** Just to clarify and repeat that my understanding is that the school funds were used to buy two church parish properties that have no education use whatsoever and it is part of a bail-out of a parish priest. The allegations are very serious. If we can get an update on how they are being handled, that would be appreciated. My time has expired. We are near enough to the morning tea break so we will take a 15-minute adjournment. Thank you.

**(Short adjournment)**

**The CHAIR:** We will resume the hearing. I turn to the Labor Opposition for questioning.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Cachia, I wanted to draw your attention to question No. 185 in the answers to supplementary questions. The department was asked, "What is the teacher rate of absence due to COVID in 2022?" Your answer was, "It's not possible to determine COVID-related sick leave." Given the evidence that has been provided earlier today around work, health and safety notifications, how is it possible that you do not know how many teachers have called in with COVID?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I do not have the answer in front of me, but I will endeavour to answer the question. Mr D'Adam, teachers who have COVID and, indeed, all staff are required to notify the department that that is what they have. Sometimes a casual teacher will have COVID and they may choose to be at home, or they may be at home with parental duties as somebody in the family may have COVID, so they may be looking after those people at home. Because I do not have it in front of me, would you mind reading the specific question that was asked?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The question is, "What is the teacher rate of absence due to COVID in 2022?"

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, if I may, where we can help the Committee with that question is that we can provide details of the number of staff who are absent because they have COVID. What we cannot do is provide any details of that in relation to casual staff, as Ms Cachia replied, because they do not have quite the same requirement to report to us if they have COVID and have not been on a school site. Also, we do not fully capture the data in relation to those who might be in isolation because they are a household contact. We would know that they are off for a week locally, but we would not necessarily know. I am very happy to come back to you with the specifics we can provide.



**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** If you had the data available, why was it not returned in the answer to the question?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** The question you asked—if I heard you correctly, Mr D'Adam—was, "How many are off because of COVID?" In relation to that, as I just described, we are unable to determine the total number of staff who are absent because they either have COVID or are a household contact. What I have just indicated to you is that I am very happy to come back on notice with the specifics of those staff who have suffered from COVID and have reported that to us.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** In the answer that was returned you said that, "Staff also have the option to apply for special leave if they are ill from COVID or are required to comply with isolation protocols." Is that correct?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** That is correct, but they are not required to, Mr D'Adam. They may, but they do not have to and not all of our staff have done so.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Why not?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, I would be an example myself. Last week I was in isolation because my daughter had COVID. I have not claimed special leave as a requirement for that. I continued to work from home in my duties. Some staff will be unable to do that also, so they may or may not access that special leave provision. I am very happy to provide on notice the numbers of staff who have accessed that special provision alongside those who have also had COVID, if that would assist the Committee.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you advising staff who have accessed sick leave that they could have accessed special leave?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** All of our staff have access to their leave entitlements in relation to COVID matters. It is published on our website and we regularly update our school leaders through an often daily email depending on the nature of the events. It is called a sitrep and it goes out to all of our school leaders to inform staff as well.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I want to clarify, special leave is available if you are sick with COVID yourself or if you are required to isolate because you are a household contact. Is that correct?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Correct.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Has that been communicated to all staff?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes, it has.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** When was that communicated to staff?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I can come back to the specifics on that, Mr D'Adam, but it would have been quite early on in the pandemic and then repeated in various updates as we have experienced COVID through the system. We have been very transparent with our staff on their entitlements. Our intranet page has all of that information available to staff. We regularly flag to staff the need to go back to that webpage and stay updated with events. That is one of our most viewed intranet pages, as you can imagine. As I indicated, in terms of assisting the Committee, I am very happy to provide you with the numbers of staff who have suffered from COVID and provide you with the data that we have on those who have accessed the special leave provisions in relation to COVID.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Mr D'Adam, can I just supplement what the secretary has said there in relation to the question and answer that you have in front of you. As we said, we will go and dig further into the data and come back to you on notice. But I think, as a system in terms of sick leave, the system incorporates all types of sick leave. That may be where the nuance in the question has been difficult to tease out. It also includes non-COVID-related sick leave as well. But, as the secretary said, we will endeavour to do a breakdown. It would probably have to be site by site, to be honest, in terms of those numbers coming through for specific COVID-related issues, and that is probably why that response has been more global in nature.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Will you undertake to advise staff who have accessed sick leave instead of special leave that they can have that leave re-credited and the leave adjusted to special leave?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am very happy to provide that assurance to our staff in the next update that we put out to all staff, yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I want you to categorically confirm this: If you are sick yourself, you can access special leave.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I am advised that that is not the instruction that has been provided to staff in schools. Mr Dizdar or Ms Nixon?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** My recollection is that on numerous occasions, including principal live streams that have been almost weekly across the last two years and including sitreps—or situation reports—that are emailed to principals almost daily across the last two years—we can certainly go back—there are a multiplicity of occasions where we have relayed to our workforce what are the leave arrangements under COVID.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, Ms Cachia can provide you with the detail and the specifics of what leave you can access for what purposes.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** In terms of casuals, which I understand your question related to—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** No, it is not related to casuals.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** We provide up to 20 days' special leave, which is in addition to people's regular sick leave. As Mr Dizdar said, we are very transparent about it. There are multiple points at which we inform our staff, including on our staff intranet, of the types of leave that they can access if they are sick.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I clarify so that we are talking about the same thing.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You indicated that the question related to casuals. It did not relate to casuals. It is relating to teaching staff, whether they are permanent, temporary or casual. You can confirm on the record that staff in those categories all have access to special leave in the event that they are individually sick with COVID.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, I am just conscious—I do not have it up in front of me. I will endeavour to get it during the hearing. There has been, obviously, consistency sought throughout the public service. I want to make sure that we give you entirely the right information here. There is certainly special leave available, should it be required by staff if they are unable to access sick leave. But I do just want to check that.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I can break down the cohorts. Sorry, Mr D'Adam, I did assume that your question was not just about COVID, that it related to casuals as well. I will step through them. We have extended COVID special leave to a maximum of 20 days for casual staff. You will appreciate that that is because when you are a casual teacher, that is all built into your daily rate of pay. In terms of other staff, as I said, there is 20 days' maximum special leave. If you are sick, you do take your own sick leave and not that additional special leave. We have granted special leave on occasion to allow people to have time to go and get vaccinated or to care for somebody at home who has COVID at the time.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Now we get the actual facts, which is it is not correct to say that they have got access to special leave, permanent or temporary staff, in the event that they are individually sick with COVID.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** That is correct. That is my understanding. If you are sick with COVID, you take sick leave, Mr D'Adam.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Actually, if you are sick with COVID, there is a presumption that you have gotten it at work and you should actually be accessing workers compensation. But we will get to that. If someone is taking sick leave, you are recording the reason for their sick leave, aren't you?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes. As I indicated, we are aware. I am very happy to provide to you on notice the number of staff who have been off work because of COVID. Yes, we specifically require that reason to be stated.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You are able to provide the data around how many teachers have been absent because of COVID because you are collecting it on the basis of people accessing special leave and those who are accessing sick leave on the grounds of COVID.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, I can provide you with the two specific data points the number of people that have taken sick leave and declared to us that it was COVID. We have asked. Our staff are required to do that under the public health order if they have COVID. I can provide you also with the number of people who have taken special leave. I will need to also in that answer be clear about whether or not we can break out those that are taking special leave because they are in isolation due to a household contact having COVID or whether they are taking special leave for another reason, which may be granted locally. I will just need to check

whether or not we can disaggregate those numbers. If not, I am happy to provide you with the total number of staff that have taken special leave during any particular period that you are interested in, I think you said "2022" for this answer, and just put that proviso on it—whether or not we are able to disaggregate those that were on special leave because of COVID.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I can provide some information, which I hope will be of assistance, Mr D'Adam, in relation to that. Obviously, as I said, for casuals the pay rate includes—it is a daily rate, it is an all-in rate. So a casual member does not get leave like a permanent staff member would. Casual staff will be granted COVID-19 special leave where they have got a confirmed casual booking and they need to isolate due to having been exposed to COVID—as you rightly said, there is a presumption that you picked it up at the site—because they are a household or close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, or where they have confirmed that they are caring for somebody with COVID. I hope that is of assistance.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Yes, thank you. You just advised the Committee that it is possible to determine whether someone is absent on sick leave on the basis of COVID. My question then is, why in the response to question No. 51 of questions taken on notice at the last hearing did you say it is not possible to determine COVID-related sick leave?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Because the question, as I recall you reading it to us, Mr D'Adam, was not whether or not people were absent due to sick leave for COVID but because of COVID, and that categorisation of "because of COVID" we are not able to provide the specifics on due to the nature of household contacts and whether or not people accessed leave for that purpose. As I have indicated to you, I am very happy to provide you with the data on the number of staff that have been absent because they have had COVID this year. I am also happy to provide you with the data of those people that have taken special leave during this period and, if possible, to disaggregate within that total number the number that took special leave for COVID-related purposes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It is clear from the text that the statement is flatly wrong based on the—

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I do not concur, Mr D'Adam. We answered the question that was asked.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Cachia, given the presumption, given that you know how many people have accessed sick leave, why is it that only eight people have accessed workers comp?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I think it is to do, Mr D'Adam, with the way in which workers compensation works. There is, obviously, different regimes, depending on the nature of the condition that you have. We offer, as I said, special leave for casuals, even though we are not technically required to do that. For permanent and temporary staff, they have access to sick leave. You are quite right in saying that if you contract COVID during the course of your employment, during an engagement, you are presumed as a standard presumption under our New South Wales legislation that you contracted that at work. On the last occasion, I think, we talked about the process for people to notify health and safety that they have got an ongoing issue in accordance with COVID. What would ordinarily happen is that if you contract COVID and you are working, you would advise your school principal that you have COVID, that you need to take a period of time off. You take that as sick leave. If you have an ongoing issue or, indeed, from the first period in which you have COVID, you can also concurrently make an application—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Cachia, can I just bail you up there.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Sure.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The presumption is that if you have got it, you have gotten it because of work. So irrespective of your actual condition, if you are absent from work because of COVID, whether you are isolating and reasonably well or not very well is irrelevant. Right?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: I am going to bail Mr D'Adam up there because Ms Cachia was answering the question. Given that she was not able to complete the answer, she may well have broached some of the issues that Mr D'Adam is about to touch on.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** No. She was not going to. I want to—

**The Hon. WES FANG:** I would suggest, Mr D'Adam, you cannot pre-empt what Ms Cachia was going to say.

**The CHAIR:** I note the point of order. Let's allow the question and the answers to proceed.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I might move on. Given that there are only eight teachers who have sought workers compensation, does that not suggest that something is dramatically wrong with the advice that you are providing to staff?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** No, it does not.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** There is a presumption that they are on workers comp. There should be no reason why every staff member who has contracted COVID who has not been not at work is not lodging a workers compensation claim. Are you actively discouraging people from lodging workers compensation claims?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** No, we are not.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, by no means would we be actively discouraging people from lodging a workers compensation claim. It is the individual's responsibility to lodge that claim. We have made clear to our staff on all of our guidance on our intranet that that option is available to them. We do not have an automatic process that does that for our staff but we do have the information out there for our staff to support them in making that claim if they wish to do so.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** And we have staff members in work health and safety who can assist people to make an application for workers compensation. As the secretary said, there is absolutely no reason why somebody would not lodge a workers compensation claim, unless they did not think it is appropriate. So I do not think the number eight bears any relevance to whether or not the system is working. I think the system is working. People who are taking—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** There are clearly thousands of teachers, Ms Cachia, who are off because of COVID. How is it possible that only eight people have sought to lodge a workers compensation claim?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order: Mr D'Adam again interrupted Ms Cachia while she was in the middle of her answer.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Thank you. The answer to that, Mr D'Adam, is likely to be that ordinarily somebody will contract COVID, they will take a period of sick leave, and then if they are okay to come back to work, the sick leave expires. If I just can come back to the whole purpose and regime under which the workers compensation process works, workers compensation is designed to support an employee through a period of ongoing medical need. It is designed to work with an employee to make sure that we are supporting them in order to be able to return safely to work. It is designed to support them in the payment of long-term unemployment should they be unable to come back to work. So, for example, if you contracted COVID—and you are right: There is a presumption that you would get that in the workplace—you may get what is called long COVID. You may have some sort of ongoing respiratory problem. I am not sure the nature of them. There could be a number of different things. I am not a healthcare professional. But should this go from a sick leave issue, where you contract COVID and come back to work after a period of sick leave, to an ongoing issue in relation to your symptoms and lingering symptoms that are causing you injury and illness, you would make a workers compensation claim.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Cachia, I do not need to have the workers compensation system explained to me. The department maintains an arrangement for top-up pay in workers compensation. Isn't that correct?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I believe so. Again, I will have to take specifics on notice if the question is—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** That is a situation where if you are on workers compensation, your pay is topped up to your normal weekly pay from your sick leave. Is that a fair summary of how the system works?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** The systems works, Mr D'Adam, so that you are generally not out of pocket—that is, you would be paid at the rate that you would ordinarily be paid, yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So there is no financial disincentive for people to access the workers compensation system in preference to sick leave. If they access sick leave, that is coming out of their own entitlements. If they access workers comp, then that is obviously a cost that is fully met by the department.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** As is sick leave.

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

**YVETTE CACHIA:** That is right.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Cachia, do your employment terms provide for a KPI around reducing the workers compensation liability of the department?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** No. What we are focused on in health and safety and, indeed, as a department is, like any organisation, making sure that we support our staff through their workers compensation period—any period that they are off work—to ensure that they are returning to work in a safe way. As I said, it involves making sure they are getting appropriate medical treatment and that they are appropriately positioned to return to work if and when they are able. What we are very focused on is something that is really important across all workers compensation regimes in all organisations and that is making sure we case-manage those cases very carefully by keeping in regular contact with people who are off work as a consequence of workers compensation, to make sure that they are getting what they need from us, but also to make sure that we are liaising with them as the employer, because they will often be going to medical appointments or dealing with our insurer et cetera. It is a process whereby we make sure that they have got that adequate support not just with the insurer but with the employer as well.

**The CHAIR:** Could I just come back to the question about the Parramatta diocese, the Catholic education office and the for-profit activities of Mr Whitby, the executive director? On 24 January, Carolyn Walsh, the Chair of the Non-Government Schools Not-For-Profit Advisory Committee, wrote to Mr Whitby saying the committee had agreed to recommend to the Minister that she declares St Madeleine's Catholic primary school, which purchased these two properties with no education use, to be operating for profit pursuant to section 83D (1) of the Act. Has the Minister accepted that recommendation and made the appropriate for-profit declaration?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will need to take the specifics of that one on notice, Mr Chair. I have attempted to contact colleagues who would be closer to this information than I and I was unable to do so in the break, but I am very happy to come back to you on notice with the specifics of that.

**The CHAIR:** It is 2½ months ago. How long does it normally take for the Minister to accept a recommendation from this Walsh committee?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** In part, it will depend how long and how complicated the matters are in terms of preparing the briefing. I will take that on notice, because I want to make sure that I do not do anything that impacts on the investigation in my answers. So I will come back to you on notice, if I may.

**The CHAIR:** Is that possible before the end of this hearing or that will happen subsequently?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** It will happen subsequently.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. It just looks like a very, very serious matter that needs urgent attention.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** It does and that is why I really want to make sure we do not disrupt the investigative process by me making comments today that could influence that.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Cachia, the email sent to you by Mr Cheung on 23 February—you have had a chance to look at it. Please tell me that the 9,000 staff who were sent the letter—that should have been notified to this Committee, shouldn't it?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I do have a copy of the email that was sent to me in the break and I have read it. I see here it says, "Letter to be sent to approximately 9,000 staff on Thursday 24 February", and then "Sitrep communications for principals" et cetera. Then it goes on to say, "Note, it is very likely many of the staff who are not currently working in schools do not access their DOE email address." So this would include, from that, a presumption that they include inactive staff. I do think, given that I do not have all of the material that preceded this email, that it would be appropriate to take that on notice. I think it is really important that we are very specific about the question so that I can give you exactly what you require because, as we have said this morning already, these groups of people that we are writing to can often include permanents, temporaries and casuals. So I would like to give the Committee exactly what you require.

**The CHAIR:** I got the temporary number, but I never got the casual.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I would like to have an opportunity—as I said, the number moves and the casuals will often be in the inactive cohort and then move to active while they take on a role in a school on a particular day. So it would be useful to have a look at all of the information that preceded this. It appears to be a chain of approval emails following what we would have had as a group meeting to discuss the process and procedures to follow for unattested staff. So I am absolutely happy and keen to get the Committee exactly what you need.

**The CHAIR:** Can we get a copy of the executive paper that is mentioned in the first line after the message from Paul Wood? And I just again draw your attention to the fact that point number one of this action is notifying active staff of the requirement to attest.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, if I may, I will take advice on whether we can provide that paper to you and, if we are able to, I will. Can I confirm, I think one of the areas we might be able to assist here is to

give you the number of noncompliant casual staff who have had their approval to teach temporarily withheld. That would indicate that they were both active in our system and noncompliant. If that number would be of use to the Committee, I am very happy to provide that on notice to you.

**The CHAIR:** How many other letters of this kind have been sent out with the text message to tell them to go check their email address? The Minister on 22 February said that 1,000 casual and temporary staff had received correspondence. We find out today that approximately 9,000 staff unattested received the red flag on 24 February. Since 24 February how many other of these processes have been undertaken?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We will come back to you with the specifics of that on notice. If I may, that 9,000 staff figure that you have quoted does not necessarily refer to casual teachers as Ms Cachia indicated. It will likely include corporate staff as well as temporary teachers and others. I just want to make sure we are clear on the number. I think in the email, as I discussed with Ms Cachia in the break, it refers to staff rather than specifically casual staff.

**The CHAIR:** Isn't "ECPC" "electronic casual payroll claims"?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Again I just want to make sure that we confirm the nature of that on notice, if we may.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Mr Withey, you have had a chance to look at it. You said, "Ditto". You did not think to pipe up on 2 March here at estimates to say that the number is 9,000?

**DAVID WITHEY:** As I said in my previous answer, my recollection having checked that email in the break it was part of broader efforts to make sure we were encouraging people to attest where it was necessary.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, 9,000.

**DAVID WITHEY:** I remember that detail. I did not recall, and I did not recall when you asked this morning.

**The CHAIR:** Have you dittoed any other of these processes—bulk letters that go out to staff saying they cannot set foot in a school?

**DAVID WITHEY:** We have made a number of efforts to encourage our staff to attest. As the secretary said, we will have to take the detail of the—

**The CHAIR:** That is not the question. The question is have you got any recollection of other things you have dittoed—bulk correspondence that goes out to thousands of staff saying they have been red flagged and are not allowed to set foot in a school.

**DAVID WITHEY:** I do recall that we have made a number of efforts to contact our workforce in its totality to encourage them to attest. We would have to take the details of the timing of that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** You are taking that on notice as well.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Could I just confirm, I do not think it would be appropriate to assume that the 9,000 are a number of staff. I think we need to be careful in drawing conclusions from the number of 9,000. As I indicated, I am very happy to come back to the Committee on notice with the number of noncompliant casual staff who have had their approval to teach temporarily suspended, which would be the best measure we have of those that have not attested from our casual pool.

**The CHAIR:** As secretary, Ms Harrisson, can you see the breakdown here where it takes a member of Parliament to have access to the documents before the Committee is provided with any kind of accurate answer? I tried five times to get this number and every time I was referred to non-answers, like on a merry-go-round.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I note that the questions you are referring to are all slightly different in their nature. I am very happy to take on notice, as I have indicated—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You cannot rely on that, Ms Harrisson.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Point of order—

**The CHAIR:** No, I welcome Mr D'Adam to use my time.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** I am sure you do.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I have a question.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** You can ask the question when Ms Harrisson has finished her answer.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, we will let Ms Harrison finish, and then I will cede my time to Mr D'Adam.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** The questions you referred to, having read through them in the break, varied from how many casual and temporary teachers were advised by the department that they were no longer eligible to teach in New South Wales government schools due to vaccination status through to how many casual teachers were teaching in New South Wales government schools. Those questions are quite different, Chair. That is why, Mr D'Adam, in relation to your question, we can only answer the questions we have been asked. We do so as openly as we are able to.

**The CHAIR:** At estimates on 2 March we had a discussion about how many letters had gone out. I asked how many letters had gone out. Ms Cachia said, "Chair, certainly, and we will get you that data." She went on to say:

I will have to look through my notes. But I can give it to you today ... I should be able to get those very quickly.

The email exchange was six days earlier, and the answer was clearly 9,000.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, we would obviously want to make sure. We write to our staff on a number of different issues, and Ms Cachia will have wanted to go and check that they are aligned to the issues that you were raising in the hearing. I do not have those previous questions in front of me.

**The CHAIR:** Secretary, that is not going to wash. A witness here, under oath, clearly has an obligation to say, "Actually, six days ago we sent out 9,000 of those letters that you are asking about". Is it not just as straightforward as the constant attempts from this department to withhold information for some cover you are running—maybe for the Minister, maybe to avoid controversy? It is a debasement of the process of this Committee.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Chair, it is obviously a difficult situation given you are the Chair, but I am not sure that that question would be in order.

**The CHAIR:** Why not? It is factual. Anyway, I will go to Mr D'Adam.

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Point of order: I think Ms Harrison wants to respond to what was put by the Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, Ms Harrison.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, some questions have been raised. I think they have been answered openly and honestly. I think some of the challenges you have raised there are unfair and unjust. The witnesses have been clear that they come here to answer the questions honestly. They do so within the best of their recollection and the best of the information that they have available. That is what we have come to do, and that is what we will continue to do. There is no sense on the side of the department that we are seeking to cover anything up. We are very happy to answer the questions we are asked.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, but when we ask a question, Ms Cachia will always produce data to say that the vaccination rate is 98 per cent or 99 per cent. But these 9,000 letters clearly show that was never the case. I raised that 7,000 teachers had been sacked or stood down, and you would jump in to say that is not the figure. The 9,000 letters indicates it was the figure.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I do not concur with that analysis, Chair.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** There are many examples throughout the responses where the department has felt the need to provide supplementary information in an effort to try to elaborate on an answer to a question that was not necessarily a precise response to the exact question. How can you possibly say that just because the specific terms of the questions were slightly different, you were not in a position to provide sufficient elaboration to actually meet the expectations of Mr Latham and his question?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, I think in my answers today, where we have been able to clarify what it is you were seeking, I have been very clear that I am happy to provide you with the information.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Harrison, to your knowledge, have any of the staff been told by executive directors to delete anything—emails, documents, drafts et cetera—that may be controversial in an attempt to deny access to FOI and Standing Order 52 applications?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I am aware that within the department we regularly refresh our training and engagement of staff in relation to the State Records Act and what are appropriate records to keep. Beyond that, certainly, I would not endorse any communication beyond the requirements of the State Records Act that we take anything away for any other purpose.

**The CHAIR:** Are you aware of the report in *The Daily Telegraph* that a school principal—I am assuming this was in the Illawarra—was told by departmental officials not to provide to the media or to document any accurate numbers about staff shortages in case it causes controversy for the Minister?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am aware of the media reports. I am not aware of the email specifically from within our own system.

**The CHAIR:** Did you investigate if it is true?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I had a conversation with Mr Dizdar, and he might be able to provide you with some further information.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Dizdar?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I have had a conversation with the secretary. I am aware of the media reports as well, but I do not know who they refer to. That is what I relayed to Ms Harrisson: that I am not sure who the senior officer is that is referred to.

**The CHAIR:** I move to Walgett high school, Mr Dizdar, and the Connected Communities processes. Very disturbing information is now coming out, particularly in a *Sydney Morning Herald* report, that the highest funded school per capita in the State is a den of violence, absenteeism and failing results. What is the department going to do to turn around this catastrophe? Parents are reported as saying they will travel an hour or so to get away from Walgett Community College to get to other schools, and I think Lightning Ridge was mentioned.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Thanks for the question, Chair. I met with the school reference group myself on Friday across teams to hear from them about their perceptions of how we were travelling. I am assuming we are referring to the high school, because there is a primary school and a high school there. They covered territory in relation to both schools with me. I can say to the Committee that we have got a long way to go to get the required improvements that we are after as a system for Walgett Community College high school, but we are seeing some traction in some areas. We have had a new leadership team there for 11 months. Mr Batchelor is the executive principal there; I have met with him on numerous occasions so that I can, through my role across Connected Communities, support him.

If the Committee wants the areas where we think we are improving outlined, I am happy to do so. There has been a focus, certainly, on year 7 and year 8 attendance. There was a real concern about the drop-off rate from primary school to high school in attendance. As the Committee would appreciate, if we cannot make those improvements early in secondary education, it is going to be even tougher along the way. We have engaged a lot closer with the TAFE, and I was able to meet with the TAFE coordinator on Friday to both engage students that have not been attending for anywhere between six and 12 months—so they have become school refusers, completely disengaged—and to talk to the programs and initiatives that are available for them as well as a real pathways focus for each individual student in the high school.

There are some improvements in that area. We have employed a former TAFE institute director to work hand in hand with the leadership to support them around the pathways initiative. Chair, there are significant improvements that are required around the literacy and numeracy results of the students. We do not shy away from that. We have also made some improvements around staffing stability at the school. You will remember there was a line of questioning at a former estimates hearing around vacancy rates at Walgett. We have had greater staff stability across these 11 months, which is also helping at the site. I would also call out, as the Chair and Committee would have read, that this is a whole-of-government response that is required and that is being provisioned around what is a very challenging and complex community that the school also services.

**The CHAIR:** Is it not the truth that Anne Dennis of the AECG is calling the shots? She wants an all-Aboriginal school with zero police presence and basically is trying to implement a Black Lives Matter philosophy to school education in Walgett. It is said, Mr Dizdar, that you refused to tell her how wrong that is, so too Michele Hall. As a product, the school has melted down because of the wrongfulness of that philosophy.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't accept that premise at all, Chair. Anne Dennis is the local AECG president; she is also a member of the school reference group. As you would expect, it would be incumbent of myself and my executive director for Connected Communities to both engage with the AECG and the reference group, which we do do. My engagement with her at all times has been solutions focused, certainly calling out the challenges from her angle and certainly called out with a lot of passion and commitment for the children in the area. That has been my experience in working with Anne Dennis.

**The CHAIR:** Do you take the view that because she is Aboriginal you can never tell her she is wrong?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Again, I do not accept that premise.



**The CHAIR:** How many times have you told her that she is wrong, she is ruining the school?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Allow me to answer your question. I do not accept the premise. She is a valued stakeholder as the president of the AECG, like I would engage with any president of the AECG in any locality. She is also a founding member and continuing member of the school reference group. So it would be incumbent on me to engage. We have quite rigorous debate, in my experience, when we debate the challenges of Walgett. I also say she speaks to me about challenges in other localities as well. So I find her to be a passionate contributor to education in the area. That does not mean I agree with everything she says, nor does she agree with everything that I say.

**The CHAIR:** Why is it that the department failed to release to Mr Banasiak the numbers on the school safety notifications and the police call-out numbers for Walgett and you had a set of excuses about privacy? Why can that not be done on a confidential basis to give Mr Banasiak the answers that he needs on notice?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think that line of questioning was asked earlier and applies here to Walgett. I am more than happy to meet and to provide in confidence that material. We protect, as we indicated in the answer we provided, the privacy of individuals. Again, this is a challenging school context, and that can add to the challenge and the complexity unnecessarily. But I am happy to provide that on a confidential basis to Mr Banasiak and to reach out to him.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Dizdar, are you aware of allegations by teachers at Walgett that the executive director, Connected Communities, Michelle Hall, engages in bullying and intimidation of Connected Communities executive principals, and this has included changing digital file names to create a false case against an executive principal at Walgett?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I have had no such claims put to me in my time as the deputy secretary for Connected Communities. I am across—although I do not know what the substance of it is—a PES investigation with an executive principal, if that is where you are reading that is coming from. All I know in my supervisory role is that there is a PES investigation, but I do not believe anything has been communicated to me around those claims.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mr Chair, I am going to come back to the issues at Jerrabomberra high school, or the new Jerrabomberra high school. The first question I want to ask is, Mr Dizdar, we talked about the current consultation process that is going on with the public now. When are you expecting to make a decision about the final zones?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Houssos, my understanding is that on the Friday of week two, term two—I can only think in school week terms; I do not have the dates in front of me—Friday of week two, term two the consultations close. We will then look carefully at all the representations that are made and look for any suggestions or improvements that are valid and make those decisions as expediently as we can. I think I said in my earlier answer we are looking at mid-term two.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Mid-term two.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mid-term two. As you would appreciate, Ms Houssos, it would depend on the nature of the representations and how many representations we get, but we know that we need to provide stability of understanding for those boundaries to those school communities, so we will be working as hard as we can.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Is there an appeal process after that or is that the final decision?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There is no appeal processes with boundaries. We communicate, like I said, on a small scale when there is one street change to when there is considerable community feedback that we are seeking here. There are appeal mechanisms under the enrolment policy when you lodge an in-area or out-of-area application; there are appeal mechanisms that exist there.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I might go back to Ms Harrison, because these are probably questions for School Infrastructure NSW, who are not here today. Can you tell me what the current projection is for the new Jerrabomberra high school?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am sorry, Ms Houssos, because Mr Manning was not requested today, we assumed there was not going to be a focus necessarily on infrastructure, so I do not have that information with me. But I am very happy to take those details on notice or for you to follow up with Mr D'Adam through the inquiry hearings that you have coming up.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Perhaps you could take that on notice?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Very happy to.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I noticed in the answers to questions on notice that you provided to us—I do not have it but I can find a reference if you need it—that there will be 9.5 full-time new teachers at the Jerrabomberra high school next year. We can assume that is for years 7 and 8 only, is that correct?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr Dizdar might know the specifics on which years are commencing when.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. I do not want to get it wrong because there is Bungendore high school as well.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes, they have got 9.5 there as well.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The year groups we are starting with, I believe it is to be 7 and 8, but if that is not correct, we will come to you with the correct information. I believe that to be the case.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** My understanding is that the initial stage of Jerrabomberra high school is going to be built for 500 students. Can you tell me, and I am happy for you to take this on notice, if there is a second phase of Jerrabomberra high school planned?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Very happy to take that on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Thanks. And if you have commenced planning that stage?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** And what the capacity for that second stage would be?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes, I am very happy to provide those details on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** My understanding is that the initial documents that have been submitted to the council are for 500 students.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Very happy to take the specifics of any second phase, the capacity of a second phase and whether we are in the planning stages or not.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I can add to the secretary's answer that I am across some of the facts that the core facilities are bigger than what is required for the initial establishment, and core facilities are, as you know—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** For all the admin buildings, is that correct?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. So that if there is a required expansion of school size, that we have already inbuilt and factored that in and it is already built for that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Perhaps, Mr Dizdar or Ms Harrisson, you can tell us what is the capacity of those core buildings? My understanding is it is 800 to 900 students,

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We can get the exact number.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Thanks very much. I will just move on to a different issue now, which is unflued gas heaters. Again, it is School Infrastructure and I understand they are not here. They did provide a really helpful list of all of the schools. If you could provide us with a list of the number of classrooms that have that at each of those schools that would be great. I want to come to the question of the metro and regional renewal projects. This is something we have asked a lot of questions about, but the Government is refusing to release the list of the projects and the percentage contribution of the P&Cs to each project. Ms Harrisson, what is the reason for that?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am not aware of the issues, Ms Houssos, so I will need to take that on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Okay, but it is in the public interest that they are aware of what projects have been funded under a particular program and which projects have not been, and that is previously under the, for example, the Cooler Classrooms program—that is something that springs to mind that we have asked a lot of questions about and the department has released a list of projects. We have asked a lot of questions on this in estimates, I have asked questions on notice, I have lodged questions at other times about this. Can you just explain what is the rationale for this particular project and is this a new policy going forward?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** There is no new policy. I am very happy to take it on notice and come back to you with any specific issues. What I know about this program is that it is also currently underway. A lot of matters will be out to tender; it may well be in relation to the commercial in confidence nature of those local tender processes. I will endeavour to give you whatever we can that is completed and we can always update that

information later if possible. But I am very happy to take on notice what the reasoning is and provide you with clarity on that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I understand you just said that you will provide a list of completed projects. Can you explain—

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will seek to do so once I understand the specifics of what has occurred so far.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I understand that you would not want to disclose the amount that had been budgeted for each particular project. But if something is out for tender, can you explain why you could not tell the community that there is a project that is planned that is out for tender?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am conscious of commenting on things that I do not have the detail in front of me, Ms Houssos. I am very happy to take that on notice. We would very much expect there to be awareness at a school of the local matters that were likely to be taken into account. I expect that to be done as part of the consultation process on those works. Particularly if they are using P&C funds, the community is likely to be aware that there are plans to use those funds. I do not think there is a sense that we are holding things back from a local school community in that context.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Again, before we go down the pathway of calls for papers and things like that, can we just save ourselves some trouble and get a list of projects, even if, therefore, the percentage contribution of P&Cs needs to be privileged? That particular part of it I accept. But I cannot see a justification for a list of projects not being released.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am very happy to come back to you with whatever we are able to provide with any explanation as to why we cannot provide any further information, Ms Houssos.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Can I add the roof renewal program to that as well? That is a similar requirement.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** You can, absolutely.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I want to come back to that question—sorry, it was question 60 that listed the teaching entitlements for new schools opening in 2023. It helpfully listed Jerrabomberra high school and Bungendore high school. There were some other schools that were on that list. Gregory Hills public school, Tallawong primary school and Marsden Park high school are not on the list. Does that mean that you are not anticipating hiring any new staff for those schools?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I might need to ask one of my operational colleagues to comment on the specifics of those schools. We may need to take those on notice.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I will not have the specifics of each of those schools, but normally we hire the school principal about a year out from the school opening so we can include them in the final build. There is an enormous amount of work with recruitment of the staff that we will need with setting up the school P&C et cetera. There is a lot of work in that. Normally we will have the school principal on board. I can confirm that it is year 7 and year 8 for Jerrabomberra and Bungendore, hence the way you would be quoting those figures. We start with the principal and then staff for those year groups. For those particular schools that you just referenced, it would depend on who we start with and the size of staff that we would need for that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Perhaps, Mr Dizdar, you could take on notice the list of schools that you are planning to recruit principals for in the next 12 months.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am very happy to provide that on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** When I say the next 12 months, I mean the list of principals in 2022.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** This calendar year.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes. That would be great.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Houssos, while I said year 7 and year 8 that we have confirmed, I have had it confirmed that we will finalise the boundaries mid-term two for Queanbeyan that we have been discussing. But can I just make sure I come back to you with the correct date for the closing of the consultation? I may have given the incorrect date to the Committee. Let me come back on that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes, that is perfectly fine. There was that list at question 60 saying, "These are all the new teachers that we are planning on recruiting." Is that the extent of the new recruitment

that you are planning on doing? I understand that there are vacancies to be filled and then you have got the new teachers that you are recruiting for the new schools. Are they the only new positions that you will be recruiting for?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** The second tranche of assistant principals curriculum instruction will be recruited through this year. There may well be additional positions that schools establish using their RAM funding, which may also go out to recruitment this year as new positions. There may well be other programs in terms of behaviour support specialists and things. There will be other new roles in the system that are created to support priorities in the system.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Would you be able to provide me on notice a list of those programs and how many positions are expected in each program?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Specifically the school-based positions, Ms Houssos?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes, please.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** No problem.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That would be great. The next issue I wanted to go to was land sales. Again, this is from the questions that were taken on notice. If there are things under tender—I think, Mr Withey, this was a question to you. If there are currently land sites that are up for sale, that is fine. Are you able to provide us on notice a list of the land sales under \$1 million that have already been sold? Actually, let me not add that disclaimer. Are you able to provide a list of the land sales, including those under \$1 million, that have already been sold?

**DAVID WITHEY:** That is probably a question for Mr Manning rather than me, but I am very happy to take away what we can provide on notice on that list.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Ms Houssos, if I may, to give you some context, we currently hold around 300 hectares of vacant land as the Department of Education. Some of those sites are being held to fulfil future educational needs, but others are being disposed of as surplus to requirements. Community consultation occurs during the divestment process for sites that are determined to be particularly sensitive in the divestment. That feedback informs the future plans for the site. You will appreciate that in a community, if there has been vacant land, there will be interest in it. When we dispose of our land, the proceeds are reinvested in the provision of education infrastructure. I think the amount received in 2020-21 was \$2.8 million in gross proceeds.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Sorry, \$2.1 million?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** No, \$2.8 million.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I said \$2.1 million but I wrote down \$2.8 million. That is \$2.8 million in gross proceeds. I have one more question. I asked some questions about the announcement of the new principal at Googong public school. That was on Friday 28 January and the Minister attended. Ms Harrisson, are you aware if anyone from the department spoke to the then Nationals candidate, Nichole Overall, prior to the announcement?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am not aware of any conversations occurring, but I am happy to check with my team on return after this hearing and come back to you on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That would be great. Can you could also provide the date that the brief was requested for the event as well?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Certainly. If a brief was requested, I will provide that. I will need to confirm and come back on notice.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That would be excellent. If it was not requested, can you provide the date that the brief was provided on?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes, sure.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I am concerned by the number around the eight workers compensation claims around COVID, primarily because I fear that it is indicative of a culture in the department that is discouraging the making of workers comp claims. We heard earlier in evidence that Ms Cachia seemed to suggest that workers comp should only be used where there is an expectation that the injury will have long-term absences and a long recovery. I wanted to ask you, Ms Harrisson, are you able to provide on notice the department's performance metrics in relation to workers compensation?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am certainly happy to look into what we can provide, Mr D'Adam. You would appreciate that large organisations do look at their workers compensation premiums. They look at them because it gives you an indication of the health of your workforce. I can also assure you, Mr D'Adam, that any of the targets that may or may not exist in relation to specific premium reductions would not include any COVID impact because we would want to pull that out and look at it separately as its own category. There is no sense in the organisation that people would be incentivised to not have those claims reported. I am confident we have provided the advice to our staff. I hear your concerns that not as many staff as you would expect have accessed that workers health—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Stunningly low levels.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I note that they are your words.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** That was not a question; that was an interjection and you interrupted Ms Harrisson. I ask you not to interrupt her.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I know. I was just saying.

**The CHAIR:** Order! Let us continue.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am very happy for the department to undertake a broader communication in relation to those matters in terms of our staff. I would indicate that it is only almost at the time that you need the workers comp that people might consider putting the application form in, so it is an individual's choice. But I am very happy to make sure and to assure the Committee and to reinforce our existing communications to our staff that workers compensation is available to them if they have contracted COVID.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I wanted to put to you that, COVID aside, if staff are not making workers compensation claims, and there seems to be a preference for taking sick leave, whether that is a result of encouragement from the employer or an employee choice, that is perhaps unclear. But if there is this inclination not to file workers compensation claims for low-level injuries in the workplace, is that not a concern for you, particularly around the issue of occupational stress?

Because I think it would not be uncommon where teachers are feeling under the pump. The system is under a lot of pressure at the moment. Lots of teacher absences and teacher shortages are compounding the pressure that is on teachers. That may manifest itself in occupational stress. That is a workplace injury that should be captured in workers compensation statistics, but that is being masked if people are encouraged to access sick leave. Are you concerned about that, Ms Harrisson?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, I do not want to conflate two issues here. I think we have talked about sick leave in relation to COVID short-term illness versus a need for long-term support through a workers compensation claim for COVID. In relation to occupational stress—and in the broad categories of workers compensation they tend to be referred to as psychological injuries in the workplace—that is certainly something that I think all parts of the public sector with a frontline workforce would be concerned about. The reason we track the premiums for work health and safety is so that we can make sure we are putting the appropriate supports and interventions in place when we see specific concerns raised through that data.

We have had, and continue to have, support for the wellbeing for our staff. We do, when we have specific events that we think could really add to the stress of our staff, such as the flooding up in the Northern Rivers at the moment, we deploy additional support into those areas to provide support for staff. Ms Nixon can give you examples of exactly what we have done in Lismore to that end. We did the same during the bushfire situation a few years ago now, and we maintain that connection and support. We also make sure that our providers of our employee assistance program are available for staff in those circumstances as well.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** We have a limited amount of time. I want to come back to the question about incident reporting data collection that Mr Dizdar touched on. Is that something that is routinely recorded in Sentral or similar?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Are you talking about the behaviour incidents?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Behavioural incidents, yes.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Different schools, as I think Mr Dizdar indicated, would use their own systems. Some will be manual; some will be a system like Sentral.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** For example, what system would a high school in western Sydney apply? Is Sentral the sort of go-to technology?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** The vast majority of our high schools would use Sentral, yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you able to provide on notice how many schools—high school and primary—are using Sentral for the purposes of incident reporting?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I do not know that we would reference it as—we have a particular definition around incident reporting to our work health and safety hotline. Certainly, I am happy to come back to you on notice—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I am talking about behavioural incidents now.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** —with the number of schools that are using Sentral to record their local behaviour data as well as the information they report to us.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** In particular, I am looking at an article that was in *The Sunday Telegraph* yesterday where there was a diary entry.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** That must have killed you to read.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The reporting requirement on behaviour is actually one of the administrative burdens that seems to be stressing teachers out. Do you think that is fair to say, Mr Dizdar—that that is a stress point for teachers?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What I would say, Mr D'Adam, is that meeting the wellbeing and academic needs of our students is the primacy of every teacher's work. Teachers I talk to in my visits to schools take that dual responsibility of wellbeing and academic need seriously and—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** But you can be concerned about wellbeing of students and still feel that the process is causing occupational stress, can you not?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Even when I was back in the classroom in 1997 at Ashcroft High School, it was a requirement of me to make sure that I was reporting both positive student endeavour—I give that axis alongside behaviour concern. We took that seriously as a staff, and I see schools take that seriously because of what I said earlier. You may have an instance of a child with a lot of low-level signals in their maths class, science class, geography class that together indicate that the welfare team, or wellbeing team, should intervene, should interview that child.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Mr Dizdar, I do not think there is any argument about whether it is important. The question is whether it is also contributing to occupational stress for teachers.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Because that is important to a teacher, because that is important to a profession, I would argue that that is core business that is valued. What I would say, Mr D'Adam, is that schools—and we need to support schools to make that as easy a system as possible. When you say, "Do they use Sentral for that?", a lot of our schools use Sentral for their admin platforms, and it could be argued that they see that investment as a way of making this process easier on staff. So I do accept the premise that we can always make those things as seamless and easy for staff, but I would reject the premise that it is not critical and important that staff report on that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I never suggested that it was not important. My problem is about whether it is a stress point for teachers, and you have not addressed that issue.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I am saying the systems need to be as easy and as timely as possible for teachers because their role is fulsome but they would not neglect the role of wellbeing and academic need.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Do they have extra time for those kinds of activities, Mr Dizdar?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** This falls into the area of wellbeing need. If you can have those systems as seamless as possible, then they are not as time-consuming for staff.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Dizdar, coming back to Walgett college, what sort of benchmarks are set for the literacy and numeracy levels, and other qualifications for the student learning support officers and the Aboriginal education officers?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Chair, the school has a strategic school improvement plan, where we set our reading and numeracy targets—the top two bands—like we have for every other school, the Premier's Priorities. I think you are referring, Chair, if I have it right, to the non-teaching workforce.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. When you recruit these student learning support officers and the AEOs, do they have to have a certain level of qualification? Because there is a suggestion by some Walgett teachers that they have very low levels of literacy and numeracy, and also poor attendance rates, and that is part of the problem.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Chair, thanks for clarifying. They are non-teaching roles in our schools. Like all of those non-teaching roles, they would be subject to merit selection processes, interview processes, as well as meeting the Working With Children Check requirements because, as you would appreciate, Chair, they are not on their own in the classroom. They are there with a qualified teacher. We would test their capacities and capabilities through both a written application and the merit selection process.

**The CHAIR:** Do they need a benchmark level of literacy and numeracy, and some kind of academic qualifications to be in the classroom?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** You do not need—I think I am correct in saying—academic qualifications to be a school learning support officer.

**The CHAIR:** Do you need to have finished high school yourself to be one?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I do not believe we stipulate what the entry requirements are. Ms Cachia may want to add to that.

**The CHAIR:** So people who did not get to year 12 can be in the classroom trying to help? Would it not be helpful to have people who are qualified?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. What I would reiterate, Chair, is that we would want skilled, capable and qualified people. I know you are going into minimum levels of literacy and numeracy, and I am saying we would test that through the application and merit selection process. But as you would appreciate, Chair, we also have school leavers who will not have completed the HSC and have gone back through pathways into TAFE and back through university. We would not want to discount those who have taken alternate pathways from also entering that role and demonstrating their capability and capacity.

**The CHAIR:** Has the department advised principals, not just at Walgett but under other Connected Communities schools, to try to help these Aboriginal employees complete their professional learning activities when, actually, they should be unaided in going through that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What I can say, Chair, is I am aware of a number of our school learning support officers who we have sponsored, and we have seen their potential to be effective future teachers. We have sponsored their pathway through teaching. I am reiterating, as you appreciate, they are not employed to be teachers; they are employed to be school learning support officers, supporting the teacher in their practice in that classroom in supporting those learners. We have sponsored a number who have shown their capacity and ability to be future teachers in the system. If any of them required upskilling in any area, then we would do that through their professional learning plan.

**The CHAIR:** The NAPLAN results at Walgett are obviously very disappointing. There is another suggestion that is very worrying, that these teacher aides that you are talking about are helping students to complete the NAPLAN test—that is, they are cheating just to try to improve the results. They are still at a dismal level, but there should not be cheating should there?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I reject that premise outright, Chair. If you have any evidence that would point to any of our workforce doing the wrong thing—is what you have articulated—then we would value that information because that is totally unacceptable.

**The CHAIR:** These teachers have come to me. You have to acknowledge that the environment at Walgett is not one where these teachers can stand up and blow the whistle without repercussions. That is the problem, is it not?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What I would reiterate, Chair, is that we have no material evidence or correspondence to indicate such information that you have. If you have any material of that kind, I would indicate that you please provide that to the secretary. That is practice that would not be tolerated in any public school.

**The CHAIR:** I might suggest that you look at putting in independent observers during the NAPLAN week to see that the process there is genuine. Can I just come to the question of absenteeism because with any school often we look at absenteeism as a function of something the school is doing or not doing. But is it not the truth that in Walgett and these other Connected Communities schools that there is a broader problem in society itself—that, tragically, the level of sexual abuse of children is so high and it happens at night-time from people they know, so the children spend a lot of time out on the streets because it is not safe to go home, and then they sleep by day? In this model of connecting with the community, what is being done to overcome that tragic circumstance?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Chair, it is a very fair question you ask. I have indicated in other estimates hearings how we selected these schools. They are not just based on the educational data, which indicates we have got a

long way to go to get better outcomes for students, but on societal data in these areas—for Aboriginal people in particular—by way of health data, incarceration, employment data, life expectancy. On multiple measures, these communities are doing it tough and it takes a whole-of-government response. We are a very important component, provisioning for the future through education. But, just like in Walgett or any of these 33 that we have as Connected Communities, there is a whole-of-agency response that is required and we use our school reference group to try to galvanise our operations across agencies to get it better for the children that we serve.

**The CHAIR:** What is the practical outcome of that rhetoric? A whole-of-government approach sounds great, but what is the connection being made in the community with these other agencies to say that the monsters sexually abusing children should be arrested and if the children cannot be kept safe at night and get a decent night's sleep, and of course then do not go to school, the children should be put in places where they are safe?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** For example, in Walgett, Chair, Regional NSW has been engaged at a senior level to have whole-of-government agencies at the table, including myself for Education, but my counterparts across agencies, to best tackle the multiplicity of challenges that the community in Walgett are facing. So Regional NSW gets tasked with the whole-of-government response.

**The CHAIR:** What efforts are being made on the two fronts that I mentioned: arresting the monsters and ensuring that the children can get a good night's sleep in a safe place and can come to school the next day?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** At Walgett, specifically, Chair?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, at Walgett.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** My police colleagues are at that whole-of-government agency. They are not only looking at that data from the meetings I have been in, but also incarceration rates, youth crime rates, to best tackle effective community engagement and pathways before these things happen. These are issues that are real, that are tragic, that impact profoundly and are being worked on at a whole-of-government level, not just left to an agency on its own.

**The CHAIR:** Do you think, in the tragic reality of this, it is the problem that all these agencies just find too hard to solve and it is easier to live with the tragedy, turn a blind eye?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It does disturb me to say to you that some of these outcomes cut across considerable time periods. What I do know, having been in those meetings, is that none of my colleagues, including myself, want to give up on these communities. We want to get, in my case, the best education provision; in my colleagues' case, the best provision of service we can. There is a real concerted effort that I see through Regional NSW and my colleagues to continue to work away to make a difference—I think that is incumbent on us in our public service role—and we do. Whilst the negative press certainly does not pick up on some of the small improvements I have spoken to at the high school across the 11 months, whilst not shying away from the challenge, we also want to call out for our colleagues some of the good work that is occurring, to give them energy and zest for further improvement that is required there. I see a whole-of-government commitment to what we are talking about as one of New South Wales' most challenging, complex communities, that deserves government not walking away from it.

**The CHAIR:** To the secretary, is there an update on the "better breeding" inquiry—the principal, seemingly, at Kandos High School who made these remarks and what has happened to her?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I note that this comment came out of one piece of paper in a bundle of many as part of a Standing Order 52 request. Our investigations continue in the department and as soon as those investigations are finalised, I will happily provide an update to the committee.

**The CHAIR:** It has been six or seven weeks. How long does it take to investigate two words?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, you will appreciate that although it is only two words, certainly, as you have indicated, they have significant consequence. There are a number of people involved in the investigation. Obviously there needs to be an evidentiary threshold that can be met and so those investigations continue. As soon as I have an update, Chair, I will absolutely come back to the committee.

**The CHAIR:** When do you expect the investigation to conclude?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I will ask Ms Cachia if she has any details on the expected time line for the investigation. But, as I have indicated, as soon as it is complete I will very happily provide the Committee with an update.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** I would need to check in with the team, Chair, to find out exactly where it is at. I am not sure when the report will be delivered. I will say, though, as I did on the last occasion, that part of the



process involves procedural fairness. As the secretary indicated, it is really important that we follow the process. As the secretary said, as soon as we are actually able to give further information about that, we absolutely will do so.

**The CHAIR:** Did the department consider providing a clarifying or correcting statement to *Lithgow Mercury* which, on 1 March, had a headline, "Education Department hits back at Lithgow High 'better breeding' comment, says claims are 'incorrect'", and then went on to say *The Daily Telegraph* report "has been rubbished by the Department of Education"? Is it not the truth that the Department of Education, in its incompetence, put two Kandos High School documents in the SO 52 that was called for Lithgow High School, and any normal person would assume, having seen those documents in the piles, that they were from Lithgow High School, that the department is responsible for the error and, what is more, the department's initial reaction was to issue a statement blaming the relieving principal at Lithgow High School, Karen Mahood, and then the department subsequently had to apologise to her? How was it the department gave this comment to the *Lithgow Mercury* without owning up to its own culpability?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, you will appreciate, I am sure, that we would provide advice to media outlets multiple times a day and that not all the content of that information is necessarily published. So without the detail of what we provided to the *Lithgow Mercury* in front of me, I cannot comment on what was said versus what was then published. What I do know is we would, absolutely, given the impacts on that community, want to make sure that, as I accept, the incorrect direction of those challenges of the situation to that school was remedied and that the school did not suffer any ongoing impacts as a result.

**The CHAIR:** Can I turn to a video that has been circulating among teachers about the way in which last week, Daryl Currie, the head of PES, sacked a New South Wales teacher of 20 years service with serious autoimmune conditions. This video runs for about 45 minutes and I have watched it. What is the point of these interviews that raise hopes for teachers that there might be some consideration of their circumstances when, in the video, Mr Currie tells this particular teacher he has not considered and he is not responsible for medical or health factors, privacy laws, legal or industrial relations advice, or even that he is responsible for the vaccine mandates in sacking her. Is this not just a cruel, cruel process where people get their hopes up that they are getting a considered interview from Currie when it is really just a matter that they are automatically sacked?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I have not seen the video. I am very happy to receive it, if you wish to share it. I have not received it or viewed it. What I can say is that the requirements under the public health order are very clear for our staff and that the medical contraindications that we are able to take into account underneath that public health order are set out by ATAGI and therefore our room for movement in relation to that is somewhat limited by those factors.

**The CHAIR:** The new South Australian Government has abandoned the mandates for teachers, obviously in response to teacher shortages in that State. Why is the science different in New South Wales? Why are we keeping these mandates when South Australia is leading the way to let the teachers teach and to end the staff shortages?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I would note that, in order to attend school without a vaccination, those teachers are being asked to do a rapid antigen test every day and are required to wear a mask in school sites and are limited in the classes they can teach. So I would just partly provide that context. The public health order is a Health piece of legislation that we are required to implement in our workforce. As long as that legislation is in existence I am required to implement it and we continue to get the advice from Health. We will continue to support the advice that vaccination remains a key part of the defence for keeping workplaces safe in relation to COVID-19.

**The CHAIR:** Have you given any advice to your Minister along the lines that obviously at some stage COVID will pass and that we need to plan for the end of the mandates?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Certainly you will have seen discussion, I think quite publicly by Government, about the fact that we need to move our response to COVID into an endemic state, not a pandemic state, and we are part of those conversations within Government.

**The CHAIR:** Is there any forecast for when endemically we will not need these mandates in New South Wales?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Not that I am aware of, Chair, no.

**The CHAIR:** No. Are you still planning to go ahead with the triple vaccination employment mandates?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We are still encouraging our staff to absolutely get vaccinated. The third vaccination requirement has not been put into place within the public health order and we are currently looking at where and how we implement that through our own mechanisms and whether it would be appropriate to do so.

**The CHAIR:** What? So you are backing away from your earlier statement that you will do the booster mandate?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am looking at the mechanisms and the way that we will implement that requirement.

**The CHAIR:** Have you got an estimate of how many teachers you will lose if the booster was mandated, given the general lower-than-expected rates across the community?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** What I can say in relation to that, Chair, is the lower-than-expected rates of boosters through the community is also linked to the higher prevalence of COVID through the community over the recent weeks because, once you have had COVID, there is a period of time after which you are not required to get boosted. Questions around booster uptake and their impact is probably best directed to Health. At the moment we do not have an indication of the number of our staff that have had the booster.

**The CHAIR:** Right. You really could not implement the mandate anytime soon because you are totally in the dark as to what that would mean in terms of losing teachers?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We are currently updating our vax attest system to include the booster vaccination and once that is available we will start to collect that data from our staff.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Can I just point out that I think you might find that everyone got vaccinated and then the numbers went to 30,000 or 40,000, so people have thought, "Well, what's the point of doing the booster?" So I think that is the bigger factor than lots of people getting COVID. People are looking at the evidence and responding. I assume your teachers would be in some part responding in a similar way. Can I just come to comments? I think, Mr Dizdar, you made these comments on an online forum. Was it Telegram last week when you said the department sees no need to "collect information around the methods used by schools to address staff absences", even though the teachers online pointed out how easy it would be to collect the data on the use of casuals, the number of merged and unsupervised classes in each school. You were not persuaded by the response the teachers gave? They welcome very much the fact that you were on their forum, providing information from a departmental perspective, but how hard is it to collect this data about casuals and merged classes?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Chair, I think you are referring to Yammer where I—

**The CHAIR:** What is it—Yammer?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yeah, where I posted—

**The CHAIR:** I am not up on all this. I am very old. I am a bit of a dinosaur. What is Yammer?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Chair, I think that is a bit unfair.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There are all different social media platforms, Chair. It is our internal department communications platform.

**The CHAIR:** Oh, it was on Yammer? I thought Telegram was Yammer.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Righto. Okay. It was on Yammer, internal. Okay. I have got an internal document.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yeah. I was confused when you said the *Telegraph* because I do not—

**The CHAIR:** I have so many documents, I do not know where they come from.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** —I do not remember talking to the *Telegraph* last week.

**The CHAIR:** No, no—Telegram.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Oh, Telegram. Sorry, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** There is this online thing called Telegram, but this is Yammer.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, Chair. I did post on Yammer.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. You were on Yammer. What about the teachers who said to you on Yammer that you can collect this data about casuals and merged and unsupervised classes because it is quite easy to do that on a daily basis.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yeah. Chair, I did post on Yammer. This was in relation to questions around minimal supervision. We do not keep that data centrally. We have been collecting attendance data daily for an app and those teachers were pointing to: "Why don't you do that through that process?" My answer was indicating that we do not want to add to further data collection burdening the schools. We leave that up to the school to determine how to operationalise. We do not see a need to collect that data centrally.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I want to come back to reporting on student behaviour. This is obviously something that is disproportionately distributed among the teaching workforce because if you have an OC and you teach in a selective school, the chances are behaviour is not that much of an issue whereas in some other schools, the much more difficult schools, you have got a lot of behaviour issues. That obviously generates a workload for those teachers. That is a fair assessment, is it not, Mr Dizdar?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No, I do not believe so, Mr D'Adam. I was a student of a selective high school myself. I cannot tell you that the classes I was in as a student, including myself, were impeccably behaved throughout the seven years—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I am not saying that, Mr Dizdar.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** —and that there was no need for intervention.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** No, no. You are actually—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I was.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You are actually being a bit ingenuous there.

**The CHAIR:** We had bright, witty comments on our side.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** To suggest that behaviour is comparable in selective schools to some comprehensive schools is just not correct. It is plainly wrong.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Well, I mean—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It is plainly wrong.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There can be need to make behaviour referrals in all contexts and there can be need to make wellbeing referrals for students in all—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** My question is about the volume—the volume of behaviour referrals. It is inequitably distributed throughout the system. There are some schools where there are a lot of behaviour referrals; there are other schools where there are relatively few.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I would accept that premise.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Okay. So, in those situations where there is a situation where a lot of behaviour referrals are coming out of a class, how does that then trigger support for that teacher?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** It is a very good question. We use our needs-based funding, as you appreciate, to make sure that student need is met. Our resource allocation model across our equity loadings allocates additionality of funding based on student need, and students that have these needs and require adjustments—both in behaviour, learning, in a multiplicity of areas—would then be and that school would then be receiving the funding to put support programs in place alongside whatever systems support may be needed.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It is no guarantee that the individual students who have behavioural issues attract actual additional support, though, is there?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** But I was just going to your premise that some contexts are more challenging than others. I am just also using that to say, Mr D'Adam, that those more challenging contexts in general tend to attract greater additionality of funding and our leaders of those contexts, our staff in those contexts, pride themselves on knowing their students and putting into place programs and initiatives that meet those needs. They would use that additionality of funding for that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What about the kid who has actually got the disability or behavioural condition? There is no actual nexus, is there?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There is also State office support that comes into play. If we are talking about a particular kid and the school has looked at all its mechanisms and needs behaviour specialist experts to work with the school, then that is a State office resource that comes into play to help that teacher, help the teachers in that school, help the student and help the family.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** If a kid has ADHD, do they attract additional funding?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Our low-level adjustment for disability is the equity line that takes into account funding for students. Then on top of that there is needs-based funding, depending on the student's need, where there might be additional diagnosis that requires additional support.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I see. If there is a diagnosis, they attract additional tied support for that student?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, I think we canvassed some of these issue a few hearings back. In relation to our integrated funding support, which is the individualised stuff, that is a diagnoses basis. We are currently working through how we adjust that to take into account some of those other behavioural-related items that are not recognised as a disability as such. That integrated funding support historically was a diagnosis of a particular disability. Our low-level funding for disability is driven by the collection of data through the NCCD, which is the national data collection, and that is judgement-based by a teacher. Through that loading that comes through the Gonski funding, that is what we then apply out to the schools.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So that is like a package of money that goes to the school. What I am trying to get to is how does the individual student attract the support that they need from the funding? Presumably, the funding is calculated on a per capita basis. You have so many kids who qualify under the low-level adjustment for disability.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** This is where we would expect our schools—for those students that have been identified within a school from the local data they collect, most schools would have a wellbeing kind of executive meeting that would meet regularly and talk about individual cases and the case management support that is needed for individual students. They would seek to implement supports across the school that enable them to support those students. Where they need additional help, they would reach out to the corporate non-school-based service teams to provide assistance.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Do they qualify for SLSO support?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** They can do within the school. The school may well, in those situations, fund additional SLSOs to support particular students in class.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Where a child does not have a diagnosis but clearly the school leadership suspect that the child may have a disorder, a condition, that would attract additional funding, what does the school do then?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr Dizdar will have specific examples, but the schools will in general start by working with the family around the needs of that student.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is there financial support to assist the family to obtain a diagnosis?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** There can be. The school can use student assistance funding if the family require specialist medical practitioners to work with the child for the reporting. There is an access request process, Mr D'Adam, that you may have heard of or come across. That is the process schools and the system use for additional funding on top of the low-level adjustment for disability for a student with higher needs. We have been working with our schools and our experts to streamline and improve that process to make it easier to access the funding. We have had feedback along the way that it can be complex with the reports and diagnosis that is required, and we have been working to improve that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I ask about training for staff who have kids with disabilities in their classroom? How does that work? Classes are put together at the beginning of each year. A teacher probably does not necessarily know who they are going to get until quite late in the year before, if not at the beginning of the school year, so they do not know what the disability profile of their class is. How do you guarantee that the teacher who has a kid or maybe a number of kids who have some disabilities in their classroom has the training capability to be able to support those children? How do you guarantee that that teacher has the skills at the time when they get the class, when they need it?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That is a really good question, Mr D'Adam. Transition is a really important aspect of in-school and across-school. I find schools tend to put a lot of attention and focus on this. When they are going from, let's say, year 1 to year 2 within the same school, you will have the two teachers meet so there is a solid handover from one teacher to the next teacher around—and it could be multiple teachers.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** That is not training, is it? I mean, there is a commitment to ensuring that staff who are dealing with kids with disabilities have the training.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I want to definitely get to that too. I was just trying to describe the handover process. There might be multiple teachers involved in that meeting, alongside the year adviser. Those higher-needs students will be well known to staff because, as the secretary was outlining the learning support processes, every school must have—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Mr Dizdar, I might ask you, if you could, to put the answer on notice. I know my colleague has limited time and she needs to ask a couple of questions.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, if I may, we are entitled to answer the questions we are asked.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, please proceed.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** A learning support team is compulsory in every school context. Those higher-needs students are known across the school rather than just in one particular classroom, because they are a part of the school community, on how to best support them. Then if there is a staff member who is lacking confidence or expertise to handle that student's needs, we would provide them with the requisite additional training.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** That would be identified, Mr D'Adam, at the local school level by the principal in supporting the staff for the year ahead.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** And delivered locally?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Sometimes delivered locally. Sometimes they will draw in experts from outside the system, and sometimes they will draw in experts from within the system.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I have a couple of final things to cover. In the questions taken on notice, question 83 talked about hiring and recruiting academics into mid-year career transitions. The answer said that 10 offers have been given. How many are actually teaching in schools now?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** The mid-career entry program—and I will ask Ms Cachia to provide the details—does include an element of study as well as getting into the classroom. This is the very first time that we have run the program, and it started just at the start of this year. We had the first 50 successful applicants start the process. It is unlikely that they are currently active in classrooms because they would be in the training component of the mid-career transition program.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** Thanks, secretary. Thanks for the question, Ms Houssos. Can I quickly go to an earlier question that you had this morning? I can answer quickly.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Sure.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** You asked a question about international recruitment, and I have just been able to confirm a couple of things for you. We will support visas and relocation in line with other agencies in New South Wales, and we will require that those individuals who are successful in being placed stay in the role for three years. I just wanted to let you know that as a supplement.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Thanks.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** As the secretary said, the program as at 31 March 2022—and, again, all of these numbers continually change, and we will update the Committee as we can—has received 43 acceptances from participants into the program, with seven more offers pending. I do not believe they have actually physically started yet, but I will come back to you on notice and let you know when that anticipated start date is.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That would be great. Thank you, Ms Cachia. Ms Harrison, on reading the answer to question 108 it seems that there has been a net closure of 176 community preschools between 2020 and 2021. Is that accurate?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Sorry, Ms Houssos. If you could give me the question as well as the answer, that would help.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Question 108.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** If you could give me a moment to find the question. But if those are the figures we gave you, I would be confident they are accurate.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Do you monitor for waiting list for community preschools?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Not centrally, that I am aware of, would we monitor community preschool waiting lists. In a particular location, if we see some specific need, we may well go and out and survey and ask questions. But I would need to come back to you on notice with any specifics that we have done on that.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That would be great. You will probably need to take this on notice, but can you provide me a list of the schools that the best in-class teachers have visited in 2021 and 2022?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** The ones that they have visited or the ones that they have worked with, Ms Houssos? Some of their work, obviously, through that period has been virtual rather than in-person, given the nature of the experience. If I could give you both, that would probably give you a clearer picture.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes, I understand. That is completely fine. Just to check, they have a reduced teaching load so they can participate in that. Is that correct?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** They do. The majority, when they were first recruited—and I will need to go back and check how many of them still maintain this particular proportion. The specific starting point was that they taught for 50 per cent of the time and supported the development of other teachers 50 per cent of the time. I know for some, they wished to do more of one part of that role than the other. They might want to do more of the professional development for a particular time and so may have reduced their teaching loads over specific times in consultation with their school. But in addition to that, we provided the school with an additional full-time equivalent to backfill their position. In fact, the schools they came from also got a benefit from the fact that we were taking away one of their best teachers for some of their time to support the system.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Can you provide on notice the list of the 176 community preschools that have closed in 2021 and 2022?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I have three final matters. Secretary, are you aware that the New South Wales police did not launch any investigations and thereby found no evidence of any wrongdoing in response to the Teach Us Consent website run by Chanel Contos. The answer I have from the police Minister shows that, for the obvious reason because all the allegations were anonymous, it was impossible to investigate them.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes. I am aware of that in general terms but not specific terms, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** The department in answering supplementary question No. 124 has basically said it too was not able to investigate any of these matters inside schools for which you are responsible. Do you think it sets a worrying precedent that the curriculum has been changed in response to a website from which government authorities established zero confirmed evidence?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I think that, firstly, the changes to the New South Wales curriculum occurred before the website was put in place. You will recall from our answers that we had initially reviewed the curriculum. This is really a matter for Mr Martin and NESA. I am going from recollection here, Chair, but our initial curriculum changes were made prior to Ms Contos' website and we have since put other things under review and then there has been national curriculum changes since then. That is my recollection. I can come back to you through supplementaries if you would like to ask them and I will make sure they are directed to Mr Martin appropriately.

**The CHAIR:** If you can come back with any changes that have been made in response to the Contos website, given the fact that the department and the police have not even investigated any of these matters, and—

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** What I can confirm, Chair, is that the strength and consent content in the K-10 PDHPE syllabus by NESA followed extensive consultation with stakeholders, community, students and teachers and it was implemented in all schools from 2020, so predating the—

**The CHAIR:** From 2020. The Contos website has not changed anything. Is that what you are saying?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** No, it led us to develop a cross-sectorial statement of intent to strengthen the shared understanding and harm prevention for these issues in school communities, and we continue to work with the other sectors on our implementation of that statement of intent, but it is not necessarily further curriculum changes.

**The CHAIR:** In the statement of intent do you intend to investigate any of the matters that were raised on the website? It has been the catalyst, I know, for the Minister having a roundtable and obviously a fair bit of publicity.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I think we can probably all agree that the content on the website provides information and insight that is challenging to read at times. As our answer has indicated, we cannot investigate claims that are anonymous and where someone does not come forward, nor do I think we can ignore the volume of voice that has been given by that website as to how some people might feel in relation to some of the cultures and practices that they have experienced at school.

**The CHAIR:** Do you think anonymous websites are a way to effect change in the curriculum?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** As I indicated, our changes to the curriculum were implemented from 2020.

**The CHAIR:** Are we getting any closer to an accredited list of wellbeing providers in schools so that schools can rely on evidence of achievement and success in what they are trying to do rather than good intentions?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes, we have the first set of approved providers. I will ask Ms Walker to provide the specific cohort that that captures. We are now starting to work through additional providers in additional areas.

**SIMONE WALKER:** There are two stages of that accreditation process. As you mentioned, we looked at things that were in schools. The second stage is looking at well-used, although not centralised, programs, but I can get you the dates of when that will be finished because that review is nearly complete.

**The CHAIR:** What is the evidence base by which you assess the effectiveness of a provider? A lot of them have a celebrity fronting it or publicity or a good spiel. That does not mean they have any proven record of success, does it?

**SIMONE WALKER:** My understanding is that it is a Monash University literature review and evidence-based assurance process.

**The CHAIR:** Are you referring to the one that the department commissioned from the Fiona Stanley institute in WA that showed that a lot of this wellbeing stuff is a bit nebulous and it is hard to pin down any positive impacts?

**SIMONE WALKER:** I have heard of the one that you refer to from Western Australia. I would have to check and see whether that is a considered part.

**The CHAIR:** The department commissioned it at substantial cost. I think it is only a couple of years old. It was another literature search that was ambiguous as to what sort of impacts these programs can have.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Chair, I think what we do know from the data we have from the Tell Them From Me survey, which is global and has a longitudinal study behind it, is that strong wellbeing outcomes for students are linked to strong academic outcomes, and therefore we will continue to look for effective programs in that area that do make a difference to student wellbeing. That will of course require us to have some testing of different programs at certain times, but we should do that under the appropriate conditions.

**The CHAIR:** When do you expect the full list of accredited providers to be finalised?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I think Ms Walker said she could come back to you on the time line for phase two. Phase one is already in place and phase two of those regularly used providers is coming in the coming months, but I will ask Ms Walker to come back to you on notice on that.

**The CHAIR:** Finally, I take you to the answer to supplementary question No. 126, which is another one that I often raise at these estimates hearings. I asked:

What independent evaluation of its open-plan classroom program has the Department undertaken, assessing impact on student learning outcomes?

(a) What did this show?

The answer was:

A growing body of research explains how investing in infrastructure improvements can improve educational outcomes. The right conditions in learning spaces, such as light levels, temperature, humidity and ambient noise all contribute to supporting students' learning.

The Government's investment in the Cooler Classrooms and LED Lighting Upgrade programs are improving conditions in learning spaces to support students' learning.

What does that have to do with open-plan classroom design? The department is spending billions on a certain type of construction and open-plan classrooms. Has there been an independent evaluation of the impact on student learning given the common sense in some of the academic material to say that in open-plan classrooms students can be distracted by the other class up the way and also the noise level because students particularly at the back of the class or with hearing issues cannot hear what their teacher is saying?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Firstly, Chair, to clarify a couple of the points you have raised, we are investing significant dollars into upgrading and building new schools. We are focused on delivering flexible learning spaces that can be deployed to support a number of different teaching styles and approaches. The vast majority of our new builds would have that flexible space that would include breakout areas but also more traditional classrooms able to be configured out of partition walls and the like. We are supporting both. I do not believe we have an external valuation of the nature that you have requested, but I am very happy to look into how we could conduct such an evaluation, given that is not the only method of teaching used in those spaces. They are by and large flexible rather than just an open-plan classroom. They tend to be a flexible learning space where you can partition off for particular teaching modes.

**The CHAIR:** Is it not true that CESE emphasises explicit instruction, which would not include—

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** We certainly, as a department, would also support—

**The CHAIR:** Yes, which is supported.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** That is not done all that effectively in a classroom environment where there are three or four classes in the one space.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** In some of my school visits I have seen teachers engage in explicit instruction in large spaces very effectively. It very much depends on the pedagogy being used at the time with the teacher in the room and the number of teachers in the room at a time. If you have a number of classes together, you might have all of those teaching staff with you and able to deliver a very clear and explicit lesson in that space. I have certainly seen that on my visits to schools. But I take your point, Chair, and I am very happy to come back to the Committee with what we think might be possible in terms of continuing to build our research base and understanding here.

**The CHAIR:** Going beyond the anecdotal, there is an intention to do an independent evaluation of this big spending program.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am very happy to look at what is possible, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** And if the answer was that there is no current independent evaluation, why did you not just say no in answer to question No. 126 instead of going on about Cooler Classrooms and LED?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I think what we referred to in our answer, Chair, is that we have based our approach to design and investment in new and upgraded infrastructure in a body of research. That is the evidence that we have relied upon in developing that insight. I am very happy to go away, as I have indicated, in relation to evaluation.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for your answers. We have a few minutes left. Does the Government have any questions?

**The Hon. SCOTT FARLOW:** Not from me.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** No, I do not. I have been very satisfied with the responses that have been given so far.

**The CHAIR:** Does the Opposition want to take up those three minutes?

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Sorry, I did have a question.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You missed your chance.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Did I?

**The CHAIR:** Mr D'Adam.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I want to ask about this document that I had cause to look at entitled *Every Student, Every School*, which came out in 2012. It had some graphs in it that predicted surging enrolments



for students with both autism and mental health problems. That was the prediction. I want to ask, on notice if you like, if you could provide data as to whether that expectation came to fruition and whether the trendline is continuing to increase, as predicted by this document?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I do not have reference to the document that you are quoting and I have not seen it, Mr D'Adam, but I am very happy to come back to you on notice.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Mr Dizdar knows the document, don't you?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I recall the document but it has been some time.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** A decade, in fact.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Very happy to come back on notice on what we are seeing in the system at the moment, noting it is probably only the reported cases that we would be able to refer to.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I have one other question about the Grow Your Own teacher program, which is part of the NSW Teacher Supply Strategy. I want to know how many participants are now in the Grow Your Own teacher program. What is the status of that?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** While Ms Cachia finds the information in relation to that, we are committed as an organisation and as a lead institution in education to continue to promote teaching as an exceptional career for young people throughout the State and beyond. I would suggest to the Committee that the current debate we might be seeing around some of those issues in the media and beyond may not be assisting us in those endeavours.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** Or, indeed, some political opportunism.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I call on all of those involved in and around education to continue to support people who wish to undergo a teaching degree and to promote it wherever we get the chance. Ms Cachia will have some further information on the Grow Your Own program.

**YVETTE CACHIA:** You are right, Mr D'Adam. It is an important part of the strategy, particularly for our regional and remote schools. We are targeting 70 in the first instance. We are in the process at the moment of developing a program to identify high-potential individuals who would be suitable for that program. They would be perhaps school leavers in a regional area who may be encouraged to consider a career in—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is there a geographic focus for the targeting?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** In regional and remote areas. I can take on notice any specific areas. But because we are in the design phase we are in the process of looking at the areas that we would be most likely—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So you have not actually recruited anyone through this program?

**YVETTE CACHIA:** It is designed to encourage people who are interested in a career in teaching to, as we said, Grow Your Own. Basically we are encouraging them at that early age to engage with the process of joining the profession, so those people would not be ready to start teaching. We would need to work with them through their training et cetera and to place them.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Mr D'Adam, we did publish a Teaching Supply Strategy. That is a commitment over a number of years. We have already made significant progress in relation to the FASTstream program, mid-career entry and are well underway with the international recruitment. As Ms Cachia has indicated, the Grow Your Own program is currently in the design phase. As soon as it is designed and under implementation, as she indicated, there will be a lag in terms of the number of people coming into the profession because they will undoubtedly be in school themselves and needing to make that transition.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is it not fair to say, Ms Harrisson, that the crisis in terms of teacher supply is more acute in rural and regional areas?

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I am very happy to take that on notice given the time, Mr D'Adam.

**The CHAIR:** Time has expired.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** We should be worried about this; it is about kids in rural areas.

**The Hon. WES FANG:** I have confidence in the department.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Can I clarify one issue that Ms Houssos raised just so that I am clear?

**The CHAIR:** Order! There is a clarification about a matter from Ms Houssos.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I wanted to clarify so that we could come back to you with the right—

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Of course.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** You referenced previous question No. 108 in relation to early childhood services and quoted a number of services that had closed.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes, 176 is my calculation.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** I have been asked to clarify the understanding that that might have referenced a staffing issue rather than a service issue. I wanted to clarify in relation to question No. 108.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I understand, yes. It was a supplementary question.

**GEORGINA HARRISSON:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you to government officers for your attendance here today. The Committee secretariat will be in touch in the near future regarding any questions taken on notice, any supplementary questions and other necessary matters.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**